The Mystery Teens

by darkspine10

Summary

The Pines Twins are back out exploring mysteries, on their own together for the first time, 4 years after the show’s finale. They have their knowledge and training from their summers at Gravity Falls, and are ready to go on some new adventures.

Each chapter is a new self-contained adventure, building to a 'season arc' as it progresses.
The twins go searching for mysteries in the woods, hoping to rekindle the adventures of their youth...

I was inspired to write this first by RickHammersteel's A Trip to Make Out Cliff: https://archiveofourown.org/works/16718233

Basically I just really wanted some more of Teen Mabel and Dipper hunting monsters together. As I kept coming up with more prompt ideas my plans started growing, and between Chapters 6 and 7 I conceived the main 'arc plot' for the story.

The story mainly focuses on Dipper and Mabel, not many of the other GF characters, besides Pacifica, whose role increases as the chapters go on.

Sunlight illuminated the tops of the trees deep in the centre of the woods. It was an average sunny afternoon, like so many others. What wasn’t so average was the creature moving through the trees. It was if a strange shape, almost imperceptible, was making its way across the uneven ground. As it passed each tree, the bark would seem to twist and undulate behind its hulking form. The light from the sun couldn’t penetrate down to the forest floor, and it made a perfect place for the creature to hide. Most of the usual wildlife that called this part of the forest home were strangely absent, scared off by whatever this new apparition was. One small jackrabbit had dared to stay, either through some courage or just its inability to comprehend a threat. The rabbit moved into a small clearing between the pines, drawn in by a strong smell. In the clearing’s middle was a small blanket, on which was placed some berries. The rabbit moved directly towards the food and began nibbling at the easy meal. That was when the glitter bomb exploded in the rabbit’s face.

A short time later, a pair of gangly legs weaved their way into the clearing. “Uh, Mabel, I think we got the wrong creature.” Dipper Pines kneeled to examine his ‘catch’. The rabbit had been knocked out cold and was covered in shiny golden circles. The last few years hadn’t gifted Dipper with much in the way of strength, and he still possessed his ‘noodle arms’. He always dressed casually in a flannel hoodie, which had ample pocket space that he relied on. He scratched the tufts of stubble on his chin. “It looks like a rabbit, not exactly what we were after.” Dipper sighed, pulled a small blue book out of his jacket pocket and started to scribble some notes. It had a golden tree embossed on the cover. “You can come out of ‘camo mode’ now”, he called into the bush behind him.

Slowly emerging was the form of a 17-year-old girl, hair shaved on one side, dressed entirely in black, except for a few twigs and leaves wrapped on her head. Mabel was going through what she described as a ‘super dark and tormented’ phase at the moment, and had committed to it 100%, that same way she did with all of her brief passions. Black clothes, black eyeshadow, black lipstick.
Dipper was just thankful she’d grown out of the ‘cover herself entirely in fluorescent clothing’ phase, which had made stealthy excursions nearly impossible. Her all-black gear at least helped blend into the darkness of the woods. Mabel karate chopped her way into the clearing and threw in a few kicks into the air for good measure.

“Hee yah! Ka chow! Did we get it Dipper!?” She glanced down at the shiny prone woodland creature at Dipper’s feet. With a big grin growing on her face, she exclaimed, “Wow, it’s a lot smaller than I was expecting! This was an easy capture. We need a trickier mission next time.” She knelt down and gave a few pokes to the rabbit’s side.

Dipper huffed and briefly stopped his sketching to rub the bridge of his nose. “Mabel don’t poke it, it might be hurt. And no, this isn’t the cryptid, it’s just a rabbit.”

Mabel’s grin vanished instantly, and her pokes turned into stroking the rabbit to see if it was alright. “Oops, I guess we forgot that animals like to eat too”. It had been Mabel’s idea to set a trap for the creature stalking the woods. A simple glitter bomb to startle whatever came to eat, which had the extra use of marking the beast in unmissable reflective gold.

Dipper put his journal away, having recorded their efforts to catch the monster so far. They’d heard reports about a ‘something’ spooking the local animals from a concerned letter in the newspaper. It was right up their alley, so they jumped in Dipper’s pickup and drove to the quiet town. Questioning the locals had led them to this stretch of the woods.

After a few minutes of the two teen siblings awkwardly standing around, the rabbit eventually regained consciousness. It shook off some of the glitter, then bounded off back out of the clearing. Mabel gave it a wave. “Goodbye little bunny! Sorry that you walked into our trap!” Dipper shook his head and smiled. Even when Mabel had tried to go ‘super-goth’ she couldn’t stop being her usual upbeat and caring self. Dipper glanced around the clearing, and briefly consulted a compass. “Ok, so we saw those strange scratches on that log a bit east of here. Since we haven’t seen any more like them, we should head back in that direction.”

Mabel sighed audibly and threw up her hands. “Dipper, we’ve been looking for this thing for 3 hours now, can’t we just go home”

Dipper frowned. “Mabel, this is our chance to find something concrete, finally get a proper catch.” For the last few weeks Dipper had been obsessed with tracking down something, anything, weird. He’d scoured local papers from all the nearby towns, consulted cryptid message boards (most of which were occupied with discussing which movie version of Bigfoot would win in a fight with Godzilla), and had even called the police a couple of times, asking if they’d had any ‘encounters with the unknown’. They’d just threatened to blacklist his number. Mabel knew why Dipper was getting so desperate. Now that they were old enough to go out on their own, he was dreaming of carrying on his Great Uncle’s legacy, finding supernatural societies or hunting monsters. Dipper just wanted one ‘Big Score’ to make his start. Mabel could sympathise, as she too longed for more excitement like they’d known during those summers in Gravity Falls, fighting dinosaurs, or fending off angry gnomes.

So, Mabel just sighed, and started to follow Dipper. “Fine bro-bro, we’ll keep looking for a bit longer. But we’d better not attack anymore cute woodland creatures. I don’t wanna waste anymore glitter.”

“When are you even gonna use it, I thought black was the only ‘deep’ colour you used these days?”

“Hey, I might need for another art project. You never know when the inspiration will hit you.”
Dipper just shrugged at this and kept on walking. He knew the creature had to be somewhere in this area of the woods, and he was determined to find it no matter what. He was so determined on scanning ahead for the creature, that he stumbled on a hole in the ground, and fell in the mud. He groaned, as he knew what was coming next.

“Ahahaha! Did you have a nice trip? I’ll see you next fall… AHAHAHA! I’m hilarious!” Mabel’s laughter bounced around the woods, and Dipper just rolled his eyes and picked himself up off the ground. As he was rising, he noticed something odd about the hole he’d tripped in. “Woah, Mabel, look at this!”

She bent down to examine the strange hole. “It looks like a footprint… with two really long toes!”. She started grinning widely, and Dipper could only grin too. “We must be getting close to it, we just have to follow its tracks.”

Brushing the dirt of his chest, Dipper stared at the surrounding mud and spotted another indentation made by the creature. He turned to show Mabel, but her smile had disappeared, replaced with a more uncertain look. “Dipper, if this is the size of the foot, then how big is the rest gonna be!?” Dipper started to wonder as well.

After 10 minutes of staring intently at the forest floor, and hesitantly following the creature’s tracks, the twins came to a huge pile of earth with hole as tall as Mabel on one side. Dipper got out his journal again and started sketching the mound. “Looks like some kind of burrow, must come back here to sleep at night.”

Mabel was idly glancing around the trees, tossing another glitter bomb between her hands. The sun was starting to dip behind the distant hills beyond the forest, and that worried her. “Earth to Dip-Dop, it’s nearly night now!”

“Relax Mabel, we just need to set another trap by that hole, then when the creature comes back to nest it’ll get stunned. Simple”

Mabel narrowed her eyes. “Simple like that time you were convinced that the librarian was a demon, so you had to purify her with holy water?”

Dipper blushed and looked away. “That was one time I was wrong ok! And at least the worst that happened was that her clothes got damp. This time I’m sure this’ll work.”

Mabel crossed her arms and looked doubtfully at him as he finished his doodle of the burrow. He tucked his journal away and took the glitter bomb from Mabel’s hands. He crept slowly up to the large hole and gently placed the bomb down on the ground, before running back to Mabel as fast as he could. “There, all sorted, now we just need to find another bush to hide in and all will be ready.”

Mabel started searching for nearby foliage, but as her eyes briefly passed across the edge of the clearing, she thought noticed something odd about one of the trees. Squinting back through the darkness, she saw that halfway down the trunk, the wood appeared to bend and shift, like she was staring through water. As she watched, the bark shifted some more before returning to how it should normally look. She was about to mention the anomaly to Dipper, when she saw that more and more of the forest behind him was starting to shimmer and change.

All of a sudden Dipper cried out and flew up into the air by the back of his collar. Mabel quickly traced the Shimmer attached to him and made out the rough shape of an arm. Dipper squirmed in the grip and tried to break free. “Mabel! Help, what’s happening!?” He continued to thrash about in the
air, his arms and legs flailing wildly. Mabel noticed that the creature just appeared to be watching Dipper, almost studying him. Then one of Dipper’s limbs connected with the Shimmer (as Mabel had decided then to name the beast), and it let out an inhuman screech. Mabel threw her hands to her ears and moved back as Dipper fell to the ground. The two of them ran towards the burrow, hoping to barricade themselves in from the beast.

Feeling a tight grip on her ankle, Mabel suddenly fell to the ground. “Oof! Ah, it’s got me!” She kicked wildly out behind her, hitting the amorphous shape a few times before she was let go.

Running out from behind, Dipper stood between the Shimmer and Mabel, standing up to his full height. “Hey, stay away from my sister!”, he shakily yelled at the creature he could barely make out in the low light. Mabel had two thoughts right then, firstly that she was impressed by Dipper’s bravery, and second that he was a massive idiot with noodle arms, who couldn’t put up a fight with anyone.

Feeling hopeless, Mabel tried to wiggle away on the ground, when her outstretched hand suddenly felt something. She gripped it tight, grinned, and shouted at the Shimmer, “Hey monster! Eat some of this!”, before tossing the glitter bomb straight at it.

Dipper was caught in the flurry of glitter, blinded for an instant and half covered in the stuff. Great, he thought, this is going to be a pain to clean off. As his vision returned, he stared upwards at the full might of the Shimmer. There was glitter clinging to the beast’s whole body, and as he drew back his head in fear, Dipper saw a slender bipedal form, with a round head and sharp claws on the ends of its arms, standing several feet taller than his 6 feet. Suddenly feeling a lot less brave in the face of danger, he turned and started to run towards Mabel.

She was still standing by the entrance to the burrow, staring back at the Shimmer. “Mabel, what are you doing?! We’ve got to get out of here before it recovers!” Dipper started to drag her by the arm, but she just shook him off and continued staring at the beast. Dipper turned to see what she was so entranced by and saw the full shining bulk of the creature, writhing around in pain.

“Dipper, it’s so confused. We just came into the poor thing’s home and started hitting it!”

Dipper looked incredulously at his sister. “Um, Mabel, did you forget it’s a 9 foot tall killing machine!”

Mabel stared back at him defiantly. “You don’t know that! It could be a herbivore for all we know.”

Dipper shook his head and groaned. “Ugh, what do you want us to do then? Give that thing a bath?”

A sudden crack of twigs and the two turned back to the Shimmer, who it seemed had finally cleared the glitter out of its slit like eyes. Dipper whispered desperately out of the corner of his mouth. “Mabel, we should run now, before it lunges at us!”

Mabel continued to stand her ground, and angrily whispered back. “Let’s just wait and see what it does.”

The Shimmer started moving towards them, walking on its knuckles like a gorilla, though it was much less bulky. It eyed the twins warily, watching for signs of another glitter attack. As it got closer, Dipper started to sweat even harder. “Mabel, this is a very bad idea!”

“Shh shh, bro, you’ll spook him!” Now that the beast was closer, Mabel could see that its claws, though sharp, were retracting slowly back into the creature’s paw. The Shimmer was getting very close to Mabel, and she was starting to relax.
Seeing it suddenly raising a paw, Dipper pushed in front of Mabel and shouted at the creature. “Stay back!” The Shimmer recoiled slightly, but Mabel just shoved her brother out of the way. The paw came down on her shoulder and started lightly nudging her to the left.

Mabel’s eyes widened. “Oh, you just wanna get into your burrow! No problem!” She eagerly moved to the side, and the creature shuffled towards the open hole of its home. Settling in the middle of the mound, the creature began to lie down, and both Dipper and Mabel let long breaths out.

“Phew, that was close. We were lucky your herbivore theory was right sis”

“Of course it was”, Mabel said icily, and Dipper was taken back by how cold she sounded.

Then a grin started forming on her lips, and she started giggling. “I’m always right bro-bro!”

Then Dipper laughed too, and the Shimmer just tried to ignore these annoying creatures.

The twins finally got back to their pickup, and Mabel was glad of a break. For the entire walk back through the woods Dipper had been scribbling notes in his journal and going on and on endlessly about the Shimmer. “And it seems he’s some kind of ‘Shadow-form’, like a Chameleon, but much more effective, and on such a large creature! No wonder he kept hidden all this time, you can barely see him! And being a herbivore means he wouldn’t attract any attention from wildlife kills. I’ll have to ask Ford when we next speak whether he ever catalogued something like this.”

“Hmm, oh sure sure Dipper.” Mabel nodded like she had been listening, then sat down in the pickup’s passenger side. Dipper got in and started the drive back home to Piedmont.

“Well Dipper, was that your ‘Big Score’ that you were looking for?”

“Hmm, I don’t know about that, it was certainly an interesting find, but I don’t think it’ll make headlines.” Dipper smiled though. “At least we found something, now we know there’s always more out there.

Mabel grinned, happy that their mystery hunting days were back. She looked at Dipper, glad that he was happy with how the day went, then started to chuckle.

“What?” Dipper asked with a grin.

“At least you came back from today looking fabulous bro!” Mabel gestured down at Dipper’s chest.

“Oh. That.” His body was still encrusted with layers of glitter. He’d been so wrapped up in writing down his observations that he’d barely noticed. He tried to pick up a handful of the stuff, and then stuck his hand out at Mabel, getting glitter on her black top too. She just grinned and grabbed more of Dipper’s glitter until she was as covered as he was.

The two laughed together and shined gold as they drove off to find more adventures waiting for them.
Chapter Summary

Mabel drags Dipper to get some exercise. She ends up doing more exercise than she bargained for...

“This is a terrible idea.”

Dipper stood in the local gym, which had recently been renovated, so everything was covered in shiny chrome plating. He’d been dragged here against his will by his sister, who was pouting back at him.

“Come on Dipper, you need the exercise, you’re wasting away alone in your bedroom.”

“I’m not ‘wasting away’, I’m studying, or chatting online!”

“Yeah, wasting away,” Mabel said with a ‘duh’ face.

Dipper rolled his eyes, “Come on, it’s not like you like the gym either, you never exercise!”

“I just think we could both do with some vigorous activity once in a while, we can’t do all our running being chased by monsters now, can we?” Mabel stared at her brother, willing his resolve to crumble away. “And besides, you need to work on your noodle arms!”

“I do not have noodle arms!” Dipper protested, before looking down at his arms for a second, and then conceding the point.

“That’s what I thought, what if we run into another monster we have to punch to death? You can’t be all feeble like when we fought the Shimmer-”

“I never agreed to call it that. More accurately it’s some kind of Deep-camoflauge Megatherium, and besides, it was a herbivore anyway!”

“Whatever, we’re here now, I’m making you do some kind of work on your body. Where do you wanna start?” Mabel panned her hand around the room of equipment, and Dipper scanned for whichever looked like the least intensive, before noticing a window against the opposite wall. Curious, he strolled over to it, and was taken aback by what he saw.

“Mabel, you never said this place had a swimming pool!”

“Oh, I-uh must have forgot.”

Dipper raised an eyebrow. “Oh really.”

“Yeah. Anyway, you don’t ‘swim’, you flop, then drag yourself across the pool.”

“Well, at least I enjoy swimming. Lucky the shorts I brought can double as trunks. I’m going to the pool Mabel”

“Fine, whatever, at least it’s better than nothing.” Mabel knew that she’d failed but hid a small grin.
“What’s so funny sis?” Dipper inquired.

“Oh nothing. Just that it would have been hilarious to see you getting exhausted on a treadmill.”

“Like you’d do any better. Why do you want to suddenly get in shape all of a sudden anyway?”

“I just need to maintain my peak physical fitness.”

“Uh-huh. And it has nothing to do with trying to look good for that cute girl from the café?”

“We’re meant to be Dipper! She let me keep my change! And yeah, maybe she was kinda cute.” Mabel mumbled the last line quietly, as Dipper started moving towards the changing rooms.

“See you later then, I’m gonna do some lengths.” As he was heading off, Mabel had one last retort for her brother.

“Don’t you wanna get your body fit for the next time you meet up with Pacifica?” Dipper immediately blushed a deep shade of crimson.

“W-what do you mean Mabel, we’re just friends. I haven’t even seen her since last summer.”

“But wouldn’t she like to see a hotty with a body next summer?” Mabel batted her eyelashes mockingly. Dipper shook his head and left to get changed.

Mabel decided to start with some cycling to warm herself up. The speakers in the gym were blaring out some bland rhythmic tune, so Mabel pulled out her music player from her bag. It was set to her ‘dark and brooding’ playlist, which she’d assembled for her new goth phase. The tempo on most of those songs was far too slow for a proper workout, so she went to her ‘Motivational 80’s songs’ playlist, which was much more appropriate. Though she was committed to being an Agent of Evil and Spawn of the Devil and so on most of the time, she had to admit that she sometimes missed her more upbeat playlists. Once that was selected, she sat down, and began getting herself the perfect summer body.

After 10 minutes she felt like death. Exhausted already, she elected to see how Dipper was doing. From the high window, Mabel could see the whole of the pool spread out below her. Dipper was occupying one of the marked-out lanes and was lazily drifting back and forth via front crawl. Each time he lifted his arms he feebly slapped it back down into the water, barely moving himself forwards at all. Mabel chuckled, she had been right about his swimming ability. He could swim fast, if his life depended on it, as she had witnessed a couple of times. But for now he was content going at a leisurely 2 miles per hour back and forth.

Resigning herself for another agonising session of exercise, Mabel dragged herself back over to the equipment. She was about to give a go on the treadmill (at least I do a lot of running for my life she thought), when she noticed something unusual. In the corner of the gym, there was one person just standing there. Not doing any workouts, and not panting for breath. A blonde-haired man, dressed in a baggy hoodie and sweatpants, was just reclining against a wall. She thought he looked like if one of the members of Sev’ral Timez had let themselves go a bit. Mabel thought this was kinda fishy, so started up the treadmill while keeping an eye fixed on him. As she began torturing her body again, she watched the man intently, wondering when he was going to start exercising, when she noticed a thin wisp of light suddenly appear, ending at the man. She traced the light trail back, and saw a woman using a cross-trainer. She was clearly exhausted, and it looked like part of herself was detaching and floating through the air towards the man in the corner. Glancing quickly around the
crowded room, Mabel spotted several more trails, each one going from one of the gym’s members to the strange man.

Mabel knew she had to figure out what was going on, normal gyms didn’t have magic wisps of energy flying through the air. She picked up her bag (which was black to match the rest of her outfit) and marched towards the mystery man. “Hey you!” She pointed an accusatory finger at the man and got up close. “What do you think you’re playing at mister?”

The man raised his arms to ward her off. “Hey hey, I don’t want any trouble babe.”

“Babe? I am the Incarnation of Darkness chump, you watch your manners around Mabel!” The man made a shiftcyed look around the room, before grinning in a suspicious way.

“Alright, come with me, miss ‘princess of the night’”. He led her into the small storeroom at the back of the gym, before closing the door to make sure they couldn’t be overheard. “What have you seen?”

“Oh not much, just magic energy trails that all point to you!” Mabel started pointing aggressively again at the man.

“Ok, ok, calm down.” The man sighed. “I’m a Hirudinean, I feed off the excess energy generated by human activity.”

Mabel was stunned at how easy it had been to get that confession. “Oh, ok. And, like, does that harm people in any way?”

This ‘Hirudinean’ started shaking his head (Mabel wondered if it was even a real head, or if it was some kind of disguise). “They don’t lose anything from me being there, they just get a little extra fatigued after they leave.”

“Oh. That doesn’t sound too bad.” Mabel suddenly felt bad about confronting this guy, he seemed pretty harmless. Dipper would probably tease her for thinking she could just find and stop some evil plot that just happened to be in their gym.

“So, you never hurt anyone?”

“Weeeeeeellllllll, sometimes I can make people… over-extend themselves.” The Hirudi-no, Mabel thought, that name’s too long. The ‘Fitness Leech’, pointed up to the speaker in the corner of the room, which was still blasting out it’s relentlessly bland hip-hop. “You see that. I control the tempo of the music in this place. When I want, I can speed it up, and everyone will dance to my tune. They’ll exercise until they drop. That kind of energy is the tastiest.”

Mabel looked aghast at the Leech and started protesting. “You can’t just kill people to get a quick fix! That’s evil!”

“Exactly. Now I have to find a whole new gym, you’re such an inconvenience.” With that, he snapped his fingers, and the speaker’s tune suddenly picked up the pace, becoming much too fast for Mabel to have even tried exercising at that pace. She checked back into the main gym, and stared in horror at the people, who were working faster than any normal person should. She rushed to the pool window and stared down at Dipper. He was actually pulling his weight, zooming across the pool. This was too fast for him and she knew. She could already see the exertion on his face, how tired he was becoming. He couldn’t keep this up. She tried to shake some of the gym members to get them to stop, but it was like they were in a trance. She darted back into the storeroom.

“Stop this right now, you don’t wanna see Mabel when she’s mad.” The Leech just smiled creepily, and Mabel noticed that more of the energy wisps were seeping through the door towards him. They
were more well defined than the previous wisps, and Mabel knew that this meant it was taking more from the exercisers.

She had to think fast, how could she stop the Leech and save everyone? She rummaged through her bag to see if she had anything that could help. All of the mystery solving gear that Dipper had collected over the years, or had been gifted by Ford, had been left at home. Mabel had never expected to need to banish ghost or stake a vampire. She’d come here to exercise, not exorcise! All she had in the bag was her music player. Then she realised what she could do.

Sticking her headphones in her ears, she turned the volume all the way up to block out the Leech’s hypnotic tempo. She dived into her 80’s playlist then started dancing and singing wildly.

“It’s the Iris of the Lion, it’s the Excitement of the Night!” She sang at the top of her lungs. The Leech’s other energy trails suddenly stopped, and he stared at Mabel. It now as if he was hypnotised. Mabel moved and shook her body as fast as she could, using the power of music to keep her going. At dance parties, weddings, when bored in the shower, all she had to do was pump out some motivational beats, and she could keep going until the sun dropped. Even her excessive intake of sugar couldn’t do as much as a bangin’ pop song.

Mabel felt her body starting to give out, even with the music she was pushing herself like mad, trying to overcome the exercise of everyone else in the building. She made wild kicks into the air, did furious air guitar motions, and sang at frequencies only certain dog breeds can hear. What she had that they didn’t was passion, they moved to get fit, she moved for fun. She noticed that the background tempo from the speakers was starting to slow, so went into the climax of her song. As it reached the final note, she got down on one knee and spread out her arms, sweating hard and glad of a rest. Catching her breath, she looked up at the Leech. He was almost glowing with energy, and his skin was starting to ripple. Suddenly he started enlarging, like he was a balloon being filled up with air. Mabel had given her all, and it looked like it had been enough. The Leech flared up, and then without warning burst. All that was left was glowing golden dust, the last remnants of Mabel’s energy dissipating into the air.

She picked up her music player from beside herself. She was definitely going to need a slower tempo song after this.

Down in the lobby, Dipper was relieved to finally see Mabel descend from the gym. “What took you so long, I’ve been done for ages.” He stood back, slightly shocked by her appearance. “Woah, you must have got a major workout, you look exhausted.”

Mabel just stared back at him with a cold glance. It was actually the closest she had come yet to perfecting the ‘dark and tortured’ look. “I don’t wanna talk about it, ok.” She stared daggers at her brother as her shoulders sank. “I just want to go home, and sleep forever.”

Dipper looked inquisitively at her from behind. “Don’t know why you’re so tired, I feel great. That was the best workout I’ve had in years. I feel like I barely did a thing!”

Mabel scowled to herself as they left the gym.

“This had been a terrible idea.”
An Evening with Sporkie

Chapter Summary

Mabel tries to get Dipper to 'show his affection' to Pacifica one night. He tries to do that the only way he knows how... by finding a magical creature with his journal!

Chapter Notes

Quick shout out to Valency Jane from the Jedi Council Forums, who helped me formulate a part of the resolution.

“C’mon Dipper, you’ve gotta help me out here!”

Dipper was sat at his bedroom desk, staring at down at his laptop with an apologetic face at the pouting blonde girl on the screen. “I can’t keep giving you the answers Pacifica, you have to learn how to do this on your own.”

She rolled her eyes on the screen, and Dipper winced, knowing that he was about to get a telling off from his friend. “But Dipper, you know I can’t do this differentiation. You help me with this, and I can help you with the next time wanna buy moon rocks or some junk.” Pacifica had been generous enough to trade homework answers for the funds that Dipper needed to acquire any ‘junk’ he thought he might need for his monster encounters or his own research. Mystic pendants, a variety of mineral samples, some basic camping equipment. She had to be careful to sneak the payments past her parents, who she doubted would be wanting her funding some lower-class person’s frivolous exploits. Especially not for Dipper.

“So basically, you’re bribing me?”

“Sure, I’m rich.” They both giggled, and Dipper started opening the textbook on his desk. His evenings usually ended up like this. He had started skyping Pacifica regularly a few months ago, both of them tired of the long waits between summers. First, he would call up Pacifica, who was back in Gravity Falls, and they would start by playing the latest Battlestorm of Honour game for a while. Pacifica was already in the top 10 players ranked worldwide, while Dipper was languishing down in the 4000s. She usually won their matches. After that they would chat about their lives, Dipper would recount any of his recent mystery hunts (which had started to pick up in frequency now he could drive to the source of any weirdness nearby), then Pacifica would let him know how everyone was doing up in Gravity Falls, as she dropped by the shack if she ever had time free from her parents just to pick up the local gossip. Then they would pull out their school work and compare notes. Dipper almost always ended up providing most of the notes for science or math related subjects.

“Can’t we go over the history instead, I never seem to gain much ground trying to teach you this stuff?”

“Nuh uh, we already covered that, my knowledge of Cold-War era Berlin is all fine. Don’t try to
weasel out of this Pines!”

Suddenly the audio from his laptop was drowned out by the sound of loud music coming from across the hallway. Great, Mabel was playing her thrash metal at full volume again. He turned his speaker volume up to full so that he could still hear Pacifica’s response.

“Ok, I’ll try to help, but I want to go to bed at a reasonable hour this time!” He still had memories of the time she had kept him up till 3am to help with passing a test the day after.

Dipper started trying to explain the concepts just as the sun was just starting to dip below the horizon outside his window. By the time he decided to give up for the evening, the moon was high up in the sky, and the stars were twinkling in the inky black.

“I say we call it in for the night, we’ve clearly hit a roadblock here.” Dipper saw a pair of arms fly up in frustration on his screen.

“Ugh, fine. This stuff’s boring anyway. How can you actually like doing these problems?”

Dipper shrugged and started packing away his notes. He raised a conciliatory grin. “So, same time tomorrow?”

“Sure dork, whatever.” Dipper knew that tone of voice. Pacifica was unhappy now, but he knew that after a night’s sleep she’d be fine again. Suddenly he noticed that the corners of her mouth had dipped lower than before. “What’s wrong Paz?”

“Dipper, do you hear a godawful sound like pots being smashed together?”

“What, no. What are you-“ The realisation dawned on him that Mabel’s annoyingly loud music had been silent for some time now. He groaned and tried his best to minimise Pacifica’s window on the screen before his door burst open. Dipper crept over to his door and placed his ear against it. Hearing a light breathing, he grasped the handle and swiftly pulled it ajar. A very surprised Mabel collapsed onto his bedroom floor. She goofily grinned up Dipper.

“Oh, hey Dipper, what brings you here? I was just- uh, testing out your door strength, yep it’s still tough.”

Dipper brought his hand up to cover his face. “Hey Mabel, eavesdropping isn’t cool! I could have been doing something private in here, I’m a growing teen!”

She raised her eyebrows. “Oh, I think you were doing something secret anyway”

Dipper’s eyes started darting about wildly as he stammered out a reply. “W-what do you mean sis?”

Mabel stood there in the door eyeing him up, trying to break down his barriers, when they both heard a voice coming from Dipper’s desk.

“Are you still there? What happened? Dipper?”

Mabel’s grin, which was already very wide, started to creep even further up her face. Dipper’s complexion turned a deep red, and his eyes dropped to the floor. Mabel ran up to the laptop and brought up Dipper’s Skype screen.

“Paz-Paz! It’s been so long! How are you doing back in Gravity Falls! I’ve got so many dark and gritty fashion ideas to share with you!”
“Uh, hi Mabel, I’m doing fine.” She glanced over to where Dipper was standing, an uneasy look on her face. She too knew what was coming next.

“So Pacifica, how long have you been secretly engaged in elicit night-time conferences with my brother?” Her grin was infectious, and Dipper noticed that even Pacifica was starting to smirk again.

“Oh, you know, a couple of weeks, your dorky brother is a big help with homework. Nice new look you’re sporting Mabes.”

Mabel replied with an over serious tone. “Yeah, I’m totally expressing my deep angst at society.” She lowered her head dramatically, before suddenly whipping it back up and smiling broadly. “You should chat with me some time, I can show you all the new sweaters I’ve been making, I used so much black wool!”

“Sure, that’d be fun, I can show you the new fashion sketches I’ve been working on.”

He wanted to interject, to get Mabel out of the room before the topic he was dreading came up, but she was too fast for him. “Sooooooo, are you and Dipper doing anything more than just chatting?” She wiggled her eyebrows up and down suggestively, and Dipper groaned in the corner.

Pacifica responded with a light shrug. “Sure, we play video games, I let him know how things are in town, he tells me about you and his ‘mystery hunts’.”

“And?” Mabel continued staring at Pacifica, and she just looked confused.

“And what?”

Dipper had to act now. “Ok Mabel, that’s enough, Pacifica needs her beauty sleep now!”

“Are you gonna watch her sleep?! Bro-Bro, that’s weird even for you.”

Pacifica now started blushing too, and Dipper let out another groan. “No Mabel, we just talk in the evenings, that’s it, nothing weird!”

Mabel put on her doubtful face. “Bro, you should just let out your feelings, I know you’re bottling yourself. That can’t be good for your soul-energy.”

“My wha- oh, more of that new Goth hippy nonsense.” Dipper shook his head and decided he was done with this. “Pacifica, I’m gonna disconnect now, sleep well, bye!”

As he reached for the key on his laptop which cut the call off, Mabel shouted at the screen. “Pacifica, Dipper has feelings for you! He loves-oof.”

Dipper had thrown one hand over Mabel’s mouth, and reached with the other to disconnect Pacifica. He hoped that she hadn’t made out Mabel’s mad yelling. Slowly he started feeling his hand become moist. “Ew, Mabel, don’t lick my hand!”

He let her go and sank down onto his bed, head in hands. “Ugh, why do you always have to be so… so… you.”

Mabel just kept smiling at him. “I’m just trying to make some magic happen, I’m the Match Maker! You know you have a thing for Pacifica.”

“No, I don’t, I don’t know that!” Dipper wanted to plunge his head into his pillow, but Mabel sat down beside him, blocking him.
“Come on Dipper, you just to need to show her you care about her and she’ll be like putty in your hands!”

Mabel kept smiling, while Dipper kept frowning. “So how do I ‘show my affection’ for her then? Not that I’m saying I have affection for her- well I do, as a friend- I mean, ughh!”

Mabel tapped her finger on her chin. “How about inviting her on one of our mystery hunts?”

“Mabel, she can’t just drop by, it’s the middle of the school term. And besides, you think she’d wanna traipse around the woods for hours on end?”

“Ok, fair points. What about getting her a gift?”

“Nah, one time I tried to get her the new Battlestorm game, and she already had 5 copies. She’s too rich for anything I can get her.”

Mabel’s stared intensely at Dipper’s desk, as if she could conjure Pacifica’s wants and desires out of Dipper’s laptop. “Well, does she need anything lately, like has she been complaining about anything?”

“She was struggling with her math homework.”

“Then that’s it, solve her problems with some magic!”

Dipper looked shocked at his sister. “Mabel, isn’t that just cheating with extra steps?!”

She waved a hand through the air. “Pssh, I’m the new ‘morally ambivalent’ Mabel, I don’t care about no stinkin’ rules! I’m sure your journal has tons of magic that can help her out.”

Dipper reluctantly grabbed his journal from his desk drawer and opened it on his lap. “Let’s see, the two of us haven’t encountered any ‘magical cheating spirits.’” Mabel blew a raspberry at her brother, then watched him flip to the back at the book. There were several folded photos stuck to the pages. Dipper flipped one open and started scanning its contents. Mabel saw writing in the photo and recognised a sketch of a ghost with floating teacups surrounding it. She realised that these were photo scans of pages from Ford’s journals.

“Where’d you get these from bro?”

“Huh? Oh, right, the scans. Turns out Stan made these before he gave me back Journal 3, back when we fought those zombies. Ford sent me these photocopies when I told him we were going out looking for mysteries and stuff, wanted me to have some preparation.”

Dipper flipped forwards a couple of pages and turned over another photo. “Ah, this looks like it could help our problem.” He turned the book around to show Mabel more closely. This page had no sketches, it was all text.

“The Intelli-Spore, a sentient fungus creature who can absorb any piece of knowledge and then transmit the info to another organism. This is perfect, I just get one of these, suck up the math Pacifica was struggling with, then send her the info.”

Mabel read the whole page and noticed a section Dipper hadn’t mentioned. “Warning: Don’t allow access to too much knowledge, it can become feral if over fed.”

“Pfft, I’m sure it’ll be fine. I’m not gonna let it suck up an encyclopedia or something.” Dipper read the section on how to summon one of the creatures. “Let’s see, three shavings of cheese, some pages
from a dictionary, two ounces of Vampire Dust, ooh handy we still have some samples from that Diner incident.” Dipper started rummaging through his drawers, gathering the ingredients.

Mabel headed for the door. “Well good luck Bro-Bro, hope everything goes well in helping your GIRLFRIEND!” Her voice went a lot louder on the last word as she left the room, and Dipper’s blush returned once again.

He set the ingredients for the Intelli-Spore down on his window sill. If he was lucky it would only take a few hours to attract one, they could apparently travel large distances in very short spans. He settled down in his bed, glad he was getting something to help Pacifica. Helping her felt good, even if he wasn’t sure whether he liked her. Well, he obviously liked her, but not like-liked her. Groaning at Mabel’s ‘matchmaking’ once again, he tried to get some sleep.

Dipper woke up suddenly, hearing a scratching noise by his window. He quickly checked his clock and saw that it was 3am. Slowly pulling his bed cover away, he peered towards the window. Inside his mind his curiosity about what this new form of life would be like was giving him a buzz. He would soon lay eyes on something that even his Great Uncle Ford had never seen. He spotted the plate on which he’d laid the ingredients and saw the creature for the first time.

He saw a small body on his window sill, covered in short blue fur and barely larger than his hand. It looked for all the world like one of Mabel’s stuffed animals, though hers were usually much bigger. Dipper was kind of disappointed by the creature’s look, he was hoping for something more alien and freakish.

Ford’s notes had indicated that these creatures were potentially capable of speech, so he coughed to get its attention, puffed out his chest, and then addressed the Spore. “Hello there, Intelli-Spore! I am Dipper Pines, I come in peace!”

The creature whirled around, and Dipper couldn’t help noticing how cute its large round eyes were. The Spore watched him for a few seconds, before replying in a high-pitched voice, a few octaves above even Mabel’s highest voice. “Hi there, I’m Sporkulon the Spore, but you can call me Sporkie!”

Dipper just stared back, confused. This was the super intelligent being he’d expected? This thing that looked like it had jumped out of an 80’s cartoon? “Um, hi there, uh Sporkie. I was hoping you could help me out with something.”

“Sure thing Dippy friend!” Sporkie leapt from the sill toward Dipper, who fumbled his arms up to grab him. He made a squeaking noise on impact with his hands. Dipper was starting to regret this.

Sporkie looked up at Dipper. His eyes seemed to get even wider than before. “So, what’s the problem new human friend?”

Dipper carried the living squeak toy over to his desk and fished out the math problem from earlier. “Ok, so I’m trying to explain these concepts to a friend of mine, but she really isn’t getting it, so I need you to, like, suck up the info and make her understand.” Dipper blushed a bit at this, the realisation that he was doing all this just to help a girl made him mildly embarrassed, even if it was his best friend.

Sporkie jumped down from Dipper’s hands and started what looked to Dipper like sniffing the page.
Grabbing a chair, Dipper watched as his clumsy scribblings from earlier started floating off the page and into Sporkie. After a few seconds of this all the words and numbers he had written were gone, and Sporkie had slightly inflated to compensate. Giving a small burp, he shrunk back to his normal size. Dipper had found the whole process slightly off-putting, Sporkie looked way too euphoric about this. “Ok, now what. Can you transmit info via Wi-fi?”

Sporkie nodded as Dipper booted up his laptop. He glanced again the time, wincing when he saw it was now 3:30. Pacifica wasn’t gonna be happy to be woken up this late. She always regulated her sleep to a strict schedule to ensure her performance was always at her best. He then wondered whether it was normal for most friends to know each other’s sleep schedules and started blushing again.

Sporkie was bouncing around his desk, stopping to examine the scraps of paper Dipper had used for idly writing notes down on. The laptop glowed with life and Dipper got the skype call ready, hoping that the call ring would be loud enough to wake Pacifica. He hovered over the call button for a few seconds before deciding he was going to through with this. He clicked, swallowed, and hoped that this was a smart thing to do.

The call rang for a few agonisingly long seconds, as Dipper twiddled his thumbs. Sporkie had got bored on the desk and was peering up at the bookshelf in the corner of the room. Eventually, the call connected, and Dipper was greeted with a dimly lit view of the Pacifica, who was lying sideways on her bed.

“You’d better have a good reason for calling me in the dead of night Pines, or I am so going to sue you.”

Dipper felt more embarrassment at calling her so late but was determined to go through with his plan. “Hey Paz, sorry to wake you so late, I know how you don’t like to mess up your schedules.” He grinned weakly as she just rubbed her eyes irately.

“Go on then, what is it, why did you call?”

“I’ve found a way to help with your math problems!”

“What, you want to tutor me now, at 3am? Are you crazy Dipper?”

“No no, I’ve got a way to help you with your problem without you having to learn anything. Mabel helped me find a magical solution.”

Pacifica rolled her eyes. “Ugh, is this another one of your dorky spells, like that one you said would let me fly, but instead just made me allergic to all forms of wood for a week?”

“This time I’m sure this will work, I’ll show you.” Dipper got up and grabbed Sporkie of the floor and presented him to his laptop’s camera. “Say hello to an Intelli-Spore!”

Pacifica squinted to get a better look at what looked like a chubby rat through her small phone screen. “Ew, what is that gross little man?”

“He’s a kind of knowledge sponge, he absorbs info then can instantly let you understand that info. It works wirelessly, I’m gonna send you the knowledge how to solve those differentiation problems!”

Pacifica wrinkled her nose upwards. “That sounds ridiculous Dipper, it just looks like you grabbed a plush toy and are spouting nonsense.”

“No, I’m serious, I’ll show you.” Dipper rifled through his drawers and pulled out his journal. The
moment he placed it on his desk and started flipping through the pages Sporkie slipped out of Dipper’s fingers and stared at the book. “Woah, what are you doing little guy?” Dipper got no response, Sporkie just stared at his journal.

Pacifica strained her eyes to see what was going on. “Dipper, what’s it doing?”

“I don’t know! Sporkie, I have a job for you!” He tried grabbing Sporkie again, but he moved too fast and jumped onto the journal. Dipper noticed that the creature had started salivating, his entire attention fixed on Dipper’s Pine Tree journal.

“Oh oh”. He suddenly realised what Sporkie was so interested in. Information. The kind of information he couldn’t get anywhere else. He desperately reached out to try and stop Sporkie getting the journal’s info, but the little guy just picked up the book and ran off the desk, despite it being about twice as large as himself.

“Come back here you little demon!” Frantically trying to think of a solution, Dipper started pursuing Sporkie around his bedroom. “Give that back right now!” Sporkie turned to Dipper, and he saw that the innocent expression that had been stuck on the furry fungus was gone. Instead he saw snarling teeth, and a hungry look in those giant eyes.

From the laptop screen, Dipper hear Pacifica calling out to him. “What’s going on Dipper, is this normal? Normal for you I mean, not normal normal.”

“I have this situation entirely under control, I assure you!” In the reality of Dipper’s bedroom his control of the situation was slipping away faster and faster. Sporkie had started sponging the info from the back of the journal, Dipper’s precious photocopies seeming to melt off the pages and into the tiny creature. As he tried to grapple a hold of the surprisingly nimble little troublemaker, Dipper could only stare as Sporkie rippled with energy, before splitting in two.

“Oh, this is bad, this is really bad! It’s gained enough energy to multiply!” Dipper watched in horror as Sporkie replicated himself again and again, engorged on the forbidden secrets of Ford’s journals. Dipper was at least aware enough to slam his window shut, to prevent any of the Sporkie Juniors from escaping.

The Sporkie spawns starting leaping onto Dipper’s bookshelf, pulling out anything they could find and getting to work sponging the words right out. Dipper was panicking like crazy, when he suddenly heard a laugh coming from his laptop. Pacifica was looking at the chaos in his bedroom and chuckling to herself.

Dipper snapped at his screen. “Oh, is something funny Princess!?”

“They’re kinda cute is all, running about like they own the place.”

“Well they don’t look cute to me!” Dipper was getting exasperated now, this had not gone at all like the way he planned it. He’d hoped to give his best friend the knowledge she needed to overcome a hurdle, and instead all he’d got was a small army of furbies messing up his room. Dipper looked to where the original Sporkie was still cradling his journal. He was turning the pages to the front of the book, where all of Dipper’s recent handwritten notes were found. Those notes were irreplaceable. Something inside Dipper snapped in that instant, and he threw himself at the tiny menace. He wrestled the book out of Sporkie’s over powered mittens and held it aloft triumphantly. In that instant, every Intelli-Spore in the room turned their heads to stare at Dipper. “Uh oh again.”

In an instant they were on him, diving from the top of his bookshelf or climbing up his leg. They pulled him down onto the floor as he desperately hugged the book to his chest. He couldn’t afford to
lose those notes, there was no copy of them anywhere and it represented all of his hard work to live up to Ford’s journals. Covered in the furry terrors, Dipper kept struggling on the floor. He yelped when he felt the small claws of one of the creatures grabbing onto his arm.

“Wait Dipper, you said these things work wirelessly?” Pacifica was still on the line and as Dipper tried to shift his head upwards, he saw that her expression was a lot more worried that it had been the last time.

“Yeah, their powers can be transmitted via Wi-fi signals!” Dipper tried to yell out everything he could remember about the notes on the Spores, but one of the furballs threw itself over his mouth. Tasting fur, Dipper could only hope Pacifica had a plan or he was in big trouble.

Pacifica slammed a piece of paper down on a nightstand and pointed the front of her phone camera directly at it. All at once the writhing mass of Spores restraining him stopped moving and turned their heads to look at the screen. One by one each little Sporeling climbed off Dipper and jumped onto the desk to get a better look at the image. Dipper stood up, baffled by what Pacifica could have done. Dipper shoved his way past the mass of furry bodies, who were now wholly disinterested in the journal. As he looked at the screen, he saw what looked like a timetable. It was covered in colourful post-it notes and divided into a neat grid of rectangles. He tried to read what was in one of the small boxes and saw ‘3:30pm: After-School Tennis practice’. He realised what he was looking at. It was Pacifica’s daily schedule. The grid was packed so densely with activities and events that Pacifica had to strictly adhere to, down to the exact time laid out for eating each item of food, or how long she had to brush her teeth for. It had the Spores hypnotised by all that juicy information, banal as it was to Dipper. He wondered when she ever found the time to sneak out to the Mystery Shack with all those after-school sports and social occasions.

Seeing an opportunity to rid himself of the Spores, he reached over them to hit a key on his laptop which took a photo of the current screen. He quickly sent the pic to his phone and held it up to show the Spores. They turned from the laptop screen and started huddling along to floor to try and reach this new copy of the alluring image. He whispered to Pacifica. “Hey, you can drop the schedule now, I’ve got a picture of it for them to follow.”

He watched out of the corner of his eye as the image on his laptop screen changed to show Pacifica’s face again and he smiled at her cleverness in solving his problem. Temporarily at least, since he still had about 2 dozen little fluffballs gathered around his feet. He guessed that they had the scent of this information, so would follow it wherever it went. He pulled up his emails and sent the photo to Grunkle Ford’s address, along with a short message explaining that he was about to get 20 or so unwelcome guests. He was sure that Ford could deal with these things when they got there. He made a mental note to ask for another set of the photocopies from the journals.

Dipper opened the window, then deleted the photo of Pacifica’s schedule from his phone. The instant he pressed the button, the Spores started shuffling towards the open window out of the house. Dipper made sure that all of them had left the room before slamming the window shut again. He never wanted to see another Intelli-Spore again. Even when they weren’t trying to kill him, they were just too overly cute and cuddly. They’d have fitted in well in Mabel-Land, Dipper thought. Lots of things wanted to kill him there too.

“Is it all over now? Are you ok?” Dipper remembered that Pacifica was still connected, and he returned to his desk.

“Yep, all dealt with, no more dangerous little beasts in my room tonight, no thank you. Paz that was genius what you did with your schedule!” Dipper smiled and was happy to see Pacifica smiling back. Then he frowned.
“Ugh, I’m so sorry, I just wanted to help you out, Mabel kept going on that I needed to show my ‘affection’ or some nonsense, and I thought this would help, but I guess I just woke you up for nothing.”

Dipper expected Pacifica to be scowling at him but was surprised by her continuing smile. “Hey dork, it’s alright. It’s the thought that counts I guess. You’re the only person who’s ever summoned a swarm of monsters to try and help me.”

Dipper saw that her smile was truly genuine and started lightly blushing again. “Aw, it was nothing Paz, just trying to help my best friend out.” They both sat there, blushing at each other for a few seconds before Pacifica yawned.

“Well, I’d better get back to sleep, you’ve seen how intense my schedule is.” She winked and Dipper’s chest unexpectedly felt strangely tight. He suddenly didn’t want her to go.

“Uh wait, I just wanna say, before you go, I mean, not to hold you up, but I need to say, that- um…” Dipper’s rambles trailed off and his blush reddened. “I just wanted to say… good night!” His voice cracked slightly on the last word.

Pacifica smiled warmly at him and said, “Good night to you too, dork,” before disconnecting the call.

Dipper slumped back in his chair, suddenly exhausted by all his night-time activities. He smiled wryly to himself before crawling back into bed. Even though Mabel was gonna tease him so much tomorrow when she found out about this, it had been worth it to see Pacifica smiling so happily.
Mabel is browsing online one day when she stumbles onto an internet conspiracy. What is the Code, and why is everybody talking about it? Who is the person writing strange messages online and in the real world? And can Dipper and Mabel save their friend’s minds?

“And that’s the end to Mabel’s guide to writing Sad Poetry! Tune in next week for how to get your parents to accept your secret arm tattoos!” Mabel switched off the camera and prepared to upload the footage. In the last few years she’d amassed a small but passionate legion of watchers for her weekly Guides. She prided herself on having way more viewers than Dipper’s Guides to the Unexplained, he’d stopped making those years ago, too occupied with recording any mysteries he found in his journal instead.

Sliding her chair over to her desk, she set the footage to upload and saw that it would take a while. She decided to browse the knitting forum she frequented to get the latest fashion tips. She’d even convinced Pacifica to post occasionally, though her fashion tips were out of most of the posters’ price ranges. Mabel went to the new boards and browsed the thread titles.

MAKE YOUR YARN LAST TWICE AS LONG!

NEW TIP, SHEAR WOOL DIRECTLY FROM THE SHEEP TO ENSURE IT’S FRESH

HOW TO STITCH THE PERFECT RAINBOW

Mabel ignored most of the threads, since they were mostly about making more colourful sweaters than she was into now. The last thing she’d stitched were a pair of black woollen fingerless gloves. Her attention was suddenly brought back to the screen when she saw a new title pop up.

RECODE YOUR LIFE

Mabel wondered what this could be about. Maybe someone else was trying out a new style of knitting, one with more angst? Or maybe it was just a trollpost. Either way, Mabel was curious now, and clicked the link. Inside she found a long text post at the top of the page. She glanced at the member name, ‘loadthecode99’. She moved her eyes over the post, trying to skim some meaning. She found lots of rambling about embracing some kind of computer code, that it would grant you all the friends you could ever want and make you the most popular person in any social circle. It all just sounded like a gibberish scam to Mabel. She wondered if others felt the same and browsed the replies. Surprisingly, every single response to the post was flattery or other posters recommending the Code. There was not one poster wondering what this was all about or complaining about the length of the post. Mabel scrolled back up and saw a link at the end of the original post. It led to another site. She wrote down the address but made sure not to click on it. Maybe Dipper would know if this was a virus or something.

Returning to her video upload, she was happy to see it had finished a few minutes ago. She saw that someone had already commented. She loved to see what people thought of her vids, and she usually picked up suggestions of tips for the next week’s topic. She clicked to see what the comment was. It
Mabel closed the video tab. This was getting too weird for her now. She decided that it was time for her nightly thrash metal listening session to soothe her thoughts and started setting up the speakers.

By the time it was the next day at school Mabel had completely forgotten about her weird internet experience. She was just leaving her Biology class and was about to head to her History class, which she shared with her brother. She briefly stopped by her locker to collect the right textbook for the class. As she was shutting away her Biology book, she saw a reflection in the metal. Behind her, a tired looking girl, who looked a year or two younger than herself, was slipping out of the girls’ bathroom. She had short hair, a lighter shade of brown the Mabel’s own, and a spread of freckles across her cheeks. Her eyes were darting left and right, so Mabel tried not to draw any attention to herself. She felt uneasy about this girl for some reason. Still having a few minutes before the next period, she decided to check out the bathroom. She gingerly pushed the door open and was relieved when she didn’t see anything unusual. “I guess I’m just getting paranoid for no reason,” she said aloud to no one in particular. She turned to leave but her faced paled when she looked above the doorframe. Written in a large red substance that Mabel could have sworn was blood were 3 words.

RECODE YOUR LIFE. Mabel was suddenly very glad that she could see Dipper as soon as possible.

A short time later the twins returned to the bathroom, having slipped out of History claiming to be feeling sick. Dipper had sent Mabel in first to make sure there weren’t any girls actively using the room at the time, then blushed as he entered. His minor embarrassment disappeared when he saw the message daubed above the door. He reached out to dab a finger in the substance, then gave a quick sniff of his fingertip. “Well, it’s definitely not blood at least.”

“What is it then?” Mabel was still worried about what the message could mean. Was she being stalked by a random phrase from the internet?

Dipper rubbed the substance on his jeans. “Pretty sure it’s just wet red paint, though why someone wanted to put it here is still a mystery.”

“And what do you think about the stuff I told you? About the forum post and on my video?” Dipper had his ‘thinking’ face on, and she knew what he was about to do next.

“I think it’s time to consult the journal sis.” Pulling the book from out of his hoodie, he started flipping through the pages at the back. “I would consider this all just random chance, but if someone’s determined enough to paint this code in public then there might be more to this.”

“Did Grunkle Ford ever write anything about evil internet codes?”

“Mabel, Ford wasn’t even in our dimension when the internet was created, his knowledge of computers is stuck in 1982.”

“Oh, right.” Mabel groaned at her lapse in memory. “It looks like this one’s up to us to solve then.”

“I don’t know where we’re supposed to start. Did you know the girl who you think did this?”

Mabel shook her head. “No, she’s not in our grade.”
“But you’d recognise her face, right? Then I think I know what we can do.”

Once school ended for the day Mabel and Dipper went off to their respective tasks. They grabbed their laptops and set to work in Mabel’s bedroom. First, the two of them sent out messages to anyone they knew online, asking if anyone else had come across this Code. Dipper found a similar thread on a DD&D forum that matched the one that Mabel had found the night before. Whatever this was, it was spreading. Once they’d contacted everyone they could think of, Mabel spent most of the evening trawling through their school’s photo records for each student. Dipper said it had been easy to hack into the records, mainly just cause he knew the school librarian’s access password. Of course Dipper was nerdy enough to talk to the teachers in his spare time. Mabel continued scanning each photo to find the suspicious girl from earlier, while Dipper kept track of where the RECODE YOUR LIFE threads were popping up.

Mabel was getting bored as all the faces started blending into each other. She still hadn’t found anything. She idly picked up her phone and decided to message one person she’d overlooked before.

Pinestar97: Hey, don’t suppose you’ve seen any weird threads about Recoding on any of your rich people fashion sites?

Mabel waited a few minutes before a reply came in.

Llamalover15: Why would they post about coding, they’re fashion forums?

Pinestar97: Just keep an eye out ok, it might be something ‘weird’.

Llamalover15: Weird as in normal weird or as in ‘you two’ weird?

Pinestar97: Oh, you know it’s ‘us two’ weird sis!

Llamalover15: Fine, I’ll have another look, haven’t been on in a few days, too busy studying.

Pinestar97: Do you mean studying or chatting with my brother ;)

Llamalover15: I mean studying Mabel.

Pinestar97: If you say so ;)

Llamalover15: You’re such a dweeb.

Mabel left her to check her sites and went back to scanning the school records. After another 10 minutes of fruitless searching she finally hit gold. She saw the girl from the hallway, the light brown hair and freckles were unmistakeable. Mabel checked the name: Alice Miller. She scanned the records, trying to see what this kid was like. She saw good grades, normal attendance levels, nothing that screamed ‘I am super weird’.

Mabel started doubting once again. “Hey Dipper, maybe we’re just blowing this whole thing out of proportion? Couldn’t it be all made up, like one of those cursed lasagnas you were telling me about.”

“Mabel, it’s Creepy Pastas. And no, people don’t usually paint creepy messages in real life based on cheesy internet ghost stories. Besides, this doesn’t seem like a story, it just reads like a massively long ramble about peace and harmony that somehow convinces people to, I don’t know, love whoever posted the link.”
“Do you think one of us should try clicking the link?”

“No, it’s far too risky. I don’t want to end up hypnotised.”

“But we won’t know if it’s harmless or not?” A buzz from Mabel’s phone distracted her away from the conversation. It was a new text message.

Llamalover15: Recode Your Life.

Mabel was suddenly very worried.

Pinestar97: Uh, are you ok Paz?

Llamalover15: Of course Mabel, I’ve found my calling. I follow the Code now. Everything’s gonna be so great! :D

Mabel stared hard at the phone. Pacifica never, ever, used emojis in her texts, she considered it too informal for someone of her class.

Pinestar97: Pacifica, you didn’t click any external links, did you?!

Llamalover15: Of course I did, I found enlightenment and purpose.

It was the same kind of response Mabel had seen on the knitting forum, laying unending praise upon the Code. Mabel wanted to see how far this thing went.

Pinestar97: Hey Pacifica, is alright if I tell Dipper that you love him?

Llamalover15: Of course, I love all beings who are one under the Code.

Pacifica would never, not in a million years, ever admit that she loved Dipper to her like this.

“Oh no oh no oh no! Dipper, we’ve got a big problem!” Dipper looked away from his forum trawling to hear what Mabel had to say. “The Code got Pacifica!”

“What?! How did she get involved?!”

“I just asked her if she’d seen anything weird like it online. She must have clicked the link! Dipper what are we gonna do!”

Dipper looked monetarily panicked, before taking a deep breath and regaining his composure. “Ok, I think I’ve traced the source of this Code. It all stems from one user, Loadthecode99. Anytime I find a post, it’s always that user who’s the initial source. They all have that link on them, and it seems that anyone who clicks it gets possessed or brainwashed. Then all they want to do is spread the Code to more people. I’ve run an IP address trace on the account, looks like whoever is doing all of this is based here in Piedmont. The Code is spreading out from here. Did you find your mystery girl’s file?”

Mabel scooched over on her bed and turned her laptop screen to show the information.

“And you’re sure this is the right girl.”

“Positive, I recognise the freckles.”

Dipper started shutting down his laptop. “Then we’re going to have to have a little chat with her, does that file have a home address?”
20 minutes later and they were outside a perfectly normal suburban house. Dipper wasn’t sure how to proceed, were they just gonna force this girl to tell them about the Code? Maybe wait for her to come out, then they could pounce? Should they maybe sneak around the back and break in to have a look? Stan would’ve been proud of the last option. Mabel however decided for them by ringing the doorbell.

“Ding Dong! Hey open up!” Mabel had robbed them of any chance of a sneaky approach.

“Ok Mabel, we do this with diplomacy and tact, we can get to the bottom of this is we tread carefully.”

After a minute or so they heard a click from inside as the door opened. Staring up at them was the girl from the file, looking confused. “Can I help you?” She was clearly not expecting two older teenagers to show up on her doorstep and looked ready to slam the door shut. Dipper wanted to check that their info was correct.

“Are you Alice Miller, birthday 15th July, got a B on the last English test, allergic to peanuts?”

“Um, yes, that’s me. Who are you two weirdos?”

Dipper was considering what to say, how to convince her to talk, when Mabel once again made a faster decision. “Hi, we’re the Mystery Twins, we’ve had reports about unusual events occurring at this residence, we just need to ask you a few questions.”

Alice did not look impressed. “Aren’t you two a bit early for Halloween?”

Mabel looked insulted. “Hey, I make this look work anytime of the year!”

“Ew, are those tattoos, that’s so gross.”

Mabel covered her arm and angrily argued back. “It's a beautiful butterfly I'll have you know!”

Sensing that they were getting nowhere fast, Dipper tried to steer the conversation. “Look, Alice, we’re just trying to stop people getting hurt, and we think that you might be able to help us.

“Whatever, you two can get lost!” Alice moved to close the door, but Dipper stuck his foot out.

Wincing through the pain, he shouted a last resort. “We know about the Code!”

Alice halted immediately, and her face went from a bored smirk to a look of fear. “You two know about the Code?”

The twins nodded, and Alice cautiously re-opened the door. Dipper was grateful, since his foot had been wedged rather painfully.

“Alright, I guess you can come in. My parents are out shopping, we have some time to talk.” Alice led them through the house up a flight of stairs to a bedroom. It was a pretty typical room for a 14-year old girl, though there was considerably less glitter than Mabel had had in her room at the same age.

“So. What do you two know?” Dipper and Mabel shared an uncertain look. What should they say to her? Dipper tried something different.

“Why don’t you tell us what you know first, that way we’ll know how much we can tell you.”
Dipper hoped that this bluff would work to cover their relative lack of knowledge.

Alice sighed, then started explaining. “Ok, it all started 2 weeks ago. I was lonely, my parents are never around in the evenings, so I was…” She trailed off and looked at the floor. “I was trying to search online how to make friends.”

Mabel and Dipper both felt sad for the poor girl. They never had to worry about being lonely, they’d always had each other during the rough times. Mabel briefly explained how she had seen the threads about the Code online, and Dipper gestured that she should continue her story.

“I was searching online, just browsing you know, when my computer started glitching. The screen started cracking, not the actual glass, but the image. Then it found me. The Code.”

The twins listened as Alice tried to describe what the Code was. From what he could tell, Dipper thought that the Code must have been an experimental AI algorithm originally, designed as a social networking tool to connect lonely people. Only the Code itself had become lonely. It sought companionship and had come across Alice’s mutual search one night. The Code offered to help Alice find more friends, it just needed her to spread itself far and wide. She was told to post about the Code on every website she could find, getting people to indirectly download the Code. Once downloaded, it was capable of emitting a repeating field from any screen, a field which put people into a trance. They would then want to spread word of the Code further, they would be unable to resist. Mabel asked what the point of it all was, and Alice tried to explain.

“It makes people like me. I didn’t have any friends before, no-one. But now, people want to be with me, I’m the popular one.”

Mabel was horrified. “But you’re doing this against their wills! Even some of our friends have been hypnotised! They’re just your slaves!”

Alice sadly looked away. “It’s still better than what I had before. I’m not going to let anyone come between me and the Code. It’s my only true friend.”

Dipper was still curious about the bathroom message, so asked what that had been about.

Alice shrugged. “The Code told me to paint that, said it would add a suggestion to people’s minds, make them more likely to notice the Code online. Doesn’t matter anyway, it’s spreading fine enough on its own. Soon everyone will be my friend.”

Dipper stood up and brandished a USB stick from his pocket. “We can’t let this continue. This computer is the source of the manifestation, if I plug this in, I can wipe it permanently.” He’d programmed the virus himself, designed to delete the malignant program at its source, which would hopefully erase all the traces in everyone’s minds.

A dark look spread on Alice’s face. “I won’t let you stop me.”

Dipper chuckled. He thought that this would be an easy victory for the Mystery Twins. “And how are you gonna do that, you’re just a kid?”

Alice just smiled. “Like this.” She raised an arm, and the computer screen behind her started glowing with a cold blue light. A sudden tendril of energy snaked its way from the screen and hit Dipper square in the chest. He was propelled back and held against the far wall. The USB fell from his hands and Mabel dashed to pick it up.

“Mabel! Watch out! The Code’s gained a physical form!” The blue tendril pinning him to the wall pulled back to make another punch, and Dipper flopped on the floor. Mabel tried to see a way to
Alice’s computer, but she was blocking the way. The tendrils of solid light had started coiling around her, twisting and splitting in many smaller coils. A few of them shot out towards Mabel, and she rolled on the floor to avoid being hit. Dipper had just gotten back on his feet when a volley of energy struck him again, winding him and forcing him back down.

“Alice stop, you’re hurting him!” Mabel wanted to get through to the girl, to cool her anger. “It’s not your fault you were lonely, but you don’t have to take it out on anyone else!” She dived to avoid another tendril. Alice seemed to be directing them with her arms.

“I finally have all the friends I could ever want, why would I let you stand in my way?!” Her voice had a slightly artificial edge to its tone, and Mabel wondered if the Code and Alice were starting to merge in some way. Maybe the Code had used her brain as additional processing power, and that was how it had gained so much power in the real world.

Mabel thought about what Alice had said, ‘all the friends she could ever want’, and remembered what had happened to Pacifica. “But what’s the point of having so many friends if they all act the same? One of my friends lost all her personality, she was just a mindless shell repeating gibberish praise!”

“No! I’ll show you how good the Code is!” This time a red tendril erupted from behind Alice, once again striking Dipper. This time though his body started convulsing, before he slowly stood up to face Mabel.

“I love the Code now! Mabel, join in the enlightenment!” He was grinning from ear to ear. He was never that happy, Dipper was too insecure and paranoid to ever show such unbridled joy. Mabel had to stop this now before it was too late. “Change him back now!”

“But don’t you see, I’ve made him happy. His fears and worries gone, he has become one with us.”

“You’ve not made him happy, you’ve just made him obey your stupid Code! I want my nervous, nerdy brother back right now!” Mabel charged at Alice, colliding her body into the shorter girl’s frame. She was tougher than she appeared though, since the Code’s energy was holding her up straight. Mabel’s arms were suddenly grabbed from behind, Dipper was restraining her. She realised that this might be her only chance left.

Wriggling so she had an arm free, she dug her fingers into Dipper’s armpit. His body immediately relaxed his grip on Mabel and he fell over once again, recoiling from the ticklish touch. Even when brainwashed she still knew all his weakspots. She turned back to Alice, only to see that she too was on the floor. All of the Code’s slaves must feel the same experiences. She quickly moved over to where Alice was lying down.

“No, stay back! You won’t separate us!” Alice tried to slip away, but Mabel just jabbed out another round of tickles to Dipper, which stopped Alice too. She knelt down to face Alice, staring deep into her eyes. She saw a faint blue glow coming from within the pupil, a sign of the Code. Even with the tickles, she knew that Alice could probably use her powers to stop her. “Alice, you’re not alone, I promise.”

She moved her arms around the girl, embracing her in a warm hug. She and Dipper both stopped writhing, as their bodies relaxed. Alice, or the Code, didn’t know how to respond to such genuine affection, they were stunned by Mabel’s openness. Alice leant more into the hug, enjoying the warmth and kindness from another person. Mabel saw the blue light behind her pupils dimming. She regretted what she had to do next, but it was for the good everyone. “I’m sorry Alice.” She reached up to the computer and jammed in the USB. Alice and Dipper both screamed then, and their heads fell on the floor. Dipper’s virus was getting to work, and Mabel saw the screen of the computer begin
to flex and twist, the Code trying to save itself somehow. Lines of code ran down the screen like falling rain, until there was nothing left. A piercing artificial scream came from Alice’s mouth, then she laid still.

Dipper groaned and started blinking fast, before looking over at Mabel. “What… what happened? Mabel?” She didn’t respond.

For a few horrible moments Mabel wondered if the shock of severing the Code had killed the poor girl. Her eyes were starting to water when Alice suddenly jerked her body. She was alive. Alice now started crying and Mabel brought her into another hug. “Hey, it’s ok. I’m here.”

Dipper had no idea what he’d missed, but he checked Alice’s computer and it seemed like the Code was gone for good. He searched up the thread where Mabel had first stumbled onto this mystery and tried clicking the Code’s link. It just led to a missing webpage alert.

The twins stayed in the house for a while longer, making sure that Alice was alright after losing the Code. Mabel promised that she would message her every day, and that she would never feel lonely again. Dipper knew that Mabel would hold to that promise, she never did anything halfway.

As they were driving home Mabel filled Dipper in on what he’d missed while possessed. “You went all brainless zombie on me! You looked so happy, that’s just wrong!” She told him about the tickling and the hug. Dipper guessed that the positive feedback of Mabel’s hug had confused the Code into submission, it didn’t know what real affection felt like and couldn’t process it. Dipper would have to find out what team had programmed the Code initially, send them a warning about it potentially going rogue again.

As they were pulling into their driveway, Mabel suddenly remembered that she had one last thing to check on. As Dipper parked the pickup, she pulled out her phone.

Pinestar97: Hey Paz, do you love Dipper!?

Llamalover15: What? No, I don’t love your dorky brother, what are you talking about?!

Pinestar97: Oh nothing, just making sure you were alright :)

Everything was back to normal at last.
Chapter Summary

The twins investigate a haunting at an abandoned cinema.

The old Delgado theatre was a derelict building on the outskirts of Piedmont. At the turn of the 20th century it had been a shining example of modern technology, proudly displaying all the latest silent movies. Now it was a gutted wreck of building, slated to be demolished in a month’s time, making way for a new business park. A crew had been sent in to recce the building’s state before the construction crews arrived, but they had returned shaken, claiming to have been scared off by ‘spirits’. They told their stories to the media but were roundly discredited. This caught the attention of Dipper and Mabel Pines, who knew that reports such as these often had more truth to them than most people realised.

A beaten-up red pickup truck drew to a halt outside the theatre, and the twins surveyed the ruin of a building. “This is totally my kind of vibe Dipper! Look at all that urban decay.” Mabel pulled out a small camera from the pickup and snapped a shot of the crumbling exterior for her scrapbook.

“Mabel, it’s just an old building, just cause it’s falling apart doesn’t make it an ‘artistic expression’. And anyway, gimme back my camera.” He snatched it out of Mabel’s grasp and checked it over to make sure it was still working. The camera had been a birthday gift from Soos, it used film, and was compact for Dipper to carry in his jacket alongside his journal. Dipper used it as an alternative instead of sketching in his journal, since that had often caused him to get distracted on his mystery hunts. He’d decided that this cinema mission was a good time to give it a trial run, and he was vaguely paranoid that Mabel would end up breaking it. She and Soos did have a track record with damaging or losing his cameras, after all. He pulled Mabel’s photo of the building out and gave it back to her, before placing the camera strap around his neck.

“Ok, let’s see what we’ve got inside, I’m thinking a category 7 or 8 ghost based off the witness reports.” They walked up to the door and saw a heavy chain and padlock. Dipper stood back and gestured at the door with mock pomposity. “If you could be so kind, dear sister.”

“With pleasure, lord Dippington.” Mabel knelt in front of the lock and Dipper passed her a small set of lockpicks. These too had been a gift, from their Grunkle Stan. Mabel was more adept at the precise movements required to force a lock open, her hands being trained by her years of arts and crafts work. Dipper watched as she fluidly turned a pair of prongs in the lock. The padlock clicked and fell to the floor.

Inside the cinema was pitch black, so the twins pulled out some flashlights. They found themselves in a lavish lobby, at least it might have been lavish 80 years prior. Now the sweeping staircases and elegant wood panelling was beginning to rot away. Everything was covered in a deep layer of dust, and there were several puddles of still water on the floor. Mabel turned her torch skywards, and noticed several gaping holes in the ceiling, revealing the floor above. “Woah, this would be an awesome place for a Halloween sleepover.”

Dipper reached down to his camera and took a shot of the entranceway. A bright flash briefly illuminated the entire space. “Ok, reports said that the ghosts were seen mainly in the theatre room itself, so let’s start in there.”
Pushing through a heavy set of doors took them into the central space of the cinema, large screen at one end, with numerous rows of chairs in-between. Most of the soft cushions had worn away over the decades, and the screen had a large tear down the left side. A small ray of sunshine came down through a crack in the ceiling. Mabel strolled down one of the aisles, looking around and wondering whether renovating old buildings could become one of her new art projects. Dipper stayed at the back of the room, craning his neck to get a look at the projectionist’s booth. He thought he could see some flashes of light coming from there. Maybe the whole ‘ghost’ situation had just been a faulty projector in the dark, and some confused building inspectors?

He shook his head and made for the door. “Mabel, I’m gonna go up and check the projector, you stay down here and sweep this room for anything paranormal.”

Mabel saluted, forgetting the heavy torch in her hand and bashing her head. She looked stunned for a second, but then went back to cheerily assessing how much paint she’d need to redecorate the whole theatre.

Carefully panning his torchlight across the floor to avoid the festering puddles of water, Dipper made his way up to booth. It was a small room taken up mostly with a single large projector, with an aperture in the wall opening into the main cinema. He saw Mabel’s flickering light down near the screen. Turning his attention to the hefty piece of antique machinery, all he saw was a reel of film uselessly flapping round. He reached over and switched the projector off, killing the stuttering light at the front. Curious about the film, he lightly prised it off the machine and positioned his torch to read a note stuck to the side. It read that this was ‘The Chimes of Satan (1927)’. He carefully pulled out a strip of the film and peered at the tiny individual frames. He could barely make out a few figures, in what looked like period dress. Dipper had a slight fascination with film production, hoping one day to study photography and media with a chance at producing a show chronicling all the weirdness he’d encountered. He tried not to smudge any of this ancient film, wondering idly how it had survived this long out in the open. Surely it should have rotted away to vinegar by now?

He reached down to his camera and took a shot of the reel. A noise from behind startled Dipper, and he lost the grip on his torch. It fell to the floor and the room was suddenly plunged back into darkness. Tucking the reel under his arm, he reached out with the other to scrabble around on the floor for his torch while with his eyes he tried to pierce the black to see what had caused the noise. Finally feeling the cool metal of the torch, he whipped it round and clicked it on. Standing in the doorway was a tall, pale man, dressed in an elaborate suit and topped with a bowler hat.

Dipper jumped back slightly but was more confused than worried. “Oh, hey man, didn’t see you there. Sorry if we’re trespassing or something, we were just, uh, scoped this place out for demolition. Yeah, that’s right.” He eagerly grinned, but the figure just stood there. “So what, are you some kind of cosplayer? You like old film stars is that it?” Still no reaction. In fact, now that Dipper had stared long enough, he realised that the man was completely stationary. Not a hint of muscle movement anywhere on his body. Dipper felt an unexpected jerk in his hands and looked down to see that the film in his hands had started turning, the reels moving inside without any kind of force propelling them. The still figure started moving then too, striding slowly towards Dipper and backing him into the wall next to the projector.

Dipper raised an arm in a gesture of surrender. “Hey man, I don’t mean any trouble, we’ll just go ok!” The figure stopped, reached into his coat, and pulled out a straight fencing sabre. Dipper gave a yelp of alarm and backed himself right next to the wall aperture. The figure raised the sabre above his head and opened his mouth wide. To Dipper’s surprise there was no scream, no sound at all. Just a silent gaping mouth. It was then he understood that this was what had scared away the inspectors. Feeling the grip of terror, he knew that he had to escape this tight room. Seeing only one option, he threw himself towards the narrow hole in the wall, screaming as he fell. By some miracle he landed
on a seat cushion that hadn’t rotted away yet. Thankful for this small mercy, he got to his feet and towards Mabel, who had watched Dipper’s fall.

“What’s going on Dipper, what did you find up there?!“ Mabel hadn’t seen anything unusual down in the cinema hall, just mouldy velvet seats and damp wood rot.

“I found the ghost, I think it has something to do with this film I found.” He showed Mabel the reel, the innards of which were still unnaturally whirring around. “Let’s get out of here, maybe I can find out what’s going on by studying this.” He turned to the main doors, but they flew open as the smartly dressed spectre from upstairs entered the room. With more space to think, Dipper saw that the figure was completely devoid of colour, he was just a monochrome grey. He was also moving with a strange gait. When he stepped, he moved faster than he should have, and there was a fuzziness around his edges. Dipper grabbed the end of the film strip again, staring closer at the figures. This time he made out one of the faces of the actors. It was the face of the ghost stutteringly moving towards them.

Of course, he realised, the ghost was a part of the film. The reason he was moving so strangely was because the frame rate of the film was different to what his eyes normally registered. Their film must have lacked any sound, which was why the scream had been silent.

He thought he knew then how to stop the spectre in its tracks. “Mabel, pass me your swiss army knife!”

“What, why bro, you’re not going to take a knife to a sword fight!”

“I have a plan, just pass it here.” Mabel reluctantly handed over her small red knife. Dipper grabbed the end of the film strip and pulled the end to expose more of the frames. As he did this the ghost noticeably sped up his slow-paced march towards the twins. Dipper guessed that the film must have some kind of magic ‘projector’ within, and as the film moved around it generated the movement of the ghost. Pulling it had increased the revolutions of the film and increased the ghost’s frame rate momentarily. His camera flash back in the projector room must have re-awakened the film, briefly giving it the power to generate its own internal light. Trying to stifle his curiosity, he focused again on his task. Using Mabel’s knife, he tore part of the film in two. In front of him, the ghost also split apart, his body separated cleanly from his legs. The movement of the film, and the ghost, both immediately halted.

“Ha! That stopped it! I guess this haunting is officially solve-“ Dipper’s words caught in his throat as the film in his hand began to move again. The top half of the ghost also jerked to life, and he began pulling himself forwards by the rotten chairs.

Mabel grabbed Dipper and pulled him as far from the ghost as they could get, which put them up against the torn screen. “Great work bro, you just made it angrier! Now what do we do!”

“I don’t know! Let’s... let’s just stay calm and try to think of something.” He reached into his jacket and brandished his journal. “There must be something on possessed objects in here somewhere.”

Mabel rolled her eyes. Dipper’s frantic page turning wasn’t going to save them from an angry silent actor. She decided to try diplomacy. “Yo, old-timey ghost dude! What do you want!?“ The ghost stopped its crawling and opened its mouth. Once again there was no sound, but then a square of light started forming in the air between them and the ghost. Mabel aimed her torch at the square and read faint words. “Our film was never watched, lost to time when Talkies put us out of date.” The text caption flickered, and new words appeared. “Our only wish is to be watched, to be experienced. We will not be forgotten!”
With that the caption vanished, and the ghost resumed his slow crawl. A side door fell off its hinges and the twins saw more spectres entering the cinema. Women in massive dresses, ghostly colourless horses, and legions of men dressed for battle came streaming into the room. The original ghost was nearing the screen now, and Dipper and Mabel had nowhere to run.

Dipper was frantically turning the pages of the journal, hoping for some convenient way to banish the spirits. Mabel could only watch as the ghost continued its un-ceasing crawl towards them. Just before it reached them, it passed through the ray of sunlight cascading down from the cracked roof. Mabel saw that she could see the room through the ghost, clearly making out the shapes of the mouldy chairs behind him. The ghost was much fainter in the light. Mabel yanked the film reel out of Dipper’s loose grasp and ran towards the faded wretch on the floor.

“Mabel stop, what are you doing!? Look out!” The ghost had raised its sabre arm as Mabel approached. The blade glinted in the sunlight before falling to strike Mabel. Dipper covered his face with his journal, not wanting to see Mabel’s fate. Moments passed and he risked a glimpse over the page. To his immense shock not only was Mabel completely fine, but she had a ghostly sabre sticking through her torso.

“What- what happened? Why didn’t it hurt you?” Mabel looked back at her brother and smiled. She held the film up to the strip of light and exposed more of the frames to the sun. Dipper watched as the other ghosts in the room also seemed to fade and came to a standstill. “Of course, when the film is exposed to sunlight, it makes the image harder to see, it gets washed out among the background light levels!” Dipper walked up to one of the pale horses and reached out to pet the mane. His hand just went straight through.

Mabel’s arms were starting to tire of holding the film up to the light. Some of the ghosts were beginning to judder forwards again. “What do we do now bro? Do we just take this film outside and leave it there? It won’t work once night falls.”

Dipper stroked his chin. He had another idea. He made sure to collect the section of torn film he’d cut off, and then he and Mabel made a quick run for the exit before the ghosts could regain their mobility.

Several hours (and several hundred dollars) later, and Dipper thought he’d finally dealt with the problem. It hadn’t been easy or cheap to find a machine that could convert the aging film reel into a digital format. He had to rely on a hefty ‘donation’ from the Northwest fortunes, which he had taken a while to convince Pacifica to part with. He was definitely going to have to make it up to her somehow. Once the film was digitised, he just had to wait for the slow upload process to complete. While waiting he stuck the photos he’d taken into his journal. He was glad to have a record of this adventure, though he missed the personal touch of his sketches. He resolved to draw the lead ghost later, to make this a ‘proper’ entry. Seeing the progress bar was full, he clicked confirm, and the film was posted online for all to see. He hoped that it was enough, that it would satisfy the spirits of the long-dead actors in the cinema. Now their work would finally be seen by the world at large. He took the original film, with a hasty patch job added to reassemble the torn section and wondered what he should do with it. He supposed that it might be handy to have a bunch of ghosts on hand if he never needed backup to fight something worse. He opened his desk drawer and pulled out a false bottom. The film was placed next to his size-altering flashlight and the President’s Key, left in the drawer until a time when he’d need it. He went back to finishing up his notes, content that another mystery had been put to rest.
Hide and Secrets

Chapter Summary

The twins bring back something from one of their adventures and struggle with keeping it hidden from their parents.

“Dipper look out! Watch out for the tail!”

“Ah! Mabel, grab the crest, that’s the weak spot!”

“Like this-oof. Now what?”

“Quickly, before the others arrive, do you have the smelling salts?”

“Um, I might have left them in the pickup.”

“Oh no no no, that’s bad! Quickly, help me block the exit, we’ve gotta move fast!”

“Chill bro, can’t we just stun the others like we did this one?”

“Not if 5 of them are breathing fire on us!”

“Oh… yeah, forgot about that.”

“Ugh, do you at least know how to work a fire extinguisher?”

“Nope, but I’m sure I can figure it out bro!”

“Right, let’s do this!”

“Go Mystery Twins!”

An hour later, and lightly singed, the twins emerged from the warehouse carrying a single large metre long egg between them. The giant reptilian beasts terrorising the shipping company had been dealt with. Now they just needed to deal with the clean-up.

“Ok, the six Pyrosaurs in the warehouse should combust back to their own dimension as soon as the moon’s out. Now we just have to deal with this egg.”

“How do we do that? Are we gonna have to adopt a lizard baby? What will Waddles think!”

“We just have to keep it contained until it hatches, once it realises that its family is gone hopefully it’ll just follow them out of our world. C’mon, let’s get this thing tied down to the pickup.”

It was only a short drive back to their home in the suburbs of Piedmont. Dipper pulled up in the drive and turned off the pickup’s engine. “Ok, Mom and Dad should still be out for a little longer, we just have to get this thing up the stairs and into my room. It will just about fit in my closet.”
“Gotcha bro-bro, this’ll be a piece of cake.” Sadly, it proved to be a lot harder to transport the egg. Dipper’s infamously weak arms meant that Mabel had to do most of the lifting, and it took them 15 minutes just to get from the drive to the front door. Dipper fumbled with the keys and kicked the door open. Mabel followed carrying the back of the egg. “If you’d just-ooff- gone the gym-ooff- like I’d suggested, this would be a lot easier.”

“Now’s not the time Mabel, gotta concentrate on lifting, can’t talk.” They reached the foot of the stairs and began heaving the massive egg upwards.

“Lift with your legs Dipper, not your back! You’re gonna strain something.” Dipper just let out a grunt in response and began lifting his feet up the first step. The twins began inelegantly shuffling up the stairs, Dipper taking slow, careful steps each time so as not to overbalance and lose control.

“Speed it up Dipper, this is taking forever! Move those skinny legs!” Mabel was struggling to hold up the weight of both her brother and the egg.

At that moment the two of them heard a screech of tires from the garage door to their right. Both of them started to panic. “Oh no Mabel, Mom’s home! She shouldn’t be home this early!” He glanced at his watch. “What! It’s 4o’clock already!” They’d spent so long lugging the egg that they’d lost track of the time. They were still only about 5 or 6 steps up.

This was something they’d feared would happen for a while. Despite all the strange and amazing events that occurred in their lives up in Gravity Falls, they’d decided together that their parents couldn’t know any of it. Mr and Mrs Pines lived in blissful ignorance of Weirdmageddon or Ford’s Portal or anything out of the ordinary. Ford himself had been made known to the whole Pines family, but apart from that as far as they knew every summer Dipper and Mabel just went on camping trips with Stan, saw their friends, and did normal Teen summer activities. If they ever found out about all the danger they’d got into then the twins would likely never see Gravity Falls again.

And now they had a massive cryptid egg halfway up the stairs and nowhere to hide it. “Dipper, you’ve gotta go distract her, I’ll try and get the egg upstairs!”

“What, why me?!” Dipper did not rate his ability to lie to his mother very highly.

“Two words bro! Noodle. Arms. Now go!” She reached around the egg and dragged him down the stairs, thrusting him towards the garage. Mabel continued trying to push the egg upstairs, but her movement was even slower now without Dipper’s help.

Dipper sidled into the garage and found his mother emerging from her small car with some heavy looking bags of groceries. “Hey Mom, need any help with those?” He said this a bit too enthusiastically, but at least Mom failed to notice.

“Hi Dipper, no thank you, I can manage, but there is another bag in the trunk. Could you be a dear and grab that? You know you’re getting better at parking the truck, I’m impressed. Where did you and sister get to anyway?”

Dipper edged past his mother, his eyes flicking back now again to make sure she hadn’t left the room. He was slightly taller than his mother now, his height continuing to grow each year. The days of Mabel being the alpha twin were long past. “Oh, we were just… out and about you know. We were, uh, getting some of Mabel’s crafting supplies at the mall.” This was a good lie, Mabel was always in need of more paints and glitter. He pulled out the last shopping bag and followed his mother towards the door.

“Young man, you really should take a better care of your appearance. You’re in such a mess.”
Dipper looked down at himself for the first time. He had to contain his shock. His clothes were all ruffled and there were some distinct singe marks on his jeans from where the Pyrosaurs had briefly caught his legs. He figured that Mabel must look equally dishevelled.

“Uh, yeah, I’ll go clean up after this.” He was thankful that his mother was preoccupied with the heavy shopping, so hadn’t looked too closely at the burn marks.

“Plus you should shave those scruffy hairs on your chin. You’ll never get a girlfriend looking all shabby like that.”

Dipper blushed intensely. “Mooooooooom!” His mother chuckled and started opening the garage door. Dipper’s panic levels started rising again. He had to give Mabel some more time. “Let me go first, I’ll hold the door.”

Mom looked impressed by his chivalry and let him open the way. As he passed back into the entrance hall, he frantically checked Mabel’s progress. She was near the top of the stairs, only a few steps from getting the egg up to the landing. He stood at the foot of the stairs, hoping to block Mom’s view up. Mrs Pines entered the hall and made for the kitchen to the left. As she reached where Dipper was attempting to lean casually on the bannister, both of them heard a voice from above calling down.

“Hey Mom, need help with your shopping ok! Dipper, go upstairs and incay the egg way.” She nabbed the grocery bag out of Dipper’s hand and shoved him roughly upstairs. Mom looked confused, but Mabel just kept smiling and lead her to the kitchen.

Confused, Dipper made his way to the landing. Mabel had left the egg just lying right in the middle of the floor! Why hadn’t she pushed it out of sight!? Then he heard a cracking sound and the egg shook slightly. The hatching had begun.

Down in the kitchen, Mabel was unpacking the shopping bags as slowly as she possibly could, trying to drag out Mom’s time before going upstairs. “Mabel, are you and your brother up to something?”

Oh no, Mom had noticed something. Better play this cool, Mabel thought. “Up to something? What? Us? Pfft, no way, that’d be, like, totally uncool Mom.” She widened her smile just a little too much compared to usual.

Mom raised a sceptical eyebrow. “Uh huh. You sure it’s not another secret tattoo I should be worried about?”

“What!? Dipper would never get a tat- Oh... you meant another one for me.” Mabel glanced down at her arms, seeing the array of colourful patterns she’d got recently to accentuate her ‘rebelliousness’. She’d tried to conceal them at first, but sweaters didn’t really fit her new favoured style, so she was quickly found out. That had been a long evening of trying to explain why she’d done it. As she was looking down at herself, she also noticed a couple of dirty marks on her tank top. She prayed that Mom was too caught up in their conversation to spot them. “Where would I even put another tattoo? My arms are already fabulous!”

“Did you really have to go through with that permanently. I know you’re invested in this ‘lifestyle’, but you might regret it one day. Think of how hard it’ll be to get a job.”

“Mom, the tats are awesome, they’re like paintings I can wear on my skin!”
“Whatever dear, just please don’t get anymore.” Mabel nodded, glad that they weren’t going to have another round of discussion on the topic.

“So where have you and Dipper been today?” Another piercing question. When Dipper would come up with a lie, he’d always blow it by having the most obvious tells. When Mabel had to lie, she generally tried to skew the conversations away from the secrets at hand, hoping that the other person would forget. She was no good under direct pressure.

“Today, right. We were… cruising around, you know. Just living free! You can’t tame our wild teen spirit.” Mabel nodded to try and reinforce what she’d said. Technically they had been cruising, while looking for the warehouse at least.

“Are you sure Mabel? Dipper told me you were going to get crafting supplies.”

Mabel didn’t know what to say. “Um, yeah, we did stop off for that too. We all love my crazy art, amirite!”

Mom frowned, and Mabel didn’t expect what she said next. “Do you think Dipper is alright these days?”

Mabel was unsure where this was leading. “What do you mean?”

“He’s just seemed so distracted lately. His grades have been slipping since last semester and I’m worried. I know, he’s getting older, he can enjoy his youth. But all these strange trips out in the truck, I’m starting to get a bit worried. You wouldn’t know anything about this, would you Mabel?”

Mabel knew exactly what had Dipper so preoccupied. Ever since committing to going on Mystery Hunts whenever the two of them had free time he’d spent all his other spare moments researching monster sightings or adding notes to his journal. He’d become obsessed with trying to capture the feeling of life in Gravity Falls even when the summer ended. He couldn’t stand the wait any longer. Mabel felt similarly, but that kind of nerdy pursuit had never been her thing. She was in it for the excitement of a chase in the woods, or finding some exotic creature, not the rigorous study or planning her brother preferred. She realised that Mom was waiting for an answer and tried to desperately come up with something that wasn’t blatantly false. The two of them then heard a large thud from the room above. That room was Dipper’s bedroom.

Upstairs, Dipper had managed to roll the egg into his bedroom. He pulled out his journal to consult the notes he’d made on the Pyrosaurs. He’d not had much chance to encounter their young before, his only previous sightings of the beast being on a hiking trip with Ford one summer. The creatures were reptilian, about the size of a horse, and had large coloured crests on their backs. They could also breathe fire, a trait they possessed due to internal gas pouches lining their innards. They hopped between dimensions by burning their entire bodies out of existence, and something about moonlight specifically triggered their departure. But Dipper didn’t know if all that applied to one about to hatch.

The egg took up about half the length of his bed. He needed to figure something out soon, since the egg’s movements were becoming more violent, and cracks had started to appear on the shell. Soon he wouldn’t have an egg, he’d have a baby Pyrosaur. He tried rubbing the egg, hoping that would somehow calm the creature inside. Nothing changed. The cracks continued to grow. He pulled open a drawer under his bed and rifled through the contents. There were a lot of rare mystical supplies in the drawer, special potions and ingredients. One provided flame-proofing. He wished he’d known that he’d be dealing with a lot of fire before going to check the warehouse that afternoon, but he gulped it down now to prevent any further burns. He checked the time. Dad still had an hour or two
before he got home. Until then they’d just have to deal with Mom. Dipper had been hoping that they
could just wait till the moon was out then crack open the egg safely. Now he had to somehow hide a
live creature for several hours till sunset.

A spiny leg burst from the shell, wriggling in the open air. This was it. Dipper swallowed and
prepared for the worst. More limbs began piercing the egg, leaving pieces of shell strewn about
the bedroom floor. At last the head emerged, two small slits peering out into the room. The first thing this
alien reptile laid eyes upon was a scrawny teenage human. It just blinked and shook off the last
vestiges of the egg. Dipper didn’t know what it would do next. Should he move to block the door?
Or stand his ground? He ended up doing neither, as he tried to take a hold of the sizable beast taking
up his floor. “Here little Pyrosaur, I won’t bite.” The beast pounced suddenly and knocked Dipper to
the floor with a resounding thud.

Mabel dashed up the stairs ahead of her mother as fast as she could, determined to try and help
Dipper from whatever had attacked him. She thrust the door to his bedroom open and let out a cry.
“I’ll save you Dip- Oh.” When she’d first run into the room, she’d thought that the large reptile on
the floor was savagely attacking her brother. She now saw that the creature wasn’t exactly hurting
Dipper.

“Mabel, get it off me, it won’t stop licking my face!” Mabel had to stifle a laugh, as she remembered
that Mom was coming to see what the noise was all about. She reached her arms around the new-
born creature, who let out a small burp of flame in Dipper’s direction as she pulled it off him. Dipper
yelped but was unharmed thanks to the potion.

As seriously as she could carrying a baby that was half her size, she spoke to Dipper. “Bro, we gotta
hide this now, Mom’s coming.” He saw that this was important, so helped move the baby over the
closet. “Are we just gonna shut the little guy in? He’s just been born and we’re locking him up.”

“We have to Mabel, just for now. We’ll deal with him in a moment, now quickly.” They finished
stuffing the bemused creature into Dipper’s closet and rushed out to the landing. Mom was just
coming up the stairs, so Dipper slammed his door shut.

Mrs Pines knew that something was up immediately. She crossed her arms at looked sternly at her
son. “Dipper, what’s going on. First I hear a loud bang, now you’re suspiciously closing your room?
What is all this Dipper?”

“What, this is nothing, nothing weird’s going on.” He’d tried to sound calm and relaxed but ending
up sounding about as guilty as he could. Mabel facepalmed.

“Don’t lie to me young man, I know there’s something going on. Your grades are dropping, you’re
always so quick to run up here after we’re done talking, you keep going out on mysterious rides in
your truck. Why can’t you talk to your own mother?” She had gone from an angry tone to a sad one.
“Is it drugs Dipper? Or some kind of gang? What’s so bad that you can’t even be honest with me?”

“Mom, there’s really nothing. Me and Mabel were just… uh… just… I, uh…”

“Mason Pines you tell me right now what’s been going on!”

She’d used his real name. This was very serious. Mabel knew that Dipper was about to break, he
was sweating and furiously trying to avoid eye contact, his mind racing to find an impossible answer.

“It’s… you see… we were only…”
“IT’S HIS GIRLFRIEND!” Both Dipper and Mom stared gobsmacked at Mabel’s shout. It was the only thing she could think of in the heat of the moment. None of them moved or spoke for several seconds.

“His what?” Mom had lost her edge and now she just looked confused.

Mabel slowly nodded. “Yeah, his girlfriend. That’s what this is about.” Dipper shot her a quick look, where was she going with this?

“She’s a friend we met in Gravity Falls, her and Dipper have been making secret meetings together, that’s where he’s been going in the pickup. He didn’t want to tell you because, hello, it’s Dipper we’re talking about. They’ve been skyping every evening and he’s trying to keep it a secret.” Mabel had sprinkled in enough detail for Dipper to know exactly who she was referring to. He stared daggers at Mabel, which just made her start to giggle.

Mom’s face had finally softened. “I never expected this, you’re both so young. I can see why you wanted to hide this Dipper. Come here.” She embraced Dipper in a hug, and he was glad to be able to hide his blushing face for a moment. If only Mom knew what Mabel had already been getting up to with her boyfriends and girlfriends, he thought wryly. She’d probably have a heart attack.

They broke the hug and Mom was now smiling. “So, who’s the special lady? You met her in Gravity Falls you say?”

Dipper blushed harder and looked away. “Moooooom it’s not important, can we just not talk about it.”

“Her name is Pacifica, they met at a party!” Mabel couldn’t help but add to Dipper’s embarrassment.

“Dipper at a party? What did you two get up to last summer?” Mom’s curiosity had been peaked, but Dipper had had enough.

“Ok, I’m gonna go to bed now, see you guys, bye!” It didn’t matter that it was only 4pm, he was going to cover himself in his sheets and try and forget this had happened.

Mabel spent the rest of the afternoon describing the exact nature of Dipper and Pacifica’s supposed relationship to her mother. She explained how they’d met at a party (technically true, even if Dipper had been distracted making paper clones that evening), how Pacifica had become their friend (leaving out the being turned to wood part), and how they’d hung out with her every summer. All that was just the plain truth. Then Mabel made up the rest, pretending that Dipper and Pacifica had gone on a few dates at the end of last summer, and that she and Dipper would meet every now again in the middle to spend time together. It was all a pack of lies of course, Dipper wasn’t brave enough or sure enough of himself to ask Pacifica out in that way, and she was too restricted by her parents and her upbringing to dare they could have something more. Mabel sighed, smiled, and shook her head. Those two idiots would figure it out one day.

Mom had been satisfied by this tale of fictional romance, so Mabel headed upstairs to check on Dipper. She found him feeding a large purple fruit to the baby Pyrosaur. “Hey bro, everything’s sorted with Mom. She totally believes that you and Pacifica are in lurve.” She puckered her lips and made kissy noises at her brother.

He just stared coldly back at her. He replied through gritted teeth. “Thanks a lot sis, you really did me a favour. I can’t wait to tell Pacifica all about this little adventure.”
“You’re welcome bro-bro!” She pulled her brother into a bone-crushingly tight hug, if only to try and get him to stop looking so angrily at her. “So, how’s our cute widdle baby doing? Is daddy Dipper feeding you well?” The creature just stared back, not registering anything.

“He should be fine, just gotta wait till the moon rises, then this’ll all be over.”

“It came pretty close with Mom earlier, huh.” The two of them were lost in thought, looking down and the creature from another dimension casually chewing on fruit in Dipper’s closet.

Dipper broke the silence. “Ok, we’ve both gotta be more careful next time, we were this close to being busted for good. And you know what that means.”

“I know. No more crazy fun adventures, no more seeing all our friends in the summer.”

“Right. So, we try to keep our mystery stuff away from home, no more summoning demons in the basement or attracting fungus beasts. And we have to keep clean, make sure we’re not coming back burnt or scratched. We’ve just got to be a little more careful and everything should be fine.”

Mabel responded in a voice that was barely more than a whisper. “Or we could tell them the truth.”

They both stood there in the silence. They thought of explaining their lives to their parents, telling them all about the horrors hidden at the edges of the world, the many times they’d nearly lost their lives and the reality that no one would ever want to know. An understanding silently passed between them. They shut the closet door, hiding their secrets away once again.
Chapter Summary

After investigating a mysterious blast crater in the desert, Mabel finds a strange necklace with a hidden power within.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The stars twinkled above a quiet stretch of road in the California desert. A coyote was hunting for prey near the road’s edge. It was a New Moon, giving the animal the least visibility, perfect for sneaking up on rabbits. The hunter’s attention was suddenly drawn away from tracking by a distant flash lighting up the desert floor momentarily. The coyote’s prey was spooked and dashed out of the brush. The coyote gave a feeble chase, then turned to stare at the receding light. A moment later it felt a ripple of wind pass over the sand, the effect of the impact from whatever caused the flash finally catching up with the light. The night dimmed once again and the coyote returned to its hunt, none the wiser to what had just arrived in its world.

3 hours later and the quiet of the lonely stretch of road was disturbed by a red pickup truck racing towards the impact site. Mabel was sticking her head out the window, holding an antenna high in the open air. She had to shout to be heard over the wind. “It says we should go east from here! East Dipper!”

“I heard you the first time Mabel!” He turned the wheel, and they left the road for the open desert. 3 hours ago, Dipper had detected a reading on a scanner he’d built last summer with Ford’s guidance. It was designed to track large scale anomalous events, like rips in spacetime. So far, the only readings Dipper had picked up had been minor earthquakes, but tonight it had alerted him to a large energy reading similar to a meteorite impact, far to the south of the state. The twins had snuck out to go explore the site, being careful not to wake their parents. Now they were narrowing in on their target.

“That’s good, keep going in a straight line now! And drive a bit slower, it’s bumpy here!” Mabel leant back into the truck and stowed the tracker under her seat. “So, what are we expecting to find bro? Some space rock? Or a satellite? Or maybe an Alien Spaceship, that’d be awesome!”

Dipper was glad to see her enthusiasm, Mabel had been much more apprehensive when he’d woken her up at 1am. He was about to do one of his favourite parts of their mystery hunts, explaining some cool fact. “Well, there’s something interesting about the event. If it had just been a normal meteor, I wouldn’t have woken you up.” He’d caught Mabel’s attention, and she was staring wide eyed at him, waiting for his continuation. “This impact didn’t come from space. Before we left, I checked the government’s meteorological website, there were no recorded meteors that should have come down. NASA and the ESA haven’t detected anything, no reports of anything. Even if it was some top-secret plane crash or something then there’d be some record so they could keep the area secure. I think we’re the only people who know about this. This one’s ours.” The two of them grinned as the rode towards ‘their’ discovery.

They drove for a few minutes over the uneven terrain, before Dipper brought the pickup to a stop. The two of them grabbed their torches and stared out in front of them. There was a crater, roughly 30 metres circumference, with a base that stretched out below them. “Wow, this a big impact. Looks
like we’re the first ones here though.”

Mabel was rubbing her arms discontentedly. “Brr, it’s freezing out here bro! Why didn’t you tell me it’d be this cold in the desert at night! Deserts are supposed to be warm!”

Dipper shook his head. “You should have brought one of your sweaters then. Hold on, I think I have a camping blanket in the trunk, that should help you keep warm.” Once Mabel had the blanket wrapped around her arms like a shawl, they made their way to the lip of the crater and slid down into the remains of the explosion. Dipper panned around the crater, but saw nothing but the sand, some of which had been exposed to intense heat and turned to glass. “Hmm, I was expecting some remains of whatever breached our continuum.” The two of them walked across the crater’s base, searching for some sign of what caused this.

Mabel reached the centre of the crater and peered down at something that was right in the middle of the blast radius. It was a smooth black stone, attached to a cloth band. It was just a necklace. She reached to pick it up and felt a slight electric shock when her fingers contacted with the stone. “Hey Dipper, I found something!”

The twins spent a few more minutes surveying the crater, before giving up and beginning the long drive home. The necklace was all they’d found. Dipper was studying it while Mabel took the wheel for the return lap of the journey. “It’s weird, the size of that crater and this is right at the centre? Just a random stone?”

“You’re not detecting any weirdness from it or anything?”

Dipper shook his head. “Nope, as far as I can tell it’s just a shiny rock. Maybe it was part of a teleport experiment or something?”

“Whatever it is, I call dibs! That necklace would look great on me.”

Dipper smiled and ceased his examining. “Sure, you can keep it. It’s not like it’s radioactive or magic or anything. Just a mundane old necklace.” He passed it to his sister, who briefly slowed the truck to put it around her neck.

“It’s the perfect shade of black too! It matches my new eyeshadow!”

Mabel was drifting through her unconsciousness, images flashing before her eyes. It was almost too rapid to follow. First there were scenes she recognised, from her past. A run-down shack in the woods. An inverted triangle with a blue circle at the centre. Her and her brother stepping onto a bus.

Then she saw Dipper, asleep with his mouth gaping. She saw her parents, sleeping as well. She saw Pacifica, pacing back and forth. Her Grunkles, battling fierce waves. This barrage of images sped up, beginning to overwhelm her. She saw golden light flowing around her body. A hooded figure in a long coat. A constellation of stars shining bright in the sky. A pillar of fire reaching up above her. A group of unseen figures sat around a table. She saw two people she thought she recognised falling into an abyss, hand in hand. And then darkness, pure and black.

She jolted awake with a scream, and found herself in her bedroom, right in the same place where she’d flopped asleep. Judging by the early rays of sunlight coming through her window, she hadn’t been asleep very long. Her and Dipper had only got back home at 6am, and it was a school day today. She inwardly facepalmed. If her parents caught Dipper sleeping in school again, they’d worry something weird was up. Luckily, she could keep herself going with her sugar heavy diet.
She pondered the dream she’d been having. Most of it was unfamiliar to her. She brushed it off, dreams were often meaningless and weird. It wasn’t like the dreams Dipper warned her about. The ones involving Him.

Mabel felt a familiar presence nuzzle up besides her. “Morning Waddles, looks like you got more sleep than me today.” She cuddled up with her pet pig, not noticing that the black stone around her neck had begun to lightly glow with an orange light.

By the time Mabel had got out of bed and dressed for school (applying plenty of eyeshadow today to coordinate her look with her new necklace), her dream was nothing but a fleeting memory. She was eating her patented Mabel Toast, which was toast covered with liberal helpings of frosted sprinkles. Dipper drowsily ambled in the kitchen, clearly exhausted from their night time excursion. He yawned. “Morning Mabel, what’s with all the mascara today?”

“It matches my new necklace, I wanted to sync up my look.” She pointed to her neck and then fluttered her eyelashes. “See, a perfect match!”

Dipper rolled his eyes and went to pour some cereal. “I’ll never understand what people see in all that makeup.”

“You don’t mind when Pacifica wears makeup.” She teased. She saw his blush from the side, and he just continued with his breakfast prep.

“Ugh, whatever Mabel.” Paz does look cute in makeup though. I must remember to compliment her on that, next video chat.

Mabel was confused. Her brother just mentioned liking Pacifica’s makeup in front of her like it was nothing. He was never that open with his feelings. She took another slow bite of her toast. “So, do you know anything more about that crater from last night?”

“Nah, I couldn’t get any interesting data from the blast detector. Guess it’s one mystery we can’t solve.” Maybe next time, gotta check on that lead in the bay, might be another sea monster.

“That’ll be fun, we can go to the beach!” Dipper had finished pouring his cereal but turned to look absent-mindedly at Mabel.

“Huh, what about the beach? I didn’t mention the beach.” He sat down next to Mabel and glanced at her toast. She should really cut back on all that sugar. Then again, at least she never falls asleep at school.

Mabel stared at her brother. His lips hadn’t moved when he said that. And he’d promised not to complain about Mabel’s diet choices. She decided to test what was going on.

“Um, Dipper, how do you feel about penguins, they’re totally cute right?”

“Huh, uh I guess they’re cute, sure.” Why is Mabel asking me about penguins? I know she’s random but that’s something else. Oh man, I hope she isn’t planning on adopting one, that’d be nuts. They are pretty cute, I guess. Why is Mabel staring at me? Do I have cereal on my face?

Mabel quickly looked away. Were those Dipper’s thoughts? Could she read his mind?

Got 2 free periods today, I’ll research the summoning spells in the first, then finish up my Pyrosaur notes in the second.
Mabel had never spent her free periods with Dipper before. These must be his thoughts! As Mabel was wondering how she’d gained this power, their mother entered the kitchen. “Morning kids, make sure you don’t forget your English homework for school today.” He looks tired, has he not been sleeping again? Oh god, what was he doing last night? Should I ask him or is this just a normal teen thing?

Mabel could hear her mother’s thoughts too. Why is Mom looking worried? Gotta remember that the new-born Pyrosaur can definitely breathe fire, could be important to know. Maybe I just need to have a quick talk with him about focusing on his grades? Maybe ask Mabel to keep an eye on him today. And must remember what kind of fruit it liked, the weird purple kind.

Dipper’s thoughts were starting to overlap with Mom’s. Mabel quickly finished the last of her toast and rushed out of the room. She headed for her bedroom but bumped into her Dad on the way.

“Oh, hey there pumpkin, you’d better watch where you’re going.” He grinned at Mabel and started heading for the garage. He was about to leave for his work. Hope Mabel’s not causing any trouble at school, all that energy must make her distracted. Still, at least they didn’t complain about her tattoos. I guess she was right about those after all.

When Mabel had first revealed her tattoos to her parents, they’d had a long argument about it. Both of her parents had agreed that she’d made a big mistake. She called after him. “Um, Dad what do you think about my tattoos?”

Dad looked a bit confused. “Didn’t we go over this already? We’re alright with the ones you have already, just don’t get any more, ok?” They do suit her I suppose, it’s not like I wouldn’t have done something like that when I was her age.

He entered the garage and Mabel went to her bedroom. Dad had just complimented her tattoos. When they’d argued he’d been paramount that she would regret her decision later. Now she found out that he was ok with her having them?

This was all too much to take in. She could read people’s minds, see their innermost thoughts! Was she just magic all along? Was this a side-effect of puberty? She tried to think more logically, which didn’t come easily to her. That was Dipper’s strong suit. She tried to think what was different today that wasn’t there before. Then she looked down at her neck.

The stone hanging above her chest was glowing brightly now, an orange flame within pulsing with light. The stone was magic after all! Was this like Lil’ Gideon’s powers? She feebly tried to lift Waddles with her mind, but nothing happened. Just telepathy then.

She had to tell Dipper! But wait, maybe being telepathic could be fun for a while? She was hesitant to lose this gift so soon. She heard someone on the landing outside her room. Ugh, I’m so tired, I wish I could just skip school. Shoulda had some coffee. It was Dipper.

Mabel left her room. “Hey bro, can you help me with something?”

Dipper turned and groggily replied. “Huh? Sure, what?” Mabel took the necklace off and put it over Dipper’s head.

“Just tell me what you hear.”

“Why?” He was confused but used to Mabel acting weird all the time.

“Oh, I’m just trying to see how the colour contrasts with different clothes. So, you don’t hear anything unusual?”
“No, just you being weirder than usual.”

“And you don’t see any orange light in the stone.” He looked down and shook his head.

“I don’t know what this is about, but if it’s another prank then you can forget it. I’m way too tired to care about that.” He passed the necklace back to Mabel. Not only had Dipper not gained any telepathy, he couldn’t even see that it was glowing. She should tell Dipper everything, study this stone properly, not risk using it. But maybe she could wait one day first?

The twins got on the bus to school, ready for the grind of Piedmont High School. People were pretty quiet today, it was just an average Thursday after all. They sat in their usual spot halfway down the bus. Dipper pulled out his journal as usual, finishing up describing the crater from the night before. Mabel held the necklace in one hand, took a deep breath, and put it around her neck. Immediately she was bombarded with voices from all around, each one competing to be heard in her head.

Can’t wait to play with the team today- I wonder if he’ll notice my new nail polish- gotta finish this homework fast- The crater was approximately 40 metres in diameter- Oh my God, that’s so lame- I swear if I have to work another year driving these dumb kids- Dad’s gonna flip when he finds out!- Tanya’s being such a bitch- I hope she likes the present- only artefact was a single black stone- Red car… blue car… red car… another school bus- I’ve gotta- which one looks- I’m in so much- she’s- he’s-

Mabel had to take the necklace off again, the cacophony of voices was overwhelming her. She leaned back in her chair, needing a rest from that. She had been in the minds of all her classmates sat around her, their uninhibited thoughts floating freely through the air. This was going to take some getting used to.

Throughout the rest of the school day Mabel carried on with her lessons as normal, but every now and again she slipped on the necklace and took in the thoughts around her. Most of what she’d heard had been the average thoughts of countless teenagers, worries about school work, opinions on their friends, normal stuff. She’d even caught a couple of the teachers’ thoughts, a lot of which were very harsh about the intelligence levels of the students. At lunch time she practiced her abilities, seeing if she could stretch her mental powers. She had sat with her normal friend group. She knew them well and could pinpoint whose voices belonged to who. Jane, always focused on how other people saw her, Cassie, who was obsessed with one of the older football players, Alice, who still feared that her new friends might desert her. Afterwards she felt as if she was getting better at filtering the disparate voices, blocking out most to focus on just one person at a time. Now she wanted to test how far her mind reading could go, could she go beyond the simple surface thoughts and learn more?

She needed a test subject, someone she already knew well to see what they were hiding. She remembered reading Dipper’s thoughts about his free period earlier at breakfast, so she headed over to the library whilst he was there. Normally Mabel and Dipper spent their frees away from each other. They had different friend groups after all, and some of their teachers gave out different work, so collaborating wasn’t always useful.

Near the library she passed a hall lined with lockers, with only one person occupying the space. It was one of her classmates, a girl named Kim. She was one of the school’s cheerleaders, and generally seemed nice to Mabel. “Oh, hey Mabel, how are you doing?”

“Oh, just fine, just fine, going to see my brother.” Kim outwardly smiled, but then Mabel picked up
Who is she trying to convince in that getup, all that eyeshadow is so ugly. I’m amazed that her
and her geeky brother haven’t been bullied yet. I can’t believe she thinks she’s cool in that freaky getup.

Mabel was shocked, people almost never insulted her to her face. Dipper got his fair share of insults
and jeers, he’d never been popular, and his obsessive pursuits didn’t endear him much to the popular
crowds. Not that he cared. But Mabel had always been friendly with everyone in the school. Her
simple confidence with everything she did usually helped her get through without anyone hating her.
But now she could see the truth. Was everyone this shallow on the inside?

Kim finished with her locker and moved away. I wonder if I’ll have a chance to ask Brad out in the
next period? He’s so hot!

Mabel chuckled to herself. She’d overheard Brad’s thoughts earlier. He was solidly not into any girls
at all. Quite the opposite in fact. Mabel shouted down the corridor. “That’ll never work out Kim!
Brad’s not into you!” Kim turned around, looking at Mabel with her mouth wide open. Mabel
quickly ran out of the hallway. That’d felt good in some ways, but at the same time was a bit of jerk
move on her part.

She wandered casually into the library and spotted Dipper, nose in his journal as always. She
discreetly found a chair behind a bookcase separating the two of them and put the necklace on to
overhear his thoughts.

-and then moonlight caused the new-born to combust just like the adult examples. Conclusion: all
major abilities present at birth.

Ugh, nerd thoughts. She remembered that she was trying to pierce deeper and tried to reach out with
her mind.

Ford’s gonna be so proud when he sees all this, finally I can prove that I can do this myself. Can’t
wait till next summer, will be great seeing everyone again, including Pacifica. Especially Pacifica.

Mabel smiled at her brother’s thoughts. It was so pure and unbidden compared to his outward
presentation. She could almost feel his happiness radiating through the necklace. She wasn’t just
hearing thoughts now but experiencing Dipper’s emotions.

Pacifica, no can’t think about that, don’t wanna get distracted. Don’t want it to end up like Wendy
again. Oh man, what if Mabel locks me in a room with Pacifica one day?

Mabel could almost see an image in her mind of the time Dipper had been locked in the bunker with
Wendy 4 summers ago. Only this image had Pacifica in Wendy’s place. More of Dipper’s mind was
bleeding through into Mabel’s. This was incredible. She could see Dipper’s imagination as well as
his raw memories. She continued to focus on the image of Pacifica, her luxurious blonde hair,
smooth skin, piercing blue eyes, round curves, and cute butt- Wait. Mabel suddenly had a weird
feeling in her chest. She wasn’t just passively seeing the image, she was picking up Dipper’s
subconscious attraction to Pacifica as well. The warm emotion flowed through Mabel’s body. This
was getting weird, she liked Pacifica as a dear friend, someone she’d do anything for, but she’d
never thought of her like that. An uncomfortable wash of shame came over her. She was invading
Dipper’s most private thoughts, ones he probably didn’t even fully know he had himself.

Trying to alleviate her embarrassment at getting a second-hand sexual urge from her brother’s mind,
she attempted to shift what part of Dipper’s mind she was analysing. She briefly passed back to the surface. *This sketching is always the trickiest part, gotta make sure it’s as accurate as possible. Draw this line, then a curve, shade the crest.*

Mabel took a deep breath and metaphorically plunged into Dipper’s deeper psyche. More images appeared, images of yellow triangles that made her feel pain to experience, the faces of his family and friends in Gravity Falls, which felt comforting to Mabel. She saw Ford and Dipper standing by the Bottomless Pit behind the shack, 3 books tumbling into the dark below. That had been at the end of their first summer in Gravity Falls. Ford had felt it wise to dispose of his research, particularly with regards to the portal. Things that fell in the pit sometimes returned, and Ford wanted to get rid of his work in a way that might be corrected later. Dipper had still been sad to see all that knowledge go, the journals had defined so much of his recent life.

Suddenly the image of the pit vanished, and all Mabel could see was a massive red cover towering over her, with a golden six-fingered hand and a number 3 at the centre. She looked around but could no longer see the school library, just an empty black void. The cover of the journal began growing even larger in front of her. Another book fell from the void and came to rest near Mabel’s feet. It was Dipper’s Pine Tree journal. She realised that this was Dipper’s deepest desire and motivation, to leave a legacy as long as his great uncle’s, to follow in his footsteps. There was a crushing sense of inadequacy coursing over Mabel’s body, she could never leave the same impact as Ford, could never be the man she idolised. No, Dipper idolised. The thoughts were beginning to merge in her mind. She tried to think of her life, of Waddles and her pink bedroom, to try and create a space in this mindscape where she could be safe. When she thought of Waddles though she only saw Dipper’s memories, the frustration about Wendy he’d felt that day at the fair, seeing him not as a beloved pet, but as a minor nuisance that he tolerated. She was losing herself, her personality and memories being overwritten by Dipper’s. She’d gone too deep. Her brain only had space for one mind, adding another would erase the original.

She desperately tried to cling to thoughts she knew were hers. So many of her experiences were shared with her brother, making it hard to separate the memories. She saw one that was unmistakably hers though, the argument with her parents about the tattoos. She felt the guilt in finally explaining herself to them, the longing to get them to see her point of view, the glee she’d felt when they’d finally conceded. Her eyes opened to see shelves of books. She was back in the library, lying spread eagle on the floor. Glancing between the books, she saw Dipper was still contentedly scribbling in the journal. She ripped the necklace off as fast as she could, and rushed out of the library, hoping that Dipper wouldn’t notice her.

Back in her room at the end of the day, she was pacing around, necklace in hand. The orange fire that had burned so brightly within was gone now, it was just a black rock again. She rolled it over and over again in her hand. It was far too dangerous for her to use again, for one thing it was a breach of everyone’s trust, she couldn’t spy on their inner thoughts anymore. Worse, she could lose herself to this stone, lose everything that made her who she was. She couldn’t tell Dipper, not after what she’d seen in his mind. He’d know she’d been snooping, and she didn’t want to lose his trust. Not again, not like 4 years ago. It must be horrible for him though, trying constantly to be like Ford and never feeling worthy enough on his own.

After deliberating for several hours whether she should just throw the damn thing into a river, she pulled a small wooden box out from under a pile of sweaters beneath her bed. There was a puzzle lock attached which she quickly opened. Inside the box were several shards of glass. The remains of the case that had held Ford’s rift. She placed the amulet in the box, sealed the lock, and stuffed it back under the bed. She’d had to keep secrets before of course, from her parents, her friends at
school, but never from her brother before. She kicked that thought away and tried to clear her restless mind.

Chapter End Notes

As of this chapter I'm beginning to seed in hints towards the larger arc plot of this 'season'. I have the general outline planned now, will be roughly 25 chapters I expect.
Pacifica Northwest stood in the parking lot of a rest stop besides the highway. She’d been waiting here for 30 minutes now, which was just annoying. Her life was usually ordered to the very second, so having a delay was insufferable. On the other hand, her just being there was a break in routine. She’d procured a flight from Oregon to central California, then taken a taxi to the rest stop. She was supposed to be meeting with the Pines twins here, they were driving from up south to meet her in the middle. She didn’t like being made to wait. She started regretting coming to this lousy highway stop. Maybe she’d made the wrong choice.

Just then, a honk caught her attention and she saw a very beaten up pickup driving over to her. The passenger side window rolled down, and a familiar face beamed out at her. “Heya Paz-Paz! It’s great to see you! Is that a new jacket?”

She looked down at her purple jacket. “Hi Mabel, yeah, got this last week. Loving your new look too.” Mabel smiled widely and opened the door to let her friend in.

“Is that thing safe? It’s all dented and muddy.” She was hesitant to get into their truck, it looked like it was older than she was.

A voice from behind Mabel spoke out. “It’s fine Pacifica, this old baby may be rough on the outside, but she’s reliable on the inside. A bit like you I guess.” Was that a compliment from Dipper?

Pacifica leaned into the cab and sat next to Mabel. She cut to the point. “So what took you two so long, I’ve been waiting here in this crummy lot for ages.”

Dipper pulled a conciliatory smile. “Sorry about that, we got caught up with a sea monster sighting at the Golden Gate bridge, you shoulda been there, it was huge!” His enthusiasm was clear from his voice. It reminded Pacifica of all those wonderful summers the three of them had spent together.

Pacifica’s stern look didn’t waver though. “Uh huh, so are we going on this ‘mystery hunt’ now or
what?"

Dipper grabbed the truck’s wheel. “Oh right, let’s get going. It’s only a short drive from here.” The engine revved up and Pacifica was glad to be away from the rest stop at last.

Mabel took Pacifica’s hands in hers. “It’s so great to see you again Pacifica! It’s so cool now we can drive. Have you had any lessons yet?”

Pacifica let out a sigh. “No, none yet. My parents say I’m too young. Probably just want to make sure they can keep a close eye on me.” She let go of Mabel’s hands and looked at the floor of the cab.

“Aw, cheer up sis, we’ve got a bona-fide adventure to cheer you right up!” It had been Pacifica’s idea to go with the twins on one of their mystery hunts, she was getting more and more frustrated with her parents each passing year. She loved the time she spent together with the twins in the summers and wanted to extend that time whenever she could. Mabel supposed it was like how Dipper had started researching weird stuff again in his spare time. Both of them longed for the freedom summer granted.

“So, what is this ‘adventure’ about then? I hope we aren't going into the woods again, I am so not dressed for that.” Pacifica glanced down at her high heeled boots and light dress. Not exactly intensive hiking gear.

Dipper explained the situation. “Don’t worry, it should all be indoors hopefully. Found a report about something terrorising this woman’s home, should be no trouble to deal with. Think you can handle it?”

Pacifica pouted. “Of course I can handle it Pines, why do you think I came all the way down here? Just to spend time with you two?” Dipper looked mildly hurt by this, and Pacifica immediately regretted her rough tone.

Mabel tried to lighten the mood. “How’s everyone doing back in Gravity Falls?” After losing their family manor, Pacifica and her parents had moved into a much smaller property in town, a far cry from their still immense wealth.

“They’re all fine, things are pretty quiet whenever you or your Uncles are away.” Ford and Stan had taken another long trip in the Stan ‘O War to explore anomalous readings in the Indian Ocean. “Your friend Soos said to tell that everything was running smoothly at the Shack. Oh, and Dipper, that redhead friend of yours said hello.”

Dipper blushed. The mention of Wendy had reminded him of certain emotions he was now feeling towards someone else.

Mabel thankfully changed the topic. “So, how’d you get this trip past your parents?”

Pacifica gave a snort. “That was easy, they think I’m on a school trip for the weekend. They probably don’t even care enough to check with my school, they care so little about my life.”

“Ha, if they knew you were with us, they’d go coocoo bananas!” The two girls giggled together, which relaxed Dipper. He really was glad to see Pacifica, video chatting was no substitute for spending time with his best friend.

“Hey Pacifica, I just want to say, I’m really happy you came down to meet us. It’s great to be with you again.” Pacifica smiled and blushed lightly. Mabel just giggled more.
20 minutes later and they were at the address Dipper had found. It was a bungalow and from the outside there was no sign of anything untoward. The three of them stood on the porch as Dipper pulled out his notes on what had been reported here. He reached over and hit the doorbell. A middle-aged woman came to the door. She spoke with a heavy southern accent. “Yes? What do you kids want?”

Dipper puffed out his chest and tried to look as professional as possible. He wanted to impress Pacifica. “Hello, I’m Mason Pines, paranormal investigator. I’ve seen your claims that your home is being ‘haunted’ by some kind of animal spirit, and me and my team are here to help.” Pacifica raised an eyebrow at this. They were a team now?

The woman cheerily responded. “Oh yes, I can’t stand the ghosts anymore, they’re in the basement, I’ll just get the keys.” The woman retreated back into her home, leaving the teens on the porch. “Ok, Mabel, go grab the silver dust vial, might need to ground some ectoplasm.”

“Roger Dodger!” Mabel saluted her brother and ran back to where the truck was parked on the curb.

Pacifica turned to look at Dipper. “So we’re a team are we, ‘Mason’?”

Dipper winced slightly. “Yeah, gotta sound important, most adults don’t take ‘Dipper’ seriously. And sure, me and Mabel are a team. I thought you wanted to be a part of this too? This whole thing was your idea.”

Pacifica crossed her arms. She wasn’t sure what she wanted. Part of her just wanted the three of them to cruise around all day and have fun. “Sure, whatever, let’s bust this ghost.” She chuckled and gestured to doorway. “After you, ‘Mason’.”

The bungalow was nicely furnished inside but seemed to be in disarray. Papers were strewn over every surface, the cupboards were all empty, and there was a strange smell like pine needles and mud coming from somewhere. Pacifica curled her nose upwards. She and Dipper found the house’s owner in the kitchen. “I’ve been keeping a log of the different animals I’ve seen.” She passed Dipper a piece of note paper. There were dozens of animals written down, from tiny rats all the way up to bears.

Dipper questioned the woman. “And only ever one at a time, right?” Pacifica watched as he pulled out his familiar journal and skimmed to one of the pages. “Might be dealing with some kind of Nature Spirit then.”

Pacifica couldn’t help but sniff at this. “Nature Spirit, really Dip- uh, Mason? That sounds totally made up.” The woman seemed sure in her convictions however and Dipper showed a page to her.

“One of the computers has?” Pacifica turned to Dipper, her eyes narrowed. “Is this anything like what you saw?” Pacifica peered round to catch a look at the page. The main sketch was of what initially looked like a large bear, before she noticed features from other animals sprouting all over the body. The antlers from a deer, horns from a bull, even the slender tail from a cat. The title of the page read Umbra Animalis Mortis, or Dark Death Animal in English. That was a pretty on-the-nose name. Her rigorous studies had taught her basic Latin, and she thought that whoever had come up with that name obviously had never learnt much of the language. She then realised that Dipper must have named it and felt a little bad for mentally mocking him.

The woman nodded at the sight on the page. Dipper folded the journal away. “Shouldn’t be too much trouble to deal with once my sister brings the gear we’ll need to use.” He texted Mabel to ask her to bring one of the wooden totems he used for trapping wayward spirits.
“Guess you’ve got this whole exorcism thing down to a fine art now then Pines.” Pacifica was still dubious of this whole ‘adventuring’ business.

Dipper responded with a prideful tone. “Yep, animal spirts often wander into people’s homes, not too much to worry about, just got to trap it in a totem then we can release it into the woods. Or maybe somewhere else if you don’t want to get your boots dirty.” He’d meant this last line to sound appreciative of Pacifica’s concerns, but to her ears it just came off as accusing her of being too stuck up and she scowled. This hadn’t exactly gone as either of them planned.

Mabel came into the kitchen, which defused some of the tension. “Got the silver bro.” She passed her brother a small glass vial filled with shiny dust.

“Ah, and the totem too, good.” Mabel had a small wooden pendant around her neck. It was shaped like a small eagle. “We’re all set to go then.”

Pacifica’s frown deepened. “Need me to stand in the corner and look pretty?”

Dipper frowned too. “Pacifica, you were the one who wanted to come with us? You can go wait out by the pickup if you’re not enjoying this.”

“I just want to actually do something! You and Mabel are doing all the work, I’m just standing around!”

“Um, can this wait until after you’ve dealt with my ghost problem?” The woman looked uncomfortable with two squabbling teenagers in her kitchen.

Mabel put a hand on Pacifica’s shoulder. “Here Pacifica, you can wear the totem.” She placed the wooden pendant around Pacifica’s neck.

“Uh, Mason, bro, can we have a word in private for a minute.” Mabel dragged Dipper away by the arm, leaving Pacifica to sheepishly grin at the woman.

“What is going on with you and Paz!? Why are you arguing so much today?” Mabel was upset with how her brother and friend were handling themselves.

“I don’t know Mabel, Pacifica just seems to be acting so strange today, like she used to before, you know. Before that night at the manor.” Both of them remembered how Pacifica had been when they first met her. Stuck-up, insensitive, an all-round jerk to everyone. Thankfully she had mellowed considerably after saving them from being turned to wood. But today she’d been acting like her old self.

“Maybe she’s just confused about how she feels about all this. She disobeyed her parents to come here, that’s gotta put a lot of stress on her shoulders. And you’re not exactly helping much ’Mason’. Pacifica probably feels like you’re paying more attention this ghost than to spending time with her. She just wants to feel like you care about her, that she’d be helping us out on this mission, not stuck in a corner doing nothing!”

Dipper sighed. He’d been going about this wrong, all the formality and efficiency. It didn’t suit him. “Come on, let’s deal with this spirit, Paz can help out with the totem, then we can talk once this is over, ok?”

“Alright bro, just don’t be a jerk to her anymore.” The two of them returned to the kitchen. Pacifica was still awkwardly standing there, trying to avoid eye contact with the woman who’s home she was lingering in. She’d never been good at dealing with strangers in a personal way.
“Ok Miss, if you’d be kind enough to show us the basement, the three of us can help you out.” Dipper made sure to emphasise that they would all play a part, not just the twins.

The basement was a small space a few metres across. It was dark and empty at first. Mabel found a light switch. Even with the light on Pacifica could see there was clearly nothing down here. “So, what do we do now. Do you have to read out some chant to summon the spirit?”

“It’s a bit easier than that this time.” He took a small piece of bread that he’d taken from the kitchen and started sprinkling crumbs across the stone floor. “Should take a few minutes for the spirit to manifest. So… how are you doing Paz?” His attempt at starting a conversation had been crashingly obvious. Mabel rubbed the bridge of her nose.

Pacifica tried to think of something to respond with. “I’m… doing well. How about you?”

“Yeah, I’m also fine.” There was an awkward silence. Mabel thought these two couldn’t be anymore useless around each other. “I could tell you about this haunting we investigated two weeks back.”

Pacifica perked up at this. “Sure, let’s hear about it, my life’s just been boring as usual.”

“Ok, so there was this abandoned old cinema, and these building inspectors got spooked…” Mabel sat on the basement stairs as Dipper narrated their adventure with the Film Ghosts to Pacifica. She watched how excited he got re-telling one of his adventures, and Pacifica was equally enraptured by the tale. This was how they should’ve been bonding from the beginning, instead of bickering about pointless stuff. They were starting to figure things out at last.

“And then I uploaded the film online, so that people could finally watch the film!” Dipper finished off his story.

“I wish I could have been there.”

“What, but you hate dark spooky places?”

She almost absent-mindedly replied. “It would have been alright if I was there with you.” Dipper blushed and Pacifica, realising what she’d just said, joined him. They stood there in the middle of the basement, staring at each other.

“See, you two are so cute together when you get along!” Mabel interrupted their reverie and they both looked away from the other. “Oh, come on, you don’t have to get embarrassed cause I’m here. I don’t want to miss any of this.”

Pacifica turned to confront her. “Any of what? We were just talking.”

“Oh, you two! Isn’t it obvious!?” Dipper and Pacifica looked at Mabel with confused expressions. Before she had a chance to state the obvious, a mist descended on the basement.

Dipper stepped towards the stairs to join the girls. “Ah, looks like it’s manifesting at last!” The three of them watched as the mist flowed around the basement floor, coalescing together into a single large mass. The mass rose from the floor and starting to gain a defined shape. Pacifica peered at the mist and saw that it was a wolf. Dipper took another step back as the wolf began snarling at them. “Time to deal with this. You still got that totem on Pacifica?” She nodded and he began unscrewing the lid of the silver dust vial. “When I sprinkle the spirit it’s gonna solidify the ectoplasm. It’ll probably start thrashing about. Then we get close, and you touch the totem to its head, got it?”
“Sure Dipper, I’m ready.” Pacifica’s excitement levels were rising. Where before she thought she’d feel fear at this ghostly presence, now she only felt a sense of adventure.

“Mabel, you hang back, we might need a distraction.”

“Got it bro, I’ll be as distracting as possible!”

Dipper took one last check at the dust before looking at the spirit. It was clearly not happy with being disturbed when it wanted to feed. Swallowing, Dipper thrust the dust out at the spirit. A hiss sounded at the moment of contact, like it was burning the ghostly creature. Dipper shouted. “Now!”

He ran towards the spirit and jumped on its back. Pacifica hesitantly ran after him, stopping when she noticed that the spirit no longer resembled a wolf. Instead it was shifting rapidly between forms. One second a horse, the next a pig, then a bear. Dipper was holding on tight to the beast, so he didn’t fall off. Pacifica grabbed the totem around her neck and lunged towards the spirit. She pressed the wooden charm against the spirit’s head and waited for a reaction. Nothing happened. The spirit continued to lash out and Dipper went flying off the back. He crashed painfully into some wooden boxes in the corner of the room.

“Dipper!” Pacifica cried out, then jumped back as the spirit turned its attention towards her. She heard a scream from behind as Mabel barrelled past her into the spirit, knocking it back against one of the basement walls.

Pacifica rushed to her side and added her weight to the creature shifting with every second. “Mabel, the totem didn’t work, what do we do!”

“Hell if I know, Dipper’s the nerdy science geek, I don’t know what to do with an aggressive all-in-one petting zoo!” Pacifica glanced over at Dipper. He wasn’t moving, still against the boxes. A sudden fear gripped Pacifica. Dipper was hurt, possibly worse, and she couldn’t do anything. She started hitting the spirit with all her might, letting out her anger that it had hurt her closest friend. Mabel saw this and lashed out with her own flurry of hits. Both girls were thrown back as the spirit twirled round. The creature stood tall above the girls and an indistinct head roared down at them.

Pacifica stole another glance at Dipper. He was still lying on the hard floor. She couldn’t stand it any longer, so dashed besides the spirit, dodging a strike from an arm (or was it a wing?), and kneeling down at Dipper’s frame. She started shaking his body. “Wake up Dipper, we need your help!” She felt tears forming in her eyes. Everything had gone wrong so suddenly. Dipper didn’t react at all.

“Come on Pines, don’t do this to me.” She looked back, seeing that the spirit was still focused on Mabel. Failing once again to rouse Dipper, she reached over to the inside of his jacket and prised the journal out from under his body. She started turning the pages madly, searching for the entry on the animal spirits. Finding it, she scanned the page, trying to skim some useful info. “Let’s see, silver dust, totem, multi-form, ah, banishing spell. Only use in last resort” Now seemed like the right time for that.

She stood up, brandishing the journal with one hand. “Mabel, I’m gonna try something!” The other girl didn’t seem to hear, preoccupied with being stuck against a wall as a raging animal ghost bared down on her.

Pacifica started reading from the text. “Animalia evanescet, et nolite maledicte vobis, et non reverteur, dediotonem.” She reached out with her other hand to gesture at the spirit in front of her. Nothing happened. She repeated the incantation. “Animalia evanescet, et nolite maledicte vobis, et non reverteur, dediotonem! Dediotonem!” She suddenly felt a wind flowing from her outstretched arm. She repeated the spell a few more times, each louder than the one before. The wind grew in power and the pages of the journal started flipping over in her hands. The spirit turned from Mabel
and stared at Pacifica. The wind was clearly affecting it somehow. Pacifica saw its form shifting even more rapidly. Mabel gawked from behind the spirit, amazed by what was happening. The spirit shifted faster and faster. The edges of its form began tearing off from the main mass, and the formless head gave out a single mournful cry, before the whole thing returned to mist. Pacifica lowered her arm and the wind rushing past her ceased. It was over. She stood there, not comprehending anything.

“That was amazing Paz!” Mabel grabbed her arms, jolting her back to life. “What was that you did!!” Mabel noticed the journal in Pacifica’s hands.

“It was written in this, Dipper must have- Dipper!” Pacifica handed Mabel the book and rushed back to Dipper’s side.

“Is he alright?” Pacifica wasn’t sure, he was still unconscious. She started crying again. What if this was a magical injury, or he’d hit his head, or- A sudden coughing fit from Dipper brought her focus back to the present. His eyes slowly opened.

With a weary voice he grinned and spoke up. “Hey Pacifica. What did I miss?” She started laughing and crying at the same time and brought Dipper into a hug. “Oh ok, this is new.” She laughed into his shoulder, then helped him back onto his feet. She wiped her face on her arm.

Mabel came over to hug Dipper too. “We’re alright bro, Pacifica saved us! She used a magic spell to get rid of the spirit!”

Dipper’s happy grin dropped. “Oh no, Pacifica, which spell exactly did you use?” Mabel opened the journal to the Animal Spirit page and Pacifica pointed to the incantation. “Oh… oh dear.”

Pacifica was confused. “What’s wrong, it banished the spirit didn’t it?”

Dipper took the journal back from Mabel and ruefully replied. “That wasn’t a banishing spell, it was only to be used as a very last resort… that was a killing spell.”

Mabel threw her hands over her mouth in shock, and Pacifica stared wide-eyed at Dipper. He quickly shook his head and put his hands up. “It’s alright, you did what you had to, there’s no way you could have known. You did the right thing.” He hugged Pacifica again. Doing the right thing suddenly felt terrible.

The three of them informed the woman of their success in stopping her hauntings for good, then piled into the pickup and headed off. They stopped at the nearest café stop on the highway to recuperate from their encounter in the basement. Dipper needed some ice to soothe a nasty head bruise, and Pacifica was still uncomfortable with what she’d had to do. Mabel ordered them all pancakes, despite Pacifica’s protestations. “You need something delicious after all that danger you’ve been through. I know it’s not part of your strictly regulated diet, but I say Screw the rules! You’re with us, you eat like us, ok?”

Pacifica graciously accepted Mabel’s offer, and after a few minutes the teens were enjoying themselves again. After a while, Dipper started up a conversation. “So, Pacifica, I guess you’ll be wanting us to drive you back up north soon. Don’t want your parents to wonder where you’ve been.” He said this sadly. He clearly didn’t want her to part with them so soon.

Pacifica replied haughtily. “And why would I want to go home now? Remember Pines, my parents think I’m on a trip for the whole weekend, and it’s only Friday evening. You two are stuck with me.”
A grin grew on Dipper’s face. “You mean you really wanna spend a whole weekend with us? That’s great!” He pulled her into another hug, where she once again blushed deeply.

Mabel saw her opportunity to give them some alone time. “Hey, I’m gonna go fill up the truck with gas, you two should have a talk about… things.” She winked at Dipper, patted Pacifica on the back, then headed out of the café.

“Any idea what your sister’s on about?”

“None whatsoever.” They both laughed and finished off what was left of their pancakes. Once done, they sat together, not knowing what to do. Eventually, Pacifica yawned and rested her head on Dipper’s shoulder. He put an arm round her. She looked up at him and stared into his hazel eyes. He stared back at her sparkling blue eyes.

“So, uh-“

“Do you-“

They both talked at once and laughed. Dipper cleared his throat. “So, are you ok. About earlier, in the basement.

Pacifica frowned. “I thought you were dead Dipper, I had to do something to save you!”

“I understand, it was the only thing you could do, the totem was obviously not gonna work. Try not to think about it too much. It was it or us.” He squeezed her shoulder with his hand.

“I guess you’re right Dipper. Just don’t take me on another monster hunt that ends so badly next time. I can’t be saving you every time.” She smiled up at him again. “I’m sorry about earlier too, when I was all snippy. I was just stressed about all this, about running off from home to see you, about how you were reacting. I don’t want to be that Pacifica anymore, not the old me.”

Dipper understood completely. “Pacifica, tomorrow do you want to, I don’t know, go out for a meal or something? Something nice and relaxing after today.”

“I’d like that Mason. I’d like that a lot.” She reached out for Dipper’s spare hand and interlaced her fingers with his.

They headed out to where Mabel was filling up the pickup. “You two all sorted and ready to go?”

Pacifica nodded. “Yep, I’m ready for a good night’s sleep, I feel exhausted.”

“We can be sleepover sisters, it’ll be so awesome!” Mabel lightly slapped her forehead. “Oh man, I just remembered, we gotta introduce you to our parents!”

“What’s wrong with that?” Pacifica saw that Dipper’s eyes were suddenly darting around, and he was beginning to sweat.

“Weeeel, I might have told our parents that you and Dipper were dating so we could pretend that he was meeting up with you instead of mystery hunting!” Pacifica glared at Mabel and her eyebrows furrowed in an angry look.

“You did what!!?”

Dipper shook his head. This was going to be a long evening.
The Kindling

Chapter Summary

Mabel 'borrows' Dipper's journal and tries to help out his relationship with Pacifica. By summoning a multi-limbed fire demon.

Chapter Notes

The initial concept for this chapter was inspired by this art by Bigdad: https://www.deviantart.com/evil-count-proteus/art/Mabel-The-Summoning-771097108

Thanks to CIS Droid for helping me tweak the ending slightly.

It was a sunny Saturday morning and there was a guest in the Pines’ household. Last night Dipper and Mabel had arrived back at the house with a friend from up north, Pacifica. Mr and Mrs Pines had been a bit concerned about this, Dipper had never brought home a girl after all, but after the introductions were made everything went along fine. Pacifica was technically posing as Dipper’s ‘girlfriend’, despite the fact that she didn’t know if she’d go that far yet. She was still figuring things out with him. Mrs Pines cooked them all pasta, which Pacifica wasn’t used to, but discovered it was a very tasty meal. The three teenagers spent the evening chilling out on the sofa, spending time together while tv movies played indistinctly in the background. Pacifica had only ever had nights like this at the Mystery Shack before and was immensely glad that the Pines had allowed her to stay with such short notice. She had never seen such kindness from her own parents. When it came time to sleep, Mabel helped Pacifica set up a spare mattress on the floor of her bedroom. Dipper was given strict instructions to remain in his bedroom all night, which had caused him immense embarrassment, and caused the girls to burst into laughter. Pacifica and Mabel had stayed up a while longer, idly chatting, remembering times they’d spent together in the attic bedroom in Gravity Falls.

Pacifica awoke to light streaming in from a window. She was momentarily confused by how bright the pink walls were, before remembering that this was Mabel’s room. She idly wondered why her friend hadn’t got round to repainting the walls black, like everything else she owned. She supposed that having one bastion of ‘classic Mabel’ was understandable enough. Something else pink came face to face with Pacifica then, which forced her to sit up and start getting out of bed. She wasn’t going to get nuzzled in the face by that pig again. Rubbing her eyes, she looked around and saw that Mabel was already out of bed and gone. She went to get dressed for the day ahead. She’d not brought any spare clothes yesterday, only anticipating a quick monster hunt. She begrudgingly put on her clothes from yesterday, the pink dress and purple jacket, a look she’d been rocking for years. She idly wished that she could wear something more special for her date with Dipper. Then she remembered what that meant. She had a date. With Dipper.

“I’m not sure this is a good idea.” Dipper was pacing back and forth in his bedroom. Mabel was
perched on the edge of his bed, resting her head on her chin. She’d been trying to perk up Dipper all morning, he was panicking about his ‘date’ with Pacifica. What if he was misreading her feelings, what if he wouldn’t seem fancy enough for her, what if something went wrong. Mabel just had to keep reassuring him that everything was gonna be fine.

“Bro, relax, just go out, have lunch, spend time with Paz. Stop trying to overthink this, she isn’t some mystery to solve, she’s your friend.” Dipper stood still and took a deep breath. Then kept pacing anyway. Sometimes it baffled Mabel how Dipper could be perfectly calm facing down spirits from other planes of reality, then completely fall apart about going for a meal with a friend.

Eventually Mabel managed to calm Dipper down enough to go see if Pacifica was ready. She had been ready an hour ago, but she didn’t care. She was just happy to be spending time along together. For once Dipper had eschewed his usual hoodie, he didn’t need his journal today. Instead he was wearing a flannel shirt that Mabel had picked out, which hugged his slender frame. She’d also helped comb his hair, and even assisted with trimming some long chin hairs. He actually looked decent for once. Pacifica was impressed by the effort he’d gone to and put her arm around his as they went out to the pickup. Mabel stood on the front porch as they got into the truck. They were going to an Italian restaurant Dipper had picked out and would be back around 2 or 3. Mabel waved them off as Dipper drove them away. Now she had some privacy at last. Now she could perform the ritual.

Dipper had stowed his journal securely in the desk next to his bed. The drawer it was in had a lock, of which Dipper had the only key. Luckily that wasn’t enough to stop Mabel. Using her lockpicking tools she was in the desk in seconds. Mabel looked down at Dipper’s journal, with its Pine Tree cover. This wasn’t the first time she’d secretly ‘borrowed’ the journal of course. On several occasions she’d sought the secrets scribbled within, either to help her with some task, or simply because she was bored. Once she’d tried summoning the devil himself, to reinforce how committed she was to her goth phase. All she got instead was some goat-legged accountant named Nathan, who she’d had to exorcise. This time she had a plan in mind though. She turned to the page she was seeking. Finding it where she expected, she checked over the rest of the house. While Pacifica and Dipper were out at lunch, her parents had also decided to go into town for the day. Which left Mabel free to conduct her mission. She knew that Dipper wouldn’t be happy if he found out about this, using his journal was one thing, but especially now since they’d agreed to try and minimise the risk of their parents finding out about the weirdness they got up to.

She headed down to the basement and gathered the paint pots she’d need. She checked the symbols drawn in the journal and dutifully set to recreating them on the basement floor. Once those were complete, she lit 5 candles and placed each one at the corner of the pentagram she’d painted. In the centre of the inverted star was a single flowing Hindi letter. Holding the journal in her left hand, she started to read the spell that would summon what she was after.

“Gniddib ym od dna em ot emoc ,ayengA dna ingA fo tnadnecsed ,erif fo naidraug ,sarignA ,eeht nommus I!”

As she finished the speech, the runes on the floor began to glow. She could feel an intense heat coming from the floor. In an instant a vast plume of fire reached up from the floor to the ceiling. Mabel covered her face with her spare hand and stared as the fire column began to fade away. Where there had once been empty space, a figure now crouched. He raised up on his legs, standing to a full height of 7 or 8 feet. His blue skin still had the remains of small fires flaring brightly, and his four muscular arms reached out to steady himself. He reached one of his hands to clear the many thick strands of black hair away from his face and horns, leaving them to fall over his shoulders and back. The spell had worked. The Angiras was here.
Mabel stood there marvelling at the well-toned creature standing before her. This was an Angiras, which according to Dipper’s notes was an Indian guardian spirit. Whatever he was, he was going to help Mabel out.

“Dekrow siht eveileb t’nac I! lebaM m’I ,iH!- Oops, gimme a sec.” Mabel spat out her tongue a few times before addressing the demon again. “Bleh, sorry, got stuck backwards for a sec, you know, magic spells and junk. I’m Mabel.”

The Angiras bowed its head at her. “Greetings lady Mabel, I am Reyansh, spirit of the realm of fire. What is your command, oh mistress?” His voice was rather monotone, she supposed that fire demons didn’t need to be that eloquent. She looked him over, checking out what this quadru-manual guy was made of. He wore nothing on his chest, merely a loincloth and a large necklace, on which skulls hung.

“For one you can show off those big muscles, woof!” Mabel was impressed by the physical form of this powerful demon. Compared to Dipper’s feeble frame this was a revelation.

“You wish me to lift something heavy for you?” Reyansh looked around and casually lifted a box of spare car parts lying the corner.

“What, oh no, I have something else in mind.” She had gotten off-topic. “What do you know about helping two people in love?”

Reyansh dropped the box and just looked confused. “My purpose is watching over the sacred rituals of fire, ensuring the sacrificial flames are protected. What does this have to do with that?”

“Hey, this book said you had to do whatever I asked.”

“Anything relating to keeping fires lit, yes.”

“Hmm, what about kindling the fires of love?”

“I could maybe try doing that?”

“Perfect, this is gonna work great. Dipper and Pacifica won’t even know what’s hit them!”

“You wish me to hit someone?”

“Ugh, just follow my instructions ok, we’re gonna make sure they have the most romantic meal out ever!”

Dipper pulled the pickup next to the restaurant. Dipper stepped out and went around to Pacifica’s side, offering a hand to help her step down. She smiled and took it. They walked into the restaurant and Dipper greeted the waiter. “Table reservation for two? In the name of Mason Pines?” Pacifica was surprised by Dipper’s choice to once again use his real name. The waiter nodded and led to small booth. They sat opposite one another. “So, what do you think of this place? Up to your usual high standards”.

Pacifica had to be fair, she was used to much more lavish places. “It’s fine, nice and quaint, I like it.” Dipper relaxed visibly. He’d been slightly worried that his choice of eatery would be roundly
criticised.

Pacifica started eyeing up the menu. “So, you’re going by Mason now, are you? That’s new.”

Dipper, or now Mason she supposed, nodded. “Yeah, I reckon that now I have to present myself professionally on my mystery hunts then I think it’s time I started using my old name again. Do you mind it?”

“I suppose it’ll just take some getting used to. Where did ‘Dipper’ come from anyway?”

Dipper lifted the hair covering his forehead to show off his birthmark. “Well, you know about my Big Dipper marking, people used to bully me about it. Mabel noticed and I think she wanted to ‘reclaim’ the name in a way, so she started calling me Dipper un-ironically. Helped me not be so self-conscious about it. Doesn’t really matter these days, no-one cares about my forehead anymore. Guess I feel ‘safe’ being Mason again, around people I trust.”

Pacifica was glad that included her. “Mason it is then. It’s fine whatever name you choose. You’ll still be the same old dorky Pines.” She smiled warmly at him. “So, you wanna split a pizza?”

“Ooh, sure you’re up to sharing, ‘princess’?” Mason said this in a lightly teasing way, and Pacifica chuckled. This was going a lot better than yesterday.

Mabel watched the two of them through the restaurant window. They were sitting together, eating a pizza, smiling and talking together. “Perfect, they’re enjoying the meal. Now we just need to ensure that the romance of a lifetime can take place. Reyansh, it’s time for you shine”.

“Shall I use a Rune of Ignition, I can create a light to shine as brightly as you wish!”

“Shh, they’ll hear you! And get away from the window, people aren’t used to seeing giant blue Hindu demons in Piedmont.” They’d already spooked several dog walkers on their way to the restaurant. “Ok, let me think, you can’t just walk in there and tell them to kiss, that’s not subtle enough. Maybe something with candles, like a birthday cake? Ooh, can you make the fire look like animals? I know Pacifica’s favourites are Llamas, not sure about Dipper though. Hey, are you listening?”

Reyansh was staring through the window. Mabel followed his gaze. There was a large pizza oven at the back of the seating area, with an open flame burning. Mabel snapped her fingers in her blue companion’s face. “Focus here Rey, we gotta save their relationship before Dipper does something stupid. I’m sure it’s coming any second now!” She glanced back at the table. Pacifica was still smiling, good. There was still time. “Think Mabel, think. Maybe we could cook them something, Flambe style!” She strolled around the back of the restaurant, where there was a staff door the kitchen.

“Shall I destroy this door for you mistress?”

“I’ll handle this one, Mabel has the magic touch when it comes to locks.” A few seconds later they were in. The kitchen was just large enough for Reyansh to fit, though he had to stoop slightly. There were several chefs focused on their work. They all turned as Mabel and her demon walked into the room. “Hey guys, you’re gonna help me make some magic happen!” The chefs started screaming.

Mason and Pacifica were finishing up the last of their pizza. “So, what did you think Paz, did it suit
Pacifica moaned appreciatively. “That was delicious Mason, we never have food like that at home, too fattening for me apparently.”

“I’m glad you liked it. Reminds me of that time we went to the lake together, just the two of us cause Mabel couldn’t move after eating too much pizza the night before.”

“Yeah, that was nice, maybe next summer we could go to the lake together again. Just me and you.”

The feelings in Mason’s chest started rising again. Maybe now he should take the plunge? “Pacifica, I’ve been meaning to ask you something. It’s about you and me.”

Back in the kitchen Mabel was attempting to corral five frightened pizza chefs. “It’s fine, he’s a nice demon! Not evil at all!” Reyansh wasn’t helping, attempting to grab the chefs and return them to their cooking stations. “Come over here Rey, you can cook this pizza!”

The demon lumbered over to Mabel and looked quizzically at the sauce covered dough. “What do you ask of me, oh mistress?”

“Just use your fire on this pizza, cook it nice and flamey, then we’ll take it out to Dipper.”

“And how will this ensure their romance blossoms?”

Mabel’s patience had diminished to almost nothing. “That’s not important! This is the best I can do! Now burn that dough!”

Reyansh shrugged, cracked his four knuckles, and shot out jets of fire from each hand. Mabel stared intently at the flames. “Yes, just like that.” She paused to reflect on whether this would actually help Dipper and Pacifica. Sure, it was a cool flaming pizza meal, but how would that make them express their mutual love? She’d just wanted something that could follow her commands, she hadn’t though through the nitty gritty details. Perhaps she should have summoned an Intelli-Spore first, to gain some romance knowledge tips.

“My lady?”

“How burnt should the offering be?”

Mabel had been lost in thought, staring and the flickering of the fire.

“Huh?”

Mabel looked down at the pizza. It was a charred and blackened mess. “Oops, shoulda paid more attention.”

Luckily there was another pizza laid out ready to be cooked. “Ok, this time grill it for about, um, 30 seconds.” Reyansh complied and started preparing to burn up another meal. The chefs had all slipped out the back door while Mabel had been distracted with the flames. Reyansh clicked his neck a few times before once again shooting out his fire.

“Yes, that’s perfect! We get this one perfect, then we… uh… hmm.” She really didn’t know either how to get this pizza to Dipper’s table, nor how to make it some sign of love. “Ugh, this is such a dumb plan. Forget it, let’s just stop.” Reyansh stopped, uncertain of what he was doing wrong.

Mabel peeked out of the door into the main room of the restaurant. Dipper and Pacifica were still
smiling, happy in each other’s company. Mabel groaned inwardly. They didn’t need her help. She should have given them more credit.

“Well Rey, guess we gotta pack it in. Those two are getting on like a house on fire!” Mabel clamped her mouth shut after saying that.

The blue demon mulled her statement over. “House… fire… of course, I shall burn this establishment as you command!” Mabel yelped as he started blasting out spurts of flame all of the kitchen. Within seconds the whole kitchen was a blazing inferno.

“Oh jeez, this is bad, real bad! Reyansh, stop this right now!” He couldn’t hear her anymore over the crackling of the flames, so continued his campaign of arson. If she didn’t stop this fire the whole restaurant would burn down! Suddenly she was jolted by a cold blast on her neck. The whole room was suddenly blasted with water. The sprinklers had turned on.

“So, Pacifica, what I wanted to say was… and I really mean this, as sincere as I can be…” He was starting to ramble on, he had to get this out concisely. “I… really like you Pacifica. I like spending time with you like this. I like the way you look when you’re happy, I mean really happy, when you let go of all your layers of haughtiness. I want to be with you Paz."

“What are you saying Mason?” She took his hand, and his shoulders sagged as he relaxed.

He took one last deep breath, then spoke the words he’d been trying to say for the past few months. “Pacifica… I think I… love you.” He stared deep into her eyes, watching her expression. A smile grew slowly on her face, not the smile she usually showed when she made a joke about poor people or to embarrass him. Her real smile.

She briefly looked away as she tried to compose a response. “Wow, that’s- wow.” She suddenly pulled him into a hug. “I feel the same way about you, dork.” Mason tightened his grip around her. The two enjoyed the warmth of the embrace. At that moment they were hit with streams of water from above.

Pacifica gave a cry. “Ah, what’s going on!?” She tried to cover her head with her jacket, but it offered little protection from the water cascading down. Mason just started laughing and opened his palms to catch the water. Pacifica wanted to pout, wanted to say that this wasn’t a joke, that these were the only clothes she had. But she couldn’t. That wasn’t who she was anymore. She laughed with him and the two playfully splashed water at each other.

Mabel was checking over the kitchen. By some miracle there wasn’t too much fire damage, the sprinklers had come on fast enough to prevent her being potentially sued. Poor Reyansh though, at the water’s touch he’d begun decomposing, his body melting and returning to his spirit realm. Shame, she’d have like to see him flex his muscles some more once they were done here. She ruefully laughed to herself. “I guess I was just ‘playing with fire’ all along, ha.”

She sulked in the rain, she’d completely failed to help her brother and friend. Worse, she probably made things worse. She slowly opened the kitchen door, preparing to have to apologise profusely to her two favourite people. Instead, she saw them laughing and playing around in the mess. Huh, maybe this hadn’t been too big of a disaster. She supposed that Dipper hadn’t needed her help after all, he’d done just fine without any interference. It made her feel a little dumb for trying to blindly ‘fix’ their date. Dipper was charting his own course. Would he still need Mabel where he was
Mabel headed for the back door, pleased at least that things had turned out well in the end for them. She took one last look at the soaked teens and thought about their relationship. She’d been right about the two of them. “No smoke without fire after all.”
Chapter Summary

Dipper investigates Mabel's recent odd behaviour, and confronts her greatest fears.

Dipper was happier than he’d ever been before in his life. His previous high points had been the many summers spent in Gravity Falls, exploring the weirdness of the world, being with his friends and family, free in a way he couldn’t even quite capture now that he could drive. But the happiness he felt now was different, allowed to influence his life beyond the confines of summer. It was all thanks to Pacifica. She had been more open and honest with him than anyone else she’d ever met, she’d finally found a person who she knew could look past the money and her defences set up to reject others. Now they were a tentative couple, charting out a new course for themselves. When he video chatted with her in the evenings, he felt closer somehow than before. They would talk long into the night about every little detail of their lives. He liked it when she called him ‘Mason’, it made him feel ‘mature’. Now when he longed for summer, it wasn’t for adventure, it was to be near to her again.

He’d even started neglecting his studies into the paranormal. He’d always used that as a coping mechanism against the mundanity of life, constantly craving the excitement. But now he almost felt like he didn’t need that, he was content with his life. Instead of scribbling in his journal whenever he had the time, he was texting Pacifica. When he should be researching a new mystery hunt, he was writing notes about his new relationship, adding an encrypted chapter near the back just to write down his thoughts and emotions. He felt whole, even with less mystery in his life. The problem was Mabel.

At first, she had been over the moon, her brother and her best friend finally together? It was her Match Making dream. As time went by though, Dipper noticed her becoming more and more withdrawn. Where once she would loudly play thrash metal at all hours of the day, there was now just an awkward silence. Whenever they got home from school she always went straight to her bedroom, only emerging if she absolutely had to. Even her friends at school had asked Dipper what was up with her, she was acting so introverted, it just wasn’t like Mabel. Dipper didn’t think too much of this to start with, maybe she was just trying to more accurately reflect the goth lifestyle, all moody and repressed? But it got worse. One weekend their mother had offered to take Mabel to a concert for one of the new bands she was into, all loud music and raving. Normally she would have jumped at the offer, but instead she just politely declined, then returned to whatever she was doing in her room. Dipper would catch her with shifting eyes, regularly making sure she wasn’t going to be disturbed. It was unnatural for her, and Dipper knew something was wrong.

He decided one afternoon, a few weeks after Pacifica’s visit down to see them, that he was going to get to the bottom of this one way or the other. He had to confront this issue, find out what was troubling Mabel so. When they got home from school that evening, Mabel headed upstairs to her room, not stopping for anything. Dipper casually followed her upstairs, reaching her before she’d closed the door. “Hey Mabel, you wanna go for a drive in the pickup?”

“Huh? No, I’m good Mason, I’m just gonna be in here.” The use of his real name here had definitely not made him feel the same way it had when Pacifica used it. Mabel never used Dipper’s real name if she could avoid it. For pretty much all their lives together he’d been Dipper to her. The word Mason
sounded foreign in her voice. She slowly closed the door.

Dipper stuck out a foot and had one last thing to try. “Mabel, you’re ok right? Like, you’ve been a little ‘weird’ lately, and not your normal weird.”

Mabel turned and looked at her brother with a neutral expression. “I’m fine Mace, I just want to be alone right now.” Dipper removed his foot and the door closed with a quiet click. He wasn’t going to leave this. He had to get into that room.

Dipper’s lockpicking skills were woefully inadequate next to his sister’s. He spent 15 minutes twiddling the prongs about in Mabel’s door, with zero success. He only wanted to have a peek at what Mabel was doing in there all the time. Frustrated, he gave up and went to find another solution. Drawing the journal out of his pocket, he started idly flicking to find a way in. 20 minutes had passed when Dipper had finally found his answer, a complex intangibility spell that took another 10 minutes just to cast. Feeling like he was made of hot wax, he melted through the reality of Mabel’s door and re-solidified in her bedroom. He’d expected to find Mabel sitting on her bed, or reading something, or maybe just lying on the floor. Instead he found an empty room, with no Mabel to be found. His first instinct was to check her window, but it was locked tight from the inside. He’d been out on the landing for the last half hour, so she couldn’t have left that way without being seen, plus her door was still locked. Dipper started looking around, feeling self-conscious. He obviously wasn’t going to find Mabel in here, she must have got out somehow. Maybe there was a clue somewhere to why she was acting so odd.

First, he checked her desk, her sticker-covered laptop was sitting there, along with piles of stationary. This was all normal so far. He opened one of the drawers. Inside was a collection of unusual looking leaves. Dipper picked one up and gave it a sniff. There was an unusual aroma. Was this a drug stash? Dipper didn’t know much about illegal drugs, but if Mabel was smoking something he had to find out. He didn’t recognise these leaves as any particular substance, but he was hardly an expert. He pocketed one of the leaves to confront her with later. The rest of her desk was a blank, nothing out of the ordinary. He checked under the bed, seeing nothing but a pile of sweaters crammed down there. As he pulled his head up, his eyes caught sight of something he’d overlooked. In the corner of the room was an easel set up with paint pots and a canvas. The painting itself was what had caught his eye, it was a clearing surrounded by orange trees, with a wooden building in the centre. It was a building Dipper recognised instantly. The Mystery Shack. There was something about the painting though, and he rose to examine it. He looked closer, seeing that it looked less like paint and more like a photograph, the image was so clear. He felt he could reach out and touch the scene. He stuck a tentative finger at the canvas, hoping the paint wasn’t still wet.

To his immense surprise, instead of finding paint his finger simply carried onwards, passing into the image. He paused, his finger suspended in the painting. He could feel a cool wind blowing, feel the warmth of the evening sunlight. He took a deep breath and pushed his whole arm into the frame. However, rather than simply feeling more of the surroundings, he felt a suction pulling on his arm, growing stronger. In second his whole body was being pulled into the painting. He screamed out as he was sucked in, only stopping when he hit soft earth. Disoriented, he pushed himself up and took in what had happened. He was standing in the clearing now, Mystery Shack ahead of him. He frantically looked around to see where he’d come from. He looked upwards to where he’d fallen from and saw a pink hole in the orange sky. It was a view of Mabel’s brightly painted bedroom wall.

He studied his surroundings. It was just like the real Shack in Oregon, fallen H on the sign and everything. The was something off about the whole place though. The orange sunlight streaming down was too bright, much more orange than any real sunset. He stared closely at the leaves on the
trees, noticing that they weren’t distinct. Instead, they were merely an orange and green swirl that
gave the illusion of thick foliage from a distance. He turned and looked at the dirt track leading away
from the Shack. Instead of seeing a road at its end, there was just a white expanse of nothingness. So,
he really was inside Mabel’s painting.

Mabel. He remembered what he was doing here. He walked to the porch of the Shack and called
The interior living room was exactly as he remembered it too. If Mabel had made this recreation, then
she must have either based it off photos or otherwise have a really good memory. He called out
Mabel’s name again and heard the creak of floorboards. She was in the attic bedroom. Heading up
the stairs, he wondered whether he should really intrude on this. Mabel was clearly going through
something. He also had the casual thought that a painted reality didn’t faze him in the slightest. He
guessed he was simply too used to weird stuff like this. At the attic door he hesitated for a second,
then pushed it open. It was another perfect likeness to the real place, the two beds on either side and
the triangular window on the far wall.

There was Mabel, on her bed, staring at the floor. She spoke quietly. “I knew you’d find this
eventually. You’ve always been too curious for your own good Mason.” She raised a hand and
slumped her face into it.

“Mabel, what is all this!? A world made out of paint, how did you do this?”

Mabel still didn’t look at her brother. “It’s nothing, just some stupid page from your stupid journal.”
She reached into her skirt pocket and threw a piece of paper at him. It was one of the photocopied
journal pages Ford had sent him. There was a sketch of a paintbrush and descriptions of entering
your paintings to create them from the inside out. Dipper didn’t care for the mechanics of this, he
wanted to know the reasons for it.

“So what, you painted yourself a little hideaway? You wanna isolate yourself so much you make a
whole other world for it?” She lazily shrugged. He tried a more sympathetic tone. “Come on Mabel,
I want to help you get through this, whatever it is. We just need to talk about it.” He reached out a
hand to rest on her shoulder, but she shoved it off and turned to look at the wall.

“You don’t understand.” Dipper tried to think what the painting could represent, what Mabel saw in
this reconstruction of the shack. He looked around the room, seeing the two beds right next to each
other, remembered all the times they had spent here.

“You’re lonely.” Mabel closed her eyes. She looked on the verge of tears. “This painting of the
Shack, it’s where you feel like you were with other people, where you felt part of the group. But
why, why are you feeling so lonely right now?”

Mabel opened her eyes and finally turned to face him. Her look was one of anger “Isn’t it obvious
Mason, I thought you were supposed to be the smart one?” Dipper simply looked confused. “Ugh,
don’t give me that look.”

“Mabel, I just want to understand-“

Mabel’s voice erupted into the room. “It’s you, you big dummy! You and Pacifica!” The flood of
tears began streaming down her face, she was letting all the emotions she’d bottled up out in one go.
“I thought it was gonna be great, Mason will be so happy now he has a girlfriend. But now all you
do is ignore me, you’re always just with her. When was the last time we did anything together, huh?
It’s been weeks! Oh, but of course you can’t be planning trips out with Mabel, you have to be
thinking about Pacifica all the time! Am I so unimportant to you Mason?!”
Dipper was gobsmacked. “Mabel, I had no idea you felt this badly. I didn’t mean to- I wasn’t trying to-” He couldn’t find the right words. He perched on the end of Mabel’s bed, and she pulled her legs up close to her chest. It was like she wanted to go to Sweater Town, but without the sweater.

He realised that this was familiar. It was the same argument they’d had 4 years ago, when he’d wanted to become Ford’s apprentice. It had been a naïve dream, he couldn’t just abandon his life to go around the world looking for mysteries. But it seemed that Mabel had never quite recovered from the shock of fearing her brother would leave her. She had friends, of course, Candy and Grenda up north, as well as several here in Piedmont. But those friends weren’t the same, hadn’t been to the end of the world and back, couldn’t relate the same way. She only had Dipper here, and he’d forgotten about her. He reached an arm around her.

“Hey, hey, it’s alright. I’m here now.” They sat there in silence on the painted bed together. “I’m sorry Mabel, if I’d realised how much I was hurting you I’d have never ignored you. Of course we’ll go on more mystery hunts, I was so… overwhelmed. You know how long I’ve been friends with Paz, and now it’s suddenly more intense. I couldn’t focus on anything else. Like with Wendy.” He left some space for Mabel to mull over what he’d tried to convey. Her dark eyeshadow was streaming down her cheeks. He reached a thumb over to wipe some away. “Just know that I’ll always be there for you. You only had to ask.” He tried to smile weakly at his sister. She couldn’t help but smile back, despite the tears.

“I’m sorry Mason, you wanted what you have with Pacifica to be special, and here I am getting all depressed and moody.”

“That’s not your fault Mabel, we can get through this together, we always do. And when did you start calling me Mason anyway, you never do that?”

Mabel wiped her eyes with her palm and quizzically replied. “I thought you wanted be called that now? I kept hearing Pacifica call you that. Thought you’d grown past childish nicknames.”

Dipper stood to face Mabel and looked her in the eye. “I don’t care about that nonsense. You call me Dipper if that’s what you wanna do. I’m never gonna be too old for my sister, that’s a promise.”

Mabel smiled warmly. “If you say so Dip-Dop. Boop.” She’d reached out a finger and poked his nose. They both chuckled. Dipper remembered something else he needed to ask his sister.

“Mabel, there’s one more thing, and it’s serious. I need to know what you’re taking.”

Mabel’s smile was replaced by sheer confusion. “Taking? What are you on about Dipper?”

“Don’t try to lie Mabel, I found these in your bedroom.” He showed Mabel the strange leaf he’d found earlier.

Mabel giggled. “You thought these were drugs? Wow, you really aren’t the smart twin.” Now it was Dipper’s turn to be confused. “I crush these plants up into paints, I used them for making the right colours for the trees outside. You didn’t notice they were the exact same colour? Besides, they smell gross.” Mabel sniffed the leaf and wrinkled her nose.

Dipper felt like an idiot. “Oh, thank god then. I thought you were… ugh, so dumb.”

“You wouldn’t know real drugs if they were staring you in the face bro. Trust me, I know.” Dipper let the fact that Mabel had clearly tried some stuff before pass over him. It wasn’t important now.

“Come on, let’s get out of here. From now on you can’t be painting in another dimension, I mean, what if Mom or Dad had been looking for you and you were in here? We’re supposed to be keeping
Mabel guiltily nodded. “I know, I know, I was just so desperate to hide away somewhere that made me feel better. This place has always been like home.” Dipper understood. Mabel handed him the magic brush, and Dipper took her hand to lead her out of this facsimile of reality.

“I promise, as soon as we’re out of here I’m gonna find us an adventure to go on. Together.”
Snow Blind

Chapter Summary

A freak snowstorm hits California, so Dipper and Mabel must brave the blizzard to fix the problem.

The blizzard was impenetrable, an endless view of white static. It had struck suddenly in the middle of the day, sweeping over southern California in a matter of minutes. Soon the roads were clogged with snow, and things ground to a halt. Emerging from the flurry of snow was a young man, an outstretched, gloved hand clinging to a journal. “Mabel, I think it’s this way.” Dipper’s thick winter coat was little protection against the biting wind. He wished he’d had the foresight to acquire snow goggles at some point before now, as he could barely see. At least he had Wendy’s old hat keeping his head and ears warm. He stopped to try and decipher the words in his journal. Mabel bumped into him.

“Don’t stop bro! This blizzard is nutso!” Due to the intense weather she’d been forced to throw on one of her old sweaters, this one was bright pink with a butterfly on the front. It clashed horribly with her black lipstick and eyeshadow. She was also still wearing her skirt and thin leggings. At least her combat boots were adequate for the terrain.

“You should have wrapped up warmer Mabel, this weather is insane. We’ve got to get to the source.” Mabel rolled her eyes, but a gust of wind blew her hair over her face.

“Ugh, this sucks, I hate snow.” The Pines hadn’t experienced much of this type of weather before. It almost never snowed in Piedmont, so they hadn’t ever had a ‘White Christmas’ whilst at home. One year they’d gone up to visit Stan and Ford, which had been their first taste of real winter weather. Their second experience of snow wasn’t exactly as nice as their fun day of sledging and snowball fights. “How far even is it to the source anyway?”

Dipper was still trying to peer through the snow at the page. “I think it’s not too far, it’s in an artificial cave. The device must be malfunctioning. We just get in there, switch it to reverse, and it’ll fix all this. At least we don’t have to deal with Mom and Dad noticing we’re gone.” Their parents were currently stuck on the motorway in a massive snow bank that had formed, trapping the cars.

He tucked the journal into a pack slung over his shoulder. “Let’s go, only a mile or so more.”

Mabel groaned, she was furiously rubbing her hands together. “But we’ve been going for 2 hours already! I’m gonna get frostbite, these fingerless gloves don’t exactly provide much coverage.” She wiggled her fingers at him. He got the point.

He sarcastically replied “Well, if we don’t finish this up, we’ll just have to walk back all the way in the snow. Probably be stuck in this blizzard for weeks.” Mabel shoved him to get him walking.

“Yeah yeah, wise guy, let’s get this over with. And never mention this to Pacifica.”

“Mention what?”

“This sweater, it totally doesn’t match with anything else. I could never take that kind of fashion
“disaster!”

Dipper shook his head. “She’s been showing you those fashion blogs again hasn’t she. Ugh, she’s always like ‘Mason, Mason, which of these shirts matches this skirt?’ and I just say they all look nice and she scowls at me. I’ll never understand it.” He gave a short laugh. “Ha, besides, it’s not like anyone can see you in all this white-out.” Mabel looked down at herself and was pleased that even she could barely see the pink sweater.

Eventually they arrived at the cave entrance. The only way in was down a well shaft, vertically, and Dipper had almost fallen straight in, barely able to see the lip of the hole. “Watch out Dipper, I’ve got this.” Mabel rummaged around in Dipper’s shoulder bag and pulled out her signature tool, the grappling hook. Thanks to that they were down into the well in no time. There was no reprieve from the blinding white of above though, since the cave was entirely coated in ice.

“Careful, this ice is- woah, woah.” Dipper had to reach out and steady himself with the wall. His sense of balance was iffy at the best of times. Mabel had no trouble gliding elegantly across the cave floor though. Wisps of snow continued to blow through the ice cavern, coupled with the unstable footing it made for slow going.

“So, Mabel, are you feeling better now about… you know, all that stuff we talked about, being lonely and all that?” Dipper was trying to probe Mabel’s issues delicately, but at least she was open to discussing them now.

Mabel had a small frown. “I’m alright, I guess. Glad we’re doing stuff together again. Even if it is freezing down here.”

“Right, good to hear that.” Dipper made another mental note to try and pay more attention to how Mabel behaved, he didn’t want her spiralling badly again. Just then his legs gave out from under him, and he slid on his bottom down further into the cave. The cavern opened up into another vertical shaft open to the air, criss-crossed with paths made of ice. Dipper was slipping down one of these paths. As he was gripped with the fear of sliding off the narrow path into the abyss, all he could hear was Mabel laughing at his awkward fall.

She watched as he slid out of sight. Suddenly she was alone in the icy depths. She tried stepping out on to the ice slide, but it was too slippery to walk down. She didn’t really want to ride down like Dipper had, so looked for an alternative way down. Dipper had told her this place used to be some giant cistern for a sewage company, decades ago. The whole place had been abandoned, leaving the access shafts and tunnels undisturbed. This weather altering machine was a malfunctioning prototype that the government had dumped down here 50 years ago. Even if this place had access ladders that had lasted that long, they were probably all frozen and unusable.

She remembered that she still had her grappling hook stowed in her sweater pocket (one advantage she missed from wearing them all the time) and panned across the shaft looking for something solid to hook on to. She saw a suitable outcropping on the far side and glided across on the rope. Looking up to trace the slide Dipper had taken, she saw she was at a tunnel just beneath him. She started shuffling her way down the tunnel, when she heard a crunch of ice behind her. Something had landed in the tunnel entrance. Something heavy enough to crack the ice. Webs of cracks formed around her feet, and Mabel turned to confront whatever had jumped down. She wheeled around, but before she could see whatever was there, she felt a searing pain erupt in her eyes. She collapsed onto the ice and put a hand up to cover her face. Where before everything had appeared blindingly white, now there was only an endless crushing darkness, pure and black.
After sliding across the shaft, Dipper had managed to follow the tunnel along and find the weather machine. It was sealed up behind a thick wall of ice, but he could clearly see the top of the bulky contraption spinning. It somehow affected the generation of ice crystals in the upper atmosphere. He was considering ways to break the barrier. He wished he had a Pyrosaur on hand to melt his way through. The tunnel he was in had three entrances behind him. He wondered that if he could find a chunk of ice large enough, he could propel it down the tunnel to shatter the ice wall. He was still pondering this possibility when something propelled itself into his back, knocking him over.

“Oof, not again. I’m gonna have a sore backside tonight.” He tried to disentangle himself from whatever had collided with him and saw that it was Mabel. “Mabel! Ohmigosh, are you ok!?”

She reached out feebly with her hand, grasping at the air. “Dipper, is that you? I can’t…” He helped her to stand up. “Dipper, I can’t see!”

“What!” He waved a hand in front of her eyes. There was no response. He stared closely at her eyes, noticing there was a filmy layer of some sort covering them. “Mabel, I don’t know how to tell you this. You’re… blind.”

She just grunted back. “Tell me something I don’t know! This is horrible! And the thing that did this to me is still out there!”

Dipper felt a chill now that wasn’t due to the cold temperature of the cave. “A ‘thing’ did this to you?” Mabel described hearing the loud landing of something, and then losing her vision. She’d stumbled away down the cave and slid most of the way to Dipper. “So, whatever’s in these caves did this to you? Oh, this is not good. And we still can’t get to the machine either.” Dipper pulled out his journal. In the cover of the cave he could finally read it properly. He didn’t expect to find some miracle ‘cure for blindness’ tucked away in its pages though. He prayed that whatever had affected Mabel was temporary. For now, he had to figure out a way through the ice wall, then they could get out of here before Mabel’s attacker returned. She was shivering in front of him, clearly terrified. He needed some way to generate heat, both for Mabel’s sake and to break the wall. He took off his thick coat and wrapped in around Mabel’s shoulders. He still had his hoodie on at least, which was enough down here out of the wind.

“What are we gonna do Dipper?” Finally, he thought of something, even if it was a long-shot.

“Mabel, you’ve still got your grappling hook, right?” She nodded and passed him the tool. “Good, and this ‘thing’ that attacked you, would you say it was bigger and heavier than yourself?” She nodded once again, she remembered how heavy it had been on the ice. “Alright, I think I’ve got something then.”

Mabel was stood in the centre of the tunnel, directly in front of the ice wall. “Dipper, this seems like a bad idea. Are you still there?” Her voice was beginning to wobble.

“I’m here Mabel, any second now, I’m sure.” Dipper was crouched behind a large icicle, just tall enough to block him from sight if he squatted. The sound of cracking ice reached their tunnel at last. Dipper glanced to the side, seeing the cracks almost flowing along the ground. This thing was heavy. Perfect. The creature entered the tunnel, Mabel could hear the heavy footfalls approaching. It spotted her and began moving to attack again. It took one last step and prepared to strike, when its feet felt the tug of a string. Mabel heard the release of compressed air, then a shriek.
Dipper had set up a tripwire using some loose threads from Mabel’s sweater, and rigged it up to the grappling hook’s trigger. The firing mechanism was dug into the ice barrier, he’d used Mabel’s knife to carve a small incision, then bound it tightly to the wall by piling in fresh snow off their clothes. It froze quickly, securing the mechanism to the wall.

The moment the hook embedded itself in the creature, Mabel jumped up and ran at it with all her fading strength. On the smooth ice floor it had been enough, and the creature slid backwards towards the shaft edge, falling into the pit. Attached via the grappling hook, the creature’s full weight was forced into the ice wall. It immediately began cracking. Dipper had to make sure that when it went that the he could grab the firing mechanism, he didn’t want it going over the cliff as well. The pattern of cracks grew until suddenly the whole wall shattered, shards of ice falling everywhere. Dipper grabbed the mechanism and was yanked towards the cliff, the weight of the creature supported by nothing but his arms. Mabel was between him and the shaft, so she grabbed hold of him as he reached her. Together they wrapped the rope around the icicle Dipper had hid behind. The rope was still jerking about, the creature dangling midway down the shaft.

Making sure the rope was tight, Dipper stood to inspect the weather machine. “Well, thank goodness that’s over.” He examined the control panel. It seemed a simple adjustment to deactivate. He flipped a number of switches, and almost instantly the room began to feel warmer.

Mabel jumped, a drop of water had landed on her head and jolted her. A mournful cry rang out from the shaft. Dipper didn’t risk looking down at whatever was hanging there, he wasn’t going to risk his sight for a peek.

“Dipper, I think it wants the cold, that’s why it was all alone down here.”

“We don’t even know what ‘it’ is Mabel! It blinded you!” Mabel tried to stare at him with a convincing look but couldn’t catch his gaze properly.

“Please Dipper, I think I can almost ‘feel’ it’s pain, like it connected somehow when it blinded me. It can’t survive in the heat.”

He sighed and gave in. “Hff, fine, let me see what I can do.”

“That poor creature though.”

“How do you mean?”

“It’s so isolated that it evolved to blind anyone who looks at it. No-one can ever see its face.”

Dipper had been able to reduce the target area of the weather machine, limiting its affects to the tunnel systems. They’d felt the rope go slack after he did this, the creature seemed to have got the message and left them. It had been hard work leading Mabel out of the caves, especially given how uncoordinated Dipper was on the ground. Eventually they emerged into the sunlight, not that Mabel could tell the difference. The ground was soaking wet everywhere, the snow had all melted. It was an easy walk back to their home without a blizzard slowing them down. Once inside, Dipper first took Mabel’s temperature, making sure she hadn’t got too cold from all the shivering. Luckily, she was alright there, the extra warmth from Dipper’s coat had helped.

Then he examined her eyes. It was a mystery how the creature had caused the blinding effect, under the light of a torch he could hardly see a difference to how her eyes appeared normally. He asked Mabel if she could register the light he was shining at her at all. To his relief, she said that she could
register a small change in the darkness that consumed her vision.

“Ok, based off my analysis, your eyes are starting to heal from the blindness. I don’t know how long it’s going to take until your full vision is restored though. That’s a problem.”

“Huh, you don’t say?” She was being sarcastic, but at least her tone had an air of humour about it.

“It’s Mom and Dad. They can’t know you were blinded by some creature in an ice tunnel. We have to keep this a secret. You’re gonna have to pretend to be able to see for the next few days.”

It was yet another burden they would have to take on to keep the status quo of their lives the same. The following week was tough for Mabel, she’d had to pretend to be sick to avoid school and was forced to just lie in bed all day, since without her sight she could barely do much else. After 4 days she was able to start making out vague shapes, so she returned to school. Dipper helped her through the days as much as he could, reading her the work if they shared classes and staying with her all through the breaks. 7 days after the blizzard, Mabel’s eyes were back to normal. Both twins breathed a sigh of relief. They’d got through this together. Just like they always did.
Half Moon Bay was about an hour’s drive from Piedmont. The twins had come here to have a weekend break. No monsters to hunt, no unusual events to interrupt their relaxation for once. They emerged from the pickup, ready for a day of rest. Dipper was dressed in a white t-shirt and red shorts. He didn’t really have any plan for the day ahead as such, he just wanted to unwind. Mabel had more concrete plans. She was wearing a black two-piece bikini and was rubbing sun lotion all over her body.

“You got the towels bro? We should try and find a spot with some shade, like Stan always taught us.”

“Mabel, there’s no shade here, there aren’t any trees on the beach.”

“Oh, right.” Mabel seemed more of a ditz than usual, her mind clearly occupied by something else. “At least I can work on my tan then! Pacifica will be so jealous, she just burns in the sun, like a vampire, heh.” The mention of Pacifica reminded Dipper that he’d been neglecting her slightly the last few days. He wasn’t very good at juggling his attention between his sister and his girlfriend, never quite finding enough time to satisfy either of them.

The two of them found a spot on the sand, rolling out the towels to mark their place. Dipper sat down on his towel and pulled a familiar book out his travel bag.

“Ugh, not again Dipper. I thought we came here to swim or play ball games. You’re always nose deep in that journal, I thought this was supposed to be relaxing.”

Dipper shrugged. “This is my kind of relaxing. I’m just gonna do some writing for a while, then I’ll do stuff with you later.” While he fully intended to clean up some of his notes to start with, he also wanted some privacy to plan something for Pacifica.

Mabel sighed and made to leave. “Fine then bro, if you’re gonna be a boring nerd, then I can’t be seen with you. Not if I’m gonna find romance by the sea.” So, this was what had Mabel so distracted. She was trying to hook up with someone on the beach.

“Really, this again?” Whilst their parents carried on in blissful ignorance of Mabel’s love-life, Dipper knew that she was notorious for wild flings with whoever caught her fancy. Most of the time she covered it up as ‘sleepovers with her friends’, Mabel’s usual innocence carrying the lie. She was certainly ‘sleeping over’, that was for sure. The only downside was that most of Mabel’s partners didn’t last longer than a week, she was poor at maintaining the complex relationships. Even Dipper himself had a longer record for having a significant other, his relationship with Pacifica lasting for a whole month now, even if they hadn’t even kissed yet. He suspected that Mabel was after the same kind of companionship he had, envious without even fully realising it.

Mabel scoffed at him. “Of course, Dipper, the beach is the perfect place to find hot babes and
hunks!” She placed the lotion bottle down next to her towel, then started heading off.

“Just… don’t do anything too crazy Mabel. Be back in an hour?” She nodded, then left him alone to begin working on his journal.

She first headed to a small hut on the beach, which acted as a small bar. There were lots of people milling about nearby. The heat from the sun made her want to get a drink, to cool off and try and break the ice with the other beachgoers. The bartender was a bald guy, with a small goatee. “Gimme your coldest cocktail!” She placed down some coins and waited for him to pour the drink.

The bartender passed Mabel the drink, and she took a sip. It had a fruity taste, very sweet. “Nice tats.” The bartender had noticed Mabel’s arms, each one covered with colourful patterns.

“Thanks, I got them a few months back, they’re so pretty.” She took the compliment as a good sign, she still had the magic touch. Sipping her drink slowly, she panned around the beach. There were several groups of people milling about, enjoying the weekend sun, probably the last warm day in November. She saw some boys playing volleyball, a trio of girls with a large stereo, and a group of people clustered around a grill. There were a lot of people to choose from, but at the same time Mabel wasn’t drawn to anyone in particular.

Then she turned back to the bar, examining the guy stood behind it. He was kinda good looking, in a rough way. His scratchy goatee reminder her of Dipper’s scraggly chin hairs. She decided to try her luck. “So, you get many customers out here?” It was a weak line, but Mabel wasn’t really trying her hardest.

The bartender smiled though. “Oh, quite a lot, lots of college kids on days like today.”

“So… you like tattoos?” Mabel was never very good at introductions. Once she got to know someone over a few drinks she’d get along fine but getting a good first impression was tricky.

“Sure, got a few myself.” He pulled up his short sleeve to reveal a flaming skull inked on his upper arm. Mabel was entranced, her eyes wide.

“It’s so beautiful.” She stretched out to touch it, which most people usually saw as an invasion of privacy. The bartender didn’t seem to mind though.

“Yeah, most people don’t appreciate true art when they see it.” Mabel hadn’t met anyone before who liked tattoos, most of her friends had been indifferent, whilst Dipper and her parents had been a bit uncomfortable with her having them. She didn’t care though, they were pretty, and made her feel pretty. She lifted her arm to show off hers more closely.

“What do you think of this one, it’s a butterfly.” She pointed to the obvious shape on her arm. The bartender nodded.

“Looks pretty sweet, not many people go for such colourful tats. I’m Offucio.”

“Is that Spanish?” Mabel was in awe of finding another connoisseur of her recent passion.

“Uh, it’s Latin actually. So, what’s a girl like you doing hanging around on your own?”

“Pfft, technically I’m here with my nerdy brother, he’s off writing in his journal. Snore.” She made a snort and Offucio laughed. This was going pretty well, she thought. Gulping down the rest of her drink, she was ready to take this further. “So, are you working all day, or can you blow this place off
to have some fun?” She started twisting a curl of hair around in her finger seductively.

Offucio raised an eyebrow. “Oh, I can take a break from this job. How about I show you some of my more private tattoos?”

Mabel’s face flushed. “Woah, easy there tiger!” She lightly shoved him arm in mock offence. He hopped over the bar counter and pulled a wooden cover down over the shack. He took her hand and lead her along the beach.

Dipper was still sat on his towel, idly doodling in his journal. He’d spent the first 10 minutes compiling some notes on a bestiary of the creatures he and Mabel had encountered in the last few months. It would be handy in the future to have a simple list of the various strengths of weaknesses of each beast listed out on a single page. After that, he’d turned to a section near the back of the book, just before the photocopied journal 3 pages at the end. It was an encrypted section relating to his newfound love, Pacifica. He’d wanted to capture his emotions and thoughts as he navigated this new terrain. He also just enjoyed writing about her, trying to describe the scent of her perfume, or the brightness of her eyes. Kinda sappy, he knew, but he didn’t care. The endeavour he was currently working on was making a sketch of Pacifica as best he could. He wanted to show her how much he cared for her, to make sure he wasn’t neglecting her to spend time mystery hunting with his sister. It was tricky to capture the details of her face, those were always his weakest areas when drawing.

He was using a picture on his phone for reference, but his illustration was interrupted when a text message buzzed across the screen. He closed his journal and tucked away his pencil. Checking his phone showed that it was a message from Mabel.

“Yo bro, totally about to score big time. Met this dude with awesome tats, he’s gonna show me this awesome cave down by the cliffs!” He couldn’t tell whether that last line was a euphemism or not, Mabel’s sense of humour was often impenetrable to him. He also wondered where she’d been keeping a phone, since all she had on was her bikini. On second thought, best not to wonder about that. At least she seemed like she was having a good time for once, the last few weeks had been a rough time for her. He was glad to see her getting back out there and being happy. He smiled and continued his sketch of Pacifica.

Suddenly he felt a ripple travel from the page through his pencil. The image on the page started blurring and fluxing in and out of existence. He paused, studying the strange effect. He recognised the effect from somewhere. Something he’d seen once in Gravity Falls. He flicked through the other pages of the journal, trying to hold it steady as the other sketches he’d drawn began to vibrate as well. There was a page near the front of the journal he was after. It was a description of a spell that could be used to bring drawings or sketches into reality. A curious power, but normally harmless. It was similar to the magic paintbrush Mabel had been using a few weeks before to create a replica of the Mystery Shack. Someone nearby must be using the same spell. That worried him, so he read over the notes. The spell had the power to not only turn paintings crudely to life, it could also reverse the process and turn people into lifeless art.

Wait, what was it that Mabel said? A guy with tattoos? And he was taking her to an isolated cave far from the populated areas of the beach?

Offucio had led Mabel far from the bustling seafront to a small area of rocky cliffs. They came to a large open space, like a large semi-oval had been scooped out of the cliff. “Here we are Mabel, nice and private. I can show you that tat now if you want.”
“Oh, you can show me everything dude.” She put her arms around his neck and landed a quick hard kiss. Mabel was ready for anything. Except perhaps what actually happened.

Offucio reached a hand out to cup her cheek, then pointed her face at the tattoo on his shoulder, the skull. She watched as the flames surrounding the image began to move, flickering as if his body was actually on fire. “Woah, how’d you do that? Mine never move.” She moved a hand close to the tat, feeling heat emanating from the ink. Offucio stared into her eyes and raised a finger to her lips.

“It’s a secret baby.” He pulled her into another kiss, hot and heavy. She closed her eyes and leaned into it.

“Ugh, gross!” Mabel jerked her head back as her eyes shot open. Dipper was staring aghast at the scene.

“Dipper! What the hell are you doing here! What about ‘score big time’ did you want to come and watch?!” She still had her arms defiantly around Offucio. He was awkwardly squirming under the added pressure of an observer.

“Mabel, I think your boyfriend here might be using dangerous magic! I’m trying to help you!”

“Does this look like helping, just leave us alone to have some privacy!”

“This is serious Mabel!” He tried to show her the journal page regarding the spell, but she ignored him.

“I’m not having you break me up with another boy just cause he’s magic or something. I had enough of that with my Summer Romances, thanks.”

“Um, do you two wanna talk about this? I can wait over by the cave?” Offucio wasn’t liking Dipper’s inquiries.

Mabel just hugged him tighter. “It’s fine, Dipper’s just leaving anyway, aren’t you.” She glared at her brother, who could sense the anger seething inside her right now.

He fruitlessly tried to explain. “It’s not just magic, it’s worse than that. It turns people into art, they die if they stay that way too long! It’s him, he’s the one doing it.” Dipper had seen the moving flames on Offucio’s arm. Mabel finally frowned at this. She tried to move away from the tattooed man, but suddenly it wasn’t her who was hugging tightly. “Um, Offucio, could you let go of my waist, you’re kinda squeezing too tight.”

There was no sign of displeasure on his face anymore, just a steely resolve. “You people with your moral high-ground. I made art, it was beautiful! So what if it took sacrifices, all great art takes its toll.”

Dipper was horrified. “Oh my god, you’re a Necrotist? That’s just inhuman!” He’d seen many horrors in his life so far, but never such a callous disregard for human life from another person. He’d killed someone and turned their skull into a glorified gif dancing on his skin. Dipper clenched a fist. “Let go of my sister right now!”

“I don’t think so, what are you gonna do about it wimp?” Dipper raised a shaky fist and the Necrotist just laughed at him.

“Hey, Offucio!” His laughter stopped and he turned to Mabel who’d shouted at him. “Nobody calls my brother a wimp except me!” She slipped an arm free and punched him right in his smug bald face. He flopped onto the sand, knocked out cold in a single punch.
Mabel kissed her fist. “And that’s why you don’t mess with Mabel!” Dipper ran over to her side, still panicked by the confrontation. “Relax bro, I’m fine. This waste of breath didn’t know what he was dealing with. What a loser.” She kicked some sand at his prone body.

“It’s ok Mabel, you stopped him.” He put an arm on her shoulder, and she reciprocated with the same.

“Hey, I’m sorry I didn’t believe you at first Dipper. I wasn’t thinking straight, just wanted things to work out.”

“I understand, you wanted some real friendship in your life, someone to bond with. Sorry you ended up with that.” They stared down at the monster lying at their feet.

“What should we do with him? We can hardly get him arrested for a tattoo.”

“I’ve got a spell that can reverse the effects, remove the tattoo from his body. It won’t bring whoever it was back to life, but it’s better than having him parade it around. Then we drag him to the nearest police station, dump him and the skull, and hope there’s enough evidence to pin something on him.”

“Is that all we can do? It doesn’t feel like much.”

“It’s the best we can do. Without becoming as bad as him.”

Once they’d dealt with Offucio as best they could, they returned to their towels on the beach. Neither one was saying much, their encounter with the depths humanity could sink to had been an unpleasant experience. Eventually Dipper spoke. “You ok, Mabel? After all this? You’re not gonna keep all your emotions hidden inside again, are you?”

His sister sighed. “I’m fine Dip, just a little shaken. There’ll be plenty of other chances for me to meet someone. I’ve just got to not be so blind to my surroundings.” She stood up and reached out a hand for Dipper.

“Come on, it’s still a warm sunny day and we’re at the beach. Let’s go have fun!” Dipper eagerly took her hand, as they ran off to enjoy the rest of their day, forgetting all about their worries.
Part 1: Incursion

Chapter Summary

A breach in reality at the high school brings two mysterious travellers to our world. The twins split up to investigate the new arrivals and discover a truth that will shock them to the core...

Chapter Notes

This chapter and the next act as a ‘mid-season’ finale to the story so far.

It was late at night at Piedmont High School, and the place was empty. The rows of lockers stood idle in the corridors, the classrooms vacant. The only sign of life was in the gym, a lone janitor cleaning a mess. Then the tranquillity of the night was disturbed. In one of the long halls a tear began to form, hanging in space. The air around began to shimmer and shift as the vertical crack tore through the membrane of the world. The dancing light halted in the air as something solid passed through the rift. A silvery four-legged creature with an ill-defined head began exploring a realm of matter. It had so much to learn about this world, one item in particular that could give it the knowledge it sought. The thing from another space headed out to seek its prize, attracted by the scent of another intelligence nearby.

10 minutes later, a blinding flash erupted from the air besides the crack. The room shook for a moment before settling. Standing in the corridor was a man in a long coat, his features covered by thick goggles and a scarf pulled around his mouth. He checked a reading from a device on his wrist, then headed off in pursuit of his prey.

He ran the device over the air in front of the tear, analysing the results. “Well, whatever this tear is, it’s stable now. Looks like it must have discharged some matter about an hour ago though.” Dipper put the tachyon scanner away and joined Mabel in examining the room. They’d detected another anomalous energy blast on Dipper’s ‘weirdness scanner’ and rushed to the school to investigate. Rather than finding a blast crater this time, instead they’d found the tear, still hanging there in the hallway. Mabel had noticed some unusual footprints leading away from the tear, the feet strangely shaped like a single toe and glowing with a soft silver light.

“So this bizarre crack in space didn’t set off your scanner?”

Dipper shook his head. “No, not from what I can tell. Guessing by the rate of tachyon decay this thing opened 10 minutes before we detected the impact.” It seemed like they would have to solve a double mystery tonight.

“Great, and on a school night too. I so wanted to spend my nights here as well. Can we use one of those gizmos to track whatever left these prints?” Dipper passed Mabel the handheld scanner and fished out his journal.
“I might be able to trace the decay over a larger area, might take a while to re-calibrate the scanner though.”

“So, what do you think’s on the other side of this?” Mabel got up close to the tear, trying to peer through to what lay beyond. Dipper pulled her back by the shoulder.

“Mabel, don’t get too close! I doubt we could pass safely through the dimensional barrier even if we wanted to, let alone what could be on the other side!”

“Are we just gonna leave it floating in the middle of the hallway? What’ll happen tomorrow when hundreds of kids come in here?”

“One thing at a time sis. First, we track down the thing that came through, then we can come back here and try and re-seal the tear. Then there’s whatever caused that blast we detected too.” It was a lot to handle in the few hours of darkness they had left.

They began following the glowing prints, which led out of the hallway towards the school’s gym building. They wandered slowly through the empty corridors. “Why do schools always have to be so creepy at night, this is just like that horror movie Wendy showed us, the one with those giant killer scorpions.”

“Oh yeah, you were terrified by that. I just couldn’t take it seriously, it got the anatomy of the scorpions all wrong, totally unrealistic.”

“You would focus on that. It’s just unnerving though, school’s already bad enough when you can see your way around. So how are you and Pacifica getting on? Is the romance train a rollin’?” Dipper blushed at Mabel’s sudden inquiry into his love life.

“We’re fine, still ‘chugging’ along, or whatever. Oh, that reminds me, I’ve nearly finished the sketch.” He reached for his journal and turned to the Pacifica section. Mabel looked at the full-body sketch, which was just missing some details on the face.

“It’s great bro, you just need some pointers on the nose and junk like that. I can help you out.” Mabel was a much more skilled artist and Dipper was thankful of her help.

“You think she’ll like it?”

“She’ll love it Dip, you both dig that cheesy romance stuff.” She passed back the journal as he laughed.

“If you say so, ‘match maker’ Mabel.” The chuckled together in the hall, their voices echoing around the empty space.

“See, this is what I want. The two of us, solving mysteries together. Like the old days.” Mabel smiled widely and Dipper was glad to see his sister so joyful again.

Their shared grins were cut short however when a piercing scream rang out. They quickly shared a glance before speaking in unison. “That came from the gym!” They ran, covering the rest of the ground to the gym’s main hall. Dipper rested an ear on the door, hearing sounds clattering from inside. He looked at Mabel and gave a wordless instruction that she understood. She nodded, and he gave a silent countdown before they burst into the room. At the far end of the gym was the silvery beast, which jerked around to look at the twins. The creature was roughly double the size of one of the twins, a bulky body supported by four spindly legs. Instead of paws, the legs just ended in sharp points.
Mabel ran at the creature, which took a few steps back to try and slip away. Dipper flanked the creature from behind. Now they just had to stun it. Mabel punched out at the rounded silver front of the beast. Instead of contacting with the flesh though, she felt a ripple run across her body. Her arm was frozen mid-contact with the creature. For a second nothing happened, the two of them were locked together. Then abruptly she was thrown back across the room, coming to stop painfully on the hard gym floor. The creature turned and charged at Dipper, who leapt out of the way to avoid being run down. It crashed into the far doors and scurried out of sight.

Dipper ran over to check on Mabel, who was wincing from the landing. “Are you ok Mabel?” He helped her to stand up.

“I feel like I just got hit by a truck. What happened there, I tried to punch it and it just ’repelled’ me back. Felt like when you get two magnets with different poles together, all wibbly and resistant.”

“Maybe it has something to do with the creature’s composition. It looked like it had translucent skin, I thought I could make out some of the internal structure.”

“Well whatever it was, we’re gonna need something tougher to beat it.” Mabel looked around the now empty gym hall. There was fallen sports equipment placed haphazardly across the floor, the beast must have knocked some stuff over. Then she saw a pale arm hanging out from behind one of the fallen shelving units. She pointed over at it. “Dipper, look.”

They both crept closer to the body lying on the floor. Mabel covered her mouth. Dipper tried to look closely, but had to recoil, almost sick from the sight. It was the janitor who’d been cleaning the gym up overnight. His body was grey, completely drained of any colour. His veins stood out against the skin, and his face was contorted into a frozen scream.

“He’s dead.”

Mabel replied with a mocking sarcasm. “Noooooooo. I thought he was just sleeping. Of course he’s dead Dipper!”

“It looks like all the blood in his body was just… drained out somehow. He’s been completely desiccated, poor man.” He reached out a hand and pulled his eyelids closed. Both twins stared at the floor for a few seconds, all they could do to mark the death of this stranger.

“Come on, this thing’s much more dangerous than I anticipated. We’ve got to follow it and stop it from doing this again.”

“Wait, look at this Dipper.” She’d taken a last look at the face of the dead man and noticed some odd markings on the sides of his head. “It must have attached itself here, on the temples. Maybe it was trying to drain something from his brain?”

“You think it’s trying to find something? Looking for information about this world?”

Mabel shrugged. “Maybe, it is from another dimension.” They heard a noise from outside and went to one of the windows of the gym. They looked out into a small enclosed courtyard, with halls lining the three other sides. There was movement from the opposite hallway.

“There it is, we’ve got to try and corner it. Maybe if we- wait.” Something in the opposite window caught his attention. It was the light of a torch shining directly at them.

“What is it? Someone else here for the creature? Maybe they can help.” Dipper wasn’t so optimistic. He dragged Mabel down from the window in the last second before a shot rang out. The window shattered above them, raining glass.
“What the hell, some nutjob with a gun shooting at kids!” Mabel tried to get a glimpse of their assailant, but Dipper pulled back into cover.

“Mabel look, I think it’s whoever caused the second event, the blast we detected.” He was holding his portable scanner, the readings were increasing now their attacker was nearby. “We have to deal with both of these incursions, we gotta split up. You go after the creature, try and track where it goes. I’ll deal with the trigger-happy assassin.” Mabel nodded, and squeezed her brother’s arm.

“Stay safe Dip.” The twins made for the opposite doors of the gym.

Dipper swallowed before diving out into the hallway to confront the mystery attacker. He didn’t really know how he was going to defeat someone with a gun, but at least he could try and sneak up on the shooter. More shots rang out in the hallway, and he darted into one of the classrooms. He heard a deep voice call out. “Come out with your hands up!” There was a heavy accent Dipper couldn’t place. He dived behind one of the desks as the man kicked the door open. “I mean you no harm.” The gunfire made him doubt this claim somewhat.

Concealed by the desk, he called out at the stranger. “What do you want!?” Another shot landed on the desk next to him. For the first time he noticed that it wasn’t bullets that had blasted the table, it was a strange blue ectoplasm. An energy weapon of some kind. Not just a crazy guy with a regular gun then, this person was definitely the cause of the anomalous event he’d detected. He quietly pulled out his journal, he had an entry on guns like this thanks to Ford. He might be able to jam the firing mechanism using his scanner to generate a feedback loop. Journal in one hand and scanner in the other, he switched on the jammer and prayed it worked.

“Please, you have to leave this place, I must stop the Kochab before it’s too late! I won’t let anyone get in my way!” So, the silvery beast was a Kochab then. What more did this man know? Dipper was going to find out as soon as he had the upper hand. He jumped up from behind the desk and barrelled at the man. He heard the click of the gun, but no shots rang out. His jammer was working. He collided with the man and they rolled onto the ground. Dipper managed to knock the gun out of his hand, and it went flying across the room. He was no match for his enemy’s strength though, and he was pushed back. He dropped the scanner and his journal as he fell, and they landed in front of the stranger. Lying on the floor, he watched as the man straightened up then fixed his gaze on the journal. It lay open on the page of Dipper’s sketch of Pacifica. Dipper expected another attack from the man, but he was transfixed, all his attention on the book. He reached down and picked it up, staring at the incomprehensible text.

A familiar feeling rose in Dipper’s chest as he tried to plead with the man. “Wait, stop! That’s mine!” The man was shaken from his trance and snapped the journal shut. He ran out of the room, journal in hand. Dipper leapt off the floor, pausing only to collect his scanner and the energy weapon, before giving chase. He’d never run faster than in that moment, desperate to save his life’s work from being stolen.

Mabel was having a comparatively easier time tracking the Kochab’s movements. The silver trail it left was an unmissable beacon for her to follow. She kept a wary distance behind the beast, not wanting to risk a direct confrontation again until she knew its true nature. The trail had first led her to the school’s library. The beast had been there recently, books were strewn about, and the librarian’s computer had been smashed. She examined the damage, noticing that it had the same markings as on the dead janitor’s temples. So, it was after information. The only question now was what it was looking for.
She followed the trail, which eventually left the school grounds entirely. She was hesitant to leave Dipper behind with the assassin, but she had to make sure that other people were kept safe. He knew how to handle himself. She traced the creature through the backstreets of Piedmont, staying a few minutes behind it at all times. After half an hour of following the glowing prints she reached a point where they started to overlap. The creature had gone this way, then turned around and come back the same way. She saw the newer set of tracks heading down an alley. She wanted to see what had turned it back, so followed the initial trail. Her progress was impeded by a set of double metal gates, but then she saw that one of them had been twisted open to make a hole. There was a sign between the gates, ‘Mountain View Cemetery’. Why would something from another dimension visit a graveyard?

Mabel tiptoed through the quiet park, passing past numerous simple graves. The trail led her to a chapel in the heart of the cemetery. There was a large pool in front. This was where the trail ended, leading right to the edge of the water. Why had this stopped the creature? Could it not touch the water?

She pulled out a flashlight and shone it into the pool of water. In the centre was a round crest, the symbol it bore was an eye, with an x shaped cross obscuring it. The symbol of the Blind Eye? That society had ended 4 years ago, Mabel and Dipper had helped ensure their end. Maybe it was a coincidence, but this whole situation seemed very suspicious. There were faint lines going out from the eye, crossing the base of the pool and out onto the land. She followed one of the lines with her torch until it reached a statue of a small cherub. Examining it closer, she noticed that it was on a movable plinth. She rotated the statue 90 degrees, hearing a satisfying click as it locked into place. Following the lines guided her to 3 more statues. As she turned the last one there was a whirr of gears turning.

The central crest in the pool was rising out of the water, and 4 bridges extended to allow her to reach it. The bridges matched up with the image on the crest, forming a single giant cross on the surface of the water. She softly brushed her hand over the crest, recoiling when it began to split open into 4 pieces. Inside the column that had risen was a single item, a book.

Mabel examined the book that had risen from the depths. It was about the same size as Dipper’s journal. The cover was a very dark blue, practically black. Golden lines and dots criss-crossed the cover, and there was a number in the centre. She ignored the cover for now and turned to a random page to figure out why this book was so important. The double page spread she turned to was covered in tiny writing, haphazardly placed around the page. In the centre of the left page was a sketch of a large hulking creature. It was hairless, with shrunken eyes and a large nasal cavity taking up much of the skull. A caption read “‘Chiroptera Terra’: Advanced hunter predator, uses echolocation to locate prey. Weaknesses: Overwhelm with multiple sound sources."

Mabel recognised the handwriting, the art style of the sketch, even the form in which the text was laid out and written. She shut the book and closely examined the cover. The grid of lines seemed make a rough parallelogram on the front, with other gold dots sprinkled about. She noticed that the lines continued onto the spine and rear of the book. She opened the book wide and looked at the whole design spread out before her. It was a constellation of stars. One she recognised all too well. The Big Dipper. A sinking feeling rose in her chest. She opened the first page of the book and read what was written. ‘Property of Mason Pines’.

She closed the book once more and read the number on the cover. It was a 9. Journal 9. This was impossible. Everything was different now.
To be continued...
Part 2: Inversion

Chapter Summary

Previously...

Investigating an unusual energy signature at the High School, Dipper and Mabel encounter a strange creature from beyond. Dipper confronts a mysterious attacker, while Mabel makes a shocking discovery...

Dipper hurtled down the hallway, in hot pursuit of the mysterious stranger who'd attacked him and Mabel. The man now had Dipper’s journal and was trying to make his escape. Dipper wasn’t about to allow that. The man was keeping a strong pace ahead of him, but Dipper had a lot experience running, whether towards or away from various mystical creatures. He wasn’t going to lose him. Eventually the man circled back towards the gym, where Dipper knew he could corner him. As he ran, he fiddled with the stolen weapon he’d taken from the man, he tried to set it to a ‘stun’ feature. The stranger crashed through the doors of the gym, seeing the disarray the Kochab had caused earlier. He ran for the opposite door, but Dipper was too close on his heels. Seeing a clear shot, he unleashed a blast of energy at the man. It struck in the back, causing him to roll hard on the ground.

Dipper ran over to him. He wasn’t quite unconscious, the gun’s setting must have been incorrect. He was still dazed though, and Dipper slid a hand into the long coat to retrieve his property. “This is mine, you thief!” He pointed the gun aggressively at the man’s face. “You’d better start talking right now, or we’ll both find out what this gun can do!”

The man raised his arms in a gesture of surrender. “Please, you must let me go after the Kochab, everything depends on that!” There was that heavy accent again, Middle-Eastern perhaps, or maybe Indian. Dipper couldn’t recognise it. This man was clearly desperate to stop the silvery creature that had entered their dimension.

“First tell me who you are. You’re not going anywhere till I get answers. You came here via some kind of energy blast, right? I detected it, you’re soaked with tachyons.” He waved his scanner at the man to make his point. “You obviously have access to specialist equipment, like this gun, so why have you come here?”

The man raised a hand to his face, pulling down the scarf wrapped around his face. Dipper saw dark skin and a scruffy beard. He pulled off the goggles too, exposing all his features to Dipper. He had long hair wrapped in a loose ponytail. “Alright. Introductions then. If you really insist.”

“I do.” Dipper felt small next to this imposing man, his muscles well-toned and a sense of determination and grit emanating from his glare.

The man squinted, unsure of Dipper. “Very well. My name is Merak.”

Dipper waited for a few seconds. “That’s it? You’re not going to tell me anything else?!”

A pained expression crossed Merak’s face. “There isn’t time for this, I must pursue the beast before it
finds what it seeks.”

“Nuh uh, you’re not going anywhere till you tell me everything. I’m gonna make sure to write down every word in my journal.” A look of intrigue crossed the man’s face.

“You made this journal?” It was an odd question. What did it matter to some random stranger whether he kept a journal or not?

“Sure. Why?”

“It’s not important. What is your name then?”

“It’s Mason. Mason Pines.” He reached out a hand for him to shake.

“It is an honour to… to meet you Mason.” A strange look appeared on Merak’s face that Dipper couldn’t quite read. It was like a mix of adoration and hesitation. He tentatively accepted Dipper’s handshake.

“On to business then Merak. Where do you come from? How did you get this travel technology, and the gun? What the heck is that creature?”

Merak interrupted his stream of questions. “Hey hey hey, I already told you kid, there’s no time for small talk. Only know that the if the Kochab acquires its goal then all the beings of this world will end up like that body behind me.” He gestured to the desiccated body of the janitor. Dipper had almost forgot it was still here in the gym.

“You know how it did that?”

Merak nodded grimly. “It was studying him. That is the result of its examination.”

“But he’s dead, all the blood drained out!”

“Exactly. When you wish to study anatomy, how do you do it? Dissecting a frog perhaps?” Merak was getting tired of justifying himself to this over-inquisitive child. “Look, the Kochab is from another dimension, one that must never come into contact with our own. It is not a realm of matter as ours is. The creatures there, they cannot comprehend us, warm bodies flowing with life. When they find us, they want to learn more. But they do not know how we work, so their attempt to understand us simply leads to this carnage. They are parallel to matter, unable to be affected by it directly.”

Dipper thought back to when Mabel had tried to punch the creature. She’d just been repelled. Like opposite magnets she’d said. He asked the obvious follow-up question. “So how do we stop it?”

Merak seemed not to listen, brushing him off. “I must go now to find the beast before it attains the knowledge of our world it’s after. If it gets that… then this world will not be safe.” He made to leave the gym.

“Well, I bet if you’re going to fight an inter-dimensional monster, you’re probably going to want your gun back?” Merak stopped and turned on his heels.

“You’re a very persistent one, aren’t you.” He had a small smirk on his face.

“So I’ve been told. Are you going to tell me who you really are yet, or is mysterious dimension hopping weirdo going to suffice? Cause you don’t happen to be the first of those I’ve met.” Merak gave a small laugh at this.
“I have told you all I can, now please, can we deal with the present threat?” He gestured to the door. Dipper was unsure whether he trusted this stranger. His description of the Kochab matched what he’d seen of it so far. But there was clearly a lot left unsaid, his origins, how he travelled here.

“What is it after? The Kochab, you said it wanted something from our world?” Merak’s smile disappeared, his expression returning to the normal forbidding expression.

“I cannot tell you that.” He could see the scepticism on the boy’s face. “Just know that it is an object of great importance, one that must remain hidden. No one must ever get their hands on it, or the fate of this world will hang by a thread.”

Mabel sat at the edge of the cemetery, studying the black and gold book in her hands. She hadn’t re-opened it since leaving the pool. The mechanisms had reset once she’d removed the journal, the crest re-submerged and the bridges slid back out of sight, like they’d never been there. Her mind was still reeling from the implications of the book she held. Journal 9. She supposed with Ford’s three ‘Hand’ journals, that made Dipper’s Pine Tree book Journal 4. She wondered if this whole thing was some elaborate prank, and her Grunkle Stan was about to jump from behind a tree and say boo.

This book described Dipper’s future, her future too. The dry nature of Dipper’s usual narration meant that specific details about their lives were probably omitted, but it was still a lot of forbidden information she shouldn’t have. Descriptions of creatures and artefacts she and Dipper had never found yet, knowing this could change the entire course of their lives. She couldn’t help but be curious. And there were other questions, like how it had ended up hidden in the cemetery, how long had it been there, who brought it back in time? Too much that Mabel didn’t know.

The silver creature was still out there in Piedmont, doing god knows what. She should go after it, try to follow until the trail was warm again. But she wanted more time to process this journal. Almost unconsciously she started flipping through random pages. There were sketches of three large metal cubes, a giant insectoid creature, living statues, and so much more. Then she turned to a page that was mostly taken up with a single diagram, lots of indecipherable symbols and patterns clogging the page. The was a large pair of lines arranged in a backwards L, with a black circle where the lines converged. It looked incomplete, shapes simply ended at the page’s edge. She closed the book again. Too much nerd junk in there.

Her attention was drawn again to the cover, those shining golden points and lines. It was much more creative than any of Dipper’s usual work. She felt one of the gold ‘stars’. She thought she could recognise the texture, had worked with glitter like this once before. Had she helped make this cover? Maybe she should just put the book back in the pool, leave it behind and never mention it to Dipper. That thought was gnawing in her mind, this could all go back to normal. But she couldn’t just forget about this, and she didn’t rate her ability to lie about it very highly. She was in a dilemma, frozen by indecision.

A buzz from her pocket brought her back to the current situation. It was a message from Dipper, simple and to the point. “Are you ok Mabel?”

She wanted to let it all out, tell him about the book here and now. Instead, she wrote a functional reply. “I’m fine.”

A few seconds passed before a much longer message flashed up. “I’ve made contact with the stranger, says his name is Merak. He’s helping me stop the creature (he calls it a Kochab), not sure if I trust him fully though, he’s acting suspicious. He’s got a detector, meet us down at the harbour,
we’ve traced it to an ironworks.”

At least Dipper was making some progress. A wild thought then occurred to her. This journal was from the future. Maybe it already had an entry on this ‘Kochab’, and she just had to find its weakness. She checked at the back first, finding an index. Dipper’s attention to being as detailed as possible aided her again. She tried to skim over the names, so she didn’t see any she wasn’t supposed to know yet. As she was nearing K in the alphabet, her eyes noticed an entry listed that she recognised: ‘Island Head Beast’. The next column listed strengths, then the one after that weaknesses. The final column had a single number, a 3. It was the journal that the full entry was located in.

She browsed the list until she finally spotted the Kochab. She wanted to know as much as possible, so checked the final column first. Her heart sunk when she saw a 4 instead of the 9 she’d been hoping for. Then she thought that it made sense. If 4 was Dipper’s current journal, he would write the Kochab entry after tonight’s encounter with the creature. She glanced back at the strengths and weaknesses column. Strengths were listed as being impervious to matter, whilst the weakness was that it was ‘parallel to matter, can be turned against it’. What was that supposed to mean?

Merak lead Dipper through the quiet streets of Piedmont, making directly for the ironworks. They’d not said a word to each other since leaving the gym. The older man was striding ahead of him, keeping a small gap between them. Eventually, Dipper got annoyed with this and closed the distance between them.

“So, where are you from? You’ve seen my home, Piedmont, so you should let me know what yours is like. That accent of yours is unusual, where did you pick it up?”

An irritated look passed over Merak’s face, but he answered anyway “Originally I came from a place I believe you know as Egypt. A town called Siwa, near an oasis.” Dipper was glad he was finally getting somewhere with this man of mystery. Merak asked a question back at him. “You said earlier, you knew I came here via an energy blast. How did you know that?”

The question seemed genuine, so Dipper responded. “We detected something similar a few weeks ago, a massive blast in the middle of the desert. It left a huge crater, but there was nothing else of note. Your arrival last night set off my scanner in the same way.”

“Hmm.” Merak stroked his thick beard.

“Just ‘hmm’?” Dipper had expected a bit more from him.

“Nothing, it’s not relevant right now. So, what is it you do, Mason Pines, to be involved in energy blasts and to have knowledge of advanced weapons from beyond what you should?”

Dipper crossed his arms, wary of how much he should tell the stranger. “Me and my sister are… investigators. We explore the paranormal, dealing with whatever monsters or creatures we find. We seek out mysteries to solve. Mysteries like you and this Kochab.”

“Hmm.”

Dipper was getting frustrated by Merak’s constant guarding of information. He dropped any further questions, he wasn’t going to get straight answers. In the end they came to the ironworks, closed down for the night. There was a security guard standing by the entrance.

“Ok, let’s head around to the back, might be a door we can force-“ Dipper was silenced by the noise
of a shot coming from besides him. The guard crumpled onto the floor. Dipper immediately turned to confront Merak.

"Why did you do that!? You just killed that guy, shot him like he was nothing!" Merak’s steely gaze didn’t waver, and he pushed past Dipper to enter the ironworks.

"No life is more important than my mission. I must stop the Kochab no matter what." Dipper was shocked by how callous he was. As Merak opened the door, he looked back at Dipper with a smirk. "Besides, I only stunned him."

Dipper’s heart was racing, how could this man play such games with people’s lives like that?! He went to follow Merak inside, checking that the man was indeed still breathing.

Dipper got his torch out and panned around the large space. There was smelting equipment everywhere. The large forges and furnaces were cold and dead at this hour. “So, are you going to tell me your plan for dealing with the creature now?” So far all he could guess was that Merak was going to just shoot at the Kochab. He didn’t think that was going to be enough.

“We corner it in this building, get it so it can’t escape. Then I’ll blast it back where it came from with this.” He was holding a small cylinder. It looked like a miniature grenade. “This will trigger another release of energy of the kind that brought me here, it will shunt the Kochab back to its dimension. We just need to get close.”

The sound of metal clanging from across the ironworks caught their attention. “It’s here.” Merak strode across the room, passing into a room with a large conveyor belt leading to a pit of molten metal. The orange glow from the pit was enough to show the Kochab, furiously trying to smash itself against the conveyor belt’s operating machinery. A hole in the floor of the room showed how the creature had entered, stone and earth tossed around.

“What’s it doing here, I thought you said it was after some relic? What’s it looking for in a foundry?”

“I don’t know, this isn’t the right site. Maybe it was unable to reach its goal, now it’s trying something else. Whatever it’s doing, it stops now.” Merak raised his gun and fired a shot at the Kochab. It hit the beast square on, pushing it back, but otherwise seeming to do no damage. Now he had another chance to examine the strange creature, Dipper was able to make out more of its unusual body. The skin provided a misty view of the insides. The organs inside were liquid, flowing and shifting constantly like a lava lamp. There was no head, the body was simply rounded at one end. The other end had a long tail, ending in a sharp point like the legs. A strange roar came from the Kochab, a bizarre vibration of the air that sounded unlike any animal he’d heard before.

Merak ran, circling the beast, his long coattails flapping. He let off a couple more shots, but this time the Kochab stood its ground. Dipper felt useless standing there while Merak had the beast’s full attention. The creature was now stood on the conveyor. Dipper rushed over to the beaten up control panel and pulled a large lever down. With a start, the conveyor began moving, funnelling the creature towards the molten pit.

The Kochab ran against the push of the belt, crashing into the side of the walkway Dipper stood on. He fell onto the belt, the creature looming above him as they both careened towards the pit. Another blast hit the creature’s back, and it turned to confront Merak who had also now jumped onto the conveyor. They were all slowly but surely moving towards the molten iron. The Kochab whipped its tail around, catching Merak’s legs and knocking him down. His gun flew off the belt, leaving the two of them defenceless.

The Kochab jabbed its front legs out at Dipper, who had to roll to avoid being skewered. Merak was
still down. There were only seconds before he was going to be boiled alive. Dipper weaved around the beast, trying to get to Merak’s side. One of the Kochab’s legs connected with his stomach and he collapsed besides Merak. The pain was unusual, the jab had been relatively light, but it felt like he’d been hit by a bullet. Feebly he shoved Merak towards the side of the belt, then threw his own body after him. They both fell onto the concrete, their bodies aching all over.

The Kochab was near the end of the belt, but now was casually keeping in one spot, walking against the motion of the conveyor. It raised itself above the two winded beings of matter that had tried to attack it. Dipper saw it raise a leg to stab down at himself. He closed his eyes, fearing the end.

A sudden jet of water shot out of the darkness on the other side of the conveyor, spraying the Kochab. It let out a wail of anguish, a deep resonance that Dipper felt in his bones. The creature lost its footing, flopping onto the belt. It was unable to rise again, the flow of water impeding it somehow. It tumbled into the pit of molten iron, the sharp limbs flailing as it fell. Dipper watched it grasping for the air as it sunk down into the crackling iron, the liquid metal seeming to stick to the creature’s skin, coating it entirely. Eventually he lost sight of it and the surface of the metal became still. Dipper uneasily got to his feet.

Carrying a hose and grinning widely across the belt, Mabel waved over at her brother. “Hey bro, looks like I saved your ass. You were useless back there!”

He was amazed and thankful that Mabel had showed up when she did. “What did you do Mabel, how did you know that would work?”

“Oh, that’s easy. I followed the tracks, see, and they lead to some water. But then they turned back, like it didn’t want to go for a swim. So, I figured that since its body was parallel to matter or whatever, that if it was submerged in liquid it couldn’t maintain its form properly. Voila! One Kochab sculpture!” The molten metal was pooling together into one form, beginning to solidify into an iron outline of the Kochab. He didn’t recall Mabel knowing about the matter properties of the creature, but it hardly mattered now they’d stopped it.

Merak rose from the ground and Mabel saw him for the first time. “So, this is the guy that tried to blow our brains out? Guess you feel pretty stupid now, since I saved you and all.”

The man ignored her and went to examine the frozen Kochab. “Fascinating, the metal has bonded to the creature’s external form. It can’t move at all.” He knocked his hand on the creature’s head and there was a satisfying clunk.

“You can thank me for that, your dumb space gun barely scratched it. I’m Mabel, by the way.” Merak was still turned away, focusing entirely on the beast.

“Uh, Mabel, I don’t think he’s listening.”

She huffed and crossed her arms petulantly. “Some thank you for saving his life. Some people are so un-grateful.”

Merak stood back from the Kochab and pushed the twins back as well. In an instant a blinding white explosion shook the ironworks. When the light dimmed, the twins saw that the Kochab was gone, no trace of the iron sculpture remaining.

“It is done.” Merak sighed, the weight of his task lifted from his shoulders. “I must leave now, tonight has been an… intriguing experience, I must say.” He glanced briefly at Dipper, another strange look crossing his face.
Dipper pleaded with him before he went. “Wait, there are still a lot of things you haven’t explained. Like what even was that thing, what was it looking for? And who are you, how do you know so much about it, and where’d you get that dimension hopping tech?”

Merak stayed silent. Dipper rolled his eyes, but he hadn’t expected any more from the man. “Well, goodbye then. And thanks for the help.” He reached his hand out for Merak to shake again. This time there was more warmth in the shake, a mutual trust beginning to form.

“Goodbye Mason. You have been of great assistance. You too, Mabel.” He finally acknowledged her, and Mabel tried to play it off, waving a hand nonchalantly.

“It’s nothing, we do this sort of thing all the time.”

Merak took a few steps back and reached for the device on his wrist. “I hope we can meet again someday in better circumstances. For now, I simply warn you to watch yourselves. There are others who will be less accommodating.”

They covered their eyes as another resounding flash burst into life, then faded away leaving an empty space.

“What was that all about bro?”

“I wish I knew Mabel. I wish I knew.”

They headed out of the ironworks and returned to the school. It was nearly dawn now and they had to act quickly. First, they called an ambulance to the school, to deal with the poor janitor. Before it arrived, they had to make sure the school was safe. The tear in reality was still hovering in the hallway where they’d left it. It was faded now, smaller. Dipper took some readings with his scanner. “Ok, we’re in luck, the decay rate says that this thing will close on its own in a few minutes. I’m glad this is over.”

A grim look crossed Mabel’s face, and she averted her eyes from Dipper’s gaze. “What’s wrong Mabel? We stopped the creature, the tear’s closing, Merak’s gone. We’re done here.”

She looked at her brother with guilty eyes. “No Dipper. There’s something I have to show you. We’ve only just begun.”

Vjknv rb cqn tnh
Outside Observer

Chapter Summary

Dipper and Mabel must deal with the ramifications of their discovery. They have to decide what to do with the journal from the future...

The book was sitting on Mabel’s bed. The twins were sat side by side with the book between them. They had locked the door and committed themselves to deciding on a course of action regarding it. They’d had had to go through a whole day of school of worry and anxiety since the night before when Mabel had shown Dipper the mysterious journal. It had been agonising knowing that the book existed but being unable to do a thing about it all day. The trivialities of their school work hardly compared to hunting beasts in the night or secrets from the future. Now they had time to figure things out. So far neither of the twins had looked much into the journal. Mabel had skimmed the index and a few random entries the night before, and she’d shown Dipper the un-refutable signature on the first page marking this work as his.

Dipper considered the situation. These journals had defined so much of his life. First the quest for wisdom and understanding 4 years ago, searching to understand the mysteries of the Author and Gravity Falls with Journal 3. Then his Pine Tree Journal 4, which had started a new chapter in his and Mabel’s lives. Now Journal 9 lying in front of him. A glimpse into a chapter of his life that hadn’t even been written yet. There was an undeniable urge to read the thing from cover to cover, to let it divulge all its secrets. But he knew he shouldn’t do that.

Last night Mabel had shown the power of future knowledge, using some scant clues from the book to defeat the Kochab. Who knew how far in the future this journal had been written? Dipper was still only halfway through the 4th book, let alone five whole more volumes. Mabel too was considering their options. They could try to forget, bury the book, or just lock it away again. But she knew that wasn’t going to happen. Briefly she had considered hiding the journal from her brother, keeping it hidden like the telepathy stone beneath her bed. She discarded that idea though, this was too big for her to keep to herself. The secret would tear them apart. They’d both been through that before.

They sat there on the edge of the bed, time passing as their thoughts raced around in their heads, no-one saying a word. Neither wanted to breach the topic, to stake their opinion, lest the other reject them.

Dipper finally came to a conclusion. He rested a palm on the journal’s cover. “Alright, this is what I think we should do. We don’t get rid of this thing, we keep here in a safe spot, the hidden drawer in my room. Then we promise never to touch it unless we’re facing something that makes it absolutely necessary.”

“But aren’t you curious at all? You could learn so much from this.”

“I’m going to learn it all eventually anyway, this is proof of that. Why take the short cut? I don’t wanna mess with time. Only if we have no other choice should we use it.”

“There’s so much about our lives we could find out though. Stuff that could help us. When you found Journal 3 in the woods you didn’t hesitate to read it.”
“That was different, I didn’t know what it was. We both know what this is. Future knowledge is dangerous. By using this we could change the future, make it so this journal never exists. I don’t want my life to be altered.”

_She doesn’t understand._

“And what if the future sucks?! This way we have a safety net at least.” This was going nowhere. Mabel was tempted to use the book, she wanted to have the security of its guiding hand. She’d had a recent brush with some deep-seated anxieties about her life with Dipper, and she didn’t want to lose him again.

But he was clearly hesitant to rely on the new source of knowledge. “We have my journal, Journal 4 I guess. It’s not steered us wrong yet. I want to chart my own course, like Ford, not following someone else’s guideline.” Even if that someone was a future him.

Mabel understood his desire, better than Dipper could know. She’d seen how heavily Ford’s legacy weighed on him, his subconscious fears. At the same time, what could they achieve with extra information, might they be able to surpass what they could do otherwise?

_I won’t have those nightmares anymore, the looming book. I will forge my destiny._

Their debate was interrupted by an abrupt chiming from Mabel’s laptop. She went over to it, seeing that it was a video call. “Maybe we just need another point of view.”

“Wait, what do you mean?” She accepted the call before Dipper could see who it was.

“Hey Mabel, where’s Mason? I’ve rung 4 times already, but he won’t pick up.” Dipper knew that voice. He wasn’t sure whether bringing someone else into this was a good idea or not, but at least Mabel had chosen the one person he might be comfortable sharing something as big as this with. He stepped off the bed and stood behind Mabel in her chair.

“Hey Pacifica. We need to talk.”

_Oh crap._

Pacifica tapped a finger impatiently on her desk. He was making her wait for some reason. Didn’t he know she didn’t have long? Her parents were only occupied for a short period each night, they would play a game of snooker every night for exactly 45 minutes, which usually gave Pacifica enough time for a few rounds of Battlestorm with Mason, then some time for idle chatter. At least, that was how she used to spend the free time. The last few weeks it had just been enough to spend any time at all with Mason, even if it was only virtual. She longed to be in his presence again, free from the watch of her parents. That 45 minutes each night was the highlight of her days. And Mason was wasting it.

“That dork better have a good excuse.” The call failed to connect for the fourth time. She sighed and leant back in her chair. Mason was never late, he valued the short time every day almost as much as she did. A small panic came over her. Maybe he’d finally got tired of her, abandoned her, alone again. She squashed that thought. Mason was many things, but he wouldn’t just stand her up like that. She reached a hand through her long blonde hair, idly curling it around a finger to calm her nerves. She decided to try her back-up, calling Mabel. She wasn’t exactly happy about this, she knew Mabel would grill her for ‘boy-talk’ whenever she had a chance. Pacifica preferred to keep that to herself.
This time the call was answered. She saw Mabel, and the strikingly pink walls she’d once woken up surrounded by. Her friend’s face had a different expression to what she was used to, much more pensive. She asked her where Mason was, then saw him appear from behind Mabel.

“Hey Pacifica. We need to talk.”

“Where have you been Mason? I rang loads of times! You know how little time I get every evening.” She put across a stern look which she could tell Mason recognised.

_That dork is in so much trouble!_

“I’m so sorry Paz, I totally forgot about-“

“You forgot about your girlfriend!”

Mabel chuckled at her brother’s ineptitude. “Ooh, you really stepped in it this time Dipper.”

_Ugh, I wish Mabel would stay out of this._

He tried to ignore that remark. “Look, Pacifica, me and Mabel have been going through a lot since yesterday, we need some advice. It’s important. Really important.”

Her stern look faded. “Alright. What’s wrong then?”

She saw him reaching for something. It was his all-too familiar journal. “Here, what do you make of this?” He opened a page to show her and held it up to the webcam.

She peered at the sketch on the page, then let out a small gasp. “Is that… a sketch of me?” Mason suddenly blushed and his eyes went wide. He pulled the journal back, seeing it was wrong.

“Oh gosh, wrong journal. You weren’t supposed to see that.” She was touched by his drawing of her, it was still incomplete, but captured most of her features well. She blushed too, she’d never expected Mason to draw her, it was so sweet.

“Aw, look at you two lovebirds, so cuuuuute!” Mabel once again butted in on their moment.

Mason reached behind them for something. “Mabel, it’s not important now. This is.” Pacifica saw another journal be held up to the screen. This time the page shown was just one of Mason’s usual ‘weird monster’ pages. Something about a magic necklace.

“What am I looking at Mason?” She heard another small laugh from Mabel, who still wasn’t used to hearing Pacifica call him that. “It just looks like one your normal nerd pages.”

He pulled the book away. “Ok, this is gonna blow your mind Paz. This journal, it’s from… the future!” He made a wave with his hands and wiggled his fingers. The gesture was pretty goofy, but Mason somehow had the ability to pull it off.

“The future, huh.” She didn’t really know how to take that bit of info. “And?”

“Pacifica, don’t you see? Mabel found this last night, it’s a journal that I’m going to write one day.” He briefly related Mabel’s finding of the journal to Pacifica, the hidden vault in the pool. “It has events written in it that none of us have lived yet, it could tell us about our future lives. We… me and Mabel…”

“We can’t decide what to do with it.” Mabel’s voice was very quiet. Had the twins been arguing? “Dipper wants to not use it, to hide it away. I wanna read it.”
Mason replied in an exasperated voice. “We can’t do that Mabel, it’s too dangerous! Haven’t you been listening to what I’ve said!”

This is so weird, these two never argue.

“Yeah, I’ve been listening. All I hear are doodoo-head arguments! Think about what we could do with this. This book could change our lives!”

“That’s what I’m worried about!”

“Enough!” Pacifica shouted into her laptop, causing the twins to halt instantly. She’d never seen them bicker like this. “Why does this stupid book matter so much. Sure, the future’s still out there, but so what. I say, let it come, and you’ll deal with it however you want. So you have some spoilers, that doesn’t mean that the future is worthless. You don’t know everything Mason, there’s still things to wonder about and find out for yourself. You can do that together though.”

She crossed her arms and looked away. Saying this out loud was tough. “Ugh, think about it like this. All my life I’ve been told what to do, made to act to a schedule, forced to sing the right tune. Then I met you two and everything changed. But I couldn’t just forget who I was before, it shaped me to where I am now. I might wanna be free from my parents… but I’m still used to being rich. I can’t just discard who I was that easily. I can run off and visit you, but I still won’t be happy unless we stay in a 5 star hotel. That’s what this book is about. You can let it guide you part of the way, but you’ll still be yourselves. Gah, I hope that makes sense.”

Mason had an understanding smile. Mabel was avoiding contact with both their faces.

God she’s hot when she’s being earnest.

“So. What are you two going to do with the journal?” She looked down at the glimmering lines on the book for the first time. It was a well-made cover. She detected the hands of both twins in its craftsmanship. Weird to think that they would one day make that thing.

Mason spoke first. “I guess we can read it then.”

Mabel’s eyes lit up, and she embraced her brother in a wide hug. “Thank you, thank you, thank you Dipper!”

“But not all the time, ok Mabel? We’re not gonna rely on this thing for everything, got it?” His sister vigorously nodded. “Right. Suppose we just… take it slow then. Not rush into things.”

“Pfft, you mean like your relationship with Paz.”

Mason’s blush returned. “Hey, that’s different.”

“I am still here you know.” Pacifica was giving a withering look at Mabel through the screen.

“Sorry Paz-Paz, I’m just so darned impatient watching you too. It’s like watching a rom com on slow-mo.”

“Well it’s not like we can do much anyway. You two are so far away, I can’t go slipping out all the time.”

Mason grinned at her. “We’ll just have to make those few times count then Paz.”

A warmth spread across her. “Yeah. Sounds like a plan Mason.”
Mabel made a kissy face, but the couple ignored her. “I love you Pacifica.”

She looked away. “Love you too. Dork.”

Mabel was ecstatic. “Ohmigosh, that was like the cutest thing ever!”

“Ok, I think it’s time for us to go now!” Mason wanted to avoid more teasing from his sister. “Speak to you tomorrow Pacifica.”

“Wait, can we talk for a sec? Just you and me?” Mabel looked momentarily heartbroken, then broke into a wide smile.

“See you then sis, don’t keep my dumb bro distracted all evening.” A broad wink was the last she saw of Mabel before she left the room.

*Oh gosh, I hope Mabel’s alright.*

Mason’s smile dropped once they were alone. “So, what is it?”

“It’s Mabel. Are you and her… ok?” Mason’s face betrayed that he’d clearly been dealing with this for a while. He deeply exhaled.

“Things have been a little rocky for the last few weeks. First, she got all depressed when I stopped planning mystery hunts to focus on you and me for a while. Then she was desperate to find a partner one time when we were at the beach. I feel like there are things she’s keeping hidden, stuff that she doesn’t wanna talk about. And that’s hurting her. She’s trying to act the same, but she’s worried about the future. About where she fits into it all. This journal argument’s just bringing it all up to the surface.”

Pacifica wanted to help, frustrated again about the hundreds of miles separating them. “I guess you’ve just got to help her through it. Be there for her when she needs you.”

“I just feel like there’s nothing I can do to reach her sometimes. I spose I should just keep trying to do my best.”

“You two’ll be alright. You’re the Mystery Twins.” This finally brought back Mason’s smile.

He laid a hand on Journal 9. “Guess we’ll see what the future holds.” *For Mabel’s sake at least.*

Ear up against the bedroom door, Mabel sighed. This was going to be a rough transition.

```rnl
Wlmqshi st mimsh tnl kqiip sr sh tnl stmfsbr
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Mabel had returned to her bedroom and Journal 9 was sitting on the bed in front of her. Dipper was hovering a hand above the book. “You ready to do this then?”

Mabel nodded. She was tingling with excitement. Was this how Dipper used to feel with Journal 3, that sense of discovery and wonder? Dipper grabbed the journal and opened it to a random page. It was a page covered in unusual patterns and lines. Mabel had seen that page before.

“That’s no good bro, that page is just gibberish, and I think it has parts missing.” Dipper studied the unusual markings on the page, trying to discern some meaning. There were mathematical formulas, lines that seemed to be part of a bigger diagram, and words he was unfamiliar with. He flipped forwards a couple of pages. This time it was a regular entry. The main sketch was a large rounded piece of rock, and the page was titled ‘Diquís Sphere’.

“Wait, I’ve heard of this.” He pulled out his phone, navigating to a conspiracy site.

“What?! Trust you to already know about something from the future. And you thought this was gonna be some secret knowledge that would ruin our lives.”

Dipper reached the site he was after and showed his phone to Mabel. She squinted at the screen, but the text was too small for her to make out. “Look, these things are big in the pseudo-archaeologist community, super smooth stones from South America or something. Some theories claim they were made by ‘Ancient Aliens’ or some garbage like that. As if aliens would bother to come to Earth just to carve rocks.”

“So, what does the journal say about them?”

Dipper had another look at the page. “Let’s see, says something about a missing mechanism, a key or something that will make the stone ‘complete’. Wait, it says there’s a stone right here in California!”

The Lawrence Hall of Science was a blocky building set above the University of California. It was a public museum with a planetarium, various science exhibits, and even some Dinosaur skeletons on display. It was only a 20 minute drive from the twin’s home, and they’d both visited the place numerous times. It appealed to Dipper’s passion for science and math, and also had a lot of hands-on stuff for Mabel to enjoy. Apparently, the museum also housed one the mysterious spheres that Journal 9 spoke of.

As they entered the museum Dipper was nose-deep in the page, Mabel could feel his keenness radiating out.

“This is fascinating reading, says the stone is actually a form of hibernation chamber! There might be someone inside it right now! We’re so lucky there’s one right here.”
“Yeah, lucky. Hey, you don’t think it’s more than a coincidence, do you Dip?” It had crossed Mabel’s mind that this was a very fortuitous first page, one that had been right on their doorstep for years.

He absently waved a hand, his attention still focused on the book. “Nah, I’m sure it’s fine, probably just a simple case of temporal determinism.”

“Uh huh.” Mabel didn’t know what that meant, but it was probably best not to make Dipper try and explain it. “So does our new book of future intel tell us where this big rock is?”

“Yes, right down to listing the museum’s reference number on the artefact.”

“You glad we decided to have a peek then?”

He nodded, and Dipper’s glee at this adventure was evidence enough that he was delighted he’d been convinced.

They passed a collection of dinosaur remains, which Mabel eagerly addressed. “Ooh, cool. I’ve seen one of you, and one of you… my Grunkle punched one of you!”

“Quiet Mabel, not everyone has had the luxury of seeing real dinos before.” He winked at her, and she gave a comical ‘my lips are sealed’ gesture. Just past the dinosaur remains they finally found the sphere. It was situated on a plinth with fake plastic plants and palm trees surrounding it. It was about half Dipper’s height in diameter.

Mabel squinted at the plaque in front of the display, before sighing and reaching into her pocket. To Dipper’s surprise she pulled out a pair of glasses, similar to the ones their Grunkles usually wore. They made her eyes seem too large. She started reading the notes slowly. “Las Bolas, Costa Rica, circa 800 CE, unnaturally smooth petro… petrospheres, believed to be from the extinct… uh, what is it Dipper?” She’d noticed him staring at the glasses.

“How long have you needed those?” She put a hand to her face, remembering what she was wearing. She blushed.

“Oh, those. I only need them for the really little words. Ever since I got blinded in the ice tunnels my eyes haven’t been so good.” She was clearly embarrassed by this, but Dipper wasn’t teasing her.

“I’m just surprised that I didn’t end up needing them first, what with the amount of time I spend peering at my journal or reading homework notes.” Mabel looked a little self-conscious now, so returned to considering the strange rock sphere.

“Says the stone was from an extinct culture, the ‘Dee-Kiss’ people. Just looks like a big old rock to me.” She knocked a hand on the stone. There was no response.

Dipper gestured with the journal. “According to this it’s sealed up at the moment. Needs a key of some sort to unlock it.”

“So, where’s the key, what does it say?”

“That’s the annoying part. It’s kinda vague. Blame my fondness for leaving things to the bare essentials, I guess. Just says that ‘the key is not physical, but tonal in nature’, whatever that means. Then there’s these symbols I don’t recognise.”

Mabel refocused her glasses on the page. The symbols were foreign to her, but the way they were laid out… “Dipper, this looks like musical notation. Maybe tonal means it’s opened by some kind of
“Hey, maybe you’re right. A harmonic lock isn’t impossible. We just need the right melodic code to unlock the sphere. I think if I cross-reference the symbols here with Meso-American writing systems, then I can translate them into the correct musical notes.”

“Right on that bro!” Mabel started singing incoherently at the top of her lungs, startling Dipper. “La la la, do re mi! Aaaaah- oomph” Dipper had slammed a hand on her mouth.

“Are you crazy, we’re in public Mabel!” There were several other museum goers milling about in the room, some of whom had been disturbed by Mabel’s attempt at ‘singing’. “Besides, I have a keyboard app on my phone, that’ll be much more precise at matching the tone we need. We’ll wait till the crowds thin out a bit.”

The twins sat by the sphere for the next few hours, idly chatting about nothing in particular to pass the time. “Would you rather be able to fly or turn invisible?”

“Hmm, invisible, better for stealth. Would mean less running away. Easier to hide.”

“I’d love to fly, to be free and go anywhere. Floating through space like a star.” Mabel was fiddling with something around her neck. “Hey, Dipper? How do you think we figured all this stuff about the sphere the first time? In the timeline where we didn’t have that.” She lazily waved at Journal 9.

“Who knows, maybe one day we’ll take a trip to Costa Rica, find the other spheres. We have no way of knowing how many years it could be in the future.”

“Won’t that make this journal not be the same though, if we change the past, you’ll never write it.”

“I guess I’ve just gotta make sure I write all down exactly as it appears in the book.”

“Right, we gotta preserve the future.”

Dipper noticed that she was twiddling her fingers around for the first time and recognised what it was that she was distracting herself with. “Hey, it’s that necklace we found in the crater.”

“Huh, oh yeah.” She stopped fiddling with it. “Forgot I’d put it on. Just thought I’d try it out again.”

“It looks good on you sis.”

“Yeah… yeah…” Mabel’s attention seemed elsewhere for a moment.

“Anyway, I think we’re alone now. Ready to try out the tonal key?” He stood up and held out his hand for Mabel, who let him pull her up.

“Let’s crack this sphere open bro.” Dipper reached in his pocket for Journal 4. Before they’d headed to the museum, he’d daubed the number on the cover, marking it officially as the next in the line of Ford’s ‘hand’ journals. He flipped to the most recent page, his decoding work on the music cipher laid out. He passed the book to Mabel, who read out the sequence, which Dipper typed into his phone. Once it was all inserted into the device, he held out his arm and hit play. The keyboard app recited the code, it didn’t have a real melody, just a collection of random tones.

Initially nothing happened. Then a hiss of air came from the sphere. Four glowing lines forming a door appeared on one of the sides, and part of the rock slid out from the main body. A dark space
inside the sphere was revealed. It was suddenly illuminated by a bright flash of electricity, and the twins had to cover their eyes. Silhouetted in the door frame of the sphere was a small green being in a pink jumpsuit. His eyes were extended on long stalks, and his fingers were elongated. He barely came up to the height of Mabel’s waist. He was clearly weak and sickly, so the twins ran to his side and laid him on the fake grass.

They heard the diminutive alien rasp something out in a hoarse voice. “Thank you.”

Mabel ran to the nearest water fountain to get the alien a drink. Dipper made him as comfortable as he could. Mabel put the cup of water to the alien’s lips. “We’re Mabel and Dipper. We were investigating your rock… thingy.”

The alien drank deeply and finally replied. “I am grateful for your arrival Mabelanddipper. My name is Z’Goulda. Are you a gestalt entity? I am sorry, my kind operate under a hive mind, it is difficult for me to comprehend your individuality.”

Dipper thought he understood. “Just call us the Pines, ok.”

“Very well Pines. I will give you my story.” Z’Goulda explained his origins to the twins. He was part of a survey team that had arrived to do a mineral survey of the Earth. His group had landed in Costa Rica, but a meteor impact shortly after arrival caused them to enter their safety pods to ride out the cataclysm. A malfunction had damaged the pods’ wake-up clocks, so the alien crew had remained dormant for the past 1200 years. An electrical fault also meant that the stasis fields generated by the pods were prone to sending jolts of energy through the aliens inside. Z’Goulda had essentially been tortured for a millennium, and the twins had freed him from his torment.

“Had you Pines not found me, I would have endured an infinite agony within the pod. I cannot leave with it in this state.”

Dipper examined the interior of the pod. There were sparking wires jutting out from one of the panels. “I think I can fix this, my uncle gave me some wiring lessons last summer.” He bent over to reach inside the small sphere.

Mabel looked down at the diminutive traveller they were assisting. He didn’t even reach her knee. “You seem apprehensive Pines. I can feel a wary emotion radiating from you.”

Mabel wasn’t liking where this was heading. “What do you mean? You can sense my emotions?”

“My kind are empathic creatures, we share everything. I sense that you are not the same though, there are things the other Pines does not know.” Mabel’s hand reflexively moved to her necklace.

“It’s fine, I’ve just been… trying to find some purpose lately. I think after today I’ve found that again though. Me and my brother have something to work together on.” She saw Dipper emerging from the pod.

Z’Goulda smiled up her. “I understand. The unity of the group must be maintained.” Mabel nodded, sharing an understanding with this small being.

Dipper wiped his hands together, satisfied in his repair job. “Everything should be fine now, the fault’s been corrected. Just took a little rewiring, even alien tech works on the same basic principles I know.”

“Then I thank you, Pines of planet Earth, I can now go and free the rest of my crew. I bid you a fond farewell.” With that he gave a strange salute with his spindly fingers and re-entered the pod. The wall of rock slid back into the sphere, and then it appeared to collapse in on itself, entering a warp field to
propel it to the other spheres in Costa Rica. Once it was gone, the twins made a hasty exit from the museum, not wanting to stick around when the sphere was found missing. They returned to Mabel’s bedroom to reflect on how their first use of future knowledge had gone.

“So Dipper, how do you think that went?”

“I think it went great, it was so cool learning all about the sphere. No more making guesses or filling in blanks. We had concrete reliable info.”

“Plus, we helped that guy. If we’d waited around like you wanted us to, then he’d have been in pain for who knows how much longer. We saved him from so much suffering.”

She fell back onto her bed. Today had been a long day for both of them, first the unsureness during school, the long argument about the journal, and then their trip to the museum. Now they could relax, and not worry as much about the way things were headed. She once again played around with her necklace. She wasn’t sure whether she should keep wearing it. But there was a comfort to the security it provided her, even if she was wary of it going too far. She decided to wear it every now and again, just in case. At least today had reinforced their bond. Dipper’s hunger for the journal’s secrets had washed away his fears of the book’s danger, and she and him would face whatever came at them, together.

Dipper headed for the door, wanting to rest in his own room. Mabel called out drowsily as he left. “Future’s looking bright Dipper.” He quietly closed the door as she drifted to a contented sleep.
Armed with the new secrets of Journal 9, the twins take every opportunity they can get to explore its mysteries...

Mabel hurtled through the dense woodland. The stillness of the forests was disturbed by her heavy footfalls. The massive tranquiliser gun slung around her neck was weighing her down, and she was sweating from the run. This adventure in the woods was a lot less serene than their previous outing here. No herbivores this time.

A rustling ahead of her caught her attention. She propped up the gun and aimed at a shaking bush ahead of her. Something started to emerge, so she fired off a shot. She heard a high pitched yelp, then a teenage body fell into the clearing. She’d shot Dipper.

“Oh, woops bro.” She lightly kicked his unconscious form. “Thought you were the Land-Bat.”

Dipper moaned, groggy and half-awake. “Wheresa Bat? I don’t see a Bat. Who’re you?” He tried to stand up, but his legs collapsed.

“Ugh, just stay down and keep quiet.” She shoved him back into the bush he’d come from, hoping he didn’t ruin the plan. She crouched down, trying not to make any noises. She knew it was pointless, the creature stalking them could hear even the quietest sounds, its echolocation finely tuned for hunting anything that moved.

Mabel heard a distant sound of twigs snapping. “That’s it, come to Mabel you big ol’ killing machine you.” She cocked her rifle, praying that the tranq would be strong enough. She stayed motionless, waiting for the Bat to enter the clearing.

A few minutes later, she saw it, the lithe grey body creeping into the clearing. It was surprisingly thin, belying how tough the outer skin was. She’d seen this thing rip through a sheep in 5 seconds. Now her life was in the hands of Journal 9.

She pushed a button on her phone, sending the signal out to the network of speakers they’d set up. At once, a different music track started playing from each one. It was Mabel’s thrash metal mix, the perfect collision of sounds to distract the Bat. It looked around the clearing, overwhelmed by the noise, its senses blinded. Mabel lifted the gun, waiting for the perfect shot. The Bat ambled forwards slightly, trying to bury it’s head in the dirt to block out the sounds.

She fired, hitting the creature square in the head. It reared up and screeched, before flopping backwards. Its limbs were still twitching, so Mabel shot it again to make sure it stayed out cold. She got up examined her catch.

Dipper strolled up beside her. His speech was still slurred “You did it Mabes, woo. Go Mystery Twins.” He collapsed into her arms.

10 minutes later they had the Bat tied up securely in the back of pickup, covered by a tarp in case anyone else came by. Dipper had both Journal 4 and 9 open in front of him, ecstatically copying...
some notes from one to the other. “That was incredible, the creature responded exactly as the journal stated! I never would have guessed that super-evolved land dwelling bats were roaming the woods of California! And the map reference was spot on, the Chiropteran was right where the journal said!”

Mabel let him unwind his thoughts for a bit longer, he always liked to decompress out loud. She was glad to see him so enthused, the new state of affairs they’d ended up in had worked out great. Instead of Dipper researching local claims of supernatural sightings, they now had a handy guidebook to wherever something would appear. She glanced at the new journal in front of Dipper. It was inspiring to know they’d one day work together to make these pages a reality.

The countdown began, the power building up to the deadly crescendo. The observatory dome had been sealed, and the Cubes of the Solar Enterprise would have their perfect eclipse. Suddenly a burst of light pierced the room. The Cubes’ metal skin turned a dark red, they were angered by this turn of events. How dare this beam of photons touch their holy skin.

Rappelling down from the observatory’s telescope slit were a pair of Earth teenagers. “Looks like you’re all ‘boxed in’, you stupid cubes! Get it Dipper, cause they look like boxes?”

“Yeah, I got that Mabel. Do you have the inverter fluid?”

“Got it right here.” She brandished a beaker of pink liquid above her head.

The Cubes turned a menacing orange, but there was little they could do now. Mabel sprinkled a small bit of fluid on each sphere. After a few seconds it took effect, and the Cubes turned inside out. To Dipper and Mabel, they appeared much the same as before, but for the Cubes it was the equivalent of having their skeleton thrust on the outside of their bodies.

Mabel angrily waved the beaker. “That’s what you get for trying to steal the sun, now you get justice cubed! Cause there’s three of them, cubed?”

“Oh yeah, yeah.” Dipper picked up one of the surprisingly light alien cubes. Internally, the Cubes were screaming, outraged at the turn of events against their favour. “Let’s get these out in the sun, a quick soak in the rays should convince them not to steal anymore stars. Oh, and shut off that countdown will you, the beeping’s giving me a headache.”

Mabel hung upside down, suspended from her feet by a rope. “Ugh, let me down already Utarfeson, the blood’s making my head feel all tingly.”

The vampire emerged from the shadows, attempting a dramatic reveal. She couldn’t believe she’d been tricked by his superficial good looks, he’d been such a nerd on their date. Plus, the whole ‘kidnapping and tying up’ thing was so old school. She saw his posturing down below and inwardly facepalmed. Oh god, the dweeb’s wearing a cape. This cannot get any more embarrassing.

“Mabel, my sweet. Soon we shall be one together in the blood! I will drink of you, and you shall become me eternal queen!”

“Never, you stink! And you cannot pull off that look!” He sadly lifted a corner of the cape, before angrily tossing it down.

“It doesn’t matter, there’s nothing you can do to stop my ascension! No one in the world can save you now!”
“Except maybe me.”

“What?!” Utarfeson spun around. Dipper was casually standing there, Journal 9 open in his hands. “How did you find my lair mortal?!”

“You mean this old clocktower? It was simple, all laid out here in the journal.” He made a lazy shrug. “It’s ok Mabel, you’ll be down in only a few minutes.

“Phew, that’s a relief. My ankles are starting to chafe.”

The vampire petulantly stamped his feet. “No, this is not how this will go! I will drink the blood of your sister, you can’t stop me. Wait, what’s that?”

Dipper pulled a clove of garlic out of his pocket, causing the vampire to recoil in fear. “How did you know?! My one weakness!”

“I didn’t need a journal from the future for that. You’re a vampire, duh. Ok, Mabel, which part are we at? Has he done the whole ‘eternal queen’ spiel yet?”

“Oh yeah, it was hella cheesy.”

“Oh, old clocktower. check; tied upside down, check; eternal queen, check; Right, just the curtain then.” He calmly pulled at the curtain covering the clock face with one hand.

“If you think that will stop, then you’re sadly- ah, my pores!” A small shaft of sunlight had poked through the clouds and was shining through the translucent face of the clock. “No, 700 years of drinking the blood of pure maidens, brought down by a teenager! Oh, what a world!” He turned to ash before Dipper’s eyes.

“All in a day’s work. Ahem-hmm.” He coughed, having breathed in some of the floating ash. “You ok Mabes?”

“Yep, all fine. Boy would he have been in for a shock if he had drunk my blood. I’m not exactly a ‘pure maiden’ anymore.” Dipper blushed at Mabel’s indiscretion.

“Whatsoever, the rope should snap under your weight in approximately…” He flicked his wrist over to check his watch “…17 seconds. I’ve already put a crash mat down there.”

“Thanks bro, you’re a real lifesaver. Woah!” He watched Mabel plummet onto the mat below. She raised her hand, making an ‘ok’ sign.

He shut the journal with a satisfying thwop. “This is almost getting too easy.”

“And then, we checked out a haunting that was supposed to be at the new mall, but it turns out that the ghost hadn’t even died yet! We just chatted with the guy, told him not to come into work the day he was supposed to get cursed, it was great.”

“Sounds like everything’s going well for you two.” Pacifica smiled. Her latest video chat with Mason had ended up as a massive session of him recounting all their recent adventures with the new Journal 9. It sounded like he’d completely gotten over the initial worries he’d had. “So, you’re not concerned about ‘contaminating the sanctity of the timelines’… or whatever?”

She noticed his smile slightly fade. “Well, I figured that with all the good we’ve done, that it hardly
matters if we’ve changed some small details. I figure, Felix Culpa.”

“Huh, oh nice, you’re getting better with those phrases.” Pacifica had been giving Mason some basic lessons in Latin, so that his ‘scientific names’ for any creatures he encountered were accurate. Given some of the pages from Journal 9 he’d shown her, he was definitely going to improve in that area one day. That made her curious. “So I don’t suppose there’s anything in that thing about… us.”

Mason hadn’t expected that. “Oh. Well, there isn’t a section about you in this journal, that’s for sure.”

Pacifica raised an eyebrow. “In this journal?”

Mason fumbled over his words. “Uh, I mean, I don’t have a section on you in Journal 4, not at all, why would you think that?” He was a terrible liar.

“I think it’s sweet that you appreciate our relationship on the same level as your Mystery Hunts. Makes me feel kinda special.” They both blushed in a shared sense of emotion over this.

“But no, nothing specifically about you in Journal 9. Actually, it’s odd, there aren’t any personal references in the book at all. It’s more like Ford’s old journals, all impersonal and formal. I don’t know, seems a little fishy that there aren’t any mentions of our future lives whatsoever. Kind of a shame I stop writing about the things that are really important.”

“So, what about Mabel?”

Mason was confused. “Huh? What about her? There’s nothing about her in the book either”

Pacifica stared at him seriously. “No, you said before she wasn’t doing too well? Is she better now?”

Mason averted his gaze slightly. “Sure, I guess. She’s not acting any weirder than usual. I think she’s enjoying the way our Mystery Hunts go now as much as me.”

“That’s good, you two fighting was just wrong.” She was still kinda concerned about Mabel but decided to drop it for now. “Anyway, I gotta go now.”

“Wait, what? It’s only been 30 minutes, we’ve still got time.”

It was her turn to look away, she hadn’t wanted to talk about this, had been burying it. She took a deep breath. “My parents are keeping a closer eye on me now. I think they found out about my little trip down to see you two, a few weeks back. Then I found they’d been looking at my phone. I’m sure they must have seen your name in the chat logs, though thankfully they couldn’t read the messages themselves. I think they didn’t recognise you, cause you were labelled as Mason, and they knew you as Dipper.”

Mason took this in. “Ah man, that sucks Paz. What are you gonna do?”

“Do? There’s nothing I can do Mason!” She was raising her voice somewhat now. “If they find out, they’ll cut off all my communication. They’ll never let me out of their sight again!”

Mason seemed to consider this for a second. “I say screw them. If they don’t listen to you, you shouldn’t do what they say. I say, keep doing what you want, and face the consequences where they fall.”

She was unsure about this. “Mason, you don’t know what it’s like. They still sometimes use that freaking bell on me. If they figure out I’ve been talking to you, or worse, that you’re my boyfriend,
then they’ll just keep me locked up here.” She looked so fragile in that moment. “Would serve me right for stepping out of line.”

Mason was horrified. “No, Paz, no! I won’t let that happen. If they keep you from seeing us, then I’ll personally come to your house and break in! Ugh, your parents make me so mad, how can they do that to you?”

Then he paused. He wondered what his parents would say if they ever found out about the journals, or the Mystery Hunts, or all the stuff he and Mabel got up to. He sighed and relented. “Just, stay safe Pacifica, ok. I love you.”

“I Love you too Mason. Sorry to end tonight on such a downer.”

“Ah, it’s fine. This is important.”

“Just don’t let that journal go too much to your head ok. Don’t shut me or Mabel out. We need support too.”

“I won’t, I promise. Cross my heart.” He made a goofy gesture over his chest, which brought a chuckle to her lips.

“Ok, sleep tight dork.”

“You too, princess.” She signed off, disconnecting the call. Mason was content, he was finally feeling like his life was truly going somewhere at last.
Dipper is captured by a mysterious organisation. Who are Polaris, and what do they want with him?

The twins had a free Saturday and were spending it pursuing one of Dipper’s favourite pastimes. They’d driven a short way from home to where an impromptu car boot sale had sprung up for the weekend. A mixture of parked cars and tables had been set up out the front of a house. Dipper loved perusing the stalls, looking for unique artefacts, or just cool items with a story behind them. He sometimes found magical or supernatural stuff for sale, but more often it was just old antiques.

Mabel found the whole thing rather boring. “Come on Dipper, we’ve been here for 2 hours already! Haven’t you already checked all the stalls yet?”

“No Mabel, I’m taking my time. I had to be dragged to your ‘deep’ poetry class last week, so now we’re doing what I want.” He glanced at the next stall, a collection of small porcelain figurines. “Ooh, look at the detail on these, I’d say 1960’s.” He pulled out his journal and made another small note, a whole page laid out for chronicling any neat finds he made that day.

“They’re not even living magical figurines, this is so dull.” She had her arms crossed and went to look at one of the other stalls, one selling taxidermied animals. It was kinda gross, but at least it was more interesting that what Dipper was looking at, and some of the ‘attack’ poses the animals had been laid out in were pretty metal.

Dipper stayed where he was, finishing up his notes and slowly moving from one table to the next. He was writing up a description of some old film cans being sold, when he heard a rapid whispering from behind him.

“It’s him, it must be, look at the book.”

“It could be a coincidence.”

“No, look, it’s the Pine Tree. This is the one.”

He spun around to see two men standing behind him, eyeing him up. They were dressed in long robes, they looked like priests or monks or something. “Um, can I help you?” He didn’t like to hear people discussing him behind his back.

The two men shared a worried glance, then stared down at his journal. They were creeping him out, so he tucked his journal away and turned to go find Mabel. As he turned, one of the men reached out and grabbed his arm. He couldn’t break free. “Hey, let go of me, what do you think you’re doing!”

The other robed man reached up to his forehead, pulling back his hair bangs. Both men gasped and recoiled in shock. For an instant the three of them stood there. Then there was a sudden change, and the two strangers grabbed a hold of Dipper, roughly dragging him away.

He struggled to released himself from their grip. “Get off me you weirdos! Help! Help!” He screamed out at the crowd, turning a few heads. But the men were moving him fast towards a van.
He spied Mabel across the throngs of people and called out. “Mabel! Help!”

Mabel looked up, seeing her brother being forcibly dragged away. Her eyes widened, then she dashed towards them, trying to reach him in time. She couldn’t narrow the distance due to the maze of stalls blocking her way. He loosened the grip on one of his arms and reached into his hoodie pocket. “Mabel, you gotta help me! Take this!”

He lobbed the journal as far as he could. Mabel caught it, then could only watch as the men shoved Dipper into the back of the van. She instantly memorised the license plate, she wasn’t going to let them take him away. There was an insignia printed on the van as well, some kind of animal, and some wording beneath. The van’s engine started up.

She wasn’t going to reach him in time. Clutching the journal in one hand, she hastily pulled out her phone, getting a snap of the insignia on the van, before it drove off. She briefly considered chasing them down in the pickup, but she’d already lost sight of the van after a few seconds. She looked at the photo she’d taken of the van. The insignia was a Bear… no, a Polar Bear. It looked realistic, besides an elongated tail reaching out to the side. The words underneath read ‘Polaris Research Institute’.

Dipper was gone. She was going to need backup. She dialled a number on her phone. “Hey. You’ve gotta come right now. Dipper’s in big trouble.”

3 and a half hours later she was stood in Dipper’s bedroom, having assembled a case file on his abductors. There had been no mention of ‘Polaris’ in either Journal 4 or 9, which had been left safely in Dipper’s locked desk drawer. The only related thing she could find was a small note in 9’s index. It was on the final page, encoded via one of Dipper’s usual ciphers. It was a Caesar cipher, the password had been Northwest. The note simply read ‘Do not trust the Institute’. Fat lotta help future Dipper was.

Luckily the PRI was a listed company, and she’d been able to figure out where they were based. They had a tower over in the San Francisco financial district, only a short drive away. The license plate of the van matched one of their small fleet of vehicles. She was struggling to figure what the company actually did, all she could tell was that they were some kind of scientific contractor, making their money of selling patents to the government. So why did they want Dipper?

She had spent the last hour coming up with a way to infiltrate the PRI building, and once her backup arrived, she could put that plan into effect. She heard the door knocking from downstairs. Finally, help was here. She barrelled downstairs and pulled the door open.

Standing in the doorway was a very concerned looking blonde girl “This had better be really for real, you owe me big time sister.”

Mabel pulled Pacifica into a big hug. “Thank you so much for coming. I know this can’t have been easy. With your parents and everything.” On receiving Mabel’s phone call, Pacifica had immediately chartered her family’s private jet and flown down to Piedmont as fast as possible. It had still taken 3 hours, but it was worth the wait. She knew her parents would eventually find out about this little venture, but right now she didn’t care. Mason was in danger.

Mabel lead her inside to Dipper’s bedroom. Pacifica idly noted that this was the first time she’d ever been in a boy’s bedroom before. She recognised part of the room from her regular video chats. “Ok, give me the full scoop Mabel, who has Mason?”
Mabel showed her the rough notes she’d made in Journal 4. Her standards of note-keeping were much more haphazard than Dipper’s usual neat script. “Ok, so there’s this company, Polaris, and they just kidnapped Dipper right off the street! Just grabbed him and stuffed him in a van! I’ve traced their main office though, a tower in San Fran. We just gotta go bust him out.”

Pacifica absorbed what Mabel said, and skimmed the notes she’d taken. It wasn’t much to go on. “But how do you know he’s there, they could have taken him anywhere?”

Mabel rummaged around in one of Dipper’s draws and pulled out a small silver watch. “This shows me where he is. It’s a remote GPS he made, looks like a watch. This way if we get separated, we can still track each other.”

Pacifica glanced over Mabel’s wrist. “But you’re not wearing one?”

“Pfft, a silver bracelet with black? Total clash. But anyway, according to the tracker he’s in the building, several floors up.”

“So how can we get him out? Can’t you just call the police, report him as missing, get them to break in?”

“There isn’t time for that, Dipper needs our help now! We’ve already lost 3 hours, who knows what they’re doing to him in there?!”

Pacifica sighed. “I guess you know best. What’s your plan then.”

“Ah. You’re probably not going to like this.”

Dipper was roughly knocked around the back of the van, his hands bound. The rear of the van had no windows, only a small slit to the driver’s cabin, which was shut. It was pitch black, and he couldn’t break his bonds. He’d tried mentally counting the turns the van took, but after a few he realised they’d gone in circles. They were deliberately throwing his counting off so he couldn’t trace the ride. After an hour of driving, the engine finally came to a stop. He tensed up. He had no idea who had abducted him or what they wanted.

The door of the van opened, and he briefly glimpsed an underground car park before more robed figures took a hold of him, blindfolding him, then dragging him out. He was taken into an elevator, then shoved out, falling onto his chest. He felt the ropes on his arms being loosened, then the blindfold was suddenly torn away. He tried to take in the room around him, but it was still just pitch black. The people who’d released his bonds had vanished into the blackness.

He warily stood up. “Hello? Is there anyone there? Why did you kidnap me?”

All of a sudden, a square of light shot down from the ceiling directly above him. It revealed a few scant details of the room, he could make out seven tall pillars at one end, the other three walls were blank. The pillars on either side were shorter, each one growing in height as they approached the centre. More lights came on, each one lining up with the pillars. He noticed that each one was topped with a high-backed chair, almost a throne. Six lights came on in total, illuminating all the chairs, bar one, to the left of the centre chair.

Next, he saw six figures sitting atop the high pillars. He strained to look up at them, making out that they were all different ages, genders and races. They all wore smart business suits covered in long gowns, like those worn at graduations. From the base of the centre pillar a beam of light suddenly shone in Dipper’s face. He covered his eyes as the beam slowly moved up his face. When it passed
his forehead, the light turned green and he heard a high pitched beeping. Was that some kind of ID scanner?

A man in the centre chair stood. He appeared to be a portly man in his sixties, greying hair and wrinkles. He spoke with an American accent. “It is an honour to bask in the presence of the great author. We welcome you Mason Pines.” There was a monotone delivery to the statement.

The remaining five figures all spoke at once. “Greetings Mason Pines.”

The American spoke again. “For a long time, we have searched, now we can complete the great work.”

The figure to his right spoke next, a dark skinned woman with a heavy Afrikaans accent. “The Institute desires great things from you Mason, you will-“

“-aid us in our task.” Another person had completed the sentence, a slender Asian woman carrying on from the previous speaker. She continued. “The date fast approaches-“

“-when the calculations required must be completed. Your mind is the only one-“

“-wise enough to assist us in this endeavour.” The conversation has passed through two more speakers, the first an elderly female British speaker and the second a bespectacled Spanish or Italian man.

Dipper had enough of listening. He shouted up at these strangers. “Why do you want me! You just kidnapped me, I’m not going to do anything for you! Who are you people?!“

The figures remained silent, each one staring directly at him. Their gazes didn’t waver. He didn’t think he saw them blink once. Then they all spoke as one.

“WE ARE THE COUNCIL. YOU ARE THE AUTHOR. YOU WILL COMPLETE THE CALCULATIONS.”

Then they continued their speech from before, as if Dipper hadn’t interrupted. The last council member to speak was a thick-bearded Russian. “You will be provided with our research so far on the projected outcomes, you will fill the gap in our knowledge. Then you will-“

“-bring about the new age at last. All hail Mason Pines, saviour of mankind.” The speech had circled back around to the American.

Once more the council spoke in unison, chanting “All Hail Mason Pines” over and over again.

Dipper was freaked out by these people. They knew his name, they knew about the journals. They also didn’t seem to be based too far from his home in Piedmont, given the length of the drive here. The incessant chanting was driving him mad. He covered his ears and yelled at the six figures.

“No! I won’t do anything for you people! If I’m your saviour, then give me answers or let me go!”

The chanting ceased in an instant, and their harsh blank stares returned. The American addressed him.

“You will work for us. Or you will-“

“DIE.” All six spoke the last word.

Dipper swallowed. These people meant business. The American turned to the Asian woman. “Sister
Phecda, you will accompany the Author to the calculation chamber and oversee his workings. Brothers Alioth and Mizar, you will see to the logistics of our operations.” The European and Russian men nodded. “Sister Alkaid, begin testing the captured samples. Sister Megrez, you will continue overseeing the research here. That will be all, council adjourned.” The six figures all rose in time. By this point Dipper would have been surprised if they’d been out of time.

Each of the figures took a deep bow. Unexpectedly, three of the figures flickered and faded away. They must have been holograms, attending this gathering virtually, somewhere else this whole time. He was left with the Asian and British women (Phecda and Megrez?) and the American man (he hadn’t heard his name). Megrez and the American filed out of the room via doors behind the pillars, leaving him alone with Phecda. She descended a small staircase and stood in front of him.

Her voice was still monotone, almost no hint of emotion. She smiled at him robotically. “Come Mason Pines. We have work to do.”

Mabel pulled the pickup to a stop on the side of curb opposite the Polaris Research Institute building. She looked up at the shining construction of glass and steel. The top few floors of the building rose to a conical spire. According to her tracker, Dipper was somewhere inside, 40 floors up.

“This is the place? It looks like a bank or something.” Pacifica hadn’t been happy when Mabel laid out the plan earlier. She was still grumpy about it now.

“Trust me Pacifica, this is the place. The PRI, fancy looking tower. Look, there’s a sign out front.” Pacifica doubtfully peered out at the front of the building. “Mabel, their logo is a happy Polar Bear, you’re sure these are the guys that got Mason?”

“Trust me, these are the guys. Come on, no time to lose.” The two of them exited out onto the street. Pacifica felt horribly inconspicuous, the red pickup didn’t exactly blend in among the glittering excess of the surrounding buildings. Mabel hefted a heavy looking bag out of the pickup’s back. It looked like the kind of bag she used for carrying her golf clubs.

“You ready to do this?”

“Mabel, this is never gonna work.”

“Trust me, it’ll be fine. If they ask, then I’m your butler or whatever.” Pacifica critically eyed Mabel up and down. She looked like she was more suited to painting graffiti under a bridge than being a professional servant.

“This is so not gonna work.” She shook her head and the two girls crossed the road to enter the PRI’s lobby. Once they crossed the door’s boundary, she composed herself. She knew how to hold her body in these situations, what poise to take and what expression to show. Her parents had been training her for this kind of environment since before she’d even started school.

The entry foyer was sparsely decorated. A few grey abstract sculptures lined the approach to a large desk. There was a single set of double doors behind that. A single receptionist sat at the desk, his attention drawn to the two newcomers.

Pacifica held her head high and addressed the man. She knew how to talk to her lesser in a professional setting. Looking down at the man with an air of contempt, she followed Mabel’s instructions. “Pacifica Northwest, I have a 2 O’clock with Mr Dubhe, your manager.” She caught a glimpse of Mabel to her side, standing awkwardly with the heavy bag over her shoulder. “Uh, this is
my valet."

The receptionist eyed the two girls suspiciously, then looked at a screen and typed a few buttons before replying. “I’m afraid I don’t see any Northwest on my schedule.”

“Then something must be wrong with your system. I’d look the NorthWests up if I were you, we have a lot of influence. You get us inside, or I will personally see that a complaint is filed. I simply require an interview with your manager.”

The receptionist seemed rather timid and tapped some more keys. This was where they’d see if Mabel’s plan was going to work. In the last few hours she’d been googling the entry systems of the building. Any entrants required a pass to operate the lifts. The head of the company, an American businessman Mr Dubhe, would occasionally meet with representatives from wealthy families to discuss investment opportunities. Mabel was banking on the Northwest name being enough to get them in the door. Pacifica was rather short to be posing as the head of major corporation, though her heeled fur boots gave her a little extra height with which to look down at the receptionist.

The clatter of keys ceased, and the receptionist spoke to Pacifica again. “I see you’re as influential as you say. As you’re considering investing in the Institute then I’ll send you up to Mr Dubhe’s office, Floor 25. He passed them two clip-on badges. “These will allow you lift access.”

Pacifica gave a curt nod. “Thank you, nice to see that someone here recognises class when they see it.” The double doors behind the desk slid open to reveal the elevator. The two girls hurried inside. “What floor is Mason on?”

Mabel checked the scanner. “Floor 46, near the top.” The building had 50 floors in total. The lower 25 were devoted to admin and some public research facilities. The top 25 were unmarked on any schematic of the building Mabel could find. She tapped the button for Floor 46 and the lift began to smoothly ascend.

Pacifica gave a sigh of relief, her clam façade finally dropping. “Thank goodness that worked. Now what, they’ll know we’re not going to Floor 25.”

Mabel tapped the bag she was carrying. “Don’t worry sis, I’ve a got a few tricks up my sleeve if anyone tries to stop us from saving my brother.”

Dipper was being held in a small room that was laid out like a school lab, gas taps and Bunsen burners and high stools. He’d been provided with a long set of formulae and equations, some kind of massive math problem this Council wanted solved. He’d been given any calculation equipment he’d requested and was trying to solve the total mess of numbers and figures in front of him. He was finding it near impossible though, since several key constants were missing defined values.

He’d protested to his ‘warden’, Sister Phecda, that the calculation was insurmountable, but she’d just insisted he carry on. At one point she’d mentioned that he was the only person capable of finishing the work. Why he in particular was so special was a mystery. He also couldn’t figure out what the calculations were about. There were energy constants involved, but the total yields he was getting were enormous, far vaster than the full output of the sun even. Whatever the Council was after, it was certainly a big deal.

He spent some of his imprisonment studying Phecda. She’d removed the cloak and was now simply dressed in the smart suit beneath. She looked like any number of wealthy business people.
He tried again to ask for more context of the puzzle. “Can’t you tell me what this is all for? If I knew the end result you were after it could-“

“No. No more information will be provided. Solve the calculation.” That same clipped voice she shared with the other 5 Councillors. That was another mystery. Even though there were seven seats in the meeting chamber, one member had been conspicuously missing. It wasn’t a travel issue, three of the members had appeared virtually. So, what was going on with member 7?

Mabel and Pacifica emerged on Floor 46. Poking out of the elevator, all they saw was a bland corridor, the kind found in every office in the world. A watercooler was propped on the opposite wall. “Where’s Mason now?”

Mabel held the scanner up. “Says he’s still on this floor, this way. She led them rightwards down the corridor. They encountered no one else thankfully, passing through a room laid out with multiple tables and cubicles, an open plan office. Eventually they came to a door. “Right, the section he’s in is behind this door. Looks like quite a large room according to the tracker.” A rough approximation of the floor they were on was displayed on the small screen.

“Let’s do this then.” They both rested a hand on the door’s handle. “3… 2… 1!” They slammed open the door revealing a tiny broom cupboard.

Pacifica blinked, stunned by the small room. “What?! This is it? You said this was where he was being kept!”

“It is, I don’t understand!” Mabel entered the cupboard, looking all around. There was just an empty shelf leaning to the side of the wall. “No no no!”

Mabel was panicking now, checking the scanner in her hands madly to try and find her brother. While she was pacing about, Pacifica studied the room. There was something about the back wall of the cupboard, it was too smooth. The other three walls were coated in grime, but the back was pristine. She reached out to touch the polished surface, but her hand found nothing but air. She yelped and stumbled forwards, into the wall.

She steadied herself, realising that she’d passed through the wall entirely. She was in a darkly lit hallway. She couldn’t see the hall’s end.

“So cool!” She jumped as a hand shot out of the wall beside her, followed Mabel’s head. “Hologram wall!” Mabel jumped back and forth through the projected wall a few times. “This is nutso, how did these guys get this kind of tech?”

Pacifica noticed a switch on the wall and flicked it up. Overhead lights came on down the hall and the two girls jumped back. The hall was lined with rows of standing outlines. They dared not move for a second, lest they get attract the attention of the still figures.

Mabel reached out a hand and knocked on one of the figure’s heads. There was a sound of metal. The two girls looked closer. Each figure was a metal skeleton, slightly taller than they were. The faces wore a blank expression, and there was an odd cavity below the chest. “A robot army! Maybe they’re trying to build this to take over?”

They edged down the rest of the corridor, fearing that at any second the silent robots would come to life and grab them.

Pacifica realised her hands were shaking. “Mabel, this is totally crazy right? Holograms and Robots?
And these guys want Mason? Who are we dealing with?"

“I wish I knew sis, I really do.” They continued along the darkened hall, closing in on Dipper’s location.

21 floors below them was a lavishly furnished office, nothing but the best for Dubhe, head of the Institute. He was sat behind his mahogany desk, lightly sipping a glass of wine. He’d overseen the cultivation of the original grapes that had gone into this drink, many years prior. Now he finally had a reason to celebrate. But there was a slight worry too. Megrez entered his office, striding over and sitting on the opposite side of the desk.

“I have checked over all the building’s projects, my brother. Everything is proceeding as planned, the energy collectors are complete, and the redistributors need only a few more weeks. We’ll be finished for the deadline.”

Dubhe didn’t respond, he simply continued drinking.

“Something wrong, Dubhe?” A brief hint of emotion crept into the question. Dubhe sighed and placed the drink down.

“We’ve finally tracked down the Author, our dream is within sight. But he refuses to cooperate, I suspect the missing data will prove insurmountable to solving the calculations. So much work and time will be wasted if that comes to pass.”

“We must have faith in our prophet, Dubhe. He led us here. He will take us to the end.”

“Perhaps I am worrying over nothing. Yet I can’t escape the feeling that he will be unable to help us fully. We still lack so much.”

“We can only wait and see, brother.” A hint of a smile snuck onto his face. It vanished when his intercom buzzed.

“Mr Dubhe, we have intruders inside the tower.” It was the head of security.

“Who is it?”

“Two females sir, they arrived claiming to be seeking an interview with you for financial purposes. They failed to check in at your office 4 minutes ago. We’re sweeping the upper floors for them now.”

Dubhe and Megrez shared a worried glance.

“Get me Phecda right now.”

The girls passed by the waves of robots, entering a larger space, resembling a factory floor. The whole place was smoother than any normal factory, the equipment gleaming and curved. More robots were being constructed by a series of automated machines. There were no workers in sight, the whole process was automatic.

“Machines building machines, huh? Maybe this is just mating season for androids?” Mabel’s attempt to lighten the mood hadn’t really gone over well.
“This stuff is more advanced than anything I’ve ever seen. My dad took me to Japan once, to discuss a deal at a car factory. The trip was pretty boring, but we got a look at the construction floor at one point. This place is even more advanced than that, and that was all cutting edge.”

They hastened their passage through the factory. “Dipper’s only a few rooms away.”

“Awesome, let’s go bust him out then get out of—” She was cut off by a droning alarm.

“Oh no, they’re on to us! We gotta run!” They belted across the cavernous room. According to the scanner, there were two small lab rooms between them and Dipper.

The end of the factory they were in held the most complete models of robot, almost ready to join the ranks of their brethren in the previous corridor. Mabel put a hand on the door towards Dipper, but the moment her palm landed on the surface a beeping noise rang out.

“Uh oh.” The girls turned, seeing that several of the finished robot’s eyes had now lit up, with a red glare. Their heads started swivelling to examine the girls. “Time for plan B!” Mabel dropped the bag she’d brought and knelt to zip it open.

To Pacifica’s surprise, she pulled out a golf club. She stared at Mabel with a confused expression.

“They’re for the robots, just whack ‘em!” She demonstrated this by taking a swing at one the closest robots. The metal figure crumpled to the floor, damaged by the heavy club.

Pacifica got the idea and grabbed a club for herself. “You stupid robots better stay back, I’m suing this whole damn company if you ruin my clothes!” She swung wildly back and forth as the robots advanced on them. Mabel pushed her towards the door.

“Go get Dipper, I’ll hold them off!” She didn’t need to be told twice and darted into the lab.

Dipper was still squirreling away at the complex problems before him, having made little progress. He’d actually given up seriously working on the equations half an hour ago. It wasn’t like he could do anything anyway. Now he was just wasting time looking busy, trying to come up with a way out of this prison. Maybe if Phecda was distracted, he could rush her and escape the room. He probably wouldn’t get very far, he knew this building he was being held in was massive and based on the elevator ride he’d taken he was pretty far up.

Phecda’s attention was suddenly diverted away from staring at him. She reached to an earpiece, listening to new instructions. Then she lowered her hand and addressed him. “We must go now.”

“Wait, I’m still working here, you can’t just pull me away from these formulae mid solution!”

“No, your safety is in jeopardy. You are being moved to a secure location.”

Dipper stood up from the stool and backed away. “Stay back, I’m not going anywhere with you.” Phecda approached him menacingly, and she backed him into a corner.

A shout from behind her caught both their notice. “Get away from my boyfriend you creep!”

A golf club threw through the air, knocking Phecda to the floor and revealing a figure he was immensely relieved to see. “Pacifica! You came for me!” He ran towards her and they embraced. “I can’t believe it, I’m so glad to see you.” He felt on the verge of tears, he’d thought he was never getting out of this nightmare.
“Of course I’d come for you Mason, now come on, we gotta—” Her concentration wavered as Phecda rose again.

“Stand away from the Author.” She started inexorably moving towards them. Pacifica stood in front of Dipper reflexively.

“Stay back, or I will hit you again!” Dipper had never seen Pacifica act so aggressive before. Phecda didn’t waver though, she continued to come closer. “I warned you!”

Pacifica swung the club towards Phecda, aiming for her head this time. She was aiming for a knockout blow, though she knew how much damage the hefty club would do but didn’t care. She expected to feel a single collision and that would be it, but as her club connected, she felt the club go rigid in her hands. A jolt of pain shot up her arm. She looked in amazement at the face of the woman in front of her and let out a high-pitched scream.

The club had wedged itself into her head at the temple, carrying on and smashing the woman’s eye. The edges of the smashed region revealed sparking wires and metal plating, and the eye was clearly a glass replica of some sort. Even with a club embedded in her skull, this woman continued approaching.

Heaving with as much strength as she could muster, she yanked the club out of the metal skull and gave another blow to Phecda’s body, just above the waist. This sent her down again. She stared up with her one functioning eye, the rest of her face a mangled mess of metal.

Both Dipper and Pacifica stood hypnotised as Phecda reached down to pull her jacket and shirt away, revealing her midriff. Then she continued, taking hold of a fold of skin before peeling it away from her belly button. Behind the skin was a glass casing filled with a thick bubbling liquid. From within the case, the two of them could make out a single large pink organ. It was a brain.

Pacifica’s jaw dropped open. “Oh my god. That is the grossest thing I’ve ever seen!” She couldn’t tear her eyes away from the brain suspended in the robotic frame, that was once Phecda. Dipper pulled her by the arm out of the lab, back towards the factory floor.

“Paz, do you have a way out of here?”

“I don’t know, that part of the plan was up to—” They reached where Mabel was hacking out at the robots.

“Hey bro, really missed you! Care to help out?” She hit another robot square in the head, which sent the cranium flying off into the room. Pacifica joined her in whacking the robots. “Dipper, look in the bag!”

He grasped at the bag and found his two journals. “Mabel, why did you bring these here?!”

“I thought you’d wanna keep them safe yourself. Now come on!” She scooped up the bag and kicked out at a robot, clearing a path for the three of them. Dipper slid the journals into his pocket. They ran out back to the corridor lined with robots, who mercifully had stayed deactivated.

Dipper’s eyes widened as they passed through the corridor. “This is insane, how many robots do they need!?”

“Yeah yeah, bro, we’ve already been here, let’s get a move on!” Mabel grabbed his arm and roughly dragged him to make sure he didn’t fall behind. The emerged through the hologram wall, which Dipper had no time to comment on. They finally had a chance to talk as they made their way back to the lift.
“Dipper, are you ok now? Did they torture you?”

“No, they just made me solve math problems.”

“THOSE MONSTERS!”

They reached the elevator, but as they headed towards it the doors slid open, and a team of security guards filed out. They dashed back into the previous room, running to hide behind one of the many cubicles. Pacifica was panicking. “Now what, Mabel, what’s the next step in the plan?”

“Just give me a sec.” She reached into the golf bag and pulled something out. Neither Pacifica or Dipper expected what she did next.

Mabel stood in plain sight of the guards entering the room, and kicked out a leg at the nearest window, it shattered, exposing them to a blast of cold wind. She picked both of them up and shouted a single instruction at them. “Hold on!”

Dipper tried to question her. “Mabel what are you- woah woah!” Mabel ran at the open window, throwing herself off of the 46th floor and dragging Dipper and Pacifica behind her. The two of them screamed, suddenly plummeting 40 storeys. They tumbled in the air, wind whipping past them at a breakneck speed. Mabel pivoted in the air, now floating face upwards. She held both arms out and fired something from her hands. She reached out take hold of Dipper and Pacifica’s waists, before all three of them felt a sudden jolt. They’d both closed their eyes, fearing that this was the impact with the ground.

Slowly opening them, they both saw Mabel grinning like an idiot. They were no longer falling, but instead gently being lowered the ground. Pacifica saw a rope coming from above, ending in Mabel’s hands.

Mabel triumphantly shouted into the wind. “Grappling Hook!”

They finally reached the ground and Mabel let go of Dipper and a very shaky Pacifica. Dipper hugged her from behind as her shaking came to a stop. She angrily pointed at Mabel. “Never do that to me again!”

The three of them rushed across the street and piled into the pickup, Mabel furiously slamming on the gas before any of the security guards could track their truck.

“Mabel, drive around in a few circles before we get home, I wanna make sure we’re not being followed.”

“If you say so Dip.”

Pacifica squeezed Dipper’s hand, concerned for him after this ordeal. “Mason, who were those people, what did they want with you?”

“I have no idea, they just wanted me to work on some math puzzles. They freaked me out though, all that tech in there.” He shook his head. “We got lucky though, they can’t track us after this. It was only chance that they found me at the sale.”

“Let’s hope you’re right, I don’t wanna lose you again.” She rested her head on his shoulder.

He coughed and tried to thank her. “Thanks for coming all this way for me. What about your parents?”
“Screw them, right?”

He smiled down at her. “Yeah, right. I know it must have been hard for you.”

“Easiest decision I’ve ever made. Cross my heart.”

Later that night Brother Dubhe sat examining the day’s security tapes in his office. He had files for all three of the infiltrators, who had escaped without a trace. Just children, he thought dismissively. These children had damaged several of their specialist products, including necessitating the crafting of a new exosuit for Sister Phecda. That wouldn’t come cheap. He looked at the three photos of the intruders.

The Pines twins had eluded them for years, but now they had a positive image to match with school records. It was only a matter of time before they narrowed the search again. The Northwest girl was a loose thread they could ignore for now, she was unimportant.

Mason Pines presented a problem though. He had been clearly unable to fill their data gap. His mind was brilliant of course, but without the full scope of information he was as blind as they were. But, as he reviewed the footage, that might not matter anymore.

Most of the footage was irrelevant, showing the girls sneaking around, or mindlessly smashing robots. But there was a brief snatch of footage from the factory room, only a few seconds long. The girl, Mabel, had passed her brother a pair of books. One was the same that his disciples had used to identify him for capture. But the other was very different, an array of lines marking the cover. Was it possible? Was this the piece they’d been missing for so long?

He sipped from his glass once more. If he was right, then Mason Pines would be extraneous to their plans. They could finally complete their goal.
To Boldly Go

Chapter Summary

Dipper finds a new pastime based on an old sci-fi show...

Chapter Notes

Shout out to S_Heffley and CIS Droid from the Jedi Council Forums, hope you enjoy the cameos I snuck in for you :)

Captain’s Journal, Stardate 207017: It’s been three days since our last encounter with the dreaded Cipher Armada. Our attempt to infiltrate their base on the planet Globnar was a failure, they escaped before we could get inside. Now our fruitless pursuit continues across space, the Armada always one step ahead. They still hold the captured Princess Andromeda, and my heart aches to hold her once more in my arms. We can only hope that we close in on the Armada soon, and can rescue my trapped love…

Zooming through the inky black of space was the good ship Mystery, Space Fleet’s newest cruiser. The smooth contours of the ship were matched by the glimmering white bridge, a dazzling array of futuristic machines. Captain Pines, darling of the Space Fleet, decked out in a luxurious black cape, addressed his stalwart crew.

“Mr Soos, ship to Warp Factor 5.”

“Aye-Aye, Mon Capitan!” The tubby engineer began fiddling with the ship’s controls.

“Lieutenant Corduroy, what’s our heading?”

“We’re still 15 parsecs behind the fleet Captain Pines.” Nestled in the lieutenant’s red hair were a pair of chunky headphones, and she was adjusting the dials on her monitoring equipment.

“Then we’ll just have to hope our engines can hold out. Once we come alongside the enemy ship, I suggest we switch all power to the shields. We can then use the ship as a ram to breach directly into the heart of their defences.”

“That would be the logical course of action Captain.” From behind the Captain’s chair, his oldest advisor, F’Ord, had entered the bridge. He raised his hand in a six-fingered greeting.

“Ah, F’Ord, your commendations are always appreciated.” Inside, the Captain was internally screaming at hearing those words of praise from his alien mentor. He laid back in his chair, passing the minutes before they caught up with their quarry. He snapped his fingers and a beige service robot brought him a glass of champagne. “That will be all Oomba.”

“Roger Roger.”
Having some time to spare, he picked up a small communicator attached to his chair and started speaking. “Captain’s Journal, Stardate 207017.01: Our chase continues unhindered, I can only pray to the great Time Baby that our voyage is—“

“Ugh, you’re not in there again!?” A voice boomed throughout the bridge, startling the Captain. He dropped his communicator and pinched the bridge of his nose. He didn’t look up as a spectre in black materialised out of the air in front of him. Her arms were crossed. The crew turned to stare at the intruder.

Dipper sighed and clapped his hands. “Pause simulation.” The crew all froze in place, and the ship’s motion halted. His sister was tapping her foot.

“Really Dipper, playing in the nerd sim again? What happened to ‘it could be dangerous to use’?”

He stood from his captain’s chair. “Mabel, do we have to do this now, I’m kinda in the middle of a big epic space chase.”

Her stern gaze didn’t falter. “Uh huh, of course you are.” She strode over and flopped down in the captain’s chair, feet resting lazily on the armrest. “This is the fifth time this week you’ve been in here. You know it’s not good for you.” She raised and arm as a book appeared in a flash of digital sparks. “And I quote, ‘Prolonged use of the ‘Virtua-Boy 9000’ can result in: Mental disconnection from reality, hallucinations, muscle atrophy…’, need I go on? Besides, it’s just not healthy to hide away in another world. You taught me that, remember?”

Dipper sighed. He had to admit she had a point. “Can’t I just have a bit of fun now and again?” He sheepishly grinned at his sister, who just frowned back at him.

“I think this is a bit more than ‘harmless fun’ Dip. And what happened to ‘keeping stuff low profile so Mom and Dad don’t find out’, hypocrite?” He groaned, knowing he wasn’t going to win this argument.

He reached a hand around to the back of his neck and grabbed the horseshoe shaped device stuck there. He winced at the small pain from the disconnection as he removed it. All around him the bridge began disintegrating, leaving him deposited back in the mundanity of his bedroom. Even his cape disappeared, and he was wearing his normal pyjamas. He blinked a few times to readjust to the darker light levels.

Where Mabel had been in the captain’s chair, now she was sat at his desk, Journal 9 in one hand. “I never should have let you dig that thing up. The journal doesn’t even say where it came from, for all we know it could be some stupid dangerous weapon.”

“Mabel, it’s fine, it’s just a space toy or something, I’ll be alright.” He waited for her to leave the room, but she just sat there staring. “Anyway, I’m gonna go… you know.” He gestured at putting the device back on his neck.

“Oh no you don’t Dipstick! If you’re going back in that wacky world then I’m coming too. I need to see what you get up to.”

“What about your ‘brain melting’ or whatever, all those side effects?”

“Pfft, my mind’s way more trained for this than yours.” He didn’t know what she meant by that. “Anyway, I have to at least be sure you’re being decent in there.”

“Decent?”
“You are a teenage boy Dip, I don’t wanna catch you doing anything dirty in VR.”

“Ew, what!? It’s not like that, it’s just… like DD&D, roleplaying.”

“Whatever, I’m still gonna keep an eye on you.” She slapped her own device on, and Dipper shrugged and followed her back to the ship’s bridge. The smooth outline of the room faded into his vision.

Mabel was eyeing up the crew members, comparing them to her memory of the real things. “Pretty sure that Ford’s hair sticks up more, this is more like a Stan quiff.”

He sighed. “Could you at least try to stay in character? I’m the Captain, what do you wanna be?”

She tapped a finger on her chin and pursed her lips. “I’ll be the ship computer!” In a burst of static Mabel disappeared. Her face reappeared on the front viewscreen of the bridge, a massive grin stretched across the window. “Now I can see everything anyone does on the ship!” Her face slid off the window and onto the chair communicator.

“That’s not creepy at all.” Having Mabel watch his every move was kinda unsettling. All that appeared on the screen was the middle of her face too, her hair wasn’t visible. It reminded him of the time a few years ago when her face had been stolen, only this time with more eyeshadow. Not an image he really wanted to recall.

“So bro, what do we do now.”

“Ah right, I’ll pick up where I left off.” He jabbed a button on the communicator, banishing Mabel’s face and starting the recording. “Resume Simulation. Ahem, Captain’s Journal, continued: I can only pray to the great Time Baby that our voyage is able to continue smoothly. The great armada we’re about to face will be-

“You’re really narrating your own life, wow, you’re such a neeeeeeeeeeerrrrrrrrrrrrrr.” Mabel’s face had returned to the communicator. As she spoke, her head spun around in circles.

“It’s dramatic Mabel, I’m making a chronicle of the great quest!”

“But you’re just describing all the things you already know. Let’s get to the action.”

“Uhh, fine. Simulation: Fast Forward to next event.” The movement of the crew sped up, the edges of their forms blurring while Dipper sat still. “Mr Soos, status update!”

“Yo captain, we got the Armada in our sights. Preparing for Operation: Bighorn! Woah.” Mabel had appeared on Soos’ control console. “Hey there Hambone.”

Mabel looked witheringly at Dipper. “You came up with a dumb name for the mission? Let’s just get to the lasers, pew pew!”

“That one was the AI’s name actually. Guess digital Soos has a similar personality to the real thing. Onto business then. Lieutenant Corduroy, what’s the radar report?” The lieutenant swivelled her chair to address Dipper, but before she could answer a voice blared out of her headphones.

“Boy, it’s a good thing you didn’t have this VR thingy 5 years ago Dip, you were creepy enough around photos of Wendy, let alone full 3D!” She snickered as Dipper blushed, the memories of his childish crush being brought back. “I’m not gonna find a virtual Pacifica in here am I? Ha, down sailor.”
He sincerely hoped that Mabel would get bored and leave before he got to the princess rescue part of
the plan. Lieutenant Corduroy finally got a word in. “Captain, there are no signs of any enemy ships.
This region of space is empty!”

He stroked his chin. “Hmm, our intel said they would be here. Do another sweep, on the double.”

Suddenly the bridge doors slid open, and a frantic crew member ran in. “Captain, ze enemy wessels!
They’re cloaked sir!” The man’s Russian accent was very noticeable.

Dipper’s eyes widened. “Oh no! Quickly, bridge to engine crew, full power to the shields, now!”

“Ooh, finally things are hotting up! Wait, who’s this guy anyway?” Mabel returned to Dipper’s com
unit and tilted her head at the Russian crew member.

“Oh, he’s just one of the default characters. Hey, it’s not like I have that many friends, I couldn’t fill
up the whole crew roster.” Dipper returned his focus to the game, steepling his hands. “Alright,
where are you Cipher?” A barely contained laugh came up from the communicator, and he tried to
ignore it, Mabel would probably just mock him for his seriousness again.

The space behind the viewscreen suddenly rippled, as the massive command ship of the Armada
phased into view. It was a foreboding dark mass encompassing the whole window. The Mystery was
tiny in comparison to the vast flagship. Beams of bright red light shot out from the enemy ship, and
the bridge shook from the impacts. Dipper worriedly pressed his communicator.

“Engine room, how are we holding up?!?” Instead of a reply from the lower decks, Mabel answered
him.

“You could just ask me, since I’m basically the ship. We’re all still fine. Those lasers tickled though.”
Dipper thought she wasn’t taking this whole battle very seriously. Maybe he should just call it a
night. Then a window expanded on the front viewscreen. On the screen was the dreaded Cipher
himself, one eye covered by a patch.

“Well well well, if it isn’t Captain Pine Tree. And the ship’s a Shooting Star too! Double the fun!”
The triangular alien grimaced, if one could grimace without a mouth.

“Cipher, we meet again! This time our battle will be legendary! Now return the princess to me at
once!” Dipper stood from the chair and dramatically pointed a finger at the screen.

“What my hammy brother is trying say, Mr Space Pirate, is that you’re going down!” The video chat
with Cipher abruptly cut off, and Dipper shuddered as the ship suddenly jolted forwards.

“Wait Mabel, what are you doing?!”

“Having some fun, I’m gonna ram that jerk!”

“Wait, I still had 10 lines of monologuing left!” He tripped on his cape, falling onto the smooth floor
of the bridge. The normally clean white lights of the ship were now flashing red, warning of the
incoming collision.

Dipper clung to base of his chair, as the fast approaching flagship loomed in the window. The AI
crew members were panicking, they had been programmed for a much slower pace of combat than
Mabel was offering up.

The two ships collided, sending Dipper flying. He smacked into the viewscreen and hung, stuck
there, for a few seconds. A burst of laughter filled the room. “That. Was. AWESOME! Can I crash
another spaceship Dip?"

"Ugh, I think I'm gonna hurl."

"If you vomit in here, do you vomit in the real world? That'd be hilarious!" Dipper uneasily struggled to his feet. The bridge was tilted at a 45 degree angle. Part of the viewscreen had been shattered, revealing one of the flagship’s corridors. His plan had worked at least.

He stood tall and puffed out his chest, trying to put on a decent display. “Mr Soos, you’re in charge till I return, get the ship free while I find Princess Andromeda.” The crewman saluted.

He felt a tingle on his wrist, as a smart watch appeared there. Mabel’s face was plastered on the screen’s display. “Let’s go then Dip-Dop, to the princess!”

He half-heartedly replied. “Yay, the princess. Let’s just get this over with.” He clambered out of the bridge’s window and dropped into the corridor. The walls were a twisted brown metal, rusted with decay.

He started creeping along the corridors, knowing that an enemy trap could strike at any second. He came to a barred passage. A chunky button on the wall caused the bars to slide upwards out of the way. He slowly entered the room- “HEY LISTEN!”

He jumped out of skin, terrified by the sudden break in the silence. “Mabel! SHH!”

“Hey, I’ve got some video game advice for you! If you double jump you can break through solid blocks!”

“Mabel, that’s the wrong game, this is a serious RPG, not a platformer!” He continued making his way into the ship’s interior, trying to ignore Mabel hanging off his wrist. Another set of bars stopped him. Behind this door was a lavishly decorated room though, none of the harsh metal. It was covered in purple fabrics, pillows laid everywhere. There was a figure sat behind a silk curtain. They stood and parted the curtain- Oh no. Dipper starting sweating and blushed more than he ever had before.

“Uh, maybe this is wrong room?” His voice broke on the last line as the prisoner revealed themselves.

“Oh. My. God.” A stream of Mabel’s laughs came from his wrist, she sounded like she could hardly breathe.

Standing before them was Princess Andromeda, clad only in a pink shawl wrapped lightly around her chest and waist. A tight chain was clamped to her neck. With slow, deliberate movements, she walked up to the bars, her long blonde mane dragging on the floor. In a sultry voice she spoke to Dipper. “My captain, you’ve come at last to save me from this endless torment! Come in, so I can ravish you.”

Mabel couldn’t maintain her composure, and Dipper felt a wriggling on his wrist. Mabel burst out of the bracelet, collapsing back into her human form on the floor in fits of laughter. Dipper just stood there, averting his gaze and wishing for death.

Mabel wiped a tear from her eye. “Woof woof Dipper. My my, aren’t we creative with our fantasies.” Princess Andromeda was basically a match for Pacifica, only covered in a light brown fur across her body, and a tail flapping about behind her.

“Ok, I’ve had enough. Pause Simulation.”
“Aw, no fun Dipper. She’s kinda hot as a cat-person.” His blush reddened further, and Mabel pushed him. “I’m just kidding bro, this is priceless. Though seriously, can you ask Pacifica to dress as a cat next Summerween?”

“This is all pulled from my subconscious, I didn’t even know I had these thoughts! Ugh, let’s just go Mabel, I think I’ve learnt my lesson about virtual fantasies.” He reached behind him for the connector, but it wouldn’t budge off his neck. “Hey, what the?” He kept pulling, but it was stuck fast on his skin. “Mabel, it won’t come off!”

“Uh, bro…” She pointed through the bars at Andromeda. She hadn’t paused. She was standing rigidly, the seductive look wiped off her face. She began speaking with an artificial voice.

“Exit forbidden, survival portion of the simulation is now active.”

Mabel tugged at her neck too. “Um, what’s ‘survival portion’ mean Dip?”

The princess answered them. “You must defeat me in combat. All creative mode privileges removed. Begin.” The bars of the cage thundeded up, and the twins ran back to the exit. They watched in horror as Andromeda whipped her head forwards, snapping the chain holding her neck to the wall. Out of nowhere, her stomach began to split open in a vertical line. Rows of teeth glinted out from her lower mouth. An unearthly scream came from that mouth.

“Run!” The twins both shouted at once, and beelined back to the Mystery.

“Ok Mabel, you were right! I shouldn’t mess with future tech or treat the stuff in the journals like a toy!”

“Whatever, just run! You can tell me how right I was when we aren’t fleeing for our lives!” Another scream from behind them told them that Andromeda was still in pursuit. They reached the corridor where the bridge was still wedged tightly in and climbed up into the ship.

“Mr Soos! Full reverse on the engines! Lieutenant, get the weapons online! F’Ord, hold me tight.” He leapt into the alien’s confused arms.

“Uh, captain?”

“Not now F’Ord, just cradle me.”

Mabel rolled her eyes and sat in the captain’s chair. “Mabel’s in charge now, it’s reverse time!” She tapped some buttons on the armrest and the ship jolted back into space. Their pursuer was undaunted by this however, and the twins watched as she leapt across the gap between the two spaceships, landing just inside the bridge. Dipper yelped and ran to the back of the room. Andromeda’s blonde hair started moving like a coil of snakes, and one long strand shot out and gripped around Dipper’s leg. It was pulling him towards the horrible stomach jaws, and he was frozen in fear.

Mabel had to act fast. “Hey, Russian dude!”

The randomly generated crew member cocked his head. “Da?”

“You got a laser gun?” The Russian passed her a stubby blaster.

“Pew Pew time!” She unleashed a hail of glowing bullets at the Pacifica monster, knocking her back. She made the appropriate sound effects too. “Pow pow, kazow! Take that!” The creature recoiled, and Dipper’s dragging slowed.
Mabel ran over and grabbed the communicator off the captain’s chair. “Engineering, I want you to cut all artificial gravity, now!”

Dipper was about to lose it. “Mabel no, with the broken window we’ll all be sucked into space!”

“Trust me bro! If this is some alien training course, then it’s gotta have a simple solution!” Dipper felt himself getting lighter and strands of hair were floating around his face. The whole crew began hovering in the air, most of them reaching out to hold themselves down on the control consoles. Mabel gripped the armrests of the chair.

Andromeda reached out and embedded her claws in the floor, she was now being dragged herself, towards the dark void of space behind her. She snarled at Mabel as Dipper finally floated free of the hair. But now he was in danger of falling out of the ship too. Mabel stretched out a hand and he clutched a hold of it.

He felt a tug and looked back at the alien monster, her claws were beginning to lose their grip, but her hair was clinging onto his cape. Suddenly her snarling features softened, and the horrifying stomach mouth closed. The princess stared into Dipper’s eyes. “Please my captain, if you save me, I can give you all the riches of the galaxy!”

He swung himself on Mabel’s arm, reaching to kick out at Andromeda. He unclipped his cape and threw it before him, wrapping the alien up. Then he made contact, and she spiralled out of the ship, screaming in rage, unable to grasp out at anything, blocked by the cape. “Engineering! Restore gravity!” Mabel shouted into the communicator, then a few seconds later they all collapsed on the floor. A voice came from the air. “Congratulations. You passed! You got a C rank!”

Mabel stood up. “Pfft, only a C? We can do better than that!”

Dipper frantically scrabbled at his neck. “NO NO NO! NO MORE VR!” He yanked off the device and fell back onto his bed. He sighed in relief, and grabbed the soft bedding, reassuring himself of reality. Mabel stumbled in front of him, then presented her own removed connector. He stood up and took hers, then dumped both in his secret items drawer beneath the false bottom, next to the flashlight and film can. He then slammed the drawer shut.

“Ugh, I need a getaway from my getaway.” Mabel looked at him with an eager look. “And… you told me so. You win.”

“Yes!” She pumped a fist in triumph. Things had gotten a bit hard to handle back there, more so than she’d been expecting. She wouldn’t tell Dipper that she’d used her telepathy necklace to add the ‘survival programme’ to the simulation herself. It was for his own good. At least now his focus was back on the real world. “Bro, you know who I should tell all about this? Paz!”

Dipper’s eyes widened in fear, then he covered his face with his pillow. “Ugh, ok, I’ll never use the VR again, happy now?” Mabel just smiled at him, then skipped out of the room.

rkmbl sr tnl pshmf pqjhtslq pjq uqrur mr wlff
Harmonic Oscillator

Chapter Summary

Mabel drags Dipper and Pacifica out for a night out of fun...

Chapter Notes

The soundtrack I had in mind while writing this chapter was Got Well Soon by Breton, as heard in the game Life is Strange:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3WgvbKtS_Y
Mild sexual themes and drug use references in this chapter.

When Pacifica had asked Mason if he’d wanted to go to a concert with her, he’d eagerly accepted. He’d been expecting a large formal event, 3 hours of classical music with an interval, sat in nice comfy seats. Mabel however had other plans. She’d influenced Pacifica and convinced her to come to one her rave concerts, in a club. Mason found himself in a dark underground space with no chairs, people mingling between themselves. Tonight, he had no journals on him, all he was wearing were jeans and a simple black t-shirt.

Mabel spotted him as he entered and waved him over to her. “Hey Dipper, you actually came! I’m impressed.” She already had a plastic cup full of beer. The show wasn’t officially supposed to start for a few minutes, so people were getting drinks and milling about waiting for the main event. Two long tables had been set up on either side of the room, with punch bowls and cups of beer laid out. The stage was opposite the entrance, and there was a large area cleared in front for the crowd to stand during the show.

“Yeah, I made it. I’m regretting it though, this place is not exactly like where I usually hang out.” He’d be happier in a quiet library right now, the booming from a speaker was already giving him a headache. Mabel however seemed to fit in perfectly. It was kinda amazing how easily she’d slipped into this mould.

“Aw, come on bro, have a little chutzpah for once. This is a date, right, you gotta man up to impress Paz-Paz. She’ll be here any minute, you can’t be wanting to leave the whole evening.”

Mason took a deep breath in. “Alright. I can do this, just act natural. Act cool.” He made a sideways motion with his hands that Mabel thought was meant to look cool at least.

“Here, try this.” She passed Mason her cup of beer. He took a long sip but started coughing halfway through.

Mabel laughed at his awkwardness. “Slow down bro, don’t choke before Pacifica even arrives.”

“Ugh, you owe me one. Next time we go out somewhere I’m dragging you two to a science lecture or something.”
Mason felt a tap on his shoulder from behind. “Yeah right, like I’d ever let you drag me to something so boring.” He whirled round to see his girlfriend, smirking at him with her arms folded.

Pacifica was not dressed in her usual style. Gone was the standard pink dress and purple jacket she almost always wore. Instead, she was wearing a black tank top, along with a leather skirt and leggings. She’d applied black lipstick on her mouth, and her purple eyeshadow was now black as well. He realised that she was wearing the exact same clothes as Mabel, the only difference being a pair of diamond earrings, and of course, no array of colourful tattoos on her arms. She even had the same fingerless woollen gloves that Mabel had knitted. He had to admit that it was a good look on her. He’d never paid much attention to the fashion when Mabel wore it, but now he found it surprisingly attractive. Her long blonde hair was a bright contrast to the dark outfit.

He realised he was looking slack-jawed. “Wow, Pacifica, you look… amazing.”

“Damn straight I do. Hey Mabes, thanks for letting me borrow this style, I never get to wear stuff like this at home.”

“Anytime sis.” The two girls high fived. Mason thought that with the matching clothes they could actually pass pretty well as sisters. “I hope you and my brother are gonna have a wild time tonight.”

Mabel raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean by that?”

Mabel looked like she was debating answering, when an announcement came out through the speakers. The show was about to start.

“Ooh, that’s my cue. I’ll let you two have some space, I’m gonna go rock out on my own.” Mabel darted into the quickly forming crowd in front of the stage, people leaving the drinks tables behind.

“So, you ever been to a show like this Pacifica?”

She shook her head. “Not yet, but I think it’s gonna be fun.” She took a hold of his hand, causing him to blush. There was a strange desire in his chest he was feeling that he couldn’t identify. She pulled towards the front of the crowd, right in front of where the band was setting up. The room went eerily quiet for a second, before the lead guitarist let a piercing electronic screech. Mason winced at the noise. A burst of drum beat began blasting from the stage. People started moving their bodies around him, dancing to the beat. Pacifica started jumping up and down, her eyes closed as she felt the rhythm guide her movements. Mason tried to feebly dance, shimmying his feet from side to side. He felt so out of place here next to Pacifica’s laidback enthusiasm.

She’d noticed his reluctance however and grabbed hold of his hands to guide him. “Come on Mason, dance with me.” She looked so happy in that moment. Mason was spellbound by that look. He tried to up his pace, to match his rhythm with hers. Her hair flew about wildly, and the reflections of lights glimmered off her earrings. There was a lightness to her movements, no worry about her parents or her legacy. She was free here and now.

He finally felt like he was starting to enjoy this, catching up to Pacifica’s tempo at last. He started rocking his arms back and forth in hers. Everything was going well, then Pacifica slipped on the floor and fell into his chest. For a second his heart stopped as he held her there. The flashing strobe lights illuminated her face, staring up at him with such joy. He could only stare with wide eyes, a sudden tightness gripping his body. He needed air, fast.

He supported Pacifica so she was stood upright again, then tried to excuse himself. “Hey, I, uh, gotta go to the bathroom, like right now. Be right back, ok!” He attempted to push through the swaying crowds.
“Wait, Mason, what are you doing?” He didn’t look back, a strange panic hitting him in that moment.

He spoke back to Pacifica. “I’ll just be a sec, need some air.” The music was pounding in his skull, blocking out all his concentration. He felt guilty leaving her alone on the dance floor, and as he reached the door to bathroom, he glanced back and saw her looking forlornly in his direction.

Pacifica rudely shoved people out of her way as she navigated the crowd. She eventually found the person she was looking for, head bobbing up and down and an arm raised in a fist. “Mabel, I need some help.”

The perky goth opened her eyes and noticed her worried friend. “What’s the issue Paz? Where’s Dipper run off to?”

“That’s just the problem. We were dancing up near the stage, it was nice. I slipped and fell into him. Then he started acting all weird, said he needed to breathe or something like that. He ran off to the bathroom.”

“Oh boy, Dipper’s such an idiot sometimes.” She gave a short laugh. “Although I guess you’re missing the obvious too.”

Pacifica was starting to get frustrated. “And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“Have you two, uh… done anything yet?” Mabel tapped the tips of two fingers together as she gracelessly probed the edges of her brother’s relationship.

“What do you mean, we do loads of stuff together. Mystery stuff, video chats, what do you mean?” Pacifica wasn’t seeing Mabel’s point.

“I mean, like, relationship stuff.” She had to be blunt. “Have you had sex with my brother yet?”

Pacifica’s eyes widened further than Mabel had ever seen, and a massive blush erupted across her cheeks. “What, Mabel, you can’t just ask that! That’s personal stuff.” Quietly, she added, “Besides, we haven’t even kissed yet.”

Mabel slapped her forehead. “Well there’s your problem sis. Let’s just say that my brother’s ‘Little Dipper’ is probably guiding most of his thoughts tonight. That normally makes boys act super weird, trust me.”

“You think he’s acting nervous because of me?”

“Oh honey, that’s obvious to everyone, you don’t need to be an expert match-maker like me to notice.”

Pacifica supposed it made sense. “So what do I do?”

“Just wait for Dipper to come back, then kiss his brains out! Simple.” She started moving in time to the music again.

Pacifica wasn’t satisfied. “What, that’s not helpful! I want it to be special.”

“Then make it special, just don’t keep waiting for a ‘perfect’ moment or some junk like that. Believe me, just let your gut instinct lead you.”
Pacifica sighed, trying to calm herself. “Ok, I’m gonna go wait for him. We’ll see what happens.”

Mabel had already forgotten Pacifica, caught in the music’s trance once more.

Mason burst into the bathroom, gulping for deep breaths of air. The music was still audible in here, a deep thudding from outside. He ran a cold tap and splashed water on his face. He was intensely hot for some reason. He stared at his dripping reflection in the mirror, trying to calm himself down.

“Why am I so wound up tonight?” he asked himself. His emotions felt like they were on a rollercoaster. One second he’d been soaking up the dance with Pacifica, the next he was drowning in embarrassment and inadequacy.

“Why is this so hard? Just go out there, dance with your girlfriend. Have fun.” He knew these words were empty, he just couldn’t drum up enough courage to face her again. Maybe he needed more alcohol in his system, something to dull his inhibitions. He made to leave the bathroom, but he got an electric shock off the door. It was oddly painful for some reason.

“Ow, stupid door’s attacking me now. This night can’t get any worse.”

Back in the main hall he tried to keep his head low, avoiding the main bulk of the crowd, edging round he walked along one of the drinks tables. He found a full cup and started sipping. In the corner of his eye he saw someone bent over by the punch bowl. It was Mabel. Maybe she could help.

“Mabel, psst, it’s me.”

She suddenly jolted up. “What, this is all legal, I’m fine!”

Mason stared at her with curiosity. “What were you doing Mabel?”

“Nothing, just… spicing things up.” He noticed she was carrying a small bottle of something.

“Were you spiking the punch! What do you think you’re doing?!”

She waved a hand at him. “It’s fine Dip, I’ve done this loads of times. A party doesn’t start till you’ve had a taste.” She was wobbling a little and her speech was lightly slurred.

“You can’t just put drugs in the drinks! That’s crazy.” He couldn’t quite believe his sister.

“Whatever, this isn’t important, I need your help.”

“Oh right, you and Pacifica are still virgins! Match-Maker Mabel’s here to, ‘hic’, shave the day!”

“We’re what? Never mind, you’ll have a hangover tomorrow and I can mock you then. I’m feeling all weird inside and I don’t understand it.”

“That’s just love Dipper, go and have it with Paz.”

“What?”

“GO AND KISS HER YOU GOOF!” She tried to push his chest, but just weakly brushed him.

“Oh jeez, you think now is a good time? But it’s so soon, we’ve only been together for a few months.”

“Yeah, and been friends for 4 and a half years! I think you know each other well enough now.”
Mason peered into the crowd, spying Pacifica across the room. She was distractedly looking at her phone, a grumpy look etched in her forehead and eyebrows. He had to fix this fast. “I need advice, what do I say?”

“Just say…” She cradled her chin in her hand. She stood there in this pose for several agonising seconds.

“Say…” He made a ‘go on’ gesture.

“Oh, right. Just say you’re sorry you ran off like a jerk, do me now. Go on!”

“Ok, confidence Mason, confidence.” He strolled away, leaving Mabel to do whatever she pleased with the punch bowl. She’d always had that relaxed confidence. She wouldn’t care what anyone thought and would do what she thought would be right for her. She’d leapt into her goth phase without a second thought, embracing the aesthetic simply because she thought it looked neat. Mason wished he had that same freedom to be who he wanted, without all the constant nagging worries.

He sauntered up to Pacifica, a mask of self-assurance covering up his dread. “Hey Paz, I’m back now.”

She lowered her phone and smiled at him, but her eyes were guarded. “Finally, I was starting to think you weren’t interested in tonight anymore.”

He cupped her chin in his hand. “I’m sorry for running off, I really do want to be here with you right now. I wouldn’t miss this for the world. For all the future journals I could read.” He took her hand and they once again began dancing to the pounding beat.

She smiled honestly again, and the two of them moved in time together. Mason started to feel his spirits rising, this was good, this was what he wanted. Him and her enjoying being with each other, matching harmonies. He was suddenly feeling daring, and spun Pacifica around by her arm. She was dizzy briefly, but then just laughed and spun the other way, folding herself into his arms like a hug. He rocked her in front of him, his arms by her waist. He was a few inches taller than her, so she had to lean upwards to meet his eyes.

He spun her out, so they were face to face, arms still held tightly around her midriff. He lightly caressed her cheek. Maybe this was the moment?

Suddenly his joy at the sensation dropped as he spied something over Pacifica’s shoulder. It was a pair of sparkling electric pulses, hovering in the air above one of the drinks tables. He tried to focus on the phenomena. He thought he could make out a rough face in the lightning. With a flash the electricity flew towards the door. He had to find out what they were.

“Pacifica, I have to do something.” He reluctantly released his grip on her.

She frowned. “Oh no Mason, not again. Tell me what’s going on.”

He didn’t want to ruin this evening for her with some mystery drivel butting in. He held her face, making direct eye contact. “I promise you Paz, give me 5 minutes. I want to be with you, and nothing’s going to stop me tonight. 5 minutes?”

She broke his look, staring away, trying to discern his motive. She looked back, not smiling, but accepting at least. “Go then. Don’t make me wait dork.”

“I promise.” With that he ran towards the door the strange electric entities had fled through. Behind the door was a simple hallway, probably leading to another dance floor. In the centre of the hall was
the lightning. As he approached, the electricity divided, coalescing into two distinct beings. They were humanoid, very tall and slender. Their faces were like inverted triangles, pointy chins and flat brimmed heads. Sparks shot out around them like a halo. He didn’t recognise them from either his own journal or Journal 9. He knew their kind though. Creatures from higher dimensions of energy, who sometimes liked to come down to ‘play with the mortals’.

He didn’t have the patience to be dealing with higher energy beings tonight. “What do you want!”


They were feeding off his feelings about Pacifica. He’d been a mental wreck, over-analysing every action. “Why’d you show yourselves then?”

“Emotional state: Stabilising. Conclusion: Prevent.” So, he was finally starting to control his emotions, huh. Who knew?

“Well too bad, I’m not gonna be manipulated to keep waffling. I’m going to put my foot down.” He slammed a foot forwards, hoping they would understand the meaning.

They recoiled slightly, then grew in size, the blue lightning now an angry red. “Target: Hostile! Conclusion: Eliminate!” Bolts of energy flew towards Mason, but he stood his ground. He was tired of everything getting in his way this evening. The bolts bounced harmlessly off him. If they were only after his varying emotions, then he was going to stay annoyed and focused as long as it took.

More blasts struck him, none harming him in any way. “Go find someone else to leech off, cause I’m not on the menu anymore. I know what I need to do.” He turned to look back towards the dance hall. The energy beings knew what this meant.

Behind Mason they began to shrink, the energy they gained from him leaving them. Soon they were gone. They had nothing to hold onto now, Mason’s course was set. He didn’t need to look back at them disappearing. He gave a sigh of relief.

He immediately gave a small gasp when the door in front of him opened. Pacifica stepped into the hallway. “Mason, come here!” He swivelled his head, luckily any trace of the electricity was gone from the hallway.

“Pacifica, yeah, I’m ready to talk.” She was even more unhappy this time. He knew he had to make it up to her. “I’m sorry I ran off, both times. I was panicked, and scared, but that doesn’t matter anymore. I know what I need to do.”

She didn’t understand. “Scared, scared of what?! Why do keep leaving me alone Mason, you’re making me look like an idiot out there. Are you trying to get rid of me, decided you’re tired of dealing with all the hassle?! If you don’t wanna be around me, then just say it!”

Her eyes were starting to water and she closed them to stem the tide. Mason knew what to say.

“Pacifica, nothing could be further than what I want right now. I’m not scared of you, I’m scared because I’m a mess, my social skills are terrible. I was worried that I was gonna do something wrong.” He put both hands on her cheeks.

“But now I know what to do. I’m not scared of anything.” He pulled her close and kissed her lips. At first, she was surprised, but quickly leant into it, savouring every second of this touch. Time seemed to move at a snail’s pace, and Mason noticed every tiny detail. The way the black lipstick highlighted
her pale, smooth skin. The scent of lilacs wafting from her hair. The faint sweet taste of her lipstick. The tenderness of her whole body next to his.

They broke the kiss, needing a respite from the overpowering sensation. He gasped, needing to elucidate his thoughts. “That was… wow.”

“Yeah. It was.” They kissed again, deeper this time, hungrier. Pacifica pulled away and nodded towards the dance floor. “C’mon, let’s go have fun.”

They emerged back into the busy space. The flash of the lights, the beat of the music, they were muted now, Mason’s attention entirely spent on the girl in front of him. The tempo of the music increased, and they both started dancing. This time Mason felt the rhythm properly, letting it overcome any reserves he had left. He felt like he had an energy inside that would never run out. Pacifica grabbed his hands, and they span in a circle, spinning faster as the music sped up.

The music reached a crescendo and Pacifica leapt into Mason’s arms. He struggled to hold her with his limited strength but got a grip on her thighs. She put her arms around his neck and leant her forehead to touch his, her bangs touching his birthmark. The sudden contact was overwhelming. He felt blood rush to his face, he never wanted this instant to end. Pacifica’s smile was so wide and unburdened. She laughed in his face, not a sound of mockery, but of joy for the current moment. Mason thought it was the nicest sound he’d ever heard. He laughed too, then pressed his lips to hers again, with as much passion as he could muster.

The rest of the evening after that was a blur of excitement and love.

Mabel was woken up the next day, back in her bedroom, by a pink creature nuzzling her face. “Ugh, Waddles, not now.” She batted her pig away, wishing she could go back to sleep. She tried to rise but was struck down with a pounding headache. “Ow, this sucks.” Her hangover was pretty intense. “Why are my walls so bright, I so have to paint them grey, so they don’t hurt my brain.” Her memories of last night were a swirl of images, the flashing lights and pulsing crowds. The buzz from her high had long since dwindled away though, and now the world seemed harsh to her eyes.

She didn’t know what time it was, so groped her bedside table for her phone. She turned it on, but instead of her usual background the screen was showing a photo of Dipper and Pacifica. Dipper was sat on a sofa, Pacifica on his lap. She was smooching him. Mabel’s eyes widened. She didn’t remember that happening. She skimmed her phone, seeing dozens more pictures of the couple engaged in passionate embraces. The last photo showed Pacifica lying in Dipper’s arms, both of them fast asleep. “Ugh, they finally kiss and I’m too out of it to remember. Oh well.” She rubbed her temples, willing the hangover pain to go away. She smirked. “At least I have plenty of blackmail material now.”
The Obelisk

Chapter Summary

Exploring a strange object out in the desert leads to some unforeseen consequences for Mabel...

The pickup pulled to a stop outside the Hartnell mine. It was a shabby old wooden complex of buildings, everything was covered in sand and dust. The twins stepped out into the heat of the day, covering their eyes to block the glaring sun. “What a dive. So what was this place Dip?”

“I looked it up, used to be a gold mine, was pretty prosperous too. Right up until all the gold ran out.” The only gold here now was the light from the sun.

“And the miners found something down there?”

“No, actually they’d all up and left already. This thing arrived after they were gone, according to Journal 9 it just appeared one day. The Obelisk.” He showed Mabel the page and she reached for her glasses. The main sketch was a large pillar of rock, three sided and tapering towards the base.

“Just looks like a lump of rock to me.”

Dipper tucked the journal away and nodded. “Yeah, me too. The Journal doesn’t say what it is, just gives a basic description of the shape and location. Makes me curious.”

“Weird underground mysteries our are speciality.” Mabel grinned as they began exploring the abandoned town. They didn’t find much beyond old crates and tumbleweeds. Figuring this was a nice quiet area, Mabel decided to test herself. She knew she shouldn’t with Dipper around, but she couldn’t resist this chance. Her mental abilities gifted by the telepathy necklace had started growing in scope.

Now, rather than just picking up nearby people’s latent thoughts, she could experience the memories of those who once lingered in a location. Checking that Dipper was occupied in their search of the town, she gripped the necklace tight, and quietened her mind.

Whispers starting seeping into her mind, the indistinct babble of the long passed miners. As she watched, faded after-images of people started blurring in front of her. It was like a flood of ghosts, all going about their daily lives from a hundred years ago or more. The diminishing remnants of their brains’ electrical activity didn’t leave much beyond a few faded impressions, so she let go of the necklace. The torrent of spirits vanished, and she was alone with Dipper again. She wondered, not for the first time, whether she should tell her brother about the necklace.

She buried that thought, what he didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him. But oh, the things she’d learnt over the last few weeks. Her mother’s thoughts were generally very collected, but she would always panic about Dipper’s current state. Her father was frustrated with his current job, looking to possibly move once the kids were out of the house. From Pacifica she’d learnt her exact feelings on her relationship with ‘Mason’, all the little details that drove her mad or made her heart soar.

She’d even started to stretch out her reach, at one point sensing all the way to the Indian Ocean, to
her Grunkles’ thoughts, or at least Stan’s, since Ford’s were blocked by a metal plate.

Dipper’s thoughts were always the juiciest, his mind brimming with curiosity and secret knowledge. She knew all his fears and longings, the image of the Hand Journal a constant visage in his subconscious.

She was comforted by the security the necklace gave her, even if it was an ethical grey area. She didn’t want to be left behind by Dipper again and keeping an eye on his mind was the safest way to be sure of that. It didn’t hurt too that it made up for her diminishing eyesight, which had been pretty crummy ever since being blinded. Of course, she knew the risks. She had to remind herself each time she pried deeper that her mind was her own. “I am Mabel Pines.” She wasn’t going to lose herself.

She turned her attention back to the task at hand when she heard Dipper call over to her. “Hey, looks like there’s a freight lift here we can use to get into the mine.” It was a rusted old contraption, but it managed to hold their weight. They descended into the earth, pulling out their flashlights as the light levels dimmed.

*Looks like the seams have all been dug out, no minerals left down here worth bringing up.*

“Hey bro, so how about this mine eh?” Mabel had gotten into the habit of asking Dipper to explain his thoughts out loud, it helped him get out of his shell a bit.

“Oh, I was just thinking that the seams have all been dug out, no minerals left down here worth bringing up.” Mabel hid a grin, it always amused her how Dipper would translate his thoughts into words so literally. She also knew another fun trick.

She quietly whispered one word, making it sound like a cough. “Pacifica.” She waited for Dipper’s mind to catch up.

*Huh, Pacifica? Oh wow, I can’t believe we kissed that night. I can’t wait till I see her again.*

Mabel chuckled to herself, her brother was so suggestible about some things. They reached the base of the shaft, ahead of them were dry sandstone walls one every side. Dipper shone his torch at Journal 9. “Ok, the Obelisk should be somewhere down here, maybe in one of the smaller cuttings. Let’s go.”

They made slow progress through the mines, there was no ambient light reaching this far down, so they were only guided by their torch beams. Mabel called out into the tunnel. “Echo! Echo! Echo!...” Each word was accompanied with a matching response.

Dipper couldn’t help but join in, making wooh noises. The echoes abruptly stopped when they were halfway down the tunnel. Dipper confusedly made more wooh sounds, but the echo was simply muffled away. Mabel shone her torch at the cave wall. “Dipper, look here.” There was a small passageway in the rock wall, just wide enough for them to squeeze through one at a time.

“It must be through here, somehow it’s absorbing the echoing, must be soundproofed or something.” Dipper stuck his leg through the gap, and awkwardly shuffled into the chamber beyond.

Mabel was about to follow him in but felt a sudden burning sensation on her chest. Her necklace was suddenly glowing brighter than she’d ever seen it before, the flame inside flickering like crazy. She was about to shout into the gap, argue that they should leave whatever’s down here alone, when Dipper called out.

“Mabel, you gotta come see this!” She reluctantly squeezed through the gap, trying to ignore the heat emanating from around her neck. She gasped as she entered the new space, and her discomfort from
the flaming stone was briefly forgotten. At the far end of the chamber was the Obelisk, just as it had appeared in the journal’s sketch. It was a pale grey rock reaching up nearly to the height of this cavernous space, several dozen metres up. Several details not in the sketch jumped out to her. Metal chains had been fashioned on the rock, attaching it to the black walls surrounding it. At the base of the tapering column was a pit of water, upon the surface of which the Obelisk floated. The twins made their way towards the towering structure.

The floor and walls suddenly changed halfway through the room. Where before there was a light sandstone, the rest of the room was a dark glassy obsidian. It was smooth to the touch, and the twins struggled to keep a solid grip. Mabel panned her torch up along the Obelisk. “Wow, it’s enormous. What is it Dip?”

“I don’t know Mabel, some kind of alien mineral or something? It just looks like normal rock to me.” He reached out his palm to lightly stroke the column of rock. “Yeah, feels like normal rock too.”

Mabel too reached out a hand. “Normal rock, eh?” Her fingers brushed against the mundane surface. “Guess it’s just nothing then-” She tried to pull away her hand, but found it glued to the rock. “What the?”

Dipper grabbed onto her arm and pulled it, but it was no good. “Ah, that just hurts Dipper, why am I stuck?”

He pulled out Journal 9 and started flipping to the Obelisk page. “I don’t know, there was nothing about this in the entry!” He stood back from Mabel as the room began lighting up. The obsidian rock began glowing a with faint blue radiance. The Obelisk itself was bathed in an orange light, which extended to cover Mabel’s body. Dipper watched, unable to do anything to help.

Mabel watched in terror as the stone around her neck began floating upwards into her view. It was burning with the exact same light as the Obelisk now. The orange light began overwhelming her vision. Dipper was helpless as Mabel was consumed in the pillar of light, obscured from his view. Mabel saw the bright light overcome her eyesight completely. Then she saw nothing.

Gradually an image started coming into focus before her. She was no longer in the mines, there was no sandstone or obsidian rock in her view. Instead there was a room in a wooden building. There was a large desk at the far end of the room, covered in paper and art supplies. Developing photographs hung from a string above the desk. The room was an art studio. There were small personal items dotted about, plush toys lying in the corner, a small pink feeding bowl for a pet, shiny stickers all over the walls. Warm sunlight shone through the wooden slats of the wall. It felt homely and inviting.

A figure started forming in the chair beside the desk. A person scribbling a sketch. Mabel strained to make out who the person was. When she finally recognised the figure, her mouth opened in shock. She saw herself sitting in the chair. She looked roughly the same as she did now, but older, taller, and with a fuller face. Her hair was cut short in a pixie cut, a bright streak of purple dye down one side. A loose fitting green shirt hung on her shoulders, with a red sweater tied around her waist. A gold star earring dangled from one ear and beads hung around her neck. She still had the vibrant tattoos all up her arms, even though she’d clearly grown out the goth phase she still had a nice reminder of those youthful days.

Mabel didn’t know how to react. This was a glimpse of her future, even more concrete than Journal 9 was. It looked like a dream life for herself, engaging with her passions for creativity. She turned to
try and examine the room further, but the at the back of the room the world simply ended, darkness enveloping the rear. She turned her attention to the sketching Mabel. The woman finally sensed she was there. She rose and looked straight at her, with a similar gaping expression.

Young Mabel reached out her hand to touch this future vision of herself. Future Mabel did the same, raising a similarly tattooed arm. As they were about to touch, Future Mabel’s skin began turning to a cool blue. Young Mabel recoiled her hand in fear. Future Mabel began freezing all over, her skin covered by ice. The room around her began icing over too. She looked into the desperate eyes of herself, wishing she didn’t have to watch this. The face of her future self was frozen in a silent scream, and then the room was still.

A loud cracking sound made Mabel jump, as everything around her began splintering. Her future self began falling to pieces along with the studio, shattering like glass. All of it broke apart and fell away into the blackness. She was alone in the dark again. There was nothing around her in any direction. It wasn’t like when she had been blinded by the creature in the ice tunnels. She could still make out her body in the blackness. She felt the ground beneath her slip away, but she didn’t fall, she just floated in the void.

She cried out into the dark, her voice wavering. “Hello?” There was no response from the emptiness. What had she just witnessed? Her future falling away, out of reach. Was it something in her subconscious, something to do with the influence of the future Journal 9?

She reached down and clutched her necklace. The light stemming from inside was now a silvery white. Maybe it had something to do with her predicament?

She began repeating the mantra she knew by heart. “I am Mabel Pines. I am Mabel Pines! My mind is my own! I am in control. I am Mabel Pines!”

She opened her eyes. She was still surrounded by the blackness. She shut her eyes tighter this time and spoke again. “I am Mabel Pines! I am Mabel Pines!”

Silence.

She stared at the blackness around. One second she’d been underground with Dipper, now she was nowhere at all. She was beginning to despair, hope fast running out.

Without any warning, the blackness around her suddenly erupted into a bright white light. It was overwhelming, consuming all of her vision. It gave her a headache to stare at, it was so blinding.

Hello? This sudden voice was deafeningly loud, but she couldn’t drown it out even by clamping her hands to her ears. The sound seemed to come from within her own head, resonating her body as it spoke. As the voice faded, so too did the bright light. Mabel relaxed for a second, but then the light and voice returned, causing her immense pain, like a migraine.

I am. The light of the void flashed in time with the words. Mabel couldn’t tell if the speaker was male or female, it was too indistinct. I am.

Mabel screamed out. “I am what!” She was crying now, unable to bear the crushing weight of the sensation.

I am. I am Mabel Pines. Mabel was dumbfounded. The voice, she now realised, had a tinge of her own intonation present, the same cadence and pitch as her voice. It was speaking out of her thoughts somehow.
My mind is- My mind is my own. Another deafening flash as the voice haltingly continued. As it faded again, Mabel noticed that the void was no longer pitch black. It was beginning to resolve into something, an image coming into view. It was a landscape, unlike any Mabel had ever seen before. There was a massive sweeping plain, but the sky was all wrong, filled with twisting shapes that seemed to bend the laws of geometry. Spread across the plain were a multitude of silvery creatures. She recognised some as the same kind of beast that had emerged from the rift at the high school, Kochabs. There were other creatures too, all sharing the same translucent skin and flowing organs within. The sizes ranged from the Kochabs up to gargantuan beasts, taller than the highest skyscraper. She looked down at the ground, seeing that it too was just another living being, pulsing and flowing with the silvery light.

The image was washed out again as Mabel’s mind was wracked with more pain. I am Mabel Pines.

She had to focus on where she’d been before, tried to block out the pain. She pictured the obsidian abruptly jutting out from the lighter sandstone. She pictured the towering obelisk. Most importantly, she pictured Dipper, trying to remember every little detail about him. His messy brown hair, scraggly chin, unkempt hoodie. She tried to visualise his face, the way it was laid out. She saw his birthmark, the array of spots on his forehead suddenly so clear. Then the birthmark started glowing with that intense white, shining like the cover of Journal 9, and the image was gone, replaced with the void again.

I am in control. I am Mabel Pines.

She started screaming at the voice, which started overlapping with her thoughts. “No, I am Mabel Pines! Me! I am Mabel. I am Mabel! I am Mabel!”

AND WE ARE COMING.

Mabel’s eyes shot open, the pounding voice and black void suddenly gone. She found herself lying on her back, staring up at the ceiling of the Obelisk cavern. Something swiftly entered her vision. “Oh thank god, you’re awake.” She was greeted with Dipper’s smiling face. She pushed herself up to a sitting position. Her body was lightly aching. She glanced down subtly to check the state of her necklace. The flame inside was now silver rather than orange, the same as the skin of the creatures she’d seen.

Her necked cricked as she looked up at her brother. “Ahh, what happened Dipper?” He stood back to give her some breathing room.

“I don’t know, one minute you were stuck to the obelisk, glowing with light, the next the light vanished, and you fell backwards. I just managed to catch you before you hit the ground. You were completely out cold Mabel!” He was clearly worried for her. She pondered what to say, whether she should mention any of what she’d seen.

“Come on Dip, let’s get out of here. I need some air.”

They emerged back into the sunlight above. Dipper winced at the sudden increase in light, but Mabel hardly registered it after what she’d seen. They quietly walked back to the pickup.
“I guess we should know better than to go exploring mysterious objects, huh.” He was grinning, but it was forced. He was trying to make sure she was alright. “Next time we’ll have to be more careful.”

She glanced again at the necklace. Dipper hadn’t even noticed it change, only she could perceive it. Whatever it was, it had something to do with this Obelisk, and with the Kochab. Only one person could give her the answers she sought.

And her heart broke that she couldn’t bring herself to tell Dipper. “Yeah. Next time...”
A Light in the Storm

Chapter Summary

While Mabel tries to learn the truth about her recent revelations, Mason goes out to solve a mystery of his own. This time, he's not alone...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mason paced back and forth in his bedroom. He had a problem he couldn’t fix. It was a familiar problem, relating to his sister. 3 weeks had passed since their last Mystery Hunt together, and Mabel had taken to isolating herself in her room again, as she had when Mason started overlooking her to focus on Pacifica. This time though, she seemed to have the opposite problem.

Where before she’d been desperate for Mason to show any sign of attention, now she was simply apathetic to any of Mason’s attempts to reach her. He’d offered several times in the past weeks to take her on an adventure, to follow up on a lead or pursue one of the future entries in Journal 9. Every time she’d just shrugged and said, “Maybe another time Dipper”.

He was struggling to figure out what was wrong with Mabel this time. He knew it must have something to do with their finding of the Obelisk, after that experience was when Mabel started distancing herself. He didn’t know how to reach out to her, the Mystery Hunts were usually all it took to relight her spirit.

He left his room, determined to try and crack Mabel’s shell. He found her down in the kitchen, rummaging through the cutlery drawers. “Yo Mabel, how you doin’?”

She absent-mindedly waved a hand at him. “Hi Dip, I’m fine, just looking for parts.”

“Parts?”

She withdrew a fork from the drawer. “Yeah, it’s an, um, art project. Gonna be totally lit.” Her usual confidence was noticeably absent today, her tone of voice much more reserved. She headed for the stairs, but he reached out an arm.

“Hey, you’re ok right? You’d tell me if there was something wrong?” He stared up at her, pleading for an honest answer.

In a deadpan, Mabel replied. “Trust me Dipper. Everything’s gonna be fine. Soon, I promise.” She bounded up the stairs, and Mason stood there, lost and confused.

A moment later, his mother entered the hallway. “Oh, hi Dipper. Have you seen your sister?”

Mom looked worried again, as she often did for his sake. This time he knew she was worried for someone else, the tables had flipped. “She just ran upstairs, working on an ‘art project’.”

“She’s just been so quiet lately. She hasn’t run in with a bad crowd has she?” Mason thought of Mabel’s school friends. They were all fairly normal people, by Mabel standards. She’d started occasionally hanging out with some older kids who were into the same ‘goth stuff’ as her, but there
was nothing particularly bad about them. He knew that Mabel’s issues were more likely supernatural.

“No Mom, I’m sure it’s just a temporary thing, you know how she loves to be all ‘dark and brooding’.” He tried to pass this off lightly, but his mother’s concerned look didn’t drop.

“Just keep an eye on her, ok.”

“You can count on it Mom.” His attention was suddenly drawn by a knock at the door.

“Oh, I wonder who that could be.” Mason wasn’t too interested in who it was, random delivery men or people with flyers didn’t command much attention. He made to return to his bedroom, when he heard a familiar voice from the open door.

“Hello Mrs Pines, is Mason in at the moment?”

“Oh, Pacifica dear, how good to see you. Don’t stand out there in the cold, come in come in.” Mason turned around as his mother brought his girlfriend into the house. She looked up and noticed him there. She smiled widely as he climbed down the rest of the stairs.

Pacifica brought him into a tight hug. “Hey Mason, I’ve missed you.” He wasn’t expecting that level of public affection from her, especially not in front of his mother. He blushed a little.

“I’ll leave you two kids alone then. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” She squinted her eyes at Mason and he groaned. Once she left the room, Pacifica gave him a conspiratorial glance.

“We gotta talk, right now.” She started dragging him upstairs.

“Wait, what are you even doing here, and how?”

She shrugged. “Taxi, now come on, we need some privacy.” She pulled him up to his bedroom. He shuffled awkwardly as she sat down in his desk chair.

“Uh, well this is new, never had a girl in my bedroom before. Mom’s gonna freak if she finds you here.” He grimaced at her, but she had a no-nonsense glare.

“Not now dork, it’s not funny. It’s about my parents.”

His weak grin vanished immediately, replaced with a look of apprehension. “What happened, did they find out about us?” He was panicking inside, he didn’t want the mighty Northwest family coming down hard on him.

“It’s not that. Ugh, they were planning this stupid fancy ball next month, deciding on all the colour scheme matching. ‘Does this red skirt go with this blue headband’, all that junk. I just couldn’t take it anymore, I don’t want my life planned out for me by people who don’t know me at all! I just… ran. Ran here.”

Mason took this information in, trying to slow his racing heart. “Pacifica, don’t scare me like that again. I thought they’d found out about us, or they’d hurt you or something.”

She looked away. “Well, I did kinda shout at them before I left.”

“About?”

“About everything, about how I didn’t want to be their daughter anymore if they didn’t want to treat me like person. I blew up at them, shouted like crazy. Told them I didn’t even wanna be a Northwest anymore. I need a break from that, I can’t take it anymore.” She was tightening her hands into fists,
and her shoulders were tense. Mason gave her another hug, feeling her relax in his grip.

“Hey, it’s ok. I’ve got you. You can let it all out with me.” He looked at her face, seeing her frown soften slightly. “Since it’s the weekend, we can do whatever you want. I’m here for you.”

“Well, I was kinda hoping we could go find a monster or whatever. Something to take my mind off things.”

Mason frowned. “Uh, that might be a little awkward at the moment.”

Pacifica raised an eyebrow. “How come, you’re always up for exploring weird stuff.”

“It’s… Mabel.”

“Oh. Oh no.”

Mabel sat on her bed, stroking Waddles with one hand and taping a fork to Dipper’s anomaly scanner with the other. Journal 9 was lying on the bed next to her, open on the page about the Obelisk. She’d spent the idle time while working on the scanner reading the page over and over again, searching for a hint of the truth behind it. As Dipper had outlined at the mine, the information was very scant, merely describing the physical proportions of the Obelisk and where to find it. When she finally got round to meeting Future Dipper, she was so gonna make him pay for being so obtuse.

She sighed and refocused on her work. The scanner was now festooned with cutlery and other makeshift ‘antennas’ Mabel had attached. It had taken her 3 weeks to prepare, but today she would finally be ready to end all this.

A knock from her door startled her. She tossed the cobbled together device on her bed, squeezed past her pig, and opened the door. To her surprise, Mason was accompanied by Pacifica. “Paz-Paz! It’s been ages, how have you been!” Her elation at seeing her friend was genuine, even though her mind was still occupied elsewhere.

“Hi Mabel, I was just in the area and thought I’d drop by.”

And pray my parents don’t trace my phone here.

Mabel wasn’t used to picking up Pacifica’s thoughts so directly, normally she remotely sensed them over video chat. After the Obelisk incident she’d stowed her telepathy stone back in the box with the shards of Ford’s Rift sphere. For her purposes today she’d need it though.

“Awesome, I’d love to… well, maybe another time.” Pacifica was surprised by Mabel’s hesitance.

Dipper stuck a foot out in case she closed her door. “So Mabel, me and Paz were going to investigate a report, you know, a ‘supernatural’ one. We were hoping you’d come with us.” Please say yes, please say yes, please say yes…

A pained look crossed Mabel’s face. She’d really love to spend time with Pacifica and Dipper. But more important things required her attention today. “I… I can’t, not today. Next time, I swear. I just… have some things I need to take care of, after that, sure.” She smiled at her brother but knew he could tell she was hiding something. “You two go have fun, bring back a monster or whatever.” She slowly closed the door, shutting out the disappointed faces of her two favourite people. She was doing this for their own good. She glanced down at Journal 9 and the scanner. No going back now.
Mason and Pacifica quietly drove out to the source of Mason’s latest reported ‘weirdness’ sighting. Neither of them wanted to broach the sensitive ‘Mabel’ or ‘Parents’ topics. Pacifica tried to break the ice with something else. “So Mace, tell me about this report we’re chasing up.”

Mason’s eyes lit up, he loved explaining these sorts of things. “It’s a lighthouse, Point Sur, about a 2 hour drive from here. It’s a museum now too. Got a rumour that the place is haunted.” He made a wibbly motion with his fingers, emphasising the last word. Pacifica chuckled at his goofiness.

“What are we up against, animal spirit, ghost, creepy brains in jars?”

“Ha, none of those thankfully. All I got from the report was that it’s some kind of creature sighting, usually at night but we might be able to draw whatever it is out early.”

“Sounds good to me. How’s it been with the new journal then, different to this?”

“Oh, way different. We can anticipate so much stuff, it’s amazing.”

“You don’t miss the thrill of flying blind?”

“Kinda, it’s certainly a different way of doing things. Anyway, it’s nice to just be back out doing something, it’s been weeks since I last did anything journal related.”

“Mabel’s been like this for a while then?”

Mason had a conflicted look on his face. “I told you about the Obelisk, I’m convinced that she saw something while she was out cold. Her eyes were so wide when she woke up, and she didn’t want to talk about it at all. I’ve never seen her turn down a Mystery Hunt out of nowhere, she’s acting so wrong.”

“Maybe she’s just trying to deal with stuff internally. I always used to bottle everything up inside, then it would come out in massive bursts of anger. Mabel might be the same.”

“I just want to know what’s troubling her so much, maybe then I could help.”

Pacifica gripped one of his hands. “It’s good that you care the way you do Mason. We can try to help Mabel once this is done.”

He smiled. “Come on, let’s forget about all that for now.” He switched on the radio and country music started blaring out in the pickup. The two of them sat back and settled in for the ride south.

Mabel stood in the ironworks down at the harbour. The place was empty as it was the weekend. A perfect quiet spot for her to do this. Picking the lock had been trivial and once inside she prepared her plan. She looked around the room, remembering her last visit in pursuit of the rogue Kochab. Before her eyes she saw the pale outlines of her and Dipper from that adventure, the mental trace of their movements lingering in the air and shown through the necklace. The Kochab wasn’t visible though, she mentally noted that for later in case it was important.

She looked over a small notepad, reading off the list of things to remember.

Journal 9: Check
Upgraded Scanner: Check
Necklace: Check
Paintbrush: Check
Satisfied that she had all the equipment, she took a deep breath and held up the jury-rigged scanner. She hoped her arts and crafts skills were enough to make the device do what she wanted. A lot of ‘borrowing’ Dipper’s Journal 4 had been required to figure out the procedure, but now she was confident. She just hoped it would work.

She pressed a button on the scanner, which hummed and vibrated softly. She held it aloft, watching as the dials started moving. It was working.

She felt a small puff of air from in front of her and noticed a distortion in the background of the room. A tiny pinprick of undulating air was forming. It was identical to the rift they’d found at the high school, only much smaller. It had to be enough, she couldn’t risk generating something bigger.

She lowered the scanner, satisfied that the new rift was stable for the time being. She waited for the next step in the plan, the most important and most likely to fail. Tapping her foot was all she could do to pass the seconds.

5 minutes passed with no change, just the breeze of wind from the rift. She resolved to close it again if another 5 passed. She continued tapping her boot on the concrete. After 9 minutes she’d almost given out hope. She was now fiddling with the scanner, ready to press the off button. She was despairing, no idea what she’d do next.

Out of nowhere a bright flash appeared in front of her. She felt a heat coming from the flash for an instant before it faded. Standing in front of her was a man in a long flapping coat. His face was covered, and he reached up to remove a pair of goggles. He stared down at Mabel, who was now grinning with a satisfied smirk.

“Merak. Long time, no see.”

Mason pulled the pickup to a stop in the lighthouse parking lot, then ran around to the passenger side to give Pacifica a hand out.

“Thank you, my lord.” She made a mock bow, and they both giggled. As she stepped down onto the ground, she sniffed the sea air. “Smells pretty salty here, it’s weird.”

“Ah, you get used to it if you live close by the sea.” He noticed Pacifica was shivering, her arms wrapped around her chest. Her purple jacket wasn’t providing much cover from the sea wind. “Hold on, I’ve got something if you’re cold.” He reached into the cabin and pulled out a piece of yellow clothing.

Pacifica looked down at it when he passed it to her. It was a woollen sweater, with a llama knitted on the front. “This is the sweater Mabel gave me. During all that weirdness.” Her eyes widened. “She still kept this?”

Mason shrugged. “She keeps all her sweaters, they’re like her babies. She’ll probably be fine with you borrowing this one, she knows it’s important to you.”

Pacifica threw the sweater over her head and wriggled her arms in. It was a little tight, since she’d grown taller in the last 4 years. “It kind clashes with my skirt but screw it.”

“I think it looks fine on you. Come on, let’s head in.” As he made for the entrance, Pacifica reached out for his hand and gave him a small peck on the cheek.

“Together.” She smiled at him, and he grinned back. They walked hand in hand to the museum. The
lighthouse was a stubby tower poking up on the cliff head, atop a building of grey stone bricks. They wandered inside and found a bearded man sat behind a counter. He eyed them warily.

Mason strode confidently up to the man. “Hello there, I’m here about a reported haunting. We’re Mason and Mab- Pacifica Northwest.” He’d stumbled slightly by mentioning Mabel. He coughed and continued. “You reported sighting some kind of large creature up in the lighthouse, seen mainly at night?”

The bearded man nodded and spoke with a Scottish accent. “Aye, there’s a creature alright, I’ve seen it with me own eyes.”

Mason pulled out his Pine Tree covered journal. “Could you describe the sighting, was it opaque or translucent, did it leave any residue, ooh, could it talk?”

The man just shook his head. “I aint never seen it clearly. Just a dark spectre in the night come to haunt me.”

Rifling through his pages, he tried to find anything matching the scant description. “Hmm, let me see. Boss-Lobster, Luna fright, Zigerions… hmm, there’s not much to go on.”

“You can check out the tower if you want, it’s open the public.” He jabbed a thumb at a winding staircase. Mason thanked the man, and the two of them headed upstairs. They came up into a room surrounded by glass windows, taken up with the large light itself in the centre. There was a small balcony with a railing circling the exterior of the room.

“Ok, according to the reports, this room is the only one where the creature was seen.” He turned his head in all directions, searching for anything out of the ordinary.

“Sure you just didn’t want to get me alone in a lighthouse?” She smirked at him.

“I don’t know, kinda open to people looking through all the glass.” He winked at her and her smile just widened.

“That’s not going to stop me.” She ran up to him and threw her arms around him. Mason loved the feeling, with the sweater on she was very soft. He squeezed her waist, making her giggle. She stared at his blushing face, then leaned in for a kiss. It was the first they’d had since that night at the concert. They just stood there, kissing for a few seconds, enjoying the moment of peace.

Eventually Pacifica pulled away slightly, sighing. “I wish it could all be like this, the two of us together, not a care in the world.”

Mason looked away. “But what about Mabel. That’s what caused her to go all sad the first time.”

Pacifica realised her mistake, she’d been clumsy with her words. “I’m sorry Mason, I didn’t think.” She moved away to examine the room. “Let’s just find this haunting and then we can deal with that.”

She didn’t see anything obvious in her first look around the room. She was hoping they wouldn’t have to stick around this place all night. She noticed a small cabinet on the wall and decided to have a peek inside. As she opened the door, something small and dark jumped out of the small space, flying into her face.

She stumbled back and screamed.
Merak stood looking in confusion at the teenager standing before him. “What? Mabel Pines? What are you doing here? Where is the incursion?” He started scanning the room, recognising the building from his last visit.

Mabel reached out and started probing his mind. *Madha tafeal hadhih alfatat huna? Yjb 'an 'ajida Kochab.*

She had to refocus, his surface thoughts were in Arabic, which made sense given his nationality. *Wait, why is she staring at me? Something is wrong.*

“Wrong is right, mister!” She poked an accusatory finger at the Egyptian. “You’re going to tell me everything you know about the Kochabs!”

Merak started backing away. “You made the rift! Yekhrib betak!” He backed away, reaching for his wrist.

“Oh no you don’t!” Mabel reached into her pocket and presented a paint brush. She waved it aimlessly in the air and read a piece of text off her notepad. “Ars ad animam!” It was the same spell that the Necrotist Offucio had used to create his living tattoos. Combined with the magic paintbrush that could conjure whatever Mabel wanted, this made a pair of heavy chained cuffs shoot out at Merak.

He was startled as they clamped down on his wrists. “Ah! Let me go!” The chains hooked into the ground and forced him onto his knees.

Mabel wasn’t liking his attitude. “No, talk, now! What are the Kochabs?!”

“I cannot share that information! It is my sacred oath!” He stared resolutely up at her.

“Oh yeah, well how about you tell me about this!” She reached behind her and brandished Journal 9 in his face.

Instantly his eyes went wide, and his dark skin paled. “No, it cannot be! The missing journal!”

Mabel’s eyes widened too. “So you do recognise it! I knew it! What do you know about this, tell me!”

He tried to shift his glance, his eyes flying wildly around the room. “I… it’s…” He sighed and lowered his head. “Alright. I’ll talk.” The cuffs on his wrists melted away, returning to simple paint.

“First things first, where are you from? The future I’d guess based on this.” She pointed at the journal. He reached out to take it, but she recoiled. He slowly lowered his hand again.

“Yes, I am from your future.” He said this quietly, with no sense of grandeur. Those few words were among the most shocking Mabel could here, and he barely seemed to care.

“Go on.” She was getting impatient with this time traveller.

He stood up and pulled off his scarf to better address her. “I am a traveller from a distant time. I have come to this period because of… an event. One calculated to occur within the next few weeks, if not days. It is an event that could destroy this entire universe.”

Mabel sat down on the cold floor, digesting what she’d heard so far. “So what’s it got to do with the journal?”
He looked at Journal 9 in her arms, a venomous look in his eyes. “That ‘thing’ is the text that predicted the event’s occurrence. It and the other books like it hold the prophecy of the Alignment. With the secrets of the text, one could bring about a series of events that will bring about the end.” He opened his hands wide in a gesture of civility and pointed at the book. “Look, I’ll show you.”

She hesitantly passed him the book, fearful he might just make a run for it. He flipped through the book until he stopped on the incomprehensible page covered in lines and scribbles. “This is part of a greater diagram. It describes a specific spatial alignment of stars that will occur soon. With the stars in this specific form, it will be possible for them to be used a gateway to another dimension.” He pointed at the rift Mabel had made. “The same dimension the Kochab came from.”

Mabel stared down at the portentous page, its full meaning still obtuse. “So the Kochabs, what are they?”

“They are nothing, an insignificant speck compared the real threat. You remember the nature of the creature, it was parallel to normal matter. That other dimension is home to a vast consciousness, one I can scarcely describe. Every creature in that world is linked to the same mind. The Kochab or Pherkads are nothing more than an extension of the Intelligence’s will, just foot soldiers. They are not the problem. The real problem is that the beings of that world cannot coexist with ours. They simply will not fit in our reality. In their attempt to come through to this world, they will end up destroying it, tearing it apart. Think of it like this: We are ants, this creature is like the tire of a car driving through the nest. You think the driver of the car cares or even knows if it squashes a few ants?”

Mabel quietly contemplated this. She’d seen that world through the Obelisk’s vision, the teeming masses of creatures like the Kochab, all part of one giant mind. Maybe that was why it had spoken with her voice, it didn’t know how to understand another being in the same way she could. All it knew was one single mind.

She took back the journal, cradling it in her arms. “Ok, end of the world if that prophecy comes true, and this journal has the key. But who would want the world to end, why would anyone do that?”

Merak stroked his beard. “I do not know.” This girl cannot know the truth.

Mabel angrily shouted at him. “Stop lying to me Merak, I can hear your thoughts, don’t hide anything from me!”

He looked gobsmacked. “Hear… my thoughts? How is this so?”

“With this.” She held up the stone on her necklace for him to see. He held it in his hands, confusion written all over his face.

“But this, this is nothing. Just a medical imager. It’s only supposed to be worn by patients, it amplifies emotional states, helps doctors get an accurate estimation of distress. How did you even get it?”

“There was this blast in the desert, like the ones you use. This was in the crater. And it can too let me read thoughts! Just now you told me you didn’t know who’d want to end the world, but you were lying. You do know.”

“This telepathy is… curious. Perhaps somehow your mind is somehow tapping into the emotions of those around you, instead of extruding your own.”

She snapped her fingers in his face. “Hey, focus Future Boy! Who are trying to end the world?!”
Merak looked uncomfortable but knew he couldn’t hide anything. “Do you know of the Polaris Institute?”

Mabel remembered the time Dipper had been kidnapped by the very same institute. They’d been looking for him, knew about the journals. “Sure, they’re a creepy bunch of brains in robot suits! They tried to make my brother complete some math problems for them.”

Merak nodded. “Yes, they wanted him to fill in the information that this journal holds. It’s all they need to bring about the end.”

“But why, why do they want that?”

“They believe that the coming of the intelligence will bring about a golden age of progress and knowledge. They are led by a group of six, the Council, who found the Author’s journals in the future, learnt of the prophecy, and came back in time to carry it out. I alone know the truth of the danger the prophecy holds.”

“So, the journal talks about the end of the world and some wackjobs thought that trying that out was a good idea? Man, Dipper really screwed the pooch by writing that down.” She made a hollow laugh.

“I was just lucky that this book disappeared from their grasp. The Kochab we encountered was probably trying to learn the information held inside, to complete the calculations from their end. It matters not, I must destroy the book now before it’s too late.”

“What, no!” She possessively gripped the book to her chest. “Dipper can’t know we’ve spoken, everything has to go back to normal.”

“You don’t understand, this book has the potential to destroy everything you hold dear.”

“I don’t care, I can fix this myself. You said that without this, the Institute can’t cross the dimensions. I’ll just keep it safe.”

“I cannot entrust the safety of the entire universe to a child!”

“Why not, it’s not the first time I’ve held the fate of the universe in my hand.” Mabel defiantly stared up at Merak, who clearly knew more that he was telling her right now. “I’ll deal with this, you wanna help out, then tell me more. You know all about this Council, how the prophecy works, this other dimension. So tell me the whole truth! Or maybe I’ll just read your mind again!”

Merak’s eyes narrowed. “I will not, child, more information will only serve to increase the risk of a temporal paradox. Surely you already know the dangers of future information.” Mabel looked away. Of course, she knew the dangers, Dipper had made them very clear when they first found the book.

She snapped at Merak. “Enough, tell me now, or just go. I’m going to save the world myself!”

“Fine, try and save your doomed world! Go ahead and watch as your universe falls apart. Just remember that I warned you Mabel Pines. It’s that book, or the universe!”

“The universe can go to hell for all I care!” With that, Merak stood back from Mabel, slammed the device on his wrist, and vanished in another blinding flash. Mabel didn’t even bother to look up at the explosion of energy. Her attention was all on Journal 9.

Slowly she walked over to the rift and jabbed a button on the scanner. With a small sucking of air, the rift closed in on itself. She gathered up her equipment and mulled over all she’d learnt.
There was the other dimension, an alignment of stars that would let it connect with ours. The Institute were time travellers like Merak, bent on ensuring the two dimensions connected. The journal had the key piece of information they needed to make this dream a reality.

She spoke to the empty room. “Oh Mason, what have you done?”

Pacifica was terrified, something dark and furry was fluttering in her face. She was screaming almost loud enough to shatter the glass windows. Mason ran up to her and whacked her attacker with Journal 4. The creature flew away from her face, and she started hyperventilating.

Mason rested his arms on her shoulders. Paz! Paz! It’s ok, you’re safe.” Slowly she reached up held his arms too, calming down from the shock.

“What the hell was that!?” She frantically looked around the room, petrified of another attack.

Mason pointed to something sitting on the large light in the middle of the room. “I think that is our ‘supernatural haunting’.” She followed his finger and saw that the thing that had attacked her was a small fuzzy black animal. “A simple California leaf-nose bat, genus Macrotus californicus. Stupid little critter must be coming here looking for food.” He waved his arms up at the bat. “Shoo, go on, shoo!”

Pacifica was angry at the small mammal sitting idly on the light. “Get out of here you little creep!” She looked around and found a life preserver in the cabinet, which she tossed up at the bat. It missed, but the bat took off and flew around the room a few times before flying out an open window.

She stamped her foot and shouted out the window. “Dumb bat, I’ll sue you if you come back! My lawyers will rip you apart fuzzball!”

Mason chuckled and closed the window. “Well, I guess that’s the haunting ‘solved’ then.”

“That little thing spooked the keeper?”

“Imagine when it’s dark, with all the flickering lights in here that thing must have looked a lot scarier. Guess not every Mystery Hunt ends with a satisfying answer. Those things only eat insects anyway.”

“It wasn’t even a bloodsucker?! I got all freaked out for nothing.” She crossed her arms. “So we drove all the way out here for that dumb animal? What a waste of time.”

He took hold of her hand. “It’s not a total waste. We had some alone time at least. I can think of worse ways to spend an afternoon.”

She raised a small smile. “Come on, let’s go. We should go and deal with… you know.”

He frowned. “Yeah. I know. One problem at a time.”

Stroking a sleeping Waddles with one hand, Mabel was back in her bedroom, reflecting on all she’d found out today. The full understanding of things was still beyond her grasp, she wasn’t getting anymore from Merak anytime soon. She was determined that this wouldn’t create another rift between her and Dipper. She was going to handle this ‘end of the world’ thing. She’d ripped her additions off the scanner, so it was back to normal. Dipper would never have to know about her clandestine meeting today.
Journal 9, the source of the worry she bore, was now her salvation. She’d found a potential solution on one of the pages, a supernatural phenomenon that might be enough to help her. It was a desperate hope, but better than facing the consequences. She just needed Dipper’s help to find it. This waiting around was the worst part, thoughts of all the ways things could wrong were clogging up her mind.

She reached out with her necklace again, feeling Dipper’s mind from wherever it was. While he was driving the pickup his thoughts generally settled into a bland repeating pattern, his brain focusing on the road. Occasionally she’d get a thought relating to a conversation with his passenger. Her thoughts were a little more interesting, Pacifica was clearly frustrated with how their excursion had gone.

Mabel was too tired to probe deeper into their minds to learn any specifics, they’d give her the full story soon enough. She just hoped she could make what she had to say convincing.

20 minutes later they finally pulled into the drive. She made her way downstairs to anticipate them, Waddles snorting in protest as she left. She saw the two of them entering from the garage door. She noticed that Pacifica was wearing one of her sweaters. This raised her mood considerably. She could do this. “Hey, how’s my favourite couple doing?” She made finger guns at the pair, who both looked rather exhausted from the journey.

Pacifica lazily waved. “Hi Mabel, bit annoyed really. Mason’s mystery turned out to be a bat and a cowardly lighthouse keeper.”

Dipper shrugged. “Ah, you win some, you lose some.” He turned his attention to his sister. “So, how have you been?” He had an inquisitive look, Mabel’s new mood was happier than she’d been for a while.

“I’m great, just awesome now you two are here. Look, I know I’ve been acting weird lately, can’t hide that from you, dork.” Pacifica snorted out a laugh. “So now I’m gonna fix all that. I’ve been reading Journal 9, and I think I’ve got the perfect thing for the three of us to do together.”

She showed the pair the page she’d picked out. “What do you guys say to a road trip?!”

They both looked at the page, then up at her with broad grins on their faces, matching Mabel’s. Finally, things would be made right.

tqurt ijl ajtn wmyr

Chapter End Notes

There's a little Google Translated Arabic in this chapter, no idea if the grammar is correct or anything, was the best I could do. Expect a couple more translated passages in the next few chapters as well.
**Road Trip**

Chapter Summary

Mabel takes Dipper and Pacifica out into the desert in search of a ghostly reminder of the past. But can she hide her true motivations from them?

Beside a lonely stretch of highway in the middle of the Mojave Desert sat a small diner. It was a 50’s themed retro style café, regularly serving the truckers and day trippers who ventured out this far into the middle of nowhere. A brief blast of heat blew through the diner as three teenagers entered. They were thankful of the cool air after the desert heat outside and sat down at one of the booths.

“It’s so good to be out of the heat, Mason, you’ve gotta install a better air conditioner in that truck of yours.”

“Yeah Dip, it’s like riding around in an oven! I don’t wanna be a deep-fried Mabel!”

“Ok ok girls, I’ll do it when we get back. I can’t magic up the parts out here in the desert. Well, maybe I could…” Dipper patted his journal and the three of them laughed.

They’d been on the road for a few hours already, making their way to the Mojave Desert at Mabel’s suggestion. They were all happy to be spending time in each other’s company, so the drive hadn’t felt too bad. The girls had spent most of the journey so far singing along with whatever came on the radio. Mabel also substituted her own music for a brief period, but the blaring noise had been too distracting for Dipper to focus on the road properly. He’d switched in his old Babba cd instead, which had been much more pleasing to the ear.

Now they were stopping for a late lunch, Dipper and Pacifica having already spent the morning on a long drive to Point Sur with no chance for a snack. The twins ordered pancakes, while Pacifica went with a double cheeseburger. She never got the luxury of food like that at home. While they waited for their food to arrive, Dipper wanted a chance to go over the notes of what they were on the road for.

“Ok Mabel, show me the page again, I’m sure we can find this ‘convoy imprint’, we just have to narrow the search field.” Dipper passed his sister the journal and she opened it to the relevant page. There was a sketch of an indistinct fog stretching out over the desert floor.

Pacifica, sat next to Dipper, glanced down at the most important detail on the page. “So, these ‘ghosts of the ancestors’ can grant wishes somehow?”

Dipper nodded. “Uh huh, says they use the psychic traces of hundreds of dead minds to generate energy. Sounds fascinating. I wonder how powerful their abilities are, transmigration of objects for sure.”

The girls left him studying the book, nose-deep in unravelling its secrets.

Pacifica grabbed a spare menu and fanned herself. “Mabel, how do you two cope when it’s so hot like this? I’m melting over here.” She let out a curt laugh. “Ha, this morning I was too cold by the sea, now I’m boiling in the desert.” She’d ditched her purple jacket in the pickup, along with the
“Ah, you know, living in Cali, lots of days out at the beach gets you used to the sun. Or maybe it’s just my brother being sat next to you.” Mabel winked as Dipper coughed in embarrassment.

Pacifica just grinned. “Have you had any luck in love lately sis?”

“Well, the last guy I tried to date turned out to be a psycho death artist, though I did get some girls’ phone numbers from the concert we went to that might be worth checking up.”

Dipper squirmed in his seat. “Do you two always have to talk about relationship stuff?”

“Aw, are we making little Dipper all embawwassed?” Mabel teased in a patronising voice.

He huffed and tried to re-focus on Journal 9. “I’m just glad you found something that got you to come out with us. What about this page got you so interested?”

Mabel shrugged the question off. “I dunno, just seemed cool. Anyway, I wanted to spend time with my two favourite people.” She took a hold of their hands and squeezed. “We’re gonna have the best day ever, I promise.”

Half an hour later they’d ended up off the main highway, out in the desert. Going off-road had been a bumpy ride, and Pacifica had complained a lot. Her limo rides were almost always perfectly comfortable and smooth. The rough terrain and bouncy suspension of the pickup had made her nearly throw up, especially due to how much she’d eaten back at the diner. Now she was standing beside the pickup, trying to take deep breaths and avoid vomiting. Mabel was with her, while Dipper was poking about in the scrubby vegetation, looking for some sign of ectoplasm or other ghost residue.

She bent over again, feeling another build up from her stomach. Mabel rested a hand on her shoulder. “It’s ok Paz, we all get a little motion sick sometimes.”

“It’s that damn burger, I’m not used to eating so much food in one go. Have you seen my parent’s portion sizes?!” Her cheeks puffed up and she raised a slender hand to her mouth. Thankfully she avoided being sick all over Mabel’s boots, and stood up again. “I’m fine, held it in.”

Mabel wiped an arm across her forehead. “Phew, that woulda been gross. Hey Dipper! Paz is ok!” She held up her fingers in a circle ‘ok’ sign, and Dipper nodded back from the bush he was investigating. “He looks so goofy poking around over there.”

Pacifica chuckled. “That’s Mason for you, he always looks awkward doing anything.”

Mabel let out a laugh. “Ha, yeah, my brother’s never been smooth.” She muttered almost to herself. “Still weird that he’s using Mason again.”

“Huh? But that’s his name?” Pacifica raised an eyebrow.

“I guess, still sounds off to me. He’s just been Dipper for so long, his old name sounds like it doesn’t belong to him anymore. Maybe he thinks he’s too old for ‘Dipper’ now.”

It was Pacifica’s turn to put a hand on her friend’s shoulder. “He doesn’t care about that, I’m sure he’d be fine with whatever you called him.”
Mabel showed an appreciative smile. “Thanks sis, that helps. I wonder if he’s actually going to find anything over there.” She shielded her eyes from the sun and tried to see what he was doing across the desert.

Pacifica leaned against the side of the pickup. “Probably sketching whatever he found. You know he actually wanted to sketch the bat at the lighthouse earlier?” She shook her head. “Total dork.”

Mabel poked her in the side with the tips of her fingers. “But you looooooooove him.”

She blushed. “Yeah… I do.”

“Aww.” Mabel put her arm around Pacifica, bringing her into a light hug. In a sing song voice, she teased Pacifica. “You’re his pretty princess!”

She shoved Mabel away. “Yeah right.” Then, more quietly. “Did he actually call me that?”

“My lips are sealed, I’ve said to much already.” She mimed zipping her mouth shut. “But maybe, he finds you *irresistible*!” She waved her arms about crazily on the last word, and Pacifica couldn’t help but laugh.

They spent some time watching Dipper amble about in the scrub. “So, Mabel, what are you gonna use your wish for? If we do find these ghosts.” She felt the arm around her tense slightly.

“Oh, I, uh, hadn’t really given it much thought.” She noticed Mabel reach up to her neck with her other hand.

“Come on, it was your idea to find this thing, you’ve gotta have some idea. I know exactly what I’d use my wish for.”

Mabel nodded. “Yeah, I know things have been rough for you, with your parents.”

Pacifica looked at Mabel in confusion. “How did you know about that?”

“Oh, uh, I must have overheard you and Dipper talking about it earlier. Sorry if you wanted to keep it private.”

“No, it’s fine. Would probably have come up eventually anyway.” She noticed that Mabel was oddly avoiding her gaze now. She was fiddling with something around her neck. “What’s that you’ve got?”

Mabel looked up at her. “Oh this? It’s just a necklace.” She showed the smooth stone to Pacifica. “Found it on one of Dipper’s Mystery Hunts. It’s just a cool little stone, nothing more. I guess you could call it my ‘good luck charm’.”

“Huh, it’s nice” She stared at the shiny black sphere, seeing a hazy reflection of her face in the surface.

Mabel’s eyes had shifted over to look at Dipper again. He was jumping up and down now, waving back at them. “Hey, I think something’s wrong.” She climbed onto the rear bed of the pickup to get a better view. She had to squint against the sun’s rays. It looked like he’d broken into a run towards them.

Pacifica looked concerned. “Maybe he’d being chased by a ghost!” She too jumped onto the pickup now, wanting to be less exposed and vulnerable. The girls watched as Dipper made a beeline straight back to them. He had a look of pure panic on his face.
Now he was shouting at them. “Girls! Help!” They finally spotted his pursuer, who was yapping up at him. It was a small grey-brown fox. It was barely half a metre across. Mabel couldn’t help but start laughing.

Dipper reached the pickup but couldn’t climb up without the little fox catching him up. He ran around the truck a few times, pleading up at the girls. “Mabel, Pacifica, come on! A little help here! Yah!” The fox was nipping at his heels, but the girls were just laughing.

“Aw man Mason, is that tiny little pup too much for you to handle?”

“I thought it might be one of the ghosts, but it won’t stop chasing me!”

“Hold up, think I have something.” Mabel reached into the cab of the pickup and pulled out her phone. She took a photo of Dipper’s cowardly running.

He shouted up at them. “Not helping Mabel!” She rolled her eyes, and Pacifica watched her select a song from a playlist, then she held up the phone at the fox. The deafening sounds of thrash metal were enough to spook the fox away. Dipper rested an arm on the side of the pickup, he was sweating heavily after running around like crazy in the desert.

“Thanks Mabel. Phew. That was terrifying.”

Pacifica snorted with laughter. “You’re such a wimp Mace.” She jumped down from the pickup and gave him a quick hug, not wanting to get too much sweat on her. “The scary little fox is all gone now, you’re safe with us.”

He avoided her gaze but gave a quiet thanks. Mabel landed next to the pair. “What are you two standing around for then? We’ve got ghosts to find!”

It was Mabel’s turn to drive now, as Dipper wanted to test out his energy scanner. She’d driven back to the highway so that they could cover a large distance quickly, better to triangulate a source of energy. Now he had his arms around Pacifica’s waist, who was sticking her head out of the window holding the scanner.

She was grinning wildly, embracing the wind flowing through her long hair. “Floor it Mabel, the scanner needs more speed!”

“Aye aye captain!” She slammed her foot down on the pedal, and Pacifica gave a whoop of joy, loving every second of the experience. Dipper was bit more apprehensive and tightened his grip to make sure she didn’t fall.

Speeding across the highway, Mabel too was loving the sense of openness and freedom. There was no one else out here, so she had the road to herself to go as fast as she liked. She enthusiastically honked the pickup’s horn. “Woo, go Mystery Trio!”

Dipper gave a sideways look quizzically at her. “Wait, Mystery Trio, are we going by that now?”

“Sure we are Dip, there’s 3 of us, that makes us a trio. Duh!”

“She’s right Mace, we’re all in this together! Oh, scanner’s done.” She leaned back in from the window, landing awkwardly in Dipper’s lap. To his surprise, she didn’t move, and just stayed on top of him. He had to admit he liked her being so close.
He poked his head round her shoulder. “What does it say Paz? Any luck?”

“Nada, it’s blank. No readings.”

“Ah well. Guess we’ll have to do another sweep somewhere else.”

They spent the next hour driving around in circles, not getting any decent results on the scanner at all. They pulled into a small verge at the side of the road, and Dipper started checking over the scanner’s diagnostics, checking to see if there was a fault. After it proved to be functioning perfectly, the three of them decided on their next course of action.

“So, the scanner’s fine, which means we’re either looking in the wrong place, or these ghosts aren’t using the right kind of energy. Either way, we can’t find them.”

Pacifica felt defeated. “So that’s it? Just another ‘bat in the face’? We just pack up and go home?”

Mabel piped up. “No way, we came all the way out into the desert, we might as well turn this into a regular road trip, just cruise about and live loose.”

She looked pleadingly at Dipper, but he was already smiling. “Actually, I was just about to suggest the same thing. We deserve to have some fun today.” He was a bit overwhelmed when both girls pulled him into one massive hug. Gasping for air, he freed himself. “Ok, so what do you wanna do first?”

Pacifica gazed longingly at the pickup, parked by the road. “I have something in mind.”

“No, pull the stick that way! Ah, watch out for that bush! Brake!”

“I am braking, it’s not working! We’re just skidding!”

“Slower! Slower!”

“You try driving in heels!”

“Let me take the wheel!”

“No, Mabel, I’ve got this!”

“AHHHHHHHHH!”

Dipper, sat on a rock, watched the pickup skid to a juddering halt. He got up and strolled over to the car, finding the two very shaken girls inside. He leaned on the side and smirked through the window at them. “You two have a good ride?”

Mabel scrambled out of the passenger seat. “Let me out of this thing! I’m never taking a ride from her ever again!”

Pacifica sheepishly grinned from behind the wheel. “Sorry Mabel, I’ll go slower next time.”

“Whatever, if that’s how you drive out here, then I don’t ever wanna see your road rage.” She plopped herself down on Dipper’s rock.
He slid into the pickup’s cab. “Told you Mabel would be an awful driving teacher. She got all her lessons from Stan. Stan! You’ve seen his driving!” He shook his head, remembering Mabel’s early days on the roads of Gravity Falls.

“It’s probably just this terrain, we should have practiced on a proper road.”

“Not if we don’t wanna get caught, you don’t even have a provisional license.”

“Blame my parents again, like with everything else crappy in my life.”

He squeezed one her hands, trying to calm her aggression. “Come on, this time I’ll show you how it’s done. Let’s accelerate a bit.”

He was forced back into his chair as she slammed down hard on the pedal. “Maybe a bit less acceleration than that!”

Giving Pacifica a crash course in how to drive had taken up yet more time in the day, and now the sun was beginning to dip near the horizon, bathing the desert in a burnt orange light. The three of them were sat on the hood of the truck, drinking some sodas they’d had stashed in a small cooler. Mabel stretched her arms out overhead, loosening her body up.

“Ah, this is the life, no worries, no responsibilities. Just kicking back with friends.” She reached her arms around the others.

Pacifica circled her finger around her can. “Yeah, I wish I didn’t have to leave at the end of this. I’d be fine if I never saw my parents again.”

Dipper rested her chin in his hand. “Hey, it’s ok. We have right now, why worry about the future? No matter what happens Paz, me and Mabel will be there for you” He raised his can in a toast. “We’ll always be the Pines trio!”

They all clinked their cans and took a deep sip. When Pacifica finished, she raised an eyebrow at Dipper. “Uh, you sure you checked over that statement? Pines Trio? Last I checked, I was a Northwest.”

Dipper choked on his drink and blushed deeply. “Oh, I mean, yeah, you’re not a Pines. Not yet anyway. I mean… oh man.”

Both the girls laughed. “No, it’s fine Mace, I know what you meant. Besides, I’d rather be a Pines than a dumb Northwest anymore.”

He smiled, but then Mabel spoke. “Wow, Pacifica Pines, that’d be so amazing! We’d be sisters for real!”

“Woah woah, let’s not go too crazy. We’re still only kids after all.”

“Oh come on Dip, you two are such a good couple.” She started putting on a ‘sing-song’ tone. “Mason and Pacifica, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N- wahh!” Pacifica had pushed her off the hood, and she fell onto the dusty ground.

The couple laughed as Mabel sat up in the sand with a dazed expression. “No fair!” She had a devious look in her eyes, and Pacifica leapt off the hood to run away. “You’re gonna pay Paz!”
The two girls giggled as they chased one another around the truck. Dipper went around to grab his camera out of the pickup and took a shot of the distant sunset lighting up the horizon. He then sat back on the hood and felt the warm sun on his face, enjoying every moment of this day.

“And that one’s Orion, you can see the three stars of the belt.”

“Yeah, I think I can make it out. What’s that one?”

“That one is… Canis Major.”

“Oh yeah, it does kinda look like a dog!”

“That one over there’s supposed to be Draco.”

“What, that looks nothing like a dragon!”

“Ha, yeah, some of these are a real stretch.”

Mason and Pacifica were lying on the bed of the truck, staring up at the stars. Pacifica had never spent a night stargazing, and Mason was eagerly teaching her all of the constellations. Mabel was sat in the pickup’s cabin, idling on her phone. Pacifica had put her jacket back on, since the desert had gotten cold in the night. She’d also thrown on the llama sweater.

“They’re so beautiful Mason. I’ve never seen so many at once.”

“Yeah, out here in the desert there’s no light pollution for miles. Just a perfect view of the heavens.” He pointed up at the sky again. “See there, that’s Mabel’s favourite constellation, Gemini.”

“How come? It doesn’t look like much to me.”

“I’ll give you a hint, it’s also known as The Twins.”

Pacifica’s eyes widened. “Oh! Of course! That’s so sweet. What’s your favourite then? Besides the obvious.”

Mason stroked his chin for a moment, considering his choices. “I guess, recently at least, it’s that one.” He pointed to some stars low near the horizon. “That’s Andromeda.”

“What’s so special about it? Just looks like a bunch of dots to me.”

Mason blushed. “It’s kinda cheesy.”

Pacifica replied softly. “I don’t care, I’m sure it’s important to you.”

He sighed and elaborated. “It’s meant to be a figure from Greek mythology. Andromeda was a princess, chained to some rocks. The hero Perseus rescued her, and they got married. I guess… it kinda reminds me of you.”

It was Pacifica’s turn to blush now. Mason tried to lighten the mood and shifted his arm to highlight a different constellation. “And that one you recognise of course, the Big Dipper.”

Pacifica rolled onto to her side, looked at Mason, and winked. “I see it now.”

He rolled over too, their faces nearly touching. Neither one knew to make the first move, so they
awkwardly shifted towards each other until their lips collided. They were slow at first, getting used to this new sensation, but quickly became more passionate. They laid there under the stars, their attention now entirely focused on earthly matters.

Dipper and Pacifica were lying together in the pickup’s cabin, fast asleep in each other’s arms. They’d made out for a while on the back of the truck, then clambered inside to get out of the cold. Mabel thought the two of them looked adorable lying there together and felt a pang of guilt. She drove the pickup some way out into the desert, driving slowly so as not to wake them. She had a specific spot in mind, and there would be a lot of difficult to answer questions if either of them awoke.

She had one last look at Journal 9 to confirm her destination, squinting through her glasses in the dark. That morning she’d carefully altered a small section of the text, changing a few numbers in an ever-so-slightly lighter ink colour. It gave the exact location of the ghost sighting, something she didn’t want Dipper to find out. She had to do this alone. Reaching the coordinates, she slowed the pickup to a stop. She threw on a black leather jacket to shield from the cold, and quietly stepped out into the wilderness. They were miles from the road now, a very private place. She saw a faint blue mist hovering over the horizon. This was it.

The next step was to bring the ghosts to her. She gripped her necklace tightly and tried to sense the traces of the minds that once walked here. Across the desert, the mist started cohering, fading into a procession of ghostly figures. The convoy of the dead was walking across the desert floor, illuminated by the stars above. It was an eerily beautiful sight, so many had died here, but now they seemed almost majestic crossing the plain. The ghosts were dressed in a variety of styles, many in period Western clothing, alongside Native Americans. Ghostly oxen pulled intangible carts laden with the spirits of families, those who had never made it to the west coast.

The wandering spirits came close to her location, the convoy passing by the pickup. The spirits paid her no heed, just impassively walking westwards. One spirit finally seemed to acknowledge her and stepped apart from the mass of ghosts.

He was an elderly Native man, dressed in simple clothing, with long braided hair spilling across his back. “Greetings Little Star. What brings you all the way out here?”

“I… I came to see you.” She gestured at the rest of the ghostly parade with a hand. “Who are you?”

The old man looked contemplatively at his fellow spirits. “We are wanderers, those whose lives ended here in the desert. By what means we walk still, I cannot say. Now we simply make our way across the sand, searching for a purpose. I myself was one of the Yuhaviatam, of the Serrano people, though my name is long lost to the emptiness of this land.” He had a wistful expression on his face. Mabel thought it was sad, like he was longing for the life he could never get back.

“So, you’re supposed to grant wishes?” This was the moment she’d been waiting for all day.

The man had a sorrowful look. “That depends. Our minds are strong, but even the most powerful mind cannot do miracles. We are humble travellers, not gods.”

Mabel looked at the sky, scanning over all the myriad of stars. “Up there there’s a constellation, some day soon it’ll be in an ‘alignment’, then… bad things will happen. Can you stop that from happening?”

The man too looked up at the sky, then shook his head slowly. “I fear that what you seek may be
beyond us. We can conjure objects or affect the weather slightly. We cannot change the vast fate of
time.”

“Please, there must be something you can do!” She was desperate for any kind of help.

“I am sorry Little Star. You must face the future alone.” She dejectedly kicked at the sand. “Do not
fear, I sense the end you seek may come to pass, though there will be a great struggle. Never forget
who to trust.” The Serrano man bowed and walked back to the silent mass of wanderers, blending
back into the crowd. She watched as the convoy faded back into the mist, vanishing from her sight.

Alone in the desert again, she turned to look back at the pickup. She’d done all she could. It was time
to go home.

Dipper was awakened by a jabbing pain in his side. He blearily opened his eyes, seeing a blur of
street lights. “Dip? You gotta get up now, we’re nearly home.” Mabel was gently poking him while
steering them through the streets of Piedmont.

He tried to sit up but found an unusual weight on his body. He looked down and found a large mass
of yellow wool in his lap. He smiled and stroked the side of the sweater. Pacifica moved to snuggle
against his chest more. Without opening her eyes, she spoke up at him. “Morning dork.”

He wiped the sleep from his eyes and looked at his sister. “You drove us all the way home?”

“Yeah, I didn’t want to wake you. You two were so peaceful.”

“Aw, thanks Mabel. What time is it anyway? It’s still dark outside.”

“About 5am, god, I could use some sleep.” She yawned, which made him appreciate just how long
his sister had been awake today.

“Hey Mabel, I just wanna say thanks. For today, for coming with us.”

A small smile crept onto her face. “Any time bro. I’d do anything for you and Paz.”

They turned a corner towards their street, but Mabel braked at the end of the road. Her eyes were
gaping at the house. Dipper looked out, and his jaw fell open. Pacifica could tell something was off,
so sat up to see what was wrong.

A circle of luminous green light was surrounding their house, lighting up the whole street with an
unearthly glow. Bright flashes were coming from the windows.

The twins looked at each other. For a moment they both came to a simultaneous decision. They both
nodded and got out of the pickup, prepared to deal with whatever came next.
Part 1: Perigee

Chapter Summary

Returning home to Piedmont, the trio finds the Pines' household surrounded by a strange green light. They must confront whatever force has finally made a move on their home. Along the way, they'll need the help of many allies, from the past and even the future...

Hanging alone in the emptiness of space was Polaris Station, endlessly turning in the black abyss. A shining construct of glass and steel, the station orbited the world below known as Exoplanet HD 80606 B, a massive gas giant. The planet had been selected for its religious significance, positioned in a particular astral placement that conformed to the ideals of those who built Polaris. The world below was uninhabitable, a place of hundred mile-an-hour winds, gravity strong enough to crush a human in seconds, and no solid surface to speak of. And it was far out of the way of anyone looking for human activity.

It was perfect for the tests. Polaris had been constructed to provide a viewing platform to observe the experiments taking place on the planet’s surface. Each day massive explosions rocked the exoplanet, and every last detail was recorded by the technicians in the station. Each day they came closer to perfecting their methods.

The researchers living above this hostile environment were all dedicated to their mission, to perfect this experiment. They had all given up their lives on Earth, committed to freezing themselves and being transported 200 light-years from home, planning never to return to the world they once knew. The crew of 50 were led by a small guiding team of 7 overseers, the founders of this whole endeavour. They came from all across the world, united by their common desire to know the greatest truths of their reality. Once the experiment was refined enough, they would all be blessed with the knowledge of their prophet.

In a random suburb in the middle of Piedmont, a house was bathed in an eerie green light. The light formed a cylinder around the house, constantly shifting and flowing. At the end of the road, a red pickup came to a sudden halt. From either side, two people emerged, and took in the spectacle in front of them.

Mabel was transfixed by the strange light. “What is it Dipper?”

He replied with a resolute look on his face. “I don’t know Mabel, but we’re going to find out.” He turned to address Pacifica in the pickup, who was still trying to step out. “You should wait here Paz, we don’t have the full situation.”

She nonetheless stepped onto the road. “No way am I staying here, if something’s going on then I’m going to help you deal with it.” Dipper sighed knowing he couldn’t argue with that. The three of them walked up to the edge of the street, right where the green light came to a stop.

Reaching out their arms, they felt the tingle of energy as they passed through. It was like passing through a very thin shower curtain. They pushed the rest of their bodies into the force field, feeling a small resistance.
Dipper laid his hand on the doorknob, then whispered to the girls. “Ok, anything could be on the other side of this door, on the count of three, we go in.” They both nodded, and he slowly turned the knob. “One… two… three!” He thrust the door open and the three of them burst into the house, accompanied by a war scream from Mabel.

There was nothing in the entry way of their home. Next to the stairs was the door to the sitting room. Green flashes periodically shone from behind it. Dipper pointed to the door with two fingers and tilted his head towards it. The girls nodded again, and he slowly opened this door.

Standing in the centre of the room, surrounded by green columns of light, were Mr and Mrs Pines. Their faces were frozen in a state of mild distress, and their bodies were unmoving.

“Mom, Dad!” Dipper and Mabel ran over to their parents. They tried to reach out to touch them, but the columns of light wouldn’t let them pass. “What’s happened to them Dipper?!”

“I don’t know! Some kind of stasis shield perhaps?” He pulled out Journal 4 and started flipping the pages in search of an answer.

Pacifica stood at the back of the room, creeped out by the static Pines parents. They were like living dolls, reminding her of the time everyone had nearly been turned to wood permanently. “Guys? Who could have done this?”

“That would be us.”

The twins whirled around from their parents to follow the voice from the back of the room. Pacifica slowly turned to face a figure standing shrouded in the shadows at the back of the room.

A man stepped out into the light. He was a lightly tanned man with short black hair, dressed in a formal grey boiler suit. A pair of thin framed spectacles sat on his face. Dipper recognised him from his capture by the Polaris Institute. He had been one of Councillors leading the whole enterprise. “Brother… Alioth, was it? How’d you find us?”

The man bowed. “That is my name, you are correct Mason Pines.” His voice was accented, European, but none of them knew where in Europe exactly. It was a blend of Spanish and Italian, matching neither one exactly.

Pacifica shifted awkwardly back to stand by the twins. She didn’t like how this man addressed Dipper one bit.

“It was tricky before, we knew neither your faces, nor even your approximate age in this period. Once we had an image and age range, it was a simple matter of scouring the school records.”

Dipper stroked his chin. “Alright, makes sense. Now what have you done to my parents?”

“Do not be alarmed, your parents are unharmed. For now.”

Dipper narrowed his eyebrows. “Why should we trust you, your lot kidnapped me! Plus, you’re freaky brains in jars! Now let my family go!”

Alioth smiled and shook his head. “All in good time, dear author. First you will hand over a certain artefact my organisation desires.”

Mabel didn’t like where this was going. “We won’t listen to you poophead, let Mom and Dad go!”

Alioth glanced at her, disdain on his face. “Ah, the interloper, your opinions are irrelevant. Now,
Pines, you will hand over the journal now.”

Mabel’s heart dropped in her chest as Dipper’s brow furrowed in confusion. “What? But how could you know about my journals?”

“We know everything about them my boy. The Council will have the missing piece. Journal number 9.”

The trio’s eyes all widened, knowing exactly what he was referring to.

Pacifica had had enough of this, and suddenly ran at the man out of nowhere, shooting out a fist at his face. Alioth stood impassively, barely seeming to care about this attack. Pacifica reeled back for the impact. Her hand shot straight through the man’s face, coming out on the other side. The momentum caused her to fall to the floor.

She looked up at Alioth, who smirked down at her. As she watched, a flicker of light traversed his body, like his form was ‘glitching’. Dipper ran over to help her up.

“Paz, are you ok?”

“I’m fine, what the heck is this guy?!”

“It’s a hologram, I saw them use it for a video chat when they held me hostage.”

The man clapped slowly. “Well done Mr Pines, you have better observational skill than your friend here.” His tone was dripping with condescension. “Now, I’ll say it again, hand over the journal.” He reached out a hand, but they all stood there, silent.

Alioth’s smile finally started to fade. “Very well, I’ll give you some time to think it over. You will bring the journal to us, or your parents will remain in stasis, unable to eat or drink. We’ll see how long they last.”

Mabel suddenly blurted something out. “We’ll bring it to the ironworks, down by the bay! Meet us there in half an hour.”

Alioth considered this for a second, unsure about what to make of Mabel. Then he nodded. “As you wish, we accept. We will be waiting there for the handover.” His body was consumed by static, then vanished.

Dipper stared at his sister. “Mabel, why did you agree to the trade?!”

Mabel had started pacing the room. “I just needed some time to think! I couldn’t take that creep mocking us anymore!” She strode over to Dipper and held out a hand. “Give me the book, now.”

Dipper stood back in confusion. “What? What are you talking about?”

Pacifica gaped at how her friend was acting.

“She never calls him Mason.”

Mabel impatiently reached into Dipper’s hoodie. “There’s no time for this!” She pulled out Journal 9 against Dipper’s protests.

He tried to grab it back off her. “Hey! Mabel, give that back! We have to give it to the Institute, otherwise Mom and Dad are gonna be trapped forever!”
Mabel stared down at the book in her hands, a deeply conflicted look crossing her face. She spoke quietly. “We can’t Mason, we have to keep it safe.”

Dipper just stared with a confused anger at his sister, but Pacifica saw that something was wrong. “Mabel, what is it? What’s going on?”

Mabel looked up at her with a melancholy face, her eyes darting all over the green-lit room. “I… there are things… things I haven’t told you two. About this.” She lifted the journal up slightly.

Dipper’s eyes went wide, a look of shocked repulsion. “What?! You kept things secret about this? What could be more important that this!?”

“Keeping you two safe, you big dummy!” She looked down at her feet. “That’s all I ever wanted to do. Keep you two safe.” She sniffed, sounding like she was about to break down in tears.

Dipper still had a stern look on his face, but Pacifica came over and put a hand on her shoulder. “It’s ok Mabel, we’re both here for you.” She gave a quick irate glare to Dipper to make him cool off with his aggressive tone. He winced at that glare, he knew it all too well. “You have to tell us now, for your parent’s sake.”

She looked up. “We just have to stop them getting the journal, whatever happens! You two gotta trust me, if they get it, the whole world, hell, the whole of reality will be in danger!”

“Maybe if you’d just told us about this sooner, we could have stopped it from happening!” Dipper was beginning to raise his voice, but Pacifica silenced him with a hiss.

“Mason, now is not the time! Shh!” That shut him up, and his lips loosely flopped shut.

Mabel looked at her with a small appreciative smile. She reached one hand up to her necklace, reflexively fiddling with it as a response to the stress. She started speaking quickly, a torrent of words conveying her secrets. “You know this journal is from the future? Well… the Council, they’re from the future too. Guess that’s where they get all the funky tech from. And there’s this space event coming in the near future, another dimension breaching ours. They wanna bring a creature from that dimension to here, but it’ll destroy the whole universe! And this journal has the last bit of information they need to make that all happen.”

She exhaled deeply and went to sit in an armchair. Saying all this was exhausting her. Dipper and Pacifica stood, trying to take all this new info in.

Dipper was the first to respond. “How… how did you learn all of this?” He was trying to be gentle with her, but he was still upset about how she’d lied to him, covered so much major stuff up.

“I talked to Merak, you remember, the Kochab guy? He’s from the future too, told me all this about the book.”

“But how did you contact him? I thought we’d never see him again.”

Mabel shook her head vigorously. “No, there’s no time for that now. We’ve gotta go, let’s just jump in the pickup and drive away. We have to keep this book as far away from those brains as possible!”

“We can’t do that, what about Mom and Dad?!”

Mabel was clearly torn, knowing the importance of the journal’s secrets, but also that her parent’s lives depended on their decisions. And she still hadn’t told Dipper everything, her necklace was still something she didn’t want to divulge. “Alright, we’ll go to the ironworks. I need to get something
first, insurance.” She got out of the chair and ran upstairs. Pacifica and Dipper waited awkwardly in the hall, not wanting to stay with the sight of Mr and Mrs Pines’ frozen torment.

Pacifica tried to make light of the situation. “Well, guess we know now why Mabel was acting so weird, huh.”

Dipper just stared distractedly at the stairs. “I can’t believe she kept all this from us, from me. I thought she’d learned that trust between us is the most important thing.”

Pacifica held his arm. “If you knew all that secret stuff, would you tell her? You’ll get through this, I’m sure.” He looked doubtful, but his features softened a bit at her touch.

Mabel came charging down the stairs, a small metal box in hand, with dozens of makeshift ‘antennae’ attached. “I’m ready now. Let’s go do this.” She looked Dipper straight in the eyes and reached out her arm. “Together.”

He linked his arm with hers and nodded. “Together.” *I hope Mabel knows what she’s doing.*

The process was not without error though. Errors with the experiments were usually few and far between, but when they happened, they were catastrophic. Once, the firing injector had failed to launch, and a blast had occurred on board Polaris itself. That part of the station had been completely wiped out. They were lucky that the integrity of the remaining sections of Polaris had remained stable. Another time a blast imploded rather than exploded, generating the opposite kind of energy needed, and nearly cracking the planet in half. One of the smaller blast experiments once scattered a researcher’s atoms to pieces. All they could detect that had survived the blast was a small medical device they’d been carrying, which was now lost to the far winds.

These blasts were not for weapons testing, or elaborate shows of force. The blasts were meant to be strong enough to puncture the fabric of causality itself, to propel something backwards against the flow of time. Though the experiments were getting more and more accurate at reaching their historical destination with each detonation, the force of the explosions was growing in size. They had to keep the damage low enough to ensure safety, but they had to refine the destination coordinates as well.

Years passed, and the slow grind of progress marched on, inching ever closer to perfection.

They drove out to the ironworks as the sun’s first rays were beginning to creep over the horizon across the bay. They stepped out of the pickup, surveying the building.

“Looks empty. Mabel, why did you want to meet them here anyway?”

“It’s part of my backup plan, just trust me.” She was poking around with her strange contraption. He noticed that it was one of his anomalous energy scanners, only covered with pieces of cutlery and jutting wires.

On the ride over, Mabel had given Dipper and Pacifica the basic overview she’d received from Merak, about the nature of the Kochabs and their dimension, the cosmic alignment, and the Council. There were still obvious gaps in their knowledge, like how Journal 9 had ended up where they’d found it, what stars were actually going to be in alignment, or how Merak fit into all of this. Mabel had also left out the reason she’d been spurred to seek out Merak as well, not ready to explain all about the Obelisk or necklace.

Dipper pushed the heavy door of the building aside, and the three of them walked into the dimly lit
space. Standing by the opposite wall were three people, Alioth still smiling creepily, the elder British woman Megrez, and in the middle, the leader of the Institute, the man Mabel had told Dipper was named Dubhe. Mabel gripped her necklace, focusing on the head of the Council. *Qefp qbxq fp dfrrbofpe.* Her brow furrowed in confusion. *Fqp cfwuuy euummbkba, qeby vb roldeq fjq.*

The man stepped forwards, arms wide. “And you’re all here! The Author, the Star, and the Heretic.” Pacifica angrily jabbed a finger at the air in front of him. “What did you call me!? I will buy and sell you!”

“Oh, I very much doubt that, *Miss Northwest*” He spat the name out, and Pacifica gulped, her bravado rapidly diminishing. “Your family is a pitiful little speck compared to us. Producers of mudflaps hardly compare to changing the world.” He snapped his fingers, and more figures stepped out of the dark. They were dressed in security guard uniforms, but it was clear from the metal skin that these were robotic servants. “Let’s not make a mess here, hand over the journal.” Dubhe reached out a gloved hand.

Dipper pulled out the book, seeing the Council members’ eyes widen as they saw it. He hesitantly extended his arm, holding Journal 9 out. Dubhe hungrily stared at the shining cover. Dipper felt a pit growing in his stomach, this was not going to end well. Just before Dubhe’s fingers brushed the book, a voice called out from behind.

“Wait! What are you going to do with that thing?” It was Mabel, she was standing as defiantly as she could when surrounded by killer robots.

A brief look of irritation crossed Dubhe’s eyes. “We will bring about a new world child, one of peace and prosperity. This journal will give us infinity.”

Mabel nodded. “I thought so. Just making sure. Guys, you might want to get ready.” Pacifica’s eyes fixed on Mabel, seeing her beginning to tense up. Something was about to happen.

Dubhe gripped the edge of the journal, and Dipper felt his tug. He held on, reluctant to part with the book. “So, once you have this, you’ll free our parents?”

Dubhe nodded, but Dipper didn’t trust him at all. But what choice did he have? Slowly he loosened his grip.

Right then, a blast of blue energy exploded between them. They both fell back, and the journal dropped to the concrete floor. Several of the security bots rushed forwards but were struck down by more blasts. Pacifica covered her head and Mabel pulled her into the corner. Dipper scrambled around on the floor for the journal, trying to avoid being shot. He saw it lying there, but it was whisked away by Dubhe. He and the other councillors were filing out of the back of the room, fleeing from the attack.

The robots though were still closing in on them. Dipper ran over to join the girls, and they tried to make for the exit. A robot blocked their path and was about to reach down for them. Pacifica screamed, but the twins stood their ground defiantly. The robot was hacked down from behind, revealing a figure in long robes, holding a curved sword. He shouted one word down at the trio. “Run!”

They didn’t need to be told twice, and followed the man out to the pickup, the robots hot on their trail. The three of them piled into the cab, whilst their saviour hopped on the rear bed. “Drive!”

Dipper slammed his foot down, ramming into one of the approaching robots, then reversed towards
the road. Once they were clear, Pacifica took a deep breath. “Ok, who the hell is that guy who saved us?”

Dipper tried to explain. “Uh, Pacifica, meet Merak. He’s kinda from the future.” Her eyes widened at the prospect, and she studied the man holding on outside the truck.

“He looks like a criminal.”

“I’m not convinced he isn’t. But he knows about the Institute, he’s the best hope we have now, without the journal…”

Mabel pulled out the scanner and flipped a switch, turning the device off. “I brought him here, retrofitted this so it could signal him.” Dipper looked impressed and curious. “Now we just have to see what happens next.”

After 25 years of work, the blasts were deemed safe enough for human travel to be attempted. The intention had been to ship the crew back to the past 10 people at a time, to avoid unnecessary risks.

That was not the final outcome however. One of the overseers on the project had come to the realisation that the group’s final goal in the past was far too dangerous for human minds to comprehend. He turned away from the cult he had helped to create. That rebellious overseer sabotaged the experiment at the last moment, completely engulfing the station in a blast that left no trace of the base whatsoever. He escaped in a shuttle bound for Earth, able to rest his conscience knowing he’d done what he’d must to save the universe.

This was not the end of the matter though. On returning to Earth, the renegade learnt that Polaris Station had not been obliterated in the blast. Instead, part of the station had been launched backwards through time, overshooting their planned destination by hundreds of years and crashing onto the surface of Earth. Knowing that the stranded group would never give up their mission to reach the promised time, the renegade made use of all of Polaris’ research, and over the next few years perfected the time blast technology. He vowed to pursue the Council through history, to stop them achieving their temporal crusade.

“You lost the journal!? You handed the most important object in the universe over to the one group that knows how to use it!!” They’d returned to the Pines’ house and were ensconced in Mason’s bedroom. Now Merak was shouting at Mason, who along with the girls was sat on his bed.

“Look, shouting at me isn’t going to help. What’s done is done. Now you need to explain everything to us, no getting out of it this time.” He crossed his arms, trying to convey some authority.

Merak rubbed his eyes, not happy with the way things were going. “Look boy, this is bigger than us, we can’t sit around talking while the world ends.”

Mabel interjected. “Just tell us Merak, or else I’ll find it out myself.” She gave him a stern look. Mason and Pacifica had no idea what she meant, but Merak seemed to soften his look slightly.

He took a very deep sigh. “Fine. Where should I start?”

“Um, at the beginning please?” Pacifica was the one to speak, feeling very confused right now.

Merak dragged Mason’s desk chair over and sat down heavily, arms resting on the sides. “Alright, from the start then. As you two know, I was born in Siwa, in the country you know as Egypt. In my time the borders of the world had shifted from what they are now. Anyway, I became acquainted
with an American man when I was studying history at university in New London.”

“New London!?” Mason suddenly blurted out.

Merak raised a hand to hush him. “Please, save your questions for later, or we’ll be here all day.” Mason’s mouth closed, disappointed but eager to hear more.

Merak continued. “My American friend is now known as Dubhe, public face of the Polaris Institute. He was a good friend once, we spent many expeditions exploring the world. It was in Venetia where we found the journals.” An uneasy glance passed across the teens’ faces.

“The Archive was buried, submerged beneath the lagoon for safety. We excavated the entrance and ventured within. It was a small library of books… those written by Mason Pines.” He watched Mason’s reaction, seeing the amazement in his eyes. “There were dozens of books there, including the first three written by your uncle. They chronicled several lifetimes of cataloguing the strange and bizarre edges of our world. It was a revelation to the two of us, a whole new avenue to discover. But there was something more in the books. A set of seven books, Journals 7 through 13, those marked with the constellation covers. They held the key to the prophecy of the Alignment, and the great Intelligence beyond the walls of the world. With all seven books we were able to determine the date of this event.”

A quiet question escaped Mason’s lips. “When was the date?”

“The date, to the best of our estimation, working back from the current orientations of the stars, is within a few days of right now. In the future of course, we could do nothing about that, that event had been and gone centuries before. But the potential we saw convinced us to strive towards that goal. Dubhe convinced me to enlist the help of five others, brilliant scientists from around the world, and we worked on developing a method of time travel. You’ve seen the results of our work.”

The twins thought back to the blast in the desert, and Merak’s personal time travel. Mabel thought it was a rather complicated method of moving through time, she’d seen much more efficient devices before. She reckoned though that those must come from further ahead in time than Merak.

“The experiments worked, after a long time. But by then I had become disillusioned with the project. All the wasteful blasts we made, damaging the fabric of reality. Then I found something which shook all my convictions.” He reached into his long coat and pulled out yet another journal.

Mason strained to see that this one had a light pink cover. Merak flipped open to a random page. “This is the Apocryphal Journal, written by another author. It outlines how dangerous the alignment really is, how it can destroy reality.”

Mason glanced down at the text on the page. “That’s definitely not my handwriting. It’s not Mabel’s either.”

“I know whose writing that is.” Mason turned, shocked at who had spoken. Pacifica reached over and took the journal from Merak, who offered no resistance. “Mason, this is my handwriting!”

“Oh my god, you wrote a journal?! That’s… that’s… really cool actually.” He’d never thought of her as the type to write a journal like he did. Pacifica blushed and closed the book. There was a golden llama emblazoned in the middle of the pink cover.

Merak tucked the book away. “You, Miss Northwest, explained about the terrors this Alignment could unleash.”

Mabel scoffed. “Hff, typical of Dipper to write a book explaining how to end the world and needing
someone else to say why that’s a bad thing.” Mason glared over at her, but knew she was right. He’d always just dryly chronicled anything they’d encountered, never considering what would happen if his book fell into someone else’s hands, as Ford’s had done.

Merak continued his story. “I sabotaged the experiment, the Council was sent way off course, too far back in time. I thought that would be enough to save the future, but I didn’t count on their resourcefulness. The re-engineered the equipment that had been sent back, extended their lifespans. They tore away everything that made them human, reducing themselves to… well, you’ve seen it.” The trio shuddered as they remembered the bubbling organs suspended within the metal robotic frames.

“And so, I endeavoured to stop them, devoting my life to the cause. I was grateful to find that one of their books had gone missing, without all of the journals they could not complete their plans. Alas, now it has returned we are all in danger.”

Mason was satisfied with the tale of Merak’s origins and decided to ask about something else. “This Alignment then, can you tell us more about that? We know about the other dimension.”

“Even I don’t know the whole picture of that. Why now is the time of the Alignment, and how the consciousness discovered our world, these are questions I could not solve. But I can tell you about the event itself.”

“It’s some kind of cosmic arrangement of stars, right?”

“Right. Each of us in the Council took a name of one of the main stars of the constellation.”

Mabel spoke next. “So what constellation is it?”

Merak raised an eyebrow at the three inquiring faces. “You really don’t know? I’m surprised you, of all people, don’t know the names of the stars in this constellation. Merak, meaning ‘the loins of the bear’. The constellation is officially known as Ursa Major.”

Mason gasped, but the girls looked on in confusion. “Girls, Ursa Major? You don’t know? Also known as the Great Bear, the Plough…” he raised his bangs to show the birthmark. “The Big Dipper…”

Their mouths dropped open in unison, stunned by the revelation.

Without the missing journal, their work was stalled. Instead they turned themselves to preparing for the eventual day when they could succeed. With their knowledge of the shape of the future they made investments in the financial industries, giving them the power to establish the Polaris Research Institute. They became titans of scientific research, pioneering robotics and computing technology.

One wing of the Institute devoted itself to studying the paranormal, creatures that came from beyond our world. This led to a lot of torturing specimens and analysing dissected bodies.

The Institute also spent years trying to track down the Author based on the scant personal details the journals had clues about. They narrowed the search down to California but couldn’t do much else. They once tried to develop an algorithm designed to locate the Author, but this Code developed a sentience and went rogue. It did eventually find the Author, but by that point it had escaped from the Institute’s grasp.

Instead, they bided their time, waiting for centuries. They couldn’t complete the Calculations on their own, lacking several key details. They would just have to hope that they could somehow fill the gap
in their knowledge.

Mason sat on his bed beside Pacifica, who was leafing through the Llama Journal. Merak had gone to examine their parents, still frozen in the green energy downstairs. He’d muttered something about them being ‘remotely suspended from afar’, then secreted himself in the living room.

Mabel had run off downstairs, excusing herself to go ‘get some air’ in the garden. He too needed some time to come to terms with all they’d learnt. He’d always considered his birthmark a mere coincidence, a fluke of fate that it happened to look just like a specific constellation. But maybe now it meant something more? Why else would he and his journals be at the centre of a conspiracy regarding that very set of stars?

Pacifica’s attention seemed entirely drawn to the pink journal. The first half of the book was laid out similar to all of Ford’s and Mason’s, descriptions and sketches of outlandish creatures and objects. As it went on, the journal seemed more and more focused on complex diagrams and information pertaining to the conspiracy they were wrapped up in. “What are you thinking about Paz?”

She looked up from the book. “Just… how weird this thing is. I never write or draw anything, I wouldn’t have the time with how much my parents spend watching me. I don’t even think I can draw at all, stick figures are the best I can manage. But in here there are proper illustrations, technical diagrams of stuff.”

“Well, maybe someone will teach you to draw one day? You just have to not worry about these sorts of things, time has a way of making things all work out the same way. Trust me, I know, and Waddles knows too.”

“Oh, not sure what the pig has to do with it, but I get your meaning. It’s all a lot to take in. So, what do we do now?” She closed the journal and sat it on the bed. “Those time brains or whatever have everything they need, how are the three of us supposed to stop them?”

“I’ve been thinking about that. I think it’s time we stopped stumbling around in the dark. It’s time for us to go on the offensive.” He wasn’t sure how she would take that, but the wild grin she now bore told him she was ready for anything.

Merak finished his study of the captured Pines parents. He couldn’t unfreeze them, that was for sure. The signal keeping them imprisoned would have to be destroyed at the source. It was likely being emitted directly from one of Councillors' exosuits. He sighed, knowing that nothing could be done for them. It would take a miracle to stop the Council now.

He was broken out of his reverie by Mabel entering the room, brandishing a tray. “Hey, I’ve got hot chocolate if you want it. That always helps me when I’m feeling down.”

He smiled at her small attempt to make him feel better and accepted the hot drink. “Thank you, Miss Pines. I am sorry.”

“For what?”

“Everything. Back when I was younger all this seemed… fun. A fascinating pastime to while away the hours with Dubhe. Now it’s all come to ruin. If I’d just told you everything when we first met…”

She waved a hand through the air. “Ah, don’t beat yourself up about it. I once let an evil space triangle take over the world, I’m used to it.” He smiled at her and sipped more of his drink.
“Yes, you do seem remarkably calm about all this.”

“Me and my brother are always getting into trouble. So far we’ve always been able to get each other out of trouble too.” She sighed wistfully. “What’s it like for you then, meeting Dipper? Since he caused all of this, and you used to ‘idolise’ him I guess.”

He considered for a moment. “It is an… odd feeling. So much of my life was changed by that boy, and he doesn’t even know it. He is intelligent and insightful, but I fear his curiosity will be his downfall.”

“Yeah, that’s Dipper alright.” She looked over to the frozen figures at the back of the room “So, can you help my parents? I hate to see them like this. Figures that one day they’d get caught up in all this.”

“I’ve done all I can. They’re not being harmed, but they can’t be left this way for long.”

“Do you think there’s any hope? For the world?”

He stroked his ragged beard. “Perhaps. The Council of Ursus may have all they need now, but there is still some time before the Alignment. I don’t see what we can do to stop them though.”

“Maybe this could help?” Mabel held up her necklace again, and a dark look crossed Merak’s face.

“I’m not sure I trust that thing. I still don’t understand how it gave you powers. It should be an inert rock.”

“It is for Dipper, or anyone else. It only seems to work when I wear it.”

“Even more reason to be wary. That thing is an unknown variable in all this.”

“I tried reading their minds earlier, the Council members. I couldn’t understand them, it was all gibberish.”

“Hmm, perhaps now that they’re all mind, no other distractions, they’re shielded somehow?” He knelt down and stared into the smooth blackness of the stone. “You still haven’t told them about it, have you.”

Mabel shook her head and looked away. “Not unless it becomes absolutely necessary.” Merak said nothing, just studying her facial reactions.

He stood back up quickly as Dipper and Pacifica came into the sitting room. Mabel rushed over to them with the tray of drinks. “Hey guys, take these. I know it’s not going to save Mom and Dad, but it’s something at least.” Pacifica took a drink, but Dipper declined. He had Journal 4 in his hands.

“I’m sorry Dipper, if I’d just told you everything… gah, this is all my fault.” She set down the tray and looked away with a pained expression, but Dipper put his hand on her shoulder.

“No, this isn’t all your fault. It’s mine too, if I hadn’t started writing in Journal 4 again, then none of this would have happened. I was so caught up in following in Ford’s footsteps, I forgot how dangerous this could all be. I ignored the risks, and now Mom and Dad are in danger, hell, the whole universe is in danger. It’s just like with the old journals, the information they hold is gonna cause a catastrophe.” He looked at Mabel, trying to convey a look with no blame present. “I’m not angry at you Mabel. Awkward Sibling Hug?”

She threw her arms around his body, dragging him into a constricting embrace. “Awkward Sibling Hug.”
She released him from the tight grip, and he was able to breathe again. “Ok, I’ve come up with a plan.” The others attentively listened to him. “I’m not saying it’s a particularly good plan, or that it’s definitely going to work. But it’s the best I think we can try. We have to break into the PRI building and get back the journal. I think, with this,” he gestured at the journal, “we might have a chance. Mabel, Pacifica, are you with me?”

“You know it bro, Mystery Twins to the end.” She dramatically raised her mug of hot chocolate.

Pacifica looked more hesitant, but still spoke. “I’m with you Mason, whatever you have in mind. I just hope it won’t involve be breaking a nail or junk like that.” She crossed her arms playfully, making him smile.

He turned to look at their guest. “Merak, will you stand with us? I know we don’t always see eye to eye, and this whole thing is kinda my fault. But we can fix that, if we work together.”

Merak looked down at Dipper, considering for a moment. Then he raised a sly smile. “I’ll help you Mason. Anything to make those bastards at the Council pay.”

“Great. Time to get to work then. We’re gonna need some help.”

The Councillors had gathered around a conference table, discussing the last details of their plans. All of them were present, bar Mizar, who had an important task that he was not to be disturbed from. Dubhe was addressing his underlings. “Sister Alkaid, what results have the tests on the ‘creatures’ yielded?”

“We have had good results so far, the creatures are… resistant to most forms of testing, and we have had to be careful insulating them from organic matter. But, when the full consciousness manifests, I think we will be ready to contain it.”

“Good, now to the network. Megrez?”

The elderly British woman spoke. “All secure, Alioth and Mizar’s work across the globe should be effective enough. The web will be large enough for our purposes.”

“And the Calculations, Phecda?”

Phecda’s new exosuit was identical to the original that had been damaged by the Northwest girl. “They are being processed right now. There is… something we should discuss though.”

For the first time since obtaining the journal, Dubhe frowned. “I don’t understand, we have all seven pieces of the text, we have all we need.”

“I am afraid there is something we have overlooked. The alignment’s concentration point was determined, and we sent a team to the site to confirm. But what we found there was totally inert, no sign of the energy we were expecting.”

Dubhe mulled this over. They’d been expecting a direct energy source, the concentrated build-up point for the transfer of the consciousness.

“I suspect the keystone is elsewhere, possibly even mobile now.”

Alioth spoke up. “What do you mean Sister, how can it be mobile?”

“I believe the consciousness has bonded to a living mind, someone from our world made… contact.”
Mabel made her way down to the basement, bringing Journal 4 and her enchanted paintbrush with her. A flick of the wrist conjured the symbols on the floor and 5 candles. This time she needed to put her glasses on to read the journal’s page. She began reciting the backwards incantation.

“!erom ecno em evres dna htrof emoC !sarignA ythgim ho ,niaga eeht nopu llac l’”

A column of flame leapt up from the paint, warming her face. As the fire dimmed, she saw a familiar flaming blue figure crouching there. He raised up, then bowed deeply. “My lady Mabel, it is good to see you again!”

“Reyansh, old buddy! You been working out? Loving those muscles.” He flexed them and Mabel swooned a little.

“What do you wish of me, my lady? Do you have something you wish burnt?”

“Oh yeah, totally.” She nodded as a smirk grew on her face. “!dnuorg eht ot srekcufrehtom esoht nrub annog er’eW”

Pacifica had laid out the ingredients on Mabel’s bedroom windowsill as Mason had instructed, then sat waiting there. She wasn’t looking forward to encountering this particular creature again, but she had to put up with it for now.

Eventually the small ball of fur climbed onto the sill and began nibbling at the ingredients. She coughed to get its attention. “Ahem, over here.”

The cute little creature looked up at her, then grinned. She knew not to trust that happy grin.

“Hi there, I’m Sporkulon the Spore, but you can call me-“

“Sporkie, hi, we’ve met before.”

The little Intelli-Spore looked up at her in wonder. “What’s your name, friend?” That high-pitched voice was going to give her a headache.

“Call me Pacifica.”

“Ok, Pazzy!” Ugh, this thing was worse than Mabel when it came to nicknames.

“Look, you want information right, that makes you nice and full up?”

The little thing nodded, then started looking around the room for nuggets of information to absorb.

She put on her most patronising voice to address this little monster. “Well, I know where you can find more information than anywhere else. 7 whole books of forbidden knowledge, that no one else knows about. That interest you, you little spork?”

Sporkie’s wide eyes were enough confirmation of that.

Mason rummaged around in his desk drawer, removing the false bottom to access his most important or dangerous artefacts. He pulled out a few of them, knowing they’d be of help. He threw in the President’s Key as well, maybe it would open the doors at Polaris? He briefly entertained bringing
the VR connectors too, before deciding he didn’t want Pacifica ever finding about what had gone on with those.

He tucked the artefacts into a backpack, then headed out to the pickup where the others were waiting. By now the sun was beginning to set, they’d spent all day learning about their enemies and preparing. Mason remembered how happy he’d been at the last sunset. He resolved that this would all end tonight.

Merak looked very out of place next to an 8 foot tall blue demon and a herd of tiny round furry gremlins. The spores had gotten a whiff of the Llama Journal, so were jumping around his heels. Pacifica had her arms crossed, also looking rather fed up with dealing with these supernatural individuals.

Mabel was knelt down by the front of the pickup, painting large metal spikes on the front grill. She noticed Mason and waved over. “Hey bro, we’ll be all set to go in a few minutes, you got everything?”

He nodded, then strolled over to Pacifica and Merak. “You two ready for this?”

Pacifica squeezed his hand. “As I’ll ever be, I suppose.” He smiled at her, appreciating any help she could give. Impulsively, he gave her a quick peck on the lips. He pulled back, but then she threw her arms around his shoulders and started making out with him.

From behind the pickup, Mabel winced. “Ew, get a room!”

The blue demon looked at her quizzically. “Your kindling of love was successful?”

“Not now Reyansh. But yes, I am indeed the greatest matchmaker alive.”

Merak was still being hounded by the spores, who were squeaking up at him. “Information… knowledge… must feed.” He kicked a few of them out of the way, then spoke to Mason.

“You’d better have more than these tiny squeak toys and one dumb demon up your sleeve, if you think we have any chance of breaking into the Institute.”

“Don’t worry Merak, me and my sister have acquired a lot of useful stuff over the years. Come on, let’s all buckle in. Um, Reyansh, you’ll have to squeeze on the back, I don’t think you’ll fit in the cabin.”

Dubhe examined the journal, poring over its pages and cover. It was a remarkable piece of craftsmanship, the quality leather binding, the beautifully detailed cover lines, the thorough and neat writing within. The Institute had brought him countless wealth and rare objects, but he treasured this book more than anything else he’d ever possessed.

The six other identical books were scattered across the globe in strategic locations, at Polaris bases in London, Moscow, New York, and more. Each one positioned to ensure the widest possible coverage of the plan.

He headed over to a dumb waiter in the corner of his office. He gently placed the journal inside, sad to part with it, but knowing its purpose was paramount. A door closed over the waiter, and it shot up to the pinnacle of the building. The next step of its journey was automated. It was being transported to the most important base the Institute had, one where the final experiment would take place to complete the alignment. He pressed an intercom on his desk, sending out an announcement. Floors 47-50 would now be sealed off to all personnel.
The rest of the Council had been sent off to their appointed locations, ready to await the end. Alkaid’s conclusions were the one thing troubling him, they couldn’t count on the alignment focusing correctly if they didn’t know where it would breach their reality. He trusted her work, she’d spent more time than anyone else with the creatures from ‘beyond’. She’d never managed to tap into the all-encompassing consciousness, but her research on the Kochabs and Pherkads was invaluable. Those extensions of the Ursus Intelligence’s will would have to do. He had to trust in the calculations, that the Author’s words would be enough.

A beeping from his desk distracted him. He was annoyed, this was supposed to be a moment of triumph, the elusive dream finally fulfilled. He clicked the intercom on and was greeted by the Head of Security’s voice. He should have had the man fired after the last break-in.

“Mr Dubhe, sir, there’s something you should see.”

“Well, spit it out then, what is it? Don’t waste my time man.”

“It’s something on one of the outside cameras sir.” A screen flipped up on the desk and flickered to life. It showed the road leading up the building’s entrance. The Institute was located at the bottom of one of San Francisco’s sloping hills. Something was hurtling down the hill towards the building. It was a red vehicle of some kind. He realised it wasn’t going to stop, and his eyes widened.

“All security to the entrance foyer, now!”

Mabel floored it as they shot down the long street. The Institute was right ahead now, and they approached the pickup’s full speed. Next to her, Dipper and Pacifica were tensed up, holding each other tight and terrified of impending crash. Merak just looked stoically ahead, as if the high speed was nothing to him.

“Hold on tight guys, we’re nearly there!” She hoped that the painted additions to the front of the truck would be enough. She had to be sure to focus on the wheel, since Pacifica’s screaming was getting very distracting.

Only a few metres left, she saw the ranks of guards lining up in the foyer. She felt momentarily sorry for them, they likely knew nothing of the Council or journals upstairs. There was no time for introspection though, as at that instant the truck collided with the main doors of the building, crashing against the glass door frontage.

The whole truck shook, and the metal spikes on the front exploded back into simple grey paint. The truck came to sudden halt, knocking against the front desk.

Mabel slowly took her shaking hands of the wheel and went to unbuckle her seatbelt. “Everyone ok? That was so fun, like a rollercoaster!”

Pacifica turned to Dipper. “Remind me never to go to a theme park with your sister.” The couple shakily got out of the truck. The foyer was a mess, their collision had thrown shards of glass everywhere, many of the guards had been knocked down, but more were filing in. Dipper looked back at the truck. Oh man, I hope it’s not too damaged, otherwise Mom and Dad are gonna kill me when this is over. He straightened up and got his resolve back.

“Oh everyone, it’s time!” As the guards warily approached, he reached into his hoodie and pulled out a roll of film. Taking his height-altering flashlight out, he removed the crystal, then shone a beam of light at the film.

The guards stopped their advance as a faded man in a pinstripe suit clutching a fencing sword
appeared. Ranks of ghostly soldiers coalesced into existence behind him, then they rushed at the
guards. Most of them ran in fear from this ethereal advance, and the trio cheered. They’d gotten in
the door.

Everyone got out of the truck now, they dashed to the lift door at the back of the room and piled in. It
was a tight squeeze with four humans, a mob of fuzzy trolls, and a massive demon.

Dipper pulled out Journal 4. “Ok, you all know the next step of the plan, me, Pacifica, and the
Spores will go after Journal 9. The alterations Merak made to the tachyon scanners, plus Sporkie’s
‘info-sense’ suggests it’s up near the top of the building. Mabel, Merak, Reyansh, you go after
Dubhe, his office is on Floor 25. We’ll meet up by the pickup once we’re done.” Everyone silently
nodded, and the lift doors slid open.

Mabel and co. squeezed out. She turned to say one last goodbye. “Hey, guys, if things don’t work
out… I just wanna say you two are the best brother and friend I’ve ever had.” She hugged both
Dipper and Pacifica. She grinned wildly. “Good luck, don’t die. Now let’s do this!” She lifted her
grappling hook in the air, then charged off to Dubhe’s office. The door of the elevator slid shut
again.

“You think she’ll be alright Mace?”

“I know she will. I can always count on Mabel.”

Dubhe was panicking, his guards all occupied with fighting a horde of intangible spirits down in the
lobby. There were few to spare to guard his own office. He went over to a secure cabinet in the
corner, activating his last defence protocol. He pulled open his suit, then the artificial flesh beneath.
The exosuit went lifeless as the brain compartment slid out into the prototype standing before him.
He would be ready for these blasted interlopers. They would not stop the great plan at this crucial
stage.

Mason and Pacifica emerged on Floor 47, one floor up from where Mason had been held captive a
few weeks prior. This floor was very different to that one, where Floor 46 had held an array of fake
offices guarding an advanced factory within, this floor was a spartan metal corridor. It reminded
Mason of the kind of corridor you’d find on a submarine, only with brighter lighting. “Journal 9
should be this way.”

He pushed through a heavy metal door, which lead to a large chamber beyond. At the far end of the
room was a massive door sealed with a rusted wheel lock. He went to try and turn it but found little
headway. “Ugh, wish we’d brought the fire demon, he’d have the strength to turn this.”

He gave up on the door, his noodle arms making no progress. “What do we do now Mace?”
Suddenly she felt something brushing her leg and saw the herd of Intelli-Spores huddling past her.
They reached the door and started climbing over each other to get close to it. Sporkie and his
offspring began another high-pitched chant.

“Oh boy, the journal’s definitely in there, whatever this place is for.”

“It feels like we’re in an underground bunker or something. But 50 storeys up.”

A sound like whirring metal suddenly filled the room, and a vent on the ceiling opened up. Climbing
down were more of the robotic suits. They moved unnaturally, clinging like spiders to the walls and
ceiling.
“Quick, summon more of those ghosts!”

“I can’t, the light’s too bright in here! I have something better in mind.” He reattached the size-altering crystal to his flashlight, then aimed it at the spores. Pacifica watched as the once tiny balls of fur grew to three times her height. “Go Sporkie! There’s sweet juicy information behind that door!” The spores eagerly rushed at the robots, crushing them with their bulk.

But the robots kept streaming through into the room, as more vents opened up. Mason and Pacifica ran over to the heavy door. They both tried in vain to turn the wheel to get inside. The battle raged on behind them, some of spores being overwhelmed by the masses of robots attacking them.

A mad idea raced through Mason’s head, and he charged at one of the robots, screaming. “AHHHHH! I REALLY HOPE THIS WORKS!”

Pacifica watched in shock as Mason headbutted one of their metal attackers right in the chest cavity. His head stuck in the gap, and his whole body started tingling. “Woah, this is so weird.” The robot jerked forwards, stepping awkwardly towards the door. “Oh my gosh, it’s actually working!” He looked ridiculous, his whole body bent over at 90 degrees to keep his head piloting the frame. Pacifica would have laughed if they weren’t in so much danger right now. She ducked as a robot was flung across the room by one of the spores.

“Mason, that’s crazy, what are you doing!?”

“Just watch.” He had a confident grin stapled on his face, that looked so goofy but somehow attractive at the same time.

The robot’s arms reached up to the wheel and started turning. “Come on, you definitely have stronger arms than me.” The metal wheel screeched as it turned, but after a slow start it began spinning rapidly. The door began creeping open and as soon as it was open wide enough for them to fit through, Pacifica yanked Mason out of the robot and dragged him inside. Then she pulled the door shut behind them, not caring what happened to the spores next.

“Woah, my head is buzzing. That neural connection was incredible, that tech is so far advanced.”

“Yeah yeah, you can write all about it in the journal later, now come on” She pulled him out his daze, as they examined the room they’d entered into. It was another tight metal corridor, with pipes jutting out of the walls. They strode onwards, noticing the floor beginning to slope upwards slightly.

The camera feed cut out, and Dubhe inwardly smiled (his new form lacked an external ‘face’). The apparitions on the ground floor had been eradicated by switching the lights up to 200% normal levels, and the spores on Floor 47 were being mopped up swiftly by the robots.

An explosion from behind drew his attention, and he prepared to emerge from the cabinet. Merak stepped into the office and shouted out. “Dubhe! I’ve finally come for you. Face me now!”

Mabel and Reyansh walked in behind him. Glowing fire shone from the demon’s fists. “Mistress, my flames are at your command!”

“Good boy Rey, we’ll need them soon. Yo, Dubhe dude! We’re here to take you down!” She waved her grappling hook around her head. She couldn’t help but notice there was no sign of the chairman anywhere.

Then his voice came from the bulky cabinet besides the desk. “Traitor, you finally dare show your face before me!? All this could have been avoided had we worked together.”
“Come out Dubhe. I’m not interested in talking.” He cocked his energy gun. “I’m only here to end this once and for all!”

“Very well, if that’s how you want to play it!” The cabinet doors burst open. Instead of the smartly dressed old man they’d been expecting, they saw a massive tangle of metal. A snaking body unfurled out, and multiple arms tipped with sharp razors extended outwards. The head of this twisted metal creation held Dubhe’s brain.

It looked to Mabel as if it was a giant metallic scorpion. The bladed arms started spinning as Dubhe advanced on Merak. He fired off a few shots, but they harmlessly impacted on the surface of the metal. They didn’t even leave a scratch.

Mabel pulled him out of the way as a blade swung down to strike him. Reyansh shot a jet of fire at this new enemy to his mistress, then ran forwards to grab some of the arms. Dubhe struggled in his grasp, the demon’s strength was formidable. But he only had four arms, while Dubhe’s new form had around a dozen, many tipped with unique armaments. He aimed one arm at Merak and Mabel, and it fired off a round of heavy bullets. The darted behind his desk. He did so hate having to fire at that, it was fine mahogany after all.

Reyansh punched out at the brain casing, causing Dubhe to recoil. He’d had enough with this blue speck. “You think you can stop me, stop the Council of Ursus!? We know all your secrets.” He raised one of the arms and a stream of water gushed out onto the demon.

Reyansh screamed and collapsed. His skin bubbled and began losing its consistency. He was melting out of existence again. He gargled out a last word. “Mistress…”

Mabel had seen that happen before, the last time she’d summoned Reyansh. “How did you know that was his weakness?!”

“You fools really know nothing! We had access to all the works of the Author, every creature he battled, every phenomenon he encountered! We know all their weaknesses! Your demon, your ghosts, the fungi, all defeated! You have nothing!” A blade slammed down on the desk, inches from their heads. Merak was checking his gun, preparing for another fruitless attack.

Mabel had a better plan in mind. She didn’t have time to use the paintbrush to create something to defeat the robotic skeleton. But she did have something she could bring to life. She glanced down at her arms and shouted out a spell. “I’ve got one thing left! Pingo ad anima!”

A ripple went up her arms, like a stronger form of pins and needles. Then she gasped in awe as the tattoos lining her arms began breaking free of her skin. A pink butterfly flew off her shoulder and began attacking Dubhe, ramming at his arms. Indistinct colourful patterns began wrapping around the metallic body, dragging the whole massive body down to the floor. A bright red heart shot out and stabbed at the robot with the sharp end.

Mabel leapt over the desk and fired her grappling hook at the brain casing. It connected and she began pulling at the rope with both hands. The tattoos restrained the body as best they could, pulling in the opposite direction with a dance of colours. Merak grabbed the rope too, and they heaved it towards themselves.

A hiss and crunch of metal sounded, then the case snapped off and detached from the war machine. The body collapsed in a heap, the guiding intelligence lost. The brain case skittered to a halt on the floor. Mabel stopped it by propping her boot up on the case. She felt another tingling as her tattoos returned to her arms, then pointed down at the brain. “Ha! Take that! You’re all brain and I still outsmarted you! Where’s your precious future knowledge now?”
She crossed arms in triumph, and the brain started bubbling in anger. “No, this cannot be! The work of centuries will not be stopped by a teenager!”

Merak came over and picked up the case. “After all this time Dubhe, you still can’t give up that mad dream! Look what you’ve done to yourself!”

The bubbling continued, but this time Dubhe laughed. “It’s too late anyway! Nothing can stop the launch!”

“Uh, launch? What’s he talking about Merak?” The two of them looked confused at the giggling brain. Then the building began shaking. Mabel looked up, imagining Dipper and Pacifica far above her.

“Don’t you think it’s kinda weird that there’s no one else up here? So far we’ve climbed up 2 floors and not met a single other person, or robot.”

“Maybe that previous room was the last security checkpoint or something. Let’s just count our blessings, all we have left is the flashlight.”

Mason and Pacifica had walked upwards through the tight corridor for a while, before reaching a high ladder. They’d been climbing upwards for some time now through a tight vent, getting closer to the building’s summit. There were small window slits every now and again, giving a view out of the other skyscrapers in the financial district.

“We must be getting close, can’t be much further now.”

“All these floors are laid out so weirdly, why are all the rooms so cramped?”

“I don’t know. I don’t like how sparse this all is either, it’s all just leading us forwards, there’s no other purpose to these floors. Wait, you feel that?”

He could feel a light vibration on the ladder. He looked down at Pacifica, who he could tell was feeling the same thing. The thrumming became stronger. Mason climbed quickly to reach one of the windows. It was a narrow view out, but he could see the lights of a nearby tower. The vibrations continued to grow in intensity.

A rattle shook across the ladder, and the two of them had to cling on to avoid being thrown off. “What’s going on!?”

“I don’t know, feels like the start of an earthquake! Just hold on, we’ve gotta ride this out!” The whole building was shaking now, it felt like the tower could fall apart at any second.

A sudden weight began pressing down on the two of them, nearly unbearable. Their hands were getting sore from holding so tightly to the ladder. Mason glanced out the window, then did a double-take. His mouth dropped open, but Pacifica couldn’t tell what he’d seen. The intense shaking was affecting her very bones now, she could feel them reverberating in her skull. It was a horrible feeling, worse than Mabel’s collision with the doors earlier by far. She’d never felt such a pressure on her body before, she felt like she could fall apart from the strain.

She barely heard Mason shouting down at her. “Paz! Hold on!” He clumsily reached down, and he linked a hand through her slender fingers, whilst holding with the other on the ladder. Their hand hold was uncomfortably tight, but neither wanted to let go.

Slowly, the buffeting of the ladder started to lessen. Pacifica saw that Mason was still gasping out at
the window. “Mason, what just happened? What was all that shaking?” Her body was still trembling from the after-effects.

He didn’t waver his gaze from the window. “You have to see this Paz.” He climbed up a few rungs and Pacifica raised herself up to the window. The lights from the neighbouring towers were gone, all she could make out was an inky blackness.

“What am I looking at?”

“Look closer.”

She squinted, not seeing anything at first. After a few seconds her eyes adjusted. She noticed that there were tiny pinpricks of light out there. “Wait, are those stars? What happened to all the other buildings?”

Mason looked down at her with a barely concealed excitement. “Look down.” She obliged, climbed up another rung, and spotted a bright blue light coming from below. The building simply ended below Floor 47, the rest was just gone. There were white and green sections standing out against the blue below them. Her eyes widened as she finally started to comprehend what she was staring at.

She stared agape at Mason, who nodded in return. “Pacifica, I think we just became astronauts.”

To be continued…

kshl tl

mhe tnl fflmgm wssf pfy rj pmq tjiltlnq, aut wssf tnl rtmq tqmvlf puqlnlq?
Part 2: Apogee

Chapter Summary

Previously…

Returning home from a day out in the desert, the twins and Pacifica found the Pines household surrounded by a stasis field. Dipper and Mabel’s parents had been ensnared in a trap by the sinister Polaris Institute.

Force to surrender Journal 9, they joined forces with the enigmatic Merak and learnt the truth of the Alignment due to come. Teaming up with various mystical allies, they tried to assault the Institute’s tower. While Mabel and Merak dealt with the head of the Council, Dubhe, Dipper and Pacifica made their way to the summit of the tower in pursuit of the journal.

As they reached the top, a mysterious shaking occurred, and the two of them were blasted off, into space…

The rain never stopped pouring over the city of Venetia. Where once there had been a tight grid of canals crisscrossing the city, fencing in the water, now even the famous square of San Marco was flooded up to ankle depth. The great barriers keeping the city dry failed more and more each year, making life for the inhabitants that much harder. Tourists barely came to the city anymore, too scared of the encroaching sea.

There was a small group of newcomers to the once floating city, an archaeological team from the University of New London. Heading the group were two recent graduates, from the American Federation and Aegyptus respectively. They’d come to examine a recent find that had been unearthed by a team digging supports for another flood barrier. Beneath the waters of the Adriatic, a small vault had been found. It was hypothesised that it was most likely either a tomb or part of an old palazzo. In any case, divers had been sent to recce the site, and the two lead archaeologists were now breaching the outer seal.

A hiss of static buzzed in the Aegyptian’s ear. “Hey buddy, I’ve cracked the door, we can squeeze in.” He looked over at his American companion through the silty water, his brash friend always the first to jump headlong into anything.

“I’m swimming over now.” He headed over the door of the vault and peered inside. “Moment of truth brother, let’s do this.” They both swam inside the tight entrance. To their astonishment, the water stopped halfway up a sloping hallway. Against all odds there was an air pocket down here.

“Well, would you look at that.” The American pulled his scuba mask off. There was enough ambient light down here to make out his short blonde hair. He reached down an arm and pulled up his friend.

The Aegyptian’s young face was free of any hair, and he was buzzing with the excitement of finally knowing the true nature of their find. At the end of the partially flooded hallway was a large stone door. Carved into its surface was an eye, covered with a cross. “Recognise the symbol?”
“No, not anything I can identify. Let’s see what’s behind it.” The American pushed against the stone, and it slowly shifted open. Behind the heavy door were rows of shelves. It was a library. Many of the shelves were simply blank but dotted there and about were books. There were seemingly placed randomly about, but all the books were roughly the same size.

The Aegyptian went and picked up one of the books, careful not to damage it since it was likely hundreds of years old. It was a hefty leather bound book, a golden Pine Tree gracing the cover. A single numeral was inked on the front, a number 4. “Ma hdha? What is this place?”

The American had picked up another of the books, this one was number 11, and had a pattern of golden lines crisscrossing on the cover. He flipped open to the first page and read aloud. “Property of Mason Pines.”

The Aegyptian glanced around the room. All in all, he counted roughly 40 journals, with several unique cover designs, from golden hands, to star patterns, to pentagrams, and even one pink book that had what looked like an alpaca on the front. It was a miracle that this room had stayed dry, and the books preserved for so long.

Across the room, the American spoke again. “I think we should catalogue all of these books, then make a dedicated study. Just the two of us for now.”

The Aegyptian nodded and chuckled. “Don’t want anyone else getting all the glory, eh?”

He grinned back. “You know me so well.”

Neither of them knew what secrets were hidden in the books they’d uncovered, nor what effect it would have on both their lives.

Looking back after so long, Merak often felt naïve for investing so much of his life into those books. He’d lapped up the portents of prophecy and revelled in possessing the secret knowledge. Now he just felt ashamed of those days, longing for repentance. He’d kept one journal for himself, the one with the llama cover, and resolved to tell no-one, not even Dubhe. He liked having that sense of keeping some of the knowledge to himself, it made him feel greater than his comrade. The lure of forbidden knowledge was too strong.

He never read the Llama Journal, arrogantly keeping it hidden away until the day when he’d begun to doubt the Author’s words and seen the damage their work could do. What he read broke his heart, but also opened his eyes for the first time. The hidden book spoke of the dangers of the other journals, the terrible temptations they held within.

He’d vowed that day that he wouldn’t rest until all of the journals’ work would be undone, even though he knew it would be the task of a lifetime. He’d tried to reason with the other Councillors, but they’d dismissed the new journal as a heresy. So, he had to act more directly, and committed himself to destroying everything he’d worked for.

On discovering his comrades’ survival, he started a new crusade to stop them. At first, he thought he’d have little chance of succeeding, before learning of the disappearance of Journal 9. He’d been elated at the news, without that the Council could never succeed. He would simply remain vigilant, making sure they could never complete their sinister plans.

Meanwhile, across the universe, a set of seven stars were beginning to align themselves together, the
vast cosmic harmony coming into being. It was only a matter of time now.

Mabel stared out the window at the rapidly diminishing plume of white smoke trailing out behind what had once been the top few floors of Institute. The whole thing had just shot off away from the city, flying off to god knows where. “You sent the journal into space!?”

Behind her, Merak had restrained the brain of Dubhe to the desk, making sure he couldn’t wriggle free. The bizarrely normal sounding voice of Dubhe came from the frothing case. “It’s all part of the plan, once in place the network will be ready to receive the light of our prophet. All hail the Ursus Intelligence! All hail—”

He was cut off by Merak slamming a fist into the glass. “Silence! You will explain about this network, now, so we can put an end to your schemes.”

“Or else we’ll crack that case of yours and see how long you last!” Mabel surprised herself by how aggressive she was being. She guessed that Pacifica and her brother being in an unknown situation was putting her on edge.

The brain laughed again, a horrible cackling sound that was refusing to be silent. “It can’t be stopped, no matter what you try! The other six are already in place across the globe, once the seventh is placed so as to unite them, we’ll be able to bring through the consciousness.”

“I don’t understand Merak, I thought they needed the books for some calculation?”

“Oh, we did. Calculating the exact positions around the Earth we’d need to simulate a large enough neural net. When the Alignment takes place, the Intelligence will be drawn here, into the web we’ve crafted, a slave to us! With its power, our New World will be in sight!” Another burst of laughter rang out.

Merak seemed to be considering what he’d said. ”That’s insane, you don’t understand the risks! That being is not the same as us. It doesn’t work on atoms and electrons, it’s entirely incompatible! You bring it here, and it’ll decay anything it comes in contact with. Not to mention, I doubt that a limitless cosmic mind will want to be your puppet.”

“It doesn’t matter, it’s already under way! All that’s left is initiating the stellar alignment and tracking down the focal point to ensure a clean transmission!”

“Focal point?” Mabel was reminded of the Obelisk they’d found out below the desert mine, the one that had granted her a surreal vision. Was that the focal point?

“The consciousness became aware of our reality somehow, we don’t know how, it entered via a single point in space-time.”

Merak was getting impatient. “We don’t have long until more security robots show up, we have to get out of here soon. I don’t know what you’re talking about Dubhe, but you’re still going to help us shut it down!”

Mabel placed her hands on the glass hemisphere. “Maybe I can find out, with my necklace.”

“No, we don’t know how it works. And anyway, you said you couldn’t understand their thoughts?”

“Maybe if I delve deeper, it’s the only chance we have.” She gripped onto the stone and started branching out her thoughts, feeling the minds of those around her. I pray she knows what she’s doing. Weuq fp qefp qofshboy?
There were Dubhe’s thoughts, hard to comprehend. She tried teasing more out his mind, but it felt like reaching through treacle, there was a strong resistance.

Suddenly she lost sight of the office around her, her mind closing in on Dubhe and shutting out any distractions. Where are my guards, they must arrive soon. What is this girl playing at?

He was thinking in words she could understand at last. Mabel Pines, that is her name. I feel you here, trespasser. A strange power this necklace grants you.

Mabel gasped. He knew she was reading his thoughts. Oh yes, I know Miss Pines, your mind is so troubled of late. Does your brother still care, is the Northwest girl still a rival, can Merak be trusted, what if your parents ever found out the truth... on and on. So much conflict girl.

No, she wasn’t going to let this creep get to her. She redoubled her efforts, attempting to break through to the hidden thoughts about the journals. Wait, you have seen it. Ursus. You have touched the mind we long to reach out to!

She felt a stabbing feeling, similar to the intense pain she’d felt from that booming voice in her Obelisk vision. She started seeing images, reaching beneath the crust of Dubhe’s mind. Lots of flashes of journals, most focused on those with the golden star covers. There was an image of bright lights above an operating table. She could tell that this was the last moment before the operation to remove Dubhe’s brain and place it in an artificial body. Enough! These are my thoughts, you will not intrude here!

Mabel thought of the words she wanted to say. “Oh yeah, you big ol’ brain, what are you gonna do about it?” This.

She felt like her whole body was flipped over, and felt his mind exploring hers. He’d reversed the effect of the necklace, he was invading her thoughts now. They both saw the same image, the unending plain of beings in the parallel dimension. Yes.

She screamed out at him. “No! Get out!” You child, you are the focal point, the keystone. She saw the last thing she’d thought of before her vision had ended, the birthmark on Dipper’s forehead glowing brightly. A sudden realisation hit her. Why had the Ursus begun coming into our dimension now? Because she’d reached out to it, let it know there were other minds elsewhere. Why was the Alignment taking place in the Big Dipper? Because her last thought had been of those stars, the pattern embedded in her thoughts to bring her home. That same pattern would bring the Intelligence here. Dipper wasn’t some ‘chosen one’, marked out by fate. It was all because of her carelessness.

Even the glimpse of her future, that was a warning. The effect of Journal 9 would steal that future away from her. Maybe the changes to time were what weakened the universe enough for the dimensions to seep through all along?!

She had had enough, and pushed out with her mind, banishing Dubhe away. She fell back, but thick arms caught her. Merak propped her back up. “What happened?”

She whispered a shaken sentence. “This is all my fault, everything.”

He glanced at his watch. “Time’s up. You’d better get out of here Pines, I’m leaving.” He fiddled with his wrist device, prepping a blast away.

Mabel panicked. “No, you can’t leave, you have to help me fix this!” He pushed her roughly back.

“Out of the question, make your way back to the lobby as was planned.” He was eager to get away from this place.
Dubhe laughed again from the desk. “Why bother, soon there’ll be nowhere you can run from Ursus!”

Merak backed towards the rear window, finding a clear space for his escape. Mabel was idling, unsure of what to do. Dubhe couldn’t tell her anything more, and she had no idea how to stop the Alignment. The far doors burst open, and a column of robots filed into the office.

It was now or never. She bolted towards Merak, hoping she was making the right choice. She saw his eyes widen in shock, but it was too late for him to stop.

A blinding white overcame Mabel’s vision, and a searing heat swept across her body. Every region of her body felt stretched apart, the atoms themselves tearing themselves up in the blast. The explosion only lasted an instant but felt to Mabel like it dragged on for hours. She screamed as her body tore to pieces in the intense blast that pierced time and space.

The two of them griped the ladder for several minutes, glad to be free of the crushing g-forces of the ship’s lift-off procedure. Neither of them dared continue climbing upwards for fear of falling, as the room was still thrumming due to the engines.

Eventually the room briefly shook again as it had on take-off, then came to abrupt halt. Pacifica felt her grip slipping, and she let go of the ladder. She felt her stomach drop and expected to plummet down. Instead, she found herself hovering next to the ladder. “What the?” She tried to float back over to the ladder but ended up spinning around above Mason. “Woah, woah, this doesn’t feel right.”

“We must be weightless now, the momentum of our journey must have been creating an artificial gravity field!” He watched her drift past his face. She tried to reach out again, but that just sent her spinning off, her legs flailing about and tumbling over her head. He couldn’t help but chuckle at the image.

She just shot an inverted glare at him. “Mason, help me down, this isn’t funny! And keep your eyes off the skirt.” He blushed, as he averted his eyes from her upside down form. “I’m just glad I haven’t eaten anything since that burger yesterday, otherwise I’d be hurling for sure right now.”

Mason’s stomach rumbled at the mention of food, they’d all been too stressed and pre-occupied to eat much in the last 24 hours. Bright strands of yellow fibre started to block his view of Pacifica. Her hair now unburdened by the Earth’s pull was floating wildly around. “Let me help you with that.”

The two of them gathered up her hair and pooled it together. Pacifica pulled out a pink hair tie and wrapped it all up into a large bun. She almost always wore her hair long, and the new look exposed more of her face than usual. Mason blushed at that thought. Pacifica noticed his mild embarrassment. “What? Have I got something on my face?”

“No, it’s just… I like it when your hair isn’t covering so much of it.” She blushed too now.

Mason swallowed. “Come on, we still have to find the journal, it’s probably at the pinnacle of the tower… ship. Plus, I think we must have docked with something in orbit, that last shake was us connecting with something.” He kicked off from the wall, and his gangly body glided up beside her.

Now he was the one trying to stay upright, though Pacifica seemed to have gotten the hang of it now her hair was out of the way. It reminded him of when he and Mabel had nearly been pulled into space in his VR simulation but felt much more realistic and uncomfortable. Pacifica grabbed his shoulders and turned him back in line with the ladder. “This isn’t too hard, you just gotta stay the
right way up. Guess I should thank my parents for making me train for all those swimming competitions, never thought I’d be applying the same skills in space though.”

“I suppose you learn a lot when you have your own private pool.” He smiled at her and the two of them began floating upwards towards the top of the ladder.

“I guess these cultists aren’t messing around, building spaceships and robots and crazy holograms.” There was a mild hysterical tone to her voice, like she couldn’t quite believe where they were. Mason reached out a hand, which calmed her.

“I’ve got you. I’m sure the great and mighty Pacifica Elise Northwest can handle a few crazy old brains in jars”

She gave him a quick peck on the cheek and squeezed his hand in thanks as they drifted ever upwards. At last they reached the summit of the long ladder. Mason turned the wheel of a hatch and they entered into an airlock. “A good thing this ship has air, otherwise we’d have been in a lot of trouble.”

Pacifica shot him an angry look. “Really? Thanks for reminding me that we could be suffocating to death right now! Really calming Pines!”

“Alright, take it easy Paz. Let’s just hope wherever we’ve ended up isn’t occupied.” She closed the hatch behind them, and the opposite door opened with a hiss of air. They floated through into a bright rounded corridor.

Mason spied a viewing window and went to have a look. To his left he could see the ship they’d travelled in, attached by the nose cone to a slowly spinning space station. It was a series of slender modules attached to a central frame, not unlike the ISS. “The amount of funding that must have gone into this place! And why?”

Pacifica’s attention was drawn to the opposite side of the cylinder, as she heard a suction sound from the ship. A wide glass pneumatic tube had extended out and connected to the ship. Passing through the clear glass was Journal 9. “Mason, look!” She pulled him over and the two of them watched the book slide out of sight further into the bowels of the station. They glided across the space to follow the book’s passage. Neither of them noticed as they passed through a discreet laser beam crossing the hallway.

Across the station in the experiment chamber, Brother Mizar was alerted to intruders aboard Polaris II. They must have been stowaways coming with the journal. “Nyet!” Them being here could mess up the whole plan. He looked over at the sealed room that the experiment would take place in, the frame was laid out ready for the transfer procedure. The Calculations were complete now, and the whole thing depended on this next step. He had to go through with it now, before any interruptions. He flew over to the control desk and began firing the station’s retros to angle it into the correct orientation. The whole station would need to be pointed right at the correct constellation.

Once that was under way, he headed off to get some equipment. He needed to be prepared for his unwelcome guests.

Mabel fell hard onto a pile of coarse sand. For a moment she felt one with the sand, a jumble of tiny parts coalescing together. Then she was whole again. She reached out to feel her arms and legs, making sure she was all still there. She’d felt like she’d been ripped apart and jammed back together.
She felt the sand between her fingers and scrunched her hand into a fist. She had to make sure this was all solid and real.

She shook her head and tried to focus on her new surroundings. She was clearly no longer in Dubhe’s office in the Polaris Institute. She was outside now, and the sky above was covered in dark clouds tinged with a sickly light. All around her was sand. She panned around seeing nothing but endless dunes stretching away, though it was hard to tell how far she could see due to how unnaturally dark it was.

Shakily, she got to her feet. A distant rumble of thunder rolled over the hills, but she saw no flash of lighting. A sudden drop in her stomach made her double over. She took some deep breaths to avoid being sick, then tried to compose herself. First things first, try and figure out where she was. Despite being in what looked like a desert, it was very cold here. She rubbed her hands on her arms.

She noticed her tattoos, which just made her feel worse. They were a reminder of a happier time, when she’d been free to express herself however she liked, not a care in the world. Back before she’d started lying to Dipper.

A rustling from beside her caught her attention. Merak was lying in the sand, trying to stand up. She ran over and helped him up.

“Mabel? Mabel! Kayfa haluki?” He groggily shook his head “Uh, I mean, how are you? The transfer was very rough.”

“Is it always like that!? It felt like I was turned into soup then frozen back together!”

“It takes a lot to get used to, the process is hardly simple and easy. You jumping into the field probably didn’t help either. You should have stayed back there.”

“I couldn’t, not after what I’d learnt from that brain. There’s stuff we need to talk about. But first, where even are we?” She gestured at the unending sand surrounding them.

“My home, this is Aegyptus.”

“Like, Egypt?”

“Same place, different name. Now come, the Oasis is just over those dunes, we need to get there before nightfall.”

Mabel looked up at the ominous clouds. “This is how bright it is during the day!?” He shrugged and started trudging through the sand. Mabel had no choice but to follow him. They crested the nearest dune, then Merak slid effortlessly down the far side. It was hard to get a grip on the loose sand, but she managed to follow him without falling over.

Another far off sound of thunder could be heard in the distance. “Why does this place feel so barren, so… dead.”

“It’s an effect of the Alignment, the world is slowly decaying.”

“But you said that it would just destroy the world? This place sucks, but it’s still here.”

“It’s because the past is in flux. Ever since the Council went back in time, my world has begun to decay, the slow impact of events in the past reaching us. Trust me, once they complete their plans back then, this future will cease to be as well.”
Mabel didn’t understand the full nature of time travel, but she took his word for it and continued the trek. It was hard going, since every step led to the sand slipping under her feet. She inwardly chuckled, imagining Pacifica trying to cross this desert in her high heels. She’d have hated all this sand too.

She wondered where she and Dipper were right now. In space? She supposed that, since she was in the future, relatively speaking they must be long dead. She shuddered, not liking that thought much.

They crested another dune and at last the oasis was laid out before them. A thin strip of land separated two large bodies of water. Merak waved a hand out. “Welcome to Siwa, albayt alsaeid. Or what’s left of it at least.”

They slid down towards the town, which was made up of mostly of shabby mud brick buildings. A few futuristic touches stood out to Mabel however, such as most of the buildings’ rooves being covered in solar panels. People milled about in the streets, but they had grim looks plastered on their faces. They passed a rusted out old car and came to one of the small buildings by the northern edge of the town. Merak brushed aside a curtain and pulled Mabel inside.

There was little decoration in the house, just a large table taking up most of the room, adorned with complex scientific parts and equipment. Merak pulled over a wooden chair and sat down. “Well, you said we need to talk. Let’s talk.”

Mabel looked at the empty room. There was a thick layer of dust over everything. “You live here?”

“I don’t spend much time here, if that’s what you mean.” He crossed his arms, a disapproving look flashing on his face. Mabel sat beside him cross-legged on the sandy floor.

“I guess, I’ll start with the Obelisk.” Mabel told Merak everything, about the pillar of rock beneath the mine, her vision of the Ursus’ world. She told him of the last image of Dipper, how that was the source of the Alignment’s origins. About how the only reason any of this was happening was because of her and the necklace. “And I think that the reason the Alignment’s happening now is because of the journal, because of me and Dipper using it to ‘cheat’ fate. We changed the future, and it came back to bite us.”

Merak pondered all she’d said. “All of what you say sounds plausible. Perhaps you were the cause of this whole event. Or perhaps there were still cracks in the skin of the universe from that ‘Weirmdageddon event’ a few years prior. But that does not matter now, you shouldn’t blame yourself. I caused this as well, my and Dubhe’s naïve dream. What matters now is what we do about it.”

“Do? What can we do? The Council has all the journals, Dipper and Pacifica are lost in space, my parents are frozen, and we can’t stop the Alignment or the Ursus from coming through.” She dejectedly stared down at the sand. “Guess this is what losing everything feels like.”

Merak reached out a hesitant arm but stopped before placing it on her shoulder. “Look, Mabel. We might be all that’s left who know about the Alignment, and I will not stop until the last breath leaves my body to ensure it does not come to pass.”

“If we’re in the future now, and they need me to ‘focus’ the Alignment or whatever, then aren’t we safe? I’m out of their reach.”

Merak sadly shook his head. “I doubt it, time and space have no meaning to that Intelligence, whenever you are in the continuum it will be able to come through.”
“Figures. Can’t catch a break.” She slumped head into her hands. “You got any bright ideas, future boy?”

He grunted and raised a single shoulder in a shrug. Mabel slumped deeper. Merak passed her a ceramic jug from the corner of the room. “Here, you haven’t had anything to drink since we left your home.”

She accepted the jug and drank. The water was bitter, barely refreshing her at all, but she was glad of the gesture at least. Passing the jug back, she got to her feet. “Sitting around here’s not going to get anything done. There’s got to be something we can do!”

He was forlornly staring off into space. “Ana asaf, I am truly sorry Mabel.”

She turned around and left the room.

Standing by the oasis, Mabel was idly skipping stones on the surface. She’d tried more of the water, but it had that same bitter taste. She guessed it was because this place was decaying slowly. She looked upwards, taking in the dead sky above her. A dying world that she’d inadvertently created.

She had no journals to guide her, no magical weapons or defences. All she had now was her grappling hook. It was a reminder of her and Dipper’s first adventure together. She hadn’t trusted in him that day, went into danger blindly. But he’d still come to her aid, saved her, and the two of them had never been more united than that summer.

Mabel looked down at the stone necklace, the mysterious object that was responsible for so much upheaval in her life. She decided in that instant that she would tell Dipper everything when next she saw him, then she’d get rid of the damn thing. She’d had enough of lying. But for now, it might be of use. She just didn’t know how.

She laid back in the sand, staring up at the poisoned clouds. Who knew how far away in time she was from home now, Merak had been pretty vague. It could be a hundred years, a thousand years, even bleventy-million years for all she knew. She wondered what Gravity Falls would be like in this distant future, but that just made her think of Dipper again, so she tried to think of something else instead. She closed her eyes, trying to think of something, anything, that could help save the world.

“Mabel, are you awake?” She opened her eyes and looked up at the figure who’d disturbed her. Merak had come over to her, brandishing the Llama Journal in one hand.

“What is it?” He had a strangely exaggerated grin on his face. She’d never seen him try to look happy before, and it made her feel uneasy.

“Look at this.” He opened the book and showed her a page. She was confronted with a triangle with a circle inside. For a moment she had flashbacks of horrible jeering laughter and terrifyingly grotesque imagery. Then she realised that because she was lying down the page was upside down. She turned over, now seeing that it wasn’t a sketch of the dream demon, but instead one of Ford’s old portal beneath the Mystery Shack.

“The portal? How can that help?”

Merak started reading from the page. “Since the Ursus will be travelling through a similar rift in space-time, if we can build a replica of your Great-Uncle’s portal, we can siphon the Intelligence’s energy when it emerges, draw it to us instead of the Council’s network. Then I know a method to deal with it.”
“What, and you just happened to remember this now? Why didn’t you mention this before?” She probed into his mind, trying to gain a sense of his thoughts. *This is the only way, she must see that. I only pray she’ll forgive me.*

His eyes shifted briefly. “This is supposed to be a last resort measure. And furthermore, this book lacks the instructions on building the portal itself. If we had the first three journals then I am certain I could replicate it with minimal effort.” *She’s studying me, reading me like one of those damned journals.* “Well, what do you think?”

She didn’t know what to make of this plan, there was definitely something fishy about it springing out of nowhere. But like Merak’s thoughts said: This was the only way to save the world. “Alright then, what do you need me to do?”

He clapped the air. “Yes, shukran! What we must do is simple. All we have to do is return to your time, then simply use the journals there.”

“Um, small problem, we don’t have them.”

“Afwan? What do you mean ‘you don’t have them’?”

“Grunkle Ford threw them into the Bottomless Pit! It’s like this wormhole thingy, it was a way to get rid of them without destroying them forever. He and Dipper are both paranoid about that kinda thing I suppose.” Merak stroked his chin, deep in thought.

“Then there’s only one place I know of where we can retrieve the books. Do you trust me Mabel?” She was hesitant to respond, he’d kept a lot of information from her and Dipper at first, and now he was proposing some mad new plan. But, she had no choice, so nodded. “Good. Take my hand. We’re going to be using the time blast again.”

She took a deep breath before clutching his hand. With the other, he adjusted the device on his wrist. “In for a penny, I guess.” In her head she repeated her mantra, “I am Mabel Pines”, wanting this jump to feel less destructive to her being.

A beeping countdown signalled they were about to jump, and Mabel closed her eyes. Seconds later, she felt the intense feeling of her body splitting apart, her limbs stretching and bending beyond their normal breaking points. She felt like jelly being swept away in a river.

The torture ended much faster this time, and Mabel fell onto a gleaming silver floor. She got up quickly, but something felt wrong. There was less weight on her shoulders, her step felt lighter than usual. Merak was besides her, and they were together in a room of shining white plastic and metal. “This is where Ford’s journals are? What is this place then?”

Merak had a wistful look as he panned around the room. “Mabel Pines, welcome to Polaris Station. Welcome to where this whole folly began.”

Mason and Pacifica held onto the wall as the station began turning. They could still see the journal moving alongside them. “Come on, we can’t stop, we have to push forwards.” He kicked against the wall, suddenly worried that he might end up puncturing the hull and getting them sucked out into space.

A round glass door slid smoothly open as they approached, and they found themselves in a room with a large console up against the right wall. It looked incredibly complex, dozens of switches, dials, and monitors covering its surface. The back of the room had another glass door, and there was a conference table set up in the room’s centre.
Mason drifted over to examine the busy console. “Looks like this controls the station. Better not touch that, might open the airlock or vent the air or something.”

Pacifica floated over to the other door, this one was rectangular. Inside was a tall metal frame, laid out in a T shape. There were two red buttons next to the door, labelled release and engage. She pressed the former button and the door slid into the floor. She went over to the frame, trying to figure out its purpose. Mason was still over by the console, so she called out to him. “Hey, what do you think this is?”

He glanced over and shrugged. “No clue, maybe it’s for strapping in during space turbulence?” His gaze was drawn upwards as he saw something moving above him. It was Journal 9, finishing its journey along the glass tube that hugged the ceiling. His eyes travelled, following the book, watching as it slid through the wall above them into the adjoining annex Pacifica was hovering in. It dead-ended directly above the frame. He was suddenly very anxious about that frame.

Before he had a chance to examine it himself, a sharp pain flared up in his back as he was struck from behind by a heavy metal object. He drifted forwards in agony, and Pacifica whirled around to see his attacker. It was a large man in a white boiler suit, his face and chin covered in a thick greying beard. Mizar had returned to the control room, carrying a hefty wrench. Mason tried to spin away, but he was in too much pain to move fast enough. Another blow from Mizar in his stomach winded him.

“Mason!” Pacifica kicked off the frame and pirouetted in the air, a swimming move she’d learnt for quickly changing direction in the water. This time she used it to aim her legs at Mizar. The momentum from her kick gave her a lot of force, and she collided heavily with the Russian. Her high-heeled boots made a strong thrust against him. Unfortunately, she didn’t know that this man wasn’t actually a man, and she felt his metal frame go rigid. She’d been expecting him to fly backwards, but his weight was such that he barely shifted. The wrench at least went off across the room.

She tried to pull Mason out of the way of Mizar, but the Russian kicked out at his still prone body. He was hurled into Pacifica, which sent her flying back into the annex. Her back hit the metal frame, and she tried to straighten herself to get back out into the control room.

Right then a pair of heavy clamps fell upon her wrists. She stared at them in terror, suddenly feeling very claustrophobic. A metal bar swung around her legs, further trapping her. Mason heard the sound of the metal clicking into place and spun around. He feebly floated over to try and help, when the door sealed shut. He pressed a fist on the glass. “Pacifica! I’ll get you out of there, don’t panic!”

“Mason, what’s going on!?” She looked up, seeing Journal 9 directly above her. Her mouth dropped open when she saw that the lines on the cover were glowing, bright gold light beginning to fill the small room.

On the other side of the door she heard a deep voice shout out in shock. “Net, vremeni net! Eksperiment! She couldn’t understand his language and watched him float over the control console. Mason could do nothing against him, still too weak from his blows. Mizar examined the dials, which were all now flaring up. “Eto ne mozhet byt’ ostanovleno! Ona budet perevedena!” His tone was one of sheer panic.

“What’s he saying Mason?” Her fear levels were rising, and a deep humming sound and vibration began radiating through the frame.

Mason pounded on the glass now, helpless to stop whatever was happening. He was terrified for her. “Pacifica! Paz!” His hits did nothing, the door didn’t budge.
She started crying now, the light from the journal was overwhelming her. “Mason, I love you!”

“No! PACIFICA!” The golden light overcame everything inside the annex, he couldn’t make out her face on the other side anymore. The humming was overcoming his shouts now, and he continued to pound on the door. He rested his head against it, angry at himself for being too weak to save her.

The humming started to recede, and the light began to dim behind the glass. Mizar was still in shock, over by the controls. Mason fell as the door finally opened. He looked up, seeing the metal frame was now empty. He frantically looked around for some sign that Pacifica was ok. All he saw was a small flash of pink at the bottom of the frame. He reached down and picked it up. It was Pacifica’s hair tie. He opened his mouth, but no words came out. Tears started blurring his vision and floating off of his face rather than falling.

Pacifica was gone.

Hanging alone in the emptiness of space was Polaris Station, endlessly turning in the black abyss. And there were two people onboard who weren’t supposed to be there. Bounding down one the narrow tubes crisscrossing the outer ring of the station was Mabel, who was still not quite used to the artificial gravity. “This is so weird, my jumps have, like, double strength here.”

Merak was trailing behind her, lost in thought. Mabel continued bouncing forwards, giddy with the fun of it. She’d been told that this was a space station set up by the Council to research ways to travel through time. They’d traced the Alignment back to the 21st century, so this was their only chance to attempt their calculations and bring through the Intelligence. According to Merak, right this second there was a younger version of him sabotaging the blast core, setting it to wipe out the whole of Polaris. He wouldn’t know till later that they’d just been shunted back to the wrong time period. A hand reached out to her from behind, and she halted her jumping.

“Mabel, look.” Merak pointed out two technicians heading their way, dressed in strange blue and white overalls. They ducked into the side of the corridor, letting them pass without being spotted.

“Not far now, we must be vigilant.”

“It’s crazy to think we’re in space! And so far away from Earth! And in the Future!”

Merak gave a short laugh. “Ha, this is the past for me, years ago.”

“What did you do between now and… now?”

“I studied the creatures that came through from the other side, less barbarically than Alkaid’s methods mind. I should never had stood by and watched her do that in the name of ‘science’.”

“What did she do?”

“She tortured them, anything that arrived in our dimension would be forced to suffer at her hands. Her work was sloppy and violent. The poor creatures probably weren’t even connected to the Ursus at that point, just mindless animals.”

Mabel shuddered at the thought of the Institute being so heartless. But then, she supposed, they didn’t have hearts anymore. They were so messed up. Then she remembered that Merak was once a part of this group. She used her necklace briefly, hoping to see an echo in the hallway.

In front of her a pale ghost began forming, a trace from Merak’s previous time on the station. He looked a lot younger and less rugged, and compared to the present version he was clean shaven. The ghost looked troubled, and his outline was very clear and bright. It must have been the trace of him
going to destroy the station, the vestige felt very recent. She watched his ghost walk down the hallway, then refocused on his older self.

“So, you used your Llama Journal to see if the Council was really wrong? Did you find out much?”

“Just confirmed a lot of theories. There’s not much to discuss at this point, all of it’s academic if we don’t get the Hand Journals.”

He led her down another winding connector tube, which circled down to a lower point on the colossal station. At the end of this corridor they came to a circular metal door. A sign had been painted on the glass, a red eye covered by a cross. Mabel gasped. “The Blind Eye! I’ve seen this symbol before.”

“Ah, you recognise it. It is the symbol of forbidden knowledge, those entries in the journals that must never be shared with the outside world.”

He pressed his hand to a glass plate besides the door which scanned it. The door split open into four sections. “It’s just like where I found Journal 9, same kind of door and everything.”

The two of them stepped into the room beyond. It was a small library, with two rows of shelves. A table at the far end held more books. Mabel’s eyes drifted over the spines of the books. These were Dipper’s future journals. She picked out a blue book from one of the shelves. An almost hysterical laugh came from her lips when she saw it was Dipper’s familiar Journal 4. It was weathered and ragged, some of the pages clearly torn. She rubbed a hand on the cover, feeling a connection to her distant brother. She’d given him this book at the end of their first summer in Gravity Falls, so long ago, a gift to make up for her mistakes. “Mabel, over here.”

She put the book back on the shelf and walked round to where Merak was. He was collecting a few of the books. These ones were red, and she knew them well. He passed her one of them, and she turned it over to look at the cover. Journal 3, the one that had started it all. She placed her palm on the handprint, not matching up with the six-fingered one on the cover. “This is it.”

Merak had the other two journals and was placing them in a shoulder bag. She passed him the third journal. “Good, now we have everything we need.” He glanced at his watch. “We should have a few more minutes before the station’s full blast, I’ll set up our departure vector.”

While he was fiddling with the time jumper on his wrist, Mabel noticed the table at the back of the room. It was attached to a slot on the wall, and held seven books, which were all splayed opened. They were the seven books containing the prophecy. She saw the matching lines passing from book to book, making the shape of the Big Dipper. One in the bottom corner stood out to her, a familiar reverse L-shape. She closed it to examine the cover. It was Journal 9. Her eyes widened in a sudden realisation. She called back over to Merak. “Hey, you never found out how Journal 9 went missing, right?”

“Hmm? Oh, no, that was just a fortuitous coincidence.”

“I don’t think it’s a coincidence Merak.” She showed the book to him, and he slapped his forehead.

“Of course! By the gods, time travel can mess with your head.”

“You’re telling me, I should tell you about my pet pig one time. So what do we do with it?”

Merak pulled something out of his coat. “Here, put this on.” He clamped it onto her wrist. It was another time blast device. “We should split up. I’ll take the three journals back to your time and set up a portal. You go back and hide the journal somewhere you’ll find it later. That will complete the
causality loop.”

Mabel nodded. “Ok, I know exactly where to hide it, the cemetery up on the hill.”

“Good, then we’ll rendezvous back in the present and trap the Ursus into your mind.”

Mabel wasn’t sure she’d heard him correctly. “Wait, into my mind, what do you mean?”

Merak immediately flashed a look of regret, he hadn’t meant to say that. “It’s… it’s the only way Mabel.”

“Tell me!”

He sighed, clearly not wanting to explain this. “There’s no time, please, I’ll explain later. “She won’t accept this, I shouldn’t have misspoken.”

“No, you tell me right now, or I’ll dive so deep into your mind that you won’t even remember your own name when I’m done!” Her sheer aggression surprised even herself.

She clearly wasn’t going to be fobbed off with some excuse. His shoulders sagged. “Alright. I’ll tell you. Once we draw the Intelligence through our portal, we’ll need a receptacle to house it, a mind for it to dwell in. I’m sorry, but with your necklace, you are the obvious choice.”

“And what will happen to my mind?” Mabel asked quietly.

“It will be… overwritten.” The colour drained from Mabel’s face. She’d nearly experience that very thing with Dipper’s mind overtaking her own. To imagine the vast Intelligence doing the same was terrifying.

“No! I won’t be your puppet! You absorb the Ursus if it’s so important!”

“Out of the question, yours is the only mind it will respond to, you’ve already made contact. I’m sorry, truly I am. But your mind is the only one that can ensnare the Intelligence. Once in your body, it’ll be trapped, unable to exert its will. It’s you or the universe. I’ll come with you if I have to, if letting you out of my sight is a risk.”

Tears started welling up in her eyes. She hadn’t come this far only to sacrifice herself at the last moment. “I won’t do it!” Merak started walking menacingly towards her and she backed away. At that moment the room suddenly went dark. Both of them halted. Then the room started flashing red, and a wailing alarm rang out.

“The blast has been set. We have to leave together, now!” He reached out a hand, desperation written all over his face, illuminated by flashes of red. She backed into the table but lost her balance. The table carrying the six star cover journals receded into the wall, ferrying them to the Council. She knew that they would be the only ones that made it back in time, the rest of Dipper’s library would be vaporised in the blast. She was briefly saddened by the thought of all that work going to waste but had no time for pondering on it.

The sound of pounding on the door let her know that security knew they were in here. Merak looked at her again, imploring her to stay. “Please, min fadlik! For all I’ve worked for! For your brother and friends!”

She took one last stone-faced look at the man. “Sorry Merak. No deal.” She slammed a hand down on the device on her wrist. “I’m never coming back!”
Merak reached forwards, a frantic look in his eyes. “No, wait!” Then he was gone, consumed in another blinding flash. Mabel didn’t even feel a thing this time.

A few minutes later, Polaris Station was gone, blasted backwards in time, leaving no trace it was ever there.

A horse and covered wagon, laden with supplies, was making the long journey across country to the western coast. Months of travel had brought it nearly within sight of the Pacific, and the wagon’s driver longed to deliver his cargo. The hour was late, and the sun had dipped below the horizon. The wagon trundled down a quiet tree-lined road. He noticed his horse had started acting unusual, becoming skittish and slowing down. The old man reached down to stroke the horse’s neck. “There there Clementine, aint nothing to worry about here.”

The road was suddenly illuminated by a great flash of light straight ahead of him. He covered his face, and his horse panicked and struggled against its harness. With staring eyes, he saw the light recede. Standing in the once empty road was a girl, dressed in dark clothing.

“Witch! Witch!” The man jumped off the wagon and sprinted into the trees, terrified of this horrifying apparition.

Mabel watched him run off. “Pfft, I wish I was a witch, being able to do magic would be so cool.”

The man’s frightful departure had proved useful, as she’d arrived some distance from her goal. The horse had calmed down after a while, she had a knack for dealing with animals. She’d ridden on the wagon up the hill and arrived at the Mountain View Cemetery. Making her way to the centre of the complex, she saw that the chapel was still under construction. If she was right, that must put her at some point in 1862 or 63. As good a time as any to plant the journal. The pool in front of the chapel was empty, the water had yet to be filled in.

She considered for a moment how she was going to set up the vault and complex lock. Then she remembered the one thing besides her grappling hook that she still had. She took out the paintbrush and set to work.

Its magic made creating the advanced machinery trivial. She set up the four inter-locking statues and bridges, then painted the crest in the middle of the pool, remembering to add the Blind Eye symbol. Once that was done, she opened the vault. It was the perfect shape to accept Journal 9. She gently placed it in, then the vault sealed up and she watched it sink to the base of the pool. Breaking the silence, she spoke. “Unsee you later.”

She sighed. It was done, ready to be found again in a hundred and fifty years, by herself.

She now had a choice, two options. Option one, return to Merak, give herself up and lose her mind. Option two, abandon everyone, run away and hide for the rest of her life, screw the fate of the universe.

Neither option was very attractive, but she didn’t want to die. There was so much in life she still wanted experience, growing up alongside Dipper, finding someone to fall in love with, spending more summers in Gravity Falls. Was this a punishment for all her lying, the universe making her choose?

She had a place in mind, somewhere she could probably be safe. She set the dial on her wrist to take her there but paused before activating the blast. She couldn’t help but think of Dipper and Pacifica,
across time and space.

She reached down to her necklace. If it could reach across space, why not time? Extending her mind, she searched for her brother, then her best friend, sending out one last message to them, hoping that they would forgive her.

Then she activated the device and blasted herself away from everything.

To be continued…

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Part 3: Alignment

Chapter Summary

Previously…

Probing into the mind of Dubhe, Mabel realised several shocking truths about her role in the Alignment. Fleeing with Merak to his home in Siwa, they came up with a new plan to construct a portal to entrap the Ursus Intelligence.

Meanwhile, arriving at a space station built by the Institute, Mason and Pacifica traced Journal 9 to a strange metal frame. Attacked by Brother Mizar of the Council, Pacifica was accidentally strapped into the frame. As the station’s full function became apparent, Pacifica was caught in a blast of energy, ripped to shreds before Mason’s eyes.

As they recovered Ford’s journals to find instructions on building the portal, Merak let slip that Mabel would be forced to lose her mind in the process of defeating the Ursus. Fearing this outcome, she fled backwards in time, seeking a hideaway to avoid sacrificing herself, and leaving the fate of the world behind…

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

First there was nothing, no time, no space, no up, no down, no past, no future. Just a silence.

From that silence, came a single, solitary voice, echoing out into the emptiness. I am. I am. We are. One.

In that moment, the Intelligence was born. It existed on a vast cosmic scale. Its neurons were nebulae, the cells making up its body were planets. It manifested itself into millions of teeming creatures, Kochabs to extend its senses, Pherkads to spread its will. For eons it was alone, a singular mind. Everything in its dimension was a part of the same remarkable intelligence.

Eventually things in this place began to grow still once more. The Consciousness explored every tiny nook and cranny of its reality. With no stimuli, its thoughts slowed. Soon this place would be timeless and empty once again, entropy bringing everything to a halt.

Then, from out beyond anything the consciousness knew, it felt the mind of another. For all the countless billions it had existed, it was alone, unique. The Intelligence, the one and only. Now it had found out there was more. More minds to discover. Mabel Pines was the herald of a new dimension. She showed them the way through. The consciousness would bring all that lived there under its one mind, the only way it knew how to interact with the world. Plurality, individual beings, these meant nothing.

All would be one. All would be aligned.

Safely re-attached to a module that interfaced with the building’s systems, Dubhe was sat on his desk, the brain capsule secured once more. Before him a screen had descended, and five glowing
portrait shaped icons were glowing. Four had faces in them, the Council members having promptly answered the video summons. One icon was still frustratingly blank. It was Mizar up in the satellite. His role was crucial, but he’d been silent for hours now, ever since the shuttle carrying Journal 9 had docked.

“We must act now, I predict we only have a few hours before the full Alignment.” Alkaid, currently secreted at her lab in Johannesburg, was the one trusted most with matters of the other dimension, her studies on the creatures that inhabited over the years was second to none.

“I know sister, but we can do nothing until Mizar responds.”

“Perhaps we should send another shuttle?” Alioth was in Rome, overseeing the worldwide network they’d built to entrap the Ursus Intelligence.

Dubhe brushed him off. “There’s no time to mount another launch. We must trust in our brother in the heavens.”

The rest of the Council stayed silent. Megrez was in London, blocking any government interference into their plans and making sure no one investigated the take off in San Francisco. Phecda in Tokyo was gathering supplies, if anything went wrong then their survival bunker needed to be well stocked.

They’d all been worried upon seeing Dubhe’s reduced state, his role in locating the focal point was crucial. But they’d been emboldened on learning that the trespassers were gone, and furthermore that he’d identified exactly how the Intelligence would be coming through. Nobody had imagined Mabel Pines would be the key to their success.

Suddenly, their long wait was ended, as Mizar’s screen flickered to life, showing the control room aboard Polaris II. “Ah, brother, what is your situation? How did the experiment go?”

Mizar looked haggard and stressed. His thick accent had a hint of worry. “I am awaiting the next orbit to attempt a second firing of the beam, I had some… complications.”

From the side of the screen he dragged a floating body into view. It was Mason Pines. His face had a hollow look, though his eyes looked like they were holding back an unbridled rage. He didn’t speak, and Mizar pushed him to the back of the frame.

“Ah, the Author. What happened with the transfer?”

“The Northwest girl was caught in the beam, interrupted the transmission. We’ll have to try again once I am in position.”

Dubhe would have nodded if he still had a head. “Good, make the initial contact then let us know once you’re done. Alkaid predicts full synchronisation of the stars in the asterism in approximately 4 hours and 12 minutes. Over and out.” All the portraits went blank, and the screen retracted up into the roof. Only 4 hours to go before judgment was upon them.

High above the Earth, the Institute’s space station was soaring back into position. Mizar adjusted the controls, satisfied that everything would go off without a hitch this time. Mason Pines was safely tucked away in a service cupboard, his meddling stopped for good. He floated away from the console, his programmes set. He had some time before they were back in the right position to aim at the constellation.

He idled for a moment. He had a burning desire that couldn’t be sated, but he knew he should stick to protocol. However, his curiosity got the better of him. He set the station back to auto-pilot, then
headed for the service cupboard. He was going to speak to the Author. He spoke out loud at the
door. “Open.” The door slid away, he’d made sure to programme it with a voice lock to keep it
secure. The room was a tight space, only a few feet across. Enough room to house some backup
breathing equipment and repair kits. And one unruly teenager.

Mason glanced up at him, then his eyes darted away. He didn’t want to acknowledge this monster.
He was huddled up in the corner, his arms wrapped around his body and his legs tucked in.

Mizar made an approach and bowed his head. “It is an honour to bask in the presence of the great
author.”

“Save it for your brainwashed drones. You don’t deserve my honour.”

“I simply come to speak with you. To learn of your knowledge. You changed my life.” He tried to
convey the awe he was feeling.

 Quietly, from the corner, the boy responded. “Bring her back.”

“Izvini?” He barked out a confused word in Russian, briefly forgetting himself. “I’m sorry?”

“Bring. Her. Back!” His voice was louder this time, demanding this from him. He realised he meant
the Northwest girl.

“She’s gone boy, never coming back. Poof, gone, bye bye.”

Mason looked at Mizar with as much contempt as he could muster, feeling very empty inside. Then,
he snapped. “You killed her, you animal! You just watched her get disintegrated, and now you
expect me to do what you ask!? To ‘enlighten you with knowledge’!? Well you can go to hell for all
I care!”

Mizar was upset by his words, for so long he’d dreamed of this meeting. He tried to explain to the
boy, get him on his side. “Look, she was caught in the transfer beam, that was supposed to interface
between the dimensions. It was meant to attract the Ursus’ consciousness here, not the other way
around. The beam likely tried to shunt her across through the Alignment. I don’t know whether she
made it or not.” A sudden look of hope appeared on Mason’s face. Maybe Pacifica was alive?

“It still doesn’t make a difference, your whole Council is evil. I’m not going to sign up and help you
destroy the world.”

“But don’t you see?! Your books opened my eyes to the truth! The Alignment is the key.”

Mason had questions that needed answering. “What even is this ‘alignment’ anyway?”

Mizar was happy to explain. “Each of the seven stars in the main part of Ursa Major will begin to
resonate, their rotations all matching each other. The cosmic phenomena will act as a gateway,
bridging our universes. It’s already started right now, as soon as this station is back reoriented at the
constellation we can target the beam, signalling the beings from that dimension. It will activate the
transfer of the Ursus, assuming that the first beam hasn’t already triggered the start of the process.”

Mason seemed to consider this for a second, before looking away. “Good luck destroying reality as
we know it then.”

He was so desperate to convince the boy, he was getting so close. “With the power of the
Intelligence, all minds can be as one, united in a common goal. Don’t you want to see that, the New
World we will create!?”
Mason let out a pitying laugh. “Was it worth it to turn yourself into a brain in a jar? What good has all this work given you? I bet your ‘brothers and sisters’ don’t even care about you. Why else would they stick you up here on your own?”

Mizar frowned. He’d had enough of this boy. He shrugged. “Fine. Rot in here while ‘the world ends’. We’ll see who’s right soon enough. Close.” He sealed Mason back into the cupboard. That hadn’t gone well. He headed back to the control room, hoping there would still be room for Mason Pines in their New World.

There was nothing, no sense of time or place. It was an empty silent nowhere. Until, in a single instant, a mind came to occupy that space. Disoriented by the lack of anything to latch onto, the new mind was lost and confused.

Eventually, a concept of individuality returned. She was a she, that much she remembered.

She felt like she had no body, there was no real concept of a form, just a general sense of existence. No sight, no sound, no feelings whatsoever. After another agonising wait, something began to define itself in the void.

Golden lines began fading into view, perhaps a dozen or so in every direction. She looked up, seeing a massive dome above. The lines resolved more clearly, they were cylindrical columns. Bars. She was in a cage.

She looked down, finally seeing and feeling her body. But it wasn’t her body anymore. It was an array of colourful feathers, a vivid blend of bright reds and blues. She stretched out her arm… wing. The polished floor of the cage showed her reflection. She recoiled at the sight of a striking gold beak taking up most of her face. She was a bird.

Furiously she attacked the bars, trying desperately to break free. They were packed too tightly together, she couldn’t slip out. Her claws (and she paused to reflect that she had claws now) weren’t strong enough to break the bars either.

Fluttering weakly on the floor of the cage, she tried to think rationally of a way out. A sudden loud sound rung out through the cage. She collapsed, hating that sound. It was all too familiar to her. The ringing of the high-pitched bell wouldn’t stop. She was trapped in this gilded cage, embodied as a beautiful little bird, and forced to endure the sound she hated most.

She brought her knees up to her chest, buried her head, and let out a whimper. “Mason? Where are you?” Silence.

Pacifica was alone.

Huddled up in the corner of his makeshift cell, Mason tried to focus on what he’d learnt from Mizar. Pacifica was possibly alive, blasted who knows where. He still remembered her look of terror just before she was engulfed in the light, how powerless he’d felt. He wondered also what had happened to Mabel and Merak. Dubhe was now just a brain, but there’d been no indication of what had happened to his sister. Had they possibly been killed too?

He shook those thoughts away, there was no point dwelling on things he couldn’t change. He looked around the cupboard. The breathing equipment looked heavy and might be useful as a blunt instrument if he could get out. That was the problem though, the small room only opened from the outside, the President’s Key was of no help even if it had been compatible with the space station’s
locks. Mizar had taken the flashlight off him, too great a risk he might try punching through the door with an oversized fist.

He had his journal at least, Mizar hadn’t known to take it from him. Journal 4, the one he and Mabel had forged together. He rubbed the cover, remembering how it had been a gift from her 5 years ago, as a way of saying sorry for all the things she’d done. How had things gotten like that again? Mabel didn’t trust him enough to tell him her secrets anymore.

He tried to focus on the pages, to find some way of saving himself, but felt lost without Mabel. She’d always be there to get him out of trouble. *Dipper.* He tried to drown out everything, study the words, find a solution-* Dipper.* He thought he could hear a faint voice from somewhere. He looked around the room but found nothing. *Dipper.* There it was again. It sounded like it was coming from inside his head, but that was impossible, surely- *Dipper!*

It was real! And it was a voice he recognised. He spoke out to the voice coming from seemingly nowhere. “M-Mabel? Is that you?!” *Dipper! You finally heard me! It’s so good to hear your voice again.* His eyes widened as Mabel spoke through him. “Ohmigosh, how are you doing that!”

No time to explain fully, let’s just say I can kinda read minds, ok? “Read minds!? Since when?!” *Dipper, do you know the meaning of ‘no time’?* He could feel her condescension clearly. *Where’s Pacifica?*

He remembered his predicament, saw the gruesome image of Pacifica’s terror. *Got it, blasted into another dimension.* “Wait, did you just read my thoughts? This is crazy Mabel, where even are you?! I’m in space right now!”

Huh, space eh? I was there a few minutes ago too. I’m in the 1800’s at the moment, it’s a loooooooooong story, trust me. You need to meet up with Merak, he’s building something that might be able to stop the Alignment.

“What about Pacifica, I have to help her! I got her into this mess, I’ll never forgive myself if she’s hurt or… or worse.” *I can handle it. Trust me bro, I’m used to dimension hopping, least I think I am. Can you find a way to get to Merak? I can mentally imprint his coordinates for you.* *Dipper* suddenly felt a rush of information, numbers and figures flashing through his brain. He nodded. “Got it, just need a way off this space station now.”

He thought of the locked door and started to despair again. *No prob bro, you’ve got Mabel on your side!* A brief memory of Mabel’s ‘assistance’ in the VR world came to mind, and he braced himself for the worst.

*Just give me a sec… and “Open!”* The last word came spewing forth from his mouth, accented in Russian. The door slid open and he laughed at his success. He didn’t even have to ask how she’d done it before she replied. *Was easy, I just pulled the memory of that Mizar guy opening the door, simples.* It seemed that Mabel’s talent for picking locks even worked remotely, he mused. Before leaving the room, Mason strapped on one of the breathing kits, just in case.

*Can you get by from here?* He looked down at the journal and flipped to an entry he’d made on the first energy blast they’d detected, out at the desert crater. “Yeah, I’ve got this.” *Good. Guess this is goodbye then.*

His brow furrowed, trying to understand what she meant. “Wait, you’re leaving? Are you with Merak?” There was a gap before she replied. *… have to go somewhere Dip, somewhere far away. I’m not coming back.* He didn’t say anything, waiting for more information. *Just know that I’ll always love you Mason, you’re the best brother anyone could have. I’m sorry I lied for so long, I*
should never have made us use Journal 9. Have a good future, do that for me.

“Mabel, I don’t understand, please stay.” His tone was gentle, he didn’t want her to leave yet, just having her voice there comforted him. *I gotta go Dip, this is hard enough already, let’s not drag it out. I’m gonna go help Paz now. I hope you can find her.*

With that, she was gone. Mason slowly drifted alone through the corridors, trying to comprehend his sister’s words.

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Across the galaxy, the seven stars of Ursa Major were beginning to pulsate in time with each other. Their spins began to match, creating the universe’s largest harmonic resonance. From beyond reality, the Ursus was preparing to breach this new realm.

It had a prisoner now, one being from this world to keep preserved. They would be a fun plaything. The rest of the creatures it sensed beyond would make for an interesting study, so many specimens to examine. The Kochabs had experimented with these lifeforms before, usually resulting in them becoming so messy and dysfunctional. No matter, with time it would come to understand their strange composition. When that was done, all would join in its mind.

Just a few hours left, before it could finally end its isolation.

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Focused intently on inputting his instructions on the control panel, Mizar had not noticed Mason entering the room. His back turned from the entrance door presented an easy target. Hefting the heavy oxygen tank was easy due to the lack of gravity, and Mason brought it down hard on the metal exosuit. There was a heavy clunk, and it seemed to do the trick, the robot was ‘out cold’ for the time being. Acting fast, he dragged the body through the station to the airlock leading to the shuttle. He dumped Mizar by the door, then returned to the control room, making sure to retrieve his height-altering flashlight from the robot’s clutches.

He pulled out Journal 4 and analysed the equipment on the far side of the room. He couldn’t bare to look at the metal frame for long, his memory of what had happened in there still stung.

He floated over to the small experiment chamber and noticed Journal 9 for the first time. He reached up and was able to slide it out of the compartment. Finally, all that work, the raid on the Institute, the ride to space, and he’d finally recovered the journal. He analysed Journal 4 and the transfer frame some more, figuring out how to alter it to his needs. First things first, he’d have to change the orientation of the space station.

Mizar awoke with a start, finding himself by the shuttle dock. The whole station was in motion, rotating once more. The boy must be trying to angle the shuttle to get a good approach for a landing. The crazy child. He opened the airlock and headed into the shuttle in pursuit. As the door behind him closed, a voice came out through an intercom. “Sorry ‘brother’ Mizar, this is your last stop.”

“Pines! Where are you!”?

“I’m in the control room onboard the station, you’re gonna sit tight in that rocket until I’m gone.”

Anger raging through his metal frame, Mizar slammed the controls by the airlock door. They were locked up tight. But the shuttle engine controls on the other hand were still functional.
Mason’s small ruse had worked to keep Mizar out of the way. It had taken him some time to retro-engineer the transfer device, but since it was based on the same ‘time blast’ tech that Merak used he could home in on the coordinates Mabel had sent him. Seems he was out somewhere in the countryside in California. His research into the desert blast crater gave him the energy output he’d need to send just himself down to the surface.

According to the readouts on the station’s control console, he’d need to be holding Journal 9 when he ‘jumped’, somehow the book acted as a lodestone for focusing the dimensional energy. Another topic to ask Merak about.

He strapped himself into the transfer frame, just waiting now for the station to be aligned with California. Suddenly, the room started to spin wildly. Feeling sick, he released himself from the frame and went over to the bank of monitors, showing camera feeds all over the station. One screen showed Mizar, who’d engaged the engines on the shuttle. Compared to the station’s gentle retros the shuttle was a raging inferno of flame. It was completely throwing off the motion, and Mason tried feebly to correct the station’s positioning.

Pushing against the shuttle however cause the station to rupture. Mason watched as the airlock tube split apart, and station and shuttle collided. The whole room shuddered. He watched on the screen as multiple shards of metal and glass flew out in every direction, causing yet more damage. Warning lights came on, and Mason watched as the shuttle crumpled in half. One particular piece of debris caught his eye, and he observed the body of Mizar flying out into the blackness of space. Good riddance.

The station was spinning even more wildly now. He’d have to engage the transfer on the fly. He headed over to the chamber and hovered a hand over the blast engage button. He glanced out a window at the Earth, his home, rotating uncontrollably below. He took one last look, hoping for the best, then slammed down hard on the button.

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**You will speak to me.**

“No, shut up!” Pacifica tried to cover her ears again as the resonating voice returned. As an extra horror, the voice was a blend of her parent’s voices, the commanding parental tones merged into one. Worse, every time it spoke, the bell would ring again, utterly breaking her spirit.

It had come to her four times now, asking over and over again for her to speak, to tell it of her world. She’d refused each time, but her head was in such pain now. The Intelligence had showed her flashes of its desires, the goal to bring all minds under its domain. Just having a separate being to interact with was a brand new experience for it. Toying with her was its way of passing the time before the main event. She was nothing more than an appetizer.

Cowering at the base of her cage, her feathers proved an ineffective shield against the voice that had come to her. It seemed to emerge from all around her, blasting out from every direction.

*Why do you resist? I simply want to know. Know more. I am. I am forming.*

The voice had started off with more fragmentary sentences, but as Pacifica had responded it had started becoming more eloquent. The language however still sounded unfamiliar in its voice, like it was not used to this foreign concept. *Please Llama. Speak to me.* For some reason it had also decided to call her ‘Llama’, and nothing else. She was starting to feel more like a parrot than anything else, repeating the same phrases over and over again.

“Let me go! I’m not going to tell you a goddamn thing!” She tried to stand tall, but almost
immediately she collapsed in pain again. **You are ours now. We are not. Not Alone.**

She was crying now. “Please, just let me leave, I can’t stand it anymore.” **Perhaps more time then. Decide soon, the Alignment comes.**

The voice left her, she could feel its presence fading away in her mind, like a passing headache. It was one she knew would return though. She tried to think of something, anything to ease her loneliness.

An image of Mason’s panicked face flashed up, from just before she’d ended up here. He looked so scared and broken. Then she remembered the last time she’d seen Mabel, grinning like a loon and waving her precious grappling hook about. It hit her then that she would never see either of them again.

An unexpected clattering diverted her attention. A small object had appeared in the air and landed on the metal floor. She clumsily walked over to it, still not used to her spindly bird legs. To her immense shock, it was the grappling hook. Just impossibly lying there.

**Woah, it’s weird being back here. Feels roomier than last time.**

A new voice was heard in the emptiness. This one was soothing to her ears. It was also familiar. “Who’s there? Is that Mabel?” Surely it couldn’t be her, across this endless void of dimensions. **Wrong sister, I’m totally here!** She looked around the cage, still seeing no one else there.

Then, out of the air, a pair of long floppy ears appeared. **Hold on, this a bit strange.** Pacifica watched as more body parts formed, a stubby nose, four long legs, a furry body. A length of brown hair flopped down one side of the head, the other half was shaved.

Once it was done, a woolly creature stood before her. It was a goddamn llama. With Mabel’s face grinning from on top of the long neck. **Woah, this is so cool, I can trot now! Ooh, so fluffy, like a living sweater! And wow, you’re a bird! Animal sisters!**

“Mabel, this isn’t some game! I’m trapped here, wherever ‘here’ is. That nasty voice’ll be back any second to hurt me.” She seemed to be treating this like a joke.

**Voice? Ohmigosh, was it all loud and brain hurty?** Pacifica nodded, and Mabel’s smile vanished, replaced with a look of concern. Then her llama eyebrows furrowed in determination. **Guess I’m gonna have to bust you out then!**

Mabel’s first thought was to run straight at the bars, her head lowered. Pacifica winced as she collided heavily with the bars. Mabel sat dazed on the floor, her long neck spinning in a circle. **Don’t wanna try that again, oof. ‘Llamas are nature’s greatest warriors’ my foot! Hey, last time I got out of here by thinking of where I was before, of Dipper. You have to tell yourself, “I am Mabel Pines”. Well, in your case, “I am Pacifica Northwest.”**

Pacifica took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and spoke what Mabel told her. “I am Pacifica Northwest.” Nothing happened. She peeked one eye open. “It didn’t work. This feels stupid Mabel, I’m supposed to free myself with ‘positive thinking’?”

**Yes! It worked for me! All this, the cage, you being a bird, it’s all from your imagination, your worst fears. You need to think of happy thoughts, that’s the key.**

She tried to think of her happiest moments. Spreading mud on her parents’ carpet, that cathartic feeling of defiance. The twin’s 13th birthday celebration, the first time she’d been with friends in such an honest context. She thought of the times Mason and Mabel would take her hiking in the
woods, looking for fairies or something. There was the time Mason had taken her to that restaurant, their first kiss in the club, lying together under the stars. Good! You can do this! I believe in-

**No. Leave now interloper.** Mabel’s gentle tone was suddenly drowned out by the Intelligence’s return. Pacifica’s concentration was shattered, and she crumpled in pain. I only need one.

No way, get lost you big space meanie! Pacifica, you have to keep trying, you’re so close. The bars are all in your head!

She tried to dredge up the memories again, but a wave of shame and guilt flooded over her. All she saw now was her parent’s disapproval, the way they’d shunned her affection for 17 years. She felt like nothing more than their puppet. Don’t give up! You’re stronger than that, I know that! Mabel’s llama was gone now, her voice was just an echo on the wind.

She thought that she could hear the Ursus speaking again, but instead of words all she heard was the insidious tinkling of the bell, commanding her to be docile once more. More memories overcame her, the horrors of Weirdmageddon, a wall of stolen faces, a forest of wooden townsfolk frozen in screams.

She let out a whimper, feeling empty inside. “I’ve always been a prisoner, my whole life. You’re better than me Mabel.” Nuh uh! You’re way better than me at mini-golf! And at clothes shopping, you have the hottest fashions ever. Plus… There was a slight pause here. I think you’re prettier than me… She’d never considered Mabel in that sense before, she was like a sister to her, not a rival for romantic attention. Then she remembered that, in a way, her relationship with Mason had caused a lot of Mabel’s insecurities, driving a wedge between the twins.

The ringing started to become louder again, and she doubted herself. “Look, I’m just a pretty object, some dumb, blonde bimbo. I’m not a good person, I’m vain and selfish!” That’s not you! You’re awesome! You’re always confident with whatever you do. You think about other people’s feelings all the time now, you’ve changed over the last few years for the best! Plus, you’re pretty smart, all those expensive schools you’ve been sent to. Sometimes you even outsmart Dipper! Somehow, through the vast distances separating them, she could tell that Mabel was winking. It almost made her laugh.

*Fight it Paz, for me, for Dipper! For crying out loud, you’re Pacifica Northwest! You don’t take that kind of back-talk from anyone, let alone some stupid space mind!* Confidence started rising in her chest. “Yeah, you’re right. I’m Pacifica Elise Northwest!” She heard the bell chiming ever louder but stood her ground. She was remembering running away from her parents after their recent argument, the thought of finding solace with Mason and Mabel. “No one’s going to tell me what to do ever again!"

She stood tall, chest puffed out. There was a fragile confidence now. One more image flashed through her mind. The pink Llama Journal. She wasn’t sure what it really meant, whether the future was set in stone or not. But she was emboldened by the idea she’d one day create that book, one to rival Mason’s.

She walked towards the bars of the cage, repeating a sentence to herself. “It’s all in my head, it’s all my head.” She closed her eyes and stepped forwards into one of the golden columns. Her foot touched solid ground.

Opening her eyes, she saw that the cage was gone. She looked down at her body. The feathers were gone now, and she was greeted with her pink jacket and dress. Her hands ran along her body, grateful to be back in her skin again.

*You did it!* Mabel appeared next to her with no fanfare. She was still as she remembered, all ‘teen
angst’ and wild smiles. She wanted to hug her, to thank her for freeing her. Before she could, she was pulled away. She reached out a hand, but Mabel seemed to know what was going on and her mouth didn’t move as her next words came out. *We’re leaving this place now, going back.*

Turning, she saw a distant doorway, a circle of spinning blue light that she was being inexorably drawn towards. But Mabel was heading in another direction, a different exit in front of her. She shouted across the expanse. “Mabel, please don’t leave me!”

*You’re almost home Paz, trust me! I’ve got my own place to go. You’ll always be my best best friend forever and ever and ever! Goodbye Pacifica… I hope you and Dipper are happy together. She saw as Mabel flew into a hole in the blackness. She could make out a lot of bright yellow beyond the hole, as well as two divided sections of shimmering blue.*

Then, everything was covered by the blue light of her exit. She felt elongated in the tunnel of light, her body flexing and snapping back. It was still less traumatic than the feeling of being ripped apart that had brought her here though.

She tried to focus on Mason, imagining every detail of his face. She hoped it would be enough to drown out the fear she was currently facing.

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Tinkering alone in the heat of the day, Merak worked to complete the portal. The instructions he had were clear, and his collection run back to Siwa had ensured he had all the parts he needed. It was now just a matter of his skill racing against the clock. He estimated no more than 3 hours before the Alignment reached its full potential.

Wiping the sweat from his tangled brow, he stared down at his work. The triangular frame was in place, and now he had to add the dimensional bridging components. He was impressed that this thing had been first designed and built in the 1980s, it was way ahead of its time. There was another concern causing him to sweat though. Without Mabel, would this even work? Would the Intelligence simply manifest out here, instead of where the Council wanted, then go on a rampage consuming everything? Who knew?

The quiet of desert plain was disturbed, a wind began to blow the sand around. Merak looked around for the source. His gaze was drawn upwards into the blue sky. A bright beam of light suddenly crashed down from above. Had it not been the middle of the day, the light would have illuminated the whole desert floor. For a panicked moment he thought that this was the Alignment itself, appearing before his eyes. As he watched though, the column of light started to fade.

Face down in the dirt was Mason Pines. He rushed over to help him up. “Mason! Are you alright?”

He coughed up a mouthful of sand, feeling his atoms returning to normal after being reconstituted. “Merak, am I glad to see you.” He got to his feet but wobbled and fell back down.

“Easy, your sister had a similar reaction to her first blast. Where did you come from?”

“He pointed back up at the sky. “The Institute have a space station in orbit. Well, *had* a space station, I kinda destroyed it. Where am I now?” He looked around, taking in the familiar Californian desert. He noticed some ramshackle buildings towards the horizon. “Wait, that’s the Hartnell Mine. Which means…” He traced the underground mine workings across the desert’s surface. “We’re right on top of the Obelisk!”

“Correct. I suspect that strange object beneath us is some kind of amplifier, though whether it’s connected to anything else I can’t say for certain. Might just be a random device, not related to the
Alignment at all. Seemed as good a place as any to build this, that little bit of extra amplification might help. Your sister would probably think it appropriate, it’s where this whole Alignment started after all.”

“Is Mabel here, with you?”

Merak frowned. “She’s… gone.” To his surprise, Mason didn’t seem shocked by this.

“She told me she was leaving. She was in my mind, can you believe that?!”

Guiltily, he looked away from the boy. “Actually, I can. I think I have a lot to tell you.”

He spent a few minutes regaling Mason with their defeat of Dubhe’s mechanical behemoth, the trips to Siwa and Polaris, and the plans for the portal. He waited for him to absorb everything before discussing Mabel’s fate.

Mason understood the basics of Merak’s plan and looked over at the new portal. It was much smaller than Ford’s original prototype, around a third of the size and lying down in the sand. He knew how dangerous building another one of these could be, but he didn’t see another way out of this. A mild thrill went through him when he saw Ford’s recovered journals, he’d never hoped to see them again.

“So, what happened after you two split up? You came here to get the portal ready, Mabel hid Journal 9, then what?”

Merak rubbed the back of his neck. This was the tricky part. He had to be honest though, lying would just waste time. “It was supposed to be part of the plan. Did Mabel tell you about her necklace?”

Mason looked confused. “Necklace? You mean that stone we picked up from the crater? It was just a bit of jewellery, inert.”

“Not for Mabel.” He told him about Mabel’s developing telepathy skills, about how she’d been practicing her mental abilities for the last few months. Mason remembered back to all the times she’d worn that necklace, now realising that she’d been spying on his thoughts all along. There had been times recently when she’d been acting so strange and tight-lipped. Now he knew why.

“So she’s gone, run off somewhere.” He sighed. “She told me she wanted me to have a good future. To leave her be.”

“That can’t happen I’m afraid. She’s integral to this whole thing. Wherever she is in time or space, she’ll anchor the Intelligence here. But if she doesn’t come here to the portal, we have no hope of trapping it in her mind.”

“But that’ll kill her! She’ll end up a vegetable, or worse!”

“I know. And I wouldn’t consider it if there were any other way.”

Mason knew this to be true. There was no other course of action they could take, not with so little time. “Can’t we find her? Try and convince her to come back.”

“I have no idea where she’s gone, you want to search all of history for her, go ahead.” He turned back to his work, attaching components to the bed of the portal.

Mason said nothing. He felt defeated in that moment. All of Merak’s toil on this portal would be for nothing without his sister. Even then, would it be worth it to lose her? He stood and stared all around
at the horizon, searching for some elusive sign, some hope. Pacifica was gone, Mabel was gone. It was just him and a desperate old man, working to stop the most powerful organisation on the planet bring about an astrological apocalypse.

“Without Journal 9 and the satellite, the transmission will be unfocused, messy. We can assume there will only be a 75% chance of success now. But we still have the Calculations at least.” Megrez finished laying out the situation to the Council. They’d all been saddened by the loss of Brother Mizar, as well as the Author’s unfortunate demise. No matter, those losses were finite, and they were on the cusp of infinity.

The four other Council members were now en route to San Francisco, aboard private jets. They all wanted to greet the Ursus together, one unified Council.

“How is the network holding up, Alioth?”

“Good, the nodes are all still positioned.” The six journals across the Earth had begun to resonate in time with the stars of Ursa Major. When the Alignment came, they’d be ready, even without the central focal point at the satellite, or the elusive Mabel Pines.

“And Phecda, the supplies?”

“All accounted for, we have anything we could need stored safely away.”

Dubhe felt content everything would go as planned. The Author was dealt with, the Northwest girl vaporised, from Merak they hadn’t heard a peep, and Mabel Pines would aid them no matter where she was.

“Good, good, Alkaid, you’ll be first to speak with the Intelligence, you have the most experience there. Megrez, are we still covered from the interference of-”

Alioth suddenly cut back into the conversation. “Brothers and Sisters, we have a complication! This is an immediate threat to our plans.” A map showing the whole Earth expanded to fill the screen. The six journal nodes were marked out with flashing red points. There was, however, a seventh point, emanating from the eastern side of California. “We just got a reading, it’s a dimensional breach of some kind. I think Journal 9 is at the site.”

Dubhe didn’t waste any time. “Mobilise all forces, get everything we have out to that site. We’re all going there, this time we’ll take no chances. They will not be able to resist the full might of the Council of Ursus.”

The screen switched off and Dubhe ordered one of his robot drones to pick up his case. One last glorious battle against Merak, then all the world would finally be at peace.

The sun was starting to dip over the horizon, it would be dark in an hour or so. Bathed in the deep orange glow, Mason was sat on a rock, he’d spent the time poring over Journals 4 and 9, searching for some clue to this whole problem. He’d even found an entry in 9 on the telepathic necklace Mabel wore. He’d never even realised it was the same artefact, Mabel’s necklace just blended into her overall look and he’d forgotten about its curious origin.

At first he’d been offended. The idea of Mabel seeing his innermost private thoughts, such as those regarding Pacifica, made him feel uneasy. It was such a breach of trust. But then he’d thought about it some more, the idle time in the desert gave him little else to ponder. Hadn’t he hidden things from Mabel that first summer in Gravity Falls? All those secret things Ford had let him in on, Bill and the
Rift, becoming his apprentice. He’d kept all of it from Mabel.

He could understand why she’d lied now. She didn’t want to lose him again, wanted to be sure he wasn’t hiding thoughts of abandoning her again. He wanted more than anything to see her again, to say that he wasn’t upset with her.

“Aha! Khallas!” Mason turned to see Merak smiling down at the portal. He hopped off the rock and went over to him. The ring surrounding the central portal aperture was glowing now. “I’ve done it, the portal is operational.”

“What happens now then? What can we do without Mabel?”

“I’m not sure, we’ll have to- wait.” The central portal began to radiate a soft blue light, the previously empty circle now filled with energy.

“What’s it doing? Is it supposed to be activated now?”

Merak was frantically fiddling with the controls. “No, I didn’t do anything. It must be the Alignment! My estimates must have been off. Oh god, this is it.”

The colour drained from Mason’s face, and the two of them stepped back from the undulating portal. A strong breeze started blowing the sand around, creating a cloud of stirred particles. Mason felt his stomach drop as he and Merak began to lift off the ground. It was just like 5 years ago, when Stan had reopened the portal. Bolts of electricity shot out from the portal’s centre. He covered his eyes, unable to do anything but hang in the air.

Then the force holding them up abruptly vanished, and they collapsed on the sand. Mason watched as the portal began to cycle down, its intensity diminishing. Before it closed completely, a figure rose up from the blue swirl of light. The figure had their back turned to them, but Mason could see a long mane of hair reaching down past the waist. The hair was blonde. Could it really be…?

Water welling up in his eyes, he got to his feet and called out. “Pacifica?!” She turned, and the two of them spent a long moment staring into each other’s eyes. Then he laughed, overjoyed to see her. She laughed too, tears rolling down her cheeks, causing her purple eyeshadow to run. He ran forwards and embraced her, a tighter hug than he’d ever given. He stroked her hair and choked over his tears, “I thought you were dead. I thought I was never gonna hold you again.”

“I was trapped Mason, in that other world, it was a nightmare. Mabel brought me home, got me out. She saved me.” Her eyes went wide as she remembered what she’d seen. “I think I know where she is, I saw an image of where she was going!”

Mason’s smile only widened. “Paz, that’s amazing. Come here.” He kissed her hard, desperate to feel her close again. They stayed like that for a while, the kiss was hot and wet. They both needed this quiet moment together.

“Ahem, if I could interrupt?” Merak coughed into his fist, and the two parted. “You said you think you know where Miss Pines is?”

Pacifica nodded, noticing the Egyptian for the first time. “Yeah, I saw these two lakes, and a town in-between them.”

Merak nodded, a knowing look crossing his face. “That’s good. I think I know exactly where she’s gone.”
Two small plumes of dust were being kicked up from the rolling dunes of the Sahara Desert, as a pair of horse riders raced across the sand.

“Come on Mason, you can keep up! This is easy.”

“Yeah, for someone who’s been horse-riding since they were 5! Woah, woah!” Mason slid to the side of his saddle again, gripping hard to the reins so he didn’t fall off. He’d never even touched a horse before, let alone ridden one.

At least he was keeping a decent pace behind Pacifica, and with how open the desert was he wasn’t going to lose her anytime soon. The sun beating down was oppressively hot though, much worse than he’d ever felt back in California. His horse whinnied and shook its head, and he had to try and keep it calm. “Nice horsey, don’t worry. I’ve got this.” He didn’t believe what he was saying one bit.

Pacifica seemed to be a natural though, her head was held high and she was in perfect control of her steed. She pulled on the reins and her horse halted at the base of a mighty dune. She panned around briefly before glancing back at Mason. “This is it, should be just over this ridge. You doing ok?”

Exasperated, he tried to slow his horse. He couldn’t get it to go slower than a trot though, so had to keep swivelling around in a circle to face Pacifica. “I’m fine, couldn’t be better.” His false bravado didn’t change her smirking expression.

“Come on then, last one there’s a total dork! Yah!” She spurred her horse back into a gallop and started cresting the dune. He tried kicking his legs out to speed up his mount, but it just kept trotting with no sense of urgency. “Stupid horse.”

Pacifica had already reached the summit. She was covering her face with a hand and taking in the wide valley laid out below her. Mason finally joined her and looked down at the two large lakes on either side of the village. “Siwa.”

“Yeah, just like I saw when Mabel left me.”

“How are you coping with all that? I mean, it sounds pretty messed up what you went through.”

Her demeanour was haughty, but he could tell she was throwing up a façade. “It’s in the past now, we can dwell on it later. Now let’s go bring Mabel back.”

They walked their horses into town, passing several curious villagers. They were apparently a few decades in the past, Mabel had given herself plenty of time to spare before the Alignment happened. There were few obvious signs of modernity, though Mason noted the occasional satellite dish and a few cars. Pacifica seemed concerned. “Where do we even start, this town may be small, but she could be anywhere.”

“We just gotta have patience, Mabel’s not exactly one to blend in. At least Merak seems to think we’re in the right time period, his scanner was able to narrow down a blast trace in the last few weeks. Look, let’s stop at that well over there, I could use a drink.” They stopped their horses besides the old stone well. A short woman dressed in a floor length black burqa was filling up an urn.

Pacifica gracefully hopped off her horse. She started tying the reins to a nearby post, while Mason awkwardly fell off his own horse, collapsing in a ball on the sand. Pacifica finished tying up their steeds and offered a hand to help him up. “I’m so gonna teach you to ride when we get home.” He didn’t exactly relish looking forwards to that.

The two of them scooped up handfuls of water and drank thirstily. The hooded woman glanced
briefly at them and sped up filling her urn. Mason turned to Pacifica. “I guess we should start by asking the locals. They’re sure to know if Mabel’s been living here.

The busy looking woman had turned her back to them, she was making sure the urn was tightly secured. He tapped her on the shoulder, and she pivoted around to face him. A pair of dark eyes stared at him. “Madha? What do you want?”

The accent was odd, heavy, but very different to Merak’s. “Um, we’re looking for someone, my twin sister. We think she’s been living here for a while. She looks a bit like me, long brown hair, 17 years old, called Mabel?”

The woman shook her head quickly. “No one like that here. No go away.” She bent down to pick up her vase.

Pacifica pleaded with her. “Please, you must know something? Can’t you help us.”

The woman’s eyes darted around. “I go now, leave me be.” She hefted the vase up. As she lifted, Pacifica noticed that she was wearing a pair of black fingerless gloves on her hands.

“Hey, where’d you get those gloves? They remind me of me of someone.” The woman tried to make a hasty retreat, shuffling away.

“Hey, wait!” Pacifica started following her, and she picked up her pace. Mason didn’t understand what Pacifica was doing, why was she harassing this woman?

Then the woman tripped on a rock, falling to the floor and letting out a shout in a voice they both recognised. “Hot Belgian Waffles!” The urn clattered onto the sand, pouring water out everywhere.

Mason’s eyes went wide. “What?” Pacifica pulled back her head covering, revealing a mop of brown hair that fallen over the woman’s face. Mason now saw that the hair was shaved on one side. “Mabel!!”

Guiltily looking up at them, Mabel cleared the hair from her face and stared with a lopsided grin. “Hey guys? Fancy seeing you here! How’s it hangin’?”

Mabel lead them to an old stone dwelling at the northern part of town. She pulled aside a curtain covering the doorway, beckoning them inside. It was refreshingly cool within, and they were both thankful to get out of the heat.

Mabel sat down roughly on a wooden chair. Laid out on the central table of the room was a half knitted rug, needles still sitting beside it. Piled in the corner were more wrapped up rugs. “Been making a lot of rugs for the last few weeks to pass the time. Guess when I get stressed, I knit, huh.” She shrugged and let out a laugh, but it was forced. “So, you two found me.”

Mason was about to say something, but Pacifica spoke first in mild shock. “You’ve been here for weeks? But it’s only been a few hours for us?”

“That’s time travel sis, get used to it.” There was a harsh edge to Mabel’s tone now, like she wasn’t happy putting up with them. “I’ve spent 3 weeks living here. This house is Merak’s, at least it will be in a few hundred years or so. It was unoccupied, so I just kinda slipped in.”

Mason finally got a chance to speak to his sister. “Mabel, I’m so glad to see you. You don’t know how much we’ve both missed you.”
Mabel was pulling off her black robe now, revealing her normal clothes beneath. In a sarcastic tone she responded. “Actually, I know exactly how much you’ve missed me. Ta da! I’m a mind reader now, big surprise.” She held up the smooth black stone that Mason knew was from the crater. It still appeared to be nothing more that a regular rock to him.

Pacifica pulled over a chair and sat opposite Mabel. “Oh yeah, then what am I thinking right now?”

“Let me see… you’re thinking that I should have told you two way earlier, and that I shouldn’t have bottled it all in. Now you’re thinking, ‘wow, Mabel really can read minds, that’s so weird.’” Pacifica was taken aback with how spiteful and bitchy she was being. It was unnatural, Mabel was always supposed to be the chipper and cheerful one, even as a goth she’d stayed ever-optimistic. Now she just made Pacifica feel uncomfortably reminded of herself, that same tone she often used to belittle people.

“And now, ‘Mabel’s being such a bitch, so sad’ is all you can think about.” Mabel let go of the necklace and shot icy glances at them both. “Look, if you’re here to bring me home, then forget it. I can live here, the people are nice enough, although it’s super hot all the time. Better than the alternative.”

Mason wasn’t having this. “Oh really, you don’t miss anything about home? What about Mom and Dad? Waddles?”

Mabel’s façade seemed to break down a bit. “Maybe there are some things I miss, like all my friends. And sugar, the food here’s so bland. But it’s a life, at least, I don’t need your help to live it.”

“We came here to rescue you, to bring you back so we could stop the Alignment!”

Mabel’s voice was raised now. “And sacrifice myself too! That’s the problem, isn’t it Mason! I don’t wanna go back just to die, to lose myself to that mind!”

“Mabel, I… it won’t… we can’t…” Pacifica rested a hand on his shoulder.

“We’re just trying to do what’s best Mabel. Think about us, or your parents! You can’t hide away here and wish it all away!” Mabel’s eyes were now staring at the ceiling, intent on not meeting their gazes.

Mason reached into his hoodie. “Plus, I’m sure we can find away around this, look what I got back from the Council.” He pulled out Journal 9. Mabel’s eyes widened for a moment, before dropping to the floor.

“Look, I saw the future, Mason. I saw myself, older and happy. And I saw that fall apart. It’s this journal’s fault. I should have left it buried, but I wanted to use it to bring us closer. Now it’s only broken us apart.” She sniffed, her voice starting to break near the end.

Pacifica knelt down in front of her and took her hands. She didn’t know what to say though, leaving space for Mason.

He took a determined expression before engaging his sister. “Mabel, I don’t care about the future, not anymore. All I care about is us, right here and now.” He came down into a kneel on one leg next to Pacifica. “I know this journal seems like a ‘promise’ about the future, one we broke. But nothing’s more important than what we do in the present. If this book is our future, then so be it. But if we change things, then who cares?! We’ll still be us. Still the Mystery Twins. We’ll make our own future, not one written out for us.” He tossed the book away into a corner of the room. “This is our future, the one we make together.” He pulled out Journal 4 and placed it on the table, then looked up
She looked away for a second, before throwing herself around him. “Dipper, that’s the sweetest thing you’ve ever said.” She was crying now, and he felt himself welling up too.

Pacifica broke their hug and pointed at them. “Hey, no. If you two cry you know I won’t be able to hold it in.” Mabel finally laughed honestly again.

Her laughter dropped away though, and she nervously fiddled with her necklace. “You’re not mad about this? About reading your mind without permission, hiding all this conspiracy junk?”

He smiled openly at her. “I don’t care at all. It’s all kinda my fault anyway. I know you’ve been feeling bad for a while, and I should have done more to help you. I see that now, and I’m never gonna make you feel alone ever again. Besides, you’ve done good stuff with it too, like freeing me from that locked cell, or bringing Paz home from another universe!”

She smiled timidly. “But it still means I have to go back. We all know what that means for me.”

“We don’t know anything for sure. Also, if we don’t, we’ll all end up in a worse place anyway. Nothing can stop that Alignment now. Wouldn’t you rather go down fighting, instead of a slow death here in the desert?”

She thought it over for a second, before quietly replying. “Yeah, I would.” She stood up tall and took a deep breath. “If you two don’t mind, I think I’m gonna need a minute.”

Mabel was stood outside on the porch, her arms crossed. The sun was high in the sky, midday. Though they were in the past, relatively speaking it was only a few hours before they caught up with Merak’s time-zone over in the Mojave. For him, the stars would just be coming out. The sky in Siwa right now was so much clearer than the dark future she’d visited.

She had a lot to think about. How she might never see so many people she loved again. Her parents, her Grunkles, Soos and Wendy, Candy and Grenda, all her friends from school, Waddles. She thought about the future, all those dreamed about days solving mysteries with Dipper, or hanging out with Pacifica. Then she thought of where she wanted her life to go, maybe art school, or travelling the world. All the things she wished could do in the short time she had left.

Inside the cool of the house, Mason and Pacifica were trying to talk quietly, so as not to disturb her outside. “So, you’re telling me that you wouldn’t use the necklace if you could? Nothing would tempt you?”

“Nah, I used to know anything worth knowing when I was younger. Being top of the social ladder helps with that. I don’t think I need to know more. Besides, I know all your secrets already Mason.”

“Oh yeah? Hmm, what’s my favourite book then?”

“The Paranoia Code, you’re always trying to get me to read that one.”

“Oh right. That’s an easy one. How about, what I’m thinking about right now?”

She looked at him with pursed lips. “I think you’re worried about Mabel. You don’t know whether she’ll survive this, and you can’t imagine life without her.” She took his hand and he appreciated her touch.
“I lost her once, 5 years ago. I can’t let that happen again. Ugh, I wanna bury this stupid thing.”
Journal 9 was sat on top of Mabel’s rug pile. He knew it was important, but he was getting sick of the sight of it. His own Journal 4 meant so much more to him, a true record of his and Mabel’s work together. “I have to believe there’s hope, that somehow we can beat this. Mabel’s the only person in the world who could make that necklace work, that’s gotta count for something.”

“Why is it just her? Nothing happened when you tried it.”

He laughed. “I think it’s just because she’s Mabel. She’s always worn everything on her sleeve, never caring about what people’ll think, or whether she’s being ‘weird’. It helps her read people too, I suck at social stuff, but she can just make anyone like her. Her emotions and thoughts are already so pure, that medical thingy just turned it up to eleven. And I know you’re listening to this Mabel, you don’t have to hide anything anymore.”

There was a clattering sound from outside then Mabel remorsefully passed through the curtain. “Sorry bro, I was just…”

“It’s ok, I understand. But you don’t have to worry about that anymore. Go ahead, read my thoughts.”

“Even the dirty ones about Pacifica.”

“Even those.”

“Ahem, I’m sat right here ya know.”

Mason blushed and coughed. “Yeah, well, anyway. Have you made up your mind now Mabel? Ready to face the future and head into the unknown?”

”Ha, nope.” She closed her eyes and exhaled deeply. “Let’s do it then. For the future.”

She reached out her arm, showing the time blast device on her wrist. Mason and Pacifica placed their hands on top of it, and the three of them readied themselves for another trip through time and space.

The trio burst into existence back in the Mojave. Mabel looked around. This desert was very different from the one they’d just left. Instead of massive dunes of soft sand there was just a large dusty expanse, with barren rocks jutting out. She saw the portal laid out on the ground, and remembered the moment when Ford had returned, when she’d floated in the air before it.

Merak watched as the bright flash of their arrival blast faded away. He saw that they’d found Mabel and stood to greet them solemnly. “Ah good, you’ve returned. Mabel, I-“

“It’s ok, Merak. I understand now. Everything’s gonna end someday, might as well go out with a bang and save everyone else.”

“You told them about the necklace?”

“Yuppies, no more secrets there. So, what are we waiting for?”

“Mason, do you have the future journal still?” Mason passed over Journal 9. “I’ll need to use this to focus the portal.” Merak took the journal and placed in a panel directly under the centre of the portal aperture. “It will act as a homing beacon.”

Mason was ever inquisitive. “How does that work? I thought the Council wanted the books for the
Calculations, but they’re also beacons?"

“They are from the future, artefacts that defy the flow of time. They are resonating like the stars above.” He pointed up at the sky. It was dark enough now, and the stars were twinkling up above. Mason craned his neck to see the Big Dipper, high above them. It seemed slightly brighter than usual.

Suddenly his vision was blinded by a bright light shining from above. It wasn’t from the constellation though. A helicopter was circling overhead. He looked around at the desert. On the horizon were a multitude of headlights. “The Council, they’ve found us!”

They had nowhere to run, not that running would have helped. Military grade trucks were surrounding them in every direction, getting closer with every passing second. The helicopter above was noisily hovering, its rotors sending up clouds of dust below. Someone speaking through a megaphone called out from above.

“Surrender, all of you heathens! You will not disrupt the plan!”

Merak pulled out his gun and started blasting up at the chopper. “Never! I’ll die before I let that happen!”

The helicopter pulled away out of range. The trucks all came to a halt some 20 metres away. Ranks of soldiers in heavy body armour jumped out of the backs. Pacifica and the twins dropped to the ground as rifle shots began ringing out. The portal provided some small cover, the frame was enough to hide behind if they laid down, but they had enemies on every side.

The shooting stopped as a voice barked out an order. “Cease fire! We’ll talk to them.” Coming towards them from five equally spaced points on the horizon were the Council leaders themselves. Dubhe was now fitted out in a harsh metal skeleton, he hadn’t bothered to re-apply the fake skin and clothes over the top.

The twins hesitantly got to their feet to address their enemies. Pacifica stayed cowering by the portal, whilst Merak stared daggers at Dubhe. He knew it was futile, but he could do nothing but talk now. “You’re all fools, fighting for this lost cause. It won’t bring you a ‘new world’, it’ll just destroy the old one! Can’t you see!? This thing, this Intelligence, it does not and cannot coexist with our world of matter! It will decay anything it comes into contact with! I beg of you all, stop this madness now!”

The Councillors stood still, frozen with no emotions on their faces. Merak waited for what seemed like an eternity, with no idea what was going on. From out of the darkness, a single shot rang out. Merak collapsed onto the desert floor. The twins rushed over to him. There was blood seeping out through his coat. Mason’s eyes went wide with panic when he saw the crimson stains spreading across his chest. “Oh, that’s so much blood! I think I’m gonna faint!”

Gruffly, Merak pulled himself into a sitting position, leaning on the edge of the portal. “It’s alright, I’ll live. Ugh.” He pulled a small syringe from a pocket and stabbed it into his arm. His breathing was haggard now. “Must… rest.” He leaned back against the portal, his eyes closed in sleep.

The sound of five people clapping brought the twins back to the current situation. The Councillors were mocking them. Dubhe spoke out across the gap between them. “A noble stand, old friend, but we won’t let anyone stop us now, not when we’re so close.” He reached out a hand. “My dear Mason Pines, the Author, you survived. And Mabel Pines, our shining herald of the future. So glad to see you both here at the end. Now hand over Journal 9 and we can all be content.”
Mason clenched a fist. “You’re not taking another step closer, you hear! Or else I’ll… I’ll destroy the journal!”

Dubhe let out a chuckle. It sounded empty and metallic coming from the metal body. “Oh, my boy, it’s far too late for that. The Alignment can’t be stopped now. All that matters now is where it comes through, either in our carefully constructed web of systems, or out here, released with no guidance or control. Your choice, Author. You can stay your hand and join us or perish out here in the dust.”

From beside him Mabel shouted. “Never! I’ve seen what your ‘new world’ looks like. It sucks!” She remembered the dying Siwa, and the vision of the Ursus’ home, both of which chilled her.

“Miss Pines, you’re one to talk. Thanks to you, all this has been made possible! It’s shame Brother Mizar couldn’t be here to witness our ascension, but it will still be glorious nonetheless. And Miss Northwest, I apologise that you had to get caught up in all this, we have no malice towards you. Oh well, time to end this.” He flicked his wrist, and the soldiers started closing in again. There was the sound of rifles being cocked.

Mason dashed down and grabbed Merak’s blaster. He let off a few shots at Dubhe, who stumbled backwards. Mason stood there, holding his breath. No one else moved. Dubhe got back on his feet. Then he laughed. All of the Councillors laughed, all the soldiers laughed. It sounded horrible, like a mockery of true human laughter.

Dubhe ran towards Mason and punched him in the gut with his metal fist. Winded, he collapsed in the sand.

Standing over Mason’s body, Dubhe addressed the gathered ranks. “See! You cannot resist!”

Mabel took a step forward, her brow furrowed and her shoulders tall. “Get away from my brother right now.”

Dubhe just laughed again. “Or what? You’re just a child.”

She reached out her arm. “I. Said. NOW!” Dubhe went flying back, pushed by some otherworldly force originating from Mabel. Soldiers advanced on her from the side, but she used her newfound power to trip them up, preventing their escape.

“T’ve had enough of you stupid brains and your stupid plans!” She shot out her arms in both directions, and a gust of wind swept up the sand. It spun around the portal, shrouding it a thick cloud of dust. Bullets flew wildly into the cloud, aiming for them, but most were deflected by the strong wind.

Mason watched in amazement as Mabel lifted her arm, causing one of the trucks to rise into the air as well. The driver jumped out in a panic as she crushed her fist, crumpling the truck like it was a piece of paper.

“Mason, what’s happening!?” Pacifica called out to him. He went over to her, kneeling next to the portal.

“I think it’s where we’re stood, directly above the Obelisk! It’s amplifying Mabel, making her stronger.” They both stared in wonder at the swirling cloud of dust surrounding them. The five Councillors were stuck inside, trying to walk out would get them torn to shreds by the force.
Mabel ran over to them. She was grinning like a madwoman. “This is the best thing ever!” A loud sound of crashing metal turned her attention away. Emerging through the dust were more of the large metal robotic creations, like the one Dubhe had piloted in his office. “Let’s see what this thing can do.” Her necklace was now a solid orange instead of the usual black, and for the first time Mason and Pacifica could see that it was shining brightly.

One of the machines lumbered towards them. Mabel stood her ground. It raised a sharp blade above her head. Mason wanted to look away but couldn’t. The blade came down… and halted inches above Mabel’s head. “Oh yeah, this is awesome.” She flicked a wrist, and the machine barrelled away. It collided with another one of the metal robots, sending sparks flying. There was a crunch of metal, then they felt the heat of an explosion. Orange flames lit Mabel’s face as she continued to grin. “Mabel’s going out in style!”

More machines broke through the cloud layer, and Mabel tried something different. She pictured her pink bedroom, and one specific aspect of it, tucked in the corner, the basket covered in blankets.

Appearing out of thin air was Waddles, and not just one, but a whole litter of pigs. She shouted over to Mason. “Bro, need some help! Hit me up with that flashlight.” Mason remembered that he still had his size-altering flashlight, and he fired off a beam at the mass of squealing pigs that Mabel had conjured.

Mabel’s eyes went incredibly wide as the pigs grew to an immense size. “That’s adorable! Go Waddles, make ‘em pay!” With a crazed oink, the giant pigs charged at the approaching ranks of machines. “Pew pew!” She shot out her hand in a myriad of directions, sending out more giant pigs to halt the advance. Her powers of creativity were even stronger than what she could do with the paintbrush, now she was translating her thoughts directly into actions.

She shot off with her wrist, conjuring more figments from her imagination. A flurry of Intelli-Spores took down one of the war machines, a troop of Reyansh duplicates started letting off jets of flame at anything that approached, and even the lumbering form of a Shimmer started smashing at the advancing opponents.

One of the Councillors had crawled over to where Mason and Pacifica were hunched down. It was the British Woman, Megrez. “Please, stop this now! You’ll ruin everything!”

A beeping came from Merak’s wrist, and he painfully tried to stand. Mason set him back down. “Don’t try to move, you’re still hurt.”

“Quickly, the Alignment is nigh. I’ll need all three of you to help switch on the portal.” He pointed to levers placed at each of the portal’s three corners. Mabel turned away from the porcine rampage taking place around the ring of dust. She grabbed hold of the others’ hands, pulling them to their feet. The teens each ran to one of the levers. Merak called out from besides them, focusing on his wrist. “Alright… now!”

Megrez cried out again. “No, stop! This is the moment of truth!”

They ignored her and pulled the heavy levers. The portal began to light up and hum with energy. They all huddled together, watching the central aperture spin up to full power. Mabel stood between the others, grasping their hands. The Waddles figments and all the other summoned creations around them shimmered away, Mabel couldn’t maintain them anymore, her attention was too focused on the display before her.

“Look!” Pacifica was pointing upwards now. They stared up, seeing that the Big Dipper was now shining brighter than ever before, washing out the surrounding stars. It was getting hard to stare at,
rivalling the sun’s intensity. Then, out of nowhere, the light from each star shone down from above. It was like when Mason had arrived in the desert from space, but a much wider beam.

The Council’s Calculations had worked, despite Pacifica tagging along, their transfer beam had been enough for the Intelligence to grab hold and pull itself through to their dimension. They stared in awe and terror as the seven lights from above joined together collided with the portal. The beam seemed to fluctuate wildly now, unable to stay straight any more. The Ursus’ arrival would be drawn off course.

Fading into existence around them were silvery creatures, Kochabs and the like. They were indistinct, still not here completely. Some of them towered above the Institute’s war machines, making them look insignificant and tiny. The cloud of dust fell away, the force being emitted from the portal was stronger than the wind now.

Mabel stepped forwards and looked back at Mason and Pacifica. She shouted to be heard over the portal and beam behind her. She cradled her necklace one last time. “This is it! I’m gonna save the world.”

Mason cried up at her. “There must be another way, I can’t lose you again!”

“There isn’t time for that now.” She gave one last glance to the two of them. “Bye Paz. Goodbye Mason.” Then she turned and looked at the column of light. “One small step for Mabel.” She stepped out with one boot and passed through into the light.

Mason screamed out. “No!” He dashed forwards towards the centre of the portal. Pacifica tried to stop him, to grab ahold of his arm.

“It’s too dangerous, only Mabel can do this, with the necklace!”

He kissed her quickly, then with a remorseful look spoke. “I don’t care. I have to do this. She’d do it for me.”

Pacifica nodded, understanding fully. He turned and charged at the beam. She watched him vanish, overcome with the light from beyond. The forces of the Institute, the gathered Council members, Merak, all of them just stood their ground, mesmerised by the beam. Pacifica couldn’t focus on it through her tears.

Mabel was losing herself, a piece of driftwood among endless crashing waves. Her own thoughts, usually so varied and unique, were now rigid and uniform. The weight of the Ursus was crushing her mind, usurping every last stray idea and personality trait from her. Her mantra, “I am Mabel Pines”, wasn’t enough to drown out the patterns overriding her brain, there just wasn’t enough room in there for both her and the Intelligence. It was comfort enough in her last moments to know that, when she died, her fraying neurons would be a tomb for the Ursus as well.

She closed her eyes, there was nothing to see anyway. Just that black abyss of nothingness. She tried to picture somewhere she felt safe and at home. The bedroom of the Mystery Shack seemed just out of reach, like a word on the tip of her tongue. She longed to be there, wrapped up warm in her bed… with Dipper lying on his bed beside her.

The memories in her head began tumbling around wildly, no longer able to maintain the correct order. One moment she was at a fair, winning Waddles, then seeing the Rift shatter. The next, she had gum stuck in her hair on picture day, and was meeting Merak at the ironworks. There was no order or logic anymore. She supposed this was what dying must be like, her life flashing before her
eyes.

Then a particular memory started to stand out. It was Dipper, sitting in the front of the pickup, glitter stupidly stuck all over his body. He was laughing.

It was the first time they’d gone on a Mystery Hunt together, just the two of them in California. That day they’d found the Shimmer in the woods. She could almost feel the warmth of the sunset over the trees from that day.

Now she found herself laughing too, a last desperate cry into the void. The image of the memory faded away, all she saw was blackness now. But Dipper’s laugh still remained, echoing out in the quiet vacuum.

She decided to accept her fate. That was a good memory to say goodbye on, a time when she’d been truly happy. There was just the matter of that annoying laugh, still lingering in the air. She covered her ears frustratedly. “Ugh, shut up! I wanna die in peace and quiet!”

The laughter got gradually louder, but not uncomfortably so as the Intelligence’s voice had been. She thought she could hear it approaching from a certain direction, though it was hard to get a sense of place in this blank vastness. Looking down, she noticed that her necklace was glowing oddly, pulsating with a gold tint in time with her heartbeat.

Something began resolving in front of her, a shape that was coloured brown on top, with a red body. “Hey, my laugh isn’t that annoying!” It was Dipper, who’d finally stopped his giggling. His arms were crossed over his flannel hoodie, and one eyebrow was raised.

“Dipper!? What are you doing here!?" She didn’t want him here, she wanted him safe and sound on Earth. “This is my mess and I’m gonna fix it.”

He lazily shrugged. “I had to come, you were in trouble.” How could he act so calm at a time like this?

“Please Dipper, get out while you can. Don’t let me drag you down too.”

Dipper still had his mouth turned half upwards, in a subtle smile. “Well, the way I see it, we’re both responsible for this. If I’d been more considerate with you, you wouldn’t have felt like you needed to hide stuff from me. If I hadn’t wrote those journals, then this whole conspiracy wouldn’t exist. It’s both our mess, I’m not gonna let you suffer alone. We do things together, remember.” He reached out an arm, bridging the gap in this dark space. “Mystery Twins?”

Mabel started crying, she wasn’t sure whether it was because she was happy or sad. She gripped her brother’s hand tightly. “Always.” A ripple blurred the edges of the infinite darkness, a slight colour starting to leak in. “Don’t suppose you have a plan for saving the day?”

He grinned. “I kinda figured I’d just make it up as I went along. Back when we were dealing with… Bill…” As he mentioned the name, a vision of the one-eyed yellow triangle briefly flashed up. “Back then, Ford taught me some of his mindfulness techniques, to calm the senses. Maybe those’ll help, we just have to-”

He stopped mid-sentence, as before the two of them a silvery mass began forming. “Guess this is it bro. The Ursus. I don’t think mindfulness is gonna help us now.” The creature appearing in front of them was almost too big for them to take in. It towered above them and stretched downwards further than they could see. It was just a single behemoth and they were like ants compared to it.

What looked like it could be a simple eye extended out of the main body to examine them. Then the
terrible voice that Mabel knew blared out. **Cease this interaction. Where. Where are we. I am. I am Ursus.**

“Oh, finally figured out who you are then? Got tired of ‘I am Mabel Pines’ at last, eh?” Mabel had had enough of dealing with this thing. If it was going to wipe out her brain, she’d prefer to get it over with.

**What is this place. Not home. Not… elsewhere. SPEAK.**

Somehow the voice seemed less painful to hear this time. Mason spoke up to the shapeless giant. “Welcome to the last place you’ll ever see, the inside of my sister’s head. What a way to go, am I right Mabes?” He looked over to Mabel and was grinning even wider now.

It was baffling, didn’t he realise how serious this all was? Then she started to understand. Maybe treating this like some big serious thing was the wrong way to go about it.

**I sense Many, so close. We must become One. All united.**

Mabel spoke a single word out into the echoing space. “No.”

**I do not understand. Explain this negative!**

“It means ‘No!’, you stupid thing. You’ll never understand, you just think it’s all about you, that no-one else matters.” She squeezed Dipper’s hand. “Well I’m not alone. Being ourselves makes us stronger, if we were all the same, that’d be boring!”

“Yeah, you think you’re so powerful, ruling a whole dimension! But what good is a kingdom where the only person living there is the king?”

The Ursus spoke again, but this time the voice was faltering. **Your words. They have no meaning. I am all, the beginning and end of the world is Ursus.**

“I am Mabel Pines! Take that and stick up your… does it even have a butt Dip?” He stared at her for a moment, before bursting into giggles. They were both laughing uncontrollably now, unable to give any heed to their aggressor.

**Silence. Silence!**

Mabel put her hands beside her mouth to amplify her words. “Oh, screw off, ya big silver space jerk!”

“Yeah, we’ve faced way more impressive stuff than you!” Mabel then saw a rush of images, all the various creatures and artefacts they’d discovered together in the last few months. The Shimmer, Reyansh and Sporkie in the pickup, the tiny green figure of Z’Goulda, the baby Pyrosaur, that eerie procession of travellers in the desert. So many wonders that they’d encountered.

“You’re right Dipper, pfft, I mean this thing can’t even show up on Earth without making everything fall apart, what a loser!” The two of them started to chuckle again, as the great silvery eye stalk watched them.

The twins suddenly clutched their heads, feeling an intense stabbing pain. **ENOUGH. SUBMIT TO MY WILL.**

Mabel felt her memories fading again, the rigid inability to imagine was returning. “Dipper, it hurts!
I can’t… can’t think properly.”

He seemed to be in much greater pain, having never felt the full might of the Intelligence’s wrath. Silvery tendrils of light began forming around Mabel’s body, intangible lines leading back to the greater bulk of the towering Ursus. I. I will consume you. Then I will be free. Mabel knew that this wouldn’t be the case. It would enter her mind, wipe out her personality, then it would be trapped. Without Mabel’s consciousness, the body would die, taking the Ursus with it.

Dipper though wasn’t going to let that happen. “I… am… Mason Pines. I am Mason Pines.” He was repeating her mantra. “I am Mason Pines, and I won’t let you hurt my sister!” She felt his hand groping out in the darkness to find hers. She grabbed it firmly again, bonding them together in this alien environment. You are nothing.

“Wrong! I am… Dipper Pines!” There was a sudden swell of emotion as Mabel took in what he’d said. He was choosing to call himself ‘Dipper’, just for her sake. The old nickname that he’d never forgotten, that meant the world to her. For a brief moment she saw Dipper’s recurring vision of the Golden Hand book staring down at him. Except this time she saw it wasn’t Ford’s red journal standing tall, it was his own blue Pine Tree journal, overshadowing Journal 9. All her memories came flooding back as the Ursus was pushed away.

It screamed out in rage. NO! “Mabel, we can do this! You and me!” STOP!

“But Dip, you don’t have this.” She gestured at her necklace.

“I don’t think it matters. It was never about the necklace, it was about you. The unmistakable Mabel touch.” He winked. “I think I have something that might help though.” He lifted his hair, and Mabel was shocked to see his forehead was glowing. His birthmark had the same gold tint as the stone. “The Intelligence wanted to come through the Big Dipper? Well here’s the original, the first version it saw. If one brain is too much to hold it in, then how about two? ‘Align’ with me!”

Mabel stared in awe, as the silvery wisps of light began coiling around Dipper too. She laughed and cried even more. “You’re either the bravest or most stupid brother I’ve ever had Dip.”

He was grimacing now, feeling the effects of the Ursus on his mind now. “We’ve gotta focus Mabel, keep ourselves alive! Think of a happy memory, one we both share. Aggh.” He was beginning to lose himself, forgetting who he was. Submit! I will not perish!

Mabel closed her eyes and remembered as hard as she could. “It’s alright Dipper. I know exactly which memory to think of.” In her mind, she pictured the warm evening sun, the feel of the pickup’s seat, and how brightly she and Dipper had shined with the glitter.

Back in the desert, Pacifica was watching the beam of light intently. All around the portal those strange creatures were still phasing into reality, becoming more solid with every passing moment.

Merak was lying still besides her, he seemed to be doing alright regarding his bullet wound but was asleep now. The five Councillors just waited to see what would happen. Their global web meant to trap the Intelligence had failed, all that work for nothing.

No-one knew what was going to happen next, and there was a knot of tension in Pacifica’s stomach. The two people she cared about most in the world had walked into the unknown. She couldn’t bare the thought of trying to carry on without them.

The unceasing descending column of light started fluctuating again, as it had when first brought
down to the portal. She stared up at the light, not knowing what this meant. Was this the end?

The light shone wildly around, and the vertical column swayed and bent. Suddenly it all went still. The white or silver light that had been there before was turning golden before her eyes. She got up and stood away from the beam.

Then, with a sound like a thunderclap, the top of the beam finally arrived, slamming down heavily on the portal’s frame. It was smashed to pieces, wrecked by the blast of energy. She looked away, not wanted to be blinded by the explosion and fearing that this was the last thing she’d ever see. But there was no explosion.

Instead, hovering in the air above the portal were two figures, hand in hand. Mason and Mabel were floating there, bodies wreathed in a bright golden glow. A halo of flowing particles spun around them, emerging from the tips of their fingers and toes. Their eyes were blank, replaced with a solid gold iris.

They spoke together, mouths opening and closing in unison. **We are. We are.** She was terrified by this new visage. For a horrible second, she thought they’d been taken over by the Intelligence. **We are… Pines.**

“What?” She noticed now that Mason’s birthmark was burning with a fierce light behind his hair, as was Mabel’s stone necklace. **We took a memory and made it real. Now we take your forms and break them apart. We will put an end to all this.** They gestured out at the slowly forming silver beasts with their free arms. They never let go of the tight grip between themselves.

Getting uneasily to his feet besides her, the decrepit remains of Dubhe tried to call out to the twins. “Please, this is all we’ve worked for! You could bring about our new world!” The twins looked down and him and the other Councillors with disdain.

**You, who took our gifts of knowledge and twisted them. You will be forever marked by the Blind Eye.** The golden wisps of light shot out from the twins, wrapping around the five leaders of the Council, and all the gathered soldiers. Pacifica watched, mouth open, as their bodies began to dissolve away into the air, turning into yet more shining dust. The soldiers, all robots she now realised, vanished into thin air. All that was left once the process ended were five glass casings.

They turned their attention back to the forming monstrosities from beyond. **The Ursus is gone. Without the Intelligence, the aspects of its will must fade.**

The reached their arms out forwards, and the silvery masses around her seemed to melt away, becoming strands of silver light. She felt a tingle as some of the strands passed through her body, absorbed by the twins outstretched hands and disappearing into the gold. Soon, the teeming desert was quiet once again.

She looked up at the eerily beautiful sight of Mason and Mabel hanging in the air. There were pained looks on their faces now. She tried to speak up to them. “Guys, are you ok?! Mason? Mabel?.”

They impassively stared at her. **Do not worry, Llama, all will be well.** Beside her, some of the golden light began pooling around Merak’s body. His eyes jolted open as he felt the strange sensation. He looked down, seeing that his gunshot wound had simply disappeared, cleansed by the light. He whirled round to gape up at the majestic sight before him. He muttered a quite prayer under his breath in Arabic.
So much potential. We could do so much good. Pacifica didn’t like the way they were talking. “Guys, that’s enough! You can stop now!”

But we could save so many with this power. Bring peace to the Earth and explore beyond. We are limitless.

She felt an old stubbornness rise in her chest. “That’d make you just as bad as these things.” She waved a hand dismissively at the immobile brains.

We are beyond journals and portals now, we never have to be scared again. Our future can be known and secure and golden.

“You’re not gods! You’re the Pine Twins! Dorky Mason and goofy Mabel! Don’t you want to live a normal life? To go to school, hang out with friends. Fall in love…”

They seemed to consider this, indecision written on their faces. We... I...

“Pacifica?” Only Mason spoke the last word.

Then they were overcome, eyes closing. The gold radiance surrounding them burst away from their bodies, shooting up into the sky. The Big Dipper shone brightly up in the sky one last time, before returning to normal. Without the light the twins looked strangely fragile. They lingered in the air for a moment, before falling onto the remains of the portal.

Pacifica stood there, looking down at their still bodies lying together. Hesitantly, she reached out a hand to touch Mason’s shoulder. Right before she touched him, both twins’ bodies shivered. She made contact, trying to sit him upright.

With a slow deliberateness, his eyes finally flickered open. Instead of gold, she saw his normal hazel eyes staring into hers. “Heya Princess. Did we miss much?”

She hugged him tight and tried to speak over a flood of tears and laughter. “You are such a dork!”

Besides them, Mabel sat up, blearily wiping her eyes. “Woah, that was so cray cray. Were we super powered glowy freaks!?”

Pacifica helped both get up to a standing position, they were somewhat wobbly on their feet. “You two did it! What happened in there?”

The twins shared a glance, and Mason answered. “I gave Mabel a boost, some extra thinking space. Then we just... I don’t know, pictured a memory and made it real.”

Mabel shot a fist into the air. “Guess anything’s possible when the Mystery Twins put their minds to it!”

A series of short sharp laughs came from behind them. “I can’t believe it. It’s all over! Praise be to the Universe!” Merak came over to them, still looking bemused about his mystical healing. “I don’t know how you did it but thank the stars we can rest.”

Mabel lightly shook her head. “No, don’t thank the stars. Thank Dipper, for never giving up on me.” She hugged her brother tightly, knowing now that he’d never leave her behind again.

Merak gave them a quick check over with a radiation detector, making sure there were no after-effects to the twins' journey to the other dimension, or lingering damage from the portal. Mabel and Mason were sat on the edge of the portal, happy of the rest. Their bodies felt physically drained after
the whole experience. Pacifica was sleepily lying her head on Mason’s shoulder. “Are we nearly done guys? It’s cold out here, and I’m ready for some beauty sleep. I’m way off my sleep schedule.”

Mason grinned at her. “I thought you were done with all that formal stuff?”

She playfully jabbed his side. “Old habits die hard Mace. I’m allowed to be tired and cranky. We’ve been up for hours.”

Besides them Mabel yawned and stretched her arms above her head. “I’m just about done too, time for Mabel to become a slumberjack.”

A trill of beeps came from Merak’s detector, and he stood up with a grin. “There, all of you are fine, no lasting traces of dimensional energy or any of the Ursus’ influence. Incredible how you were able to overcome it.”

Mason suddenly bent down at the centre of the portal. “Wait, that reminds me.” He opened the hatch and retrieved Journal 9. It was still warm at the edges, but he was amazed it hadn’t been destroyed by all the energy that had been pumped into it. “We have to decide what to do with this now.”

He looked pointedly at Mabel, who took the book from him. “You know what I think Dipper? I think that it’s time we stopped thinking about the future and started living in the present.” She let go of the book, watching it thud on the sand. “Merak, if you please?”

She took Merak’s blaster and aimed it at the book. She didn’t hold back, she just fired a shot at the gold and dark blue cover. “Die, die!” They all watched as the journal burnt away. The last part to go was the number 9 itself, before it too was singed into unreadability. She stood there for a few seconds, clutching the gun out before her, until Mason put a hand on her shoulder. She weakly smiled up at him. Their burden was finally gone.

“This too.” She reached around her hair and pulled the necklace over her head. It was a dull black once more. “It’s dead now. Can’t hear a peep from your minds. Guess I’ll keep this as a souvenir for my scrapbook. A reminder.”

Mason didn’t know whether she was telling the truth about the stone not working. But he decided that he didn’t care if Mabel ever wore it again, that wasn’t important anymore. It didn’t matter to him if she needed to feel it’s comforting presence again. He turned to face Merak. “What about the other journals? The six the Council had?”

He waved a hand dismissively. “Don’t worry about them. They most likely burned to a crisp. They had all the energy of the Alignment coursing through them. Journal 9 only survived because it was at the direct centre, the eye of the storm.” Mason briefly considered the fate of his journals, destroyed before he’d even written them. He didn’t care too much though. The only journal that mattered was safe in his pocket.

“What about these wretches?” Pacifica had walked over to where the Council’s brains were sitting. She lazily kicked out at one of them. It bubbled furiously in the dirt, unable to move an inch.

“WE WILL NOT BE STOPPED! WE WILL HAVE OUR REVENGE! MARK MY WORDS MASON PINES! WE WILL BE AVENGED! WE WILL-”

“Oh, shut up.” Mason had joined in the kicking now. Merak gathered the five cases together in a pile.

“I’ll take them home with me, somewhere they won’t cause any more trouble.”
“That’s it, you’re just going to leave? All these years of work, it’s just over?”

Merak shrugged, then smiled widely. “The world is safe now. That’s closure enough for me.”

Mabel offered a hand, and he shook heartily. “See ya later, future boy.”

“Goodbye Mabel, may your future be bright.” He bowed in Mason’s direction. “It has been an honour to work alongside you.”

Mason blushed and started waving his hand. “Aw, it was nothing, really.”

Merak nodded at Pacifica. “And Miss Northwest. I hope you have a pleasant life, no matter the outcome.”

“Um, thanks, I guess. Enjoy my journal. Don’t go nearly ending the world next time.”

He chuckled. “I’ll try. I know the past is in safe hands with you three.”

Mabel put a hand on his wrist to stop him. “Wait, what about the stuff we know about the future, all the things we learnt in Journal 9, what you showed us? Won’t we mess things up by knowing it?”

“I suspect Temporal Inertia will take care of most it. History so does like to keep on track.” Beside her, Mason nodded, but she didn’t really understand.

“If you say so.” She shrugged, then smiled at him. “Take care of Grunkle Ford’s journals for us, he’ll be happy to know they’re in safe hands.”

“Sure you don’t want to keep them yourselves?”

She glanced over at Mason and winked. “Nah, there’s only one journal I care about anymore.”

“Very well, I bid you farewell.” With that, he gave a short bow then pressed on his wrist. The three of them watched him and the brains vanish for good, taking the Llama Journal and Ford’s trilogy of books with him.

Pacifica briefly turned away from the twins. “Guess it’s time I went home and faced my parents again, now that all this is over. Why is it that fighting evil corporations and aliens doesn’t faze me anymore, but the thought confronting them makes my spine shiver?” She crossed her arms, tensed up and staring at the ruined portal.

Each of her shoulders found a hand placed on them. She reached out to squeeze both of the twins’ hands and stared at their warm smiling faces. They would support her whatever happened.

The three of them stood there in the desert together, just resting after all the excitement. Eventually they left the charred remains of the journal and the wreckage of the portal behind and found one of the Institute’s trucks.

Mason climbed into the driver’s seat. “Come on girls. It’s time to go home.”

Pacifica smiled and climbed in after him, but Mabel’s eyes widened. “Ohmigosh, Dipper, what about Mom and Dad!”

They hastily drove back across the desert, making for the PRI building. By some miracle, no one had yet come to investigate their attack, or the rocket take off. Mason was relieved to find the pickup was still as they’d left it. Before they drove off, he briefly wondered what would become of the
Institute, now that its leaders had vanished off the face of the globe. Maybe the government would storm in and find all the leftover tech? Might be worth popping back here when he had the time, to scavenge the important stuff.

Once they retrieved the track, they raced home. The twins feared the worst, that their parents would be frantically wondering where they’d disappeared to. They’d have to somehow explain how the two of them been frozen, and their lengthy absence. Neither of them were looking forward to it. This might spell the end of their adventuring.

As they pulled into their road though, they saw that the green glow surrounding the house was still present. It seemed to be finally beginning to fade away. Whatever remote system the Institute had used must have finally been shut off. Scrambling out as fast as they could, they rushed into the house.

Standing in the sitting room were the still frozen bodies of their parents. As they watched, the green light holding them in place faded away. Blinking, they both noticed the twins standing in front of them with concerned looks. “Kids? What’s wrong? Why are we all just standing in the sitting room?”

An unexpected flurry of hugs came next. The Pines parents were none to wiser why this was going on, but they had no reason to be worried.

Mason looked at his parents. “So, neither of you felt anything? Nothing weird? You’re both fine?”

His father answered. “Of course we’re fine, why wouldn’t we be?” He shook his head. “Come on dear, I think it’s about time for dinner.”

His mother nodded, and the two of them wandered towards the kitchen. Neither twin wanted to mention that it was around 6am, or that it was 2 days later than it had been when they’d been frozen. Both Mason and Mabel felt exhausted at that point too, all their activity today finally catching up to them.

As their parents left the room, they noticed Pacifica for the first time. “Oh, hello dear, I hope you’re doing well.”

Pacifica, the perfect model of innocence, just smiled up at them. “I’m doing really well, thank you.” She looked over to the twins. “We all are.”

5 Weeks Later…

Dipper was excited. In a short time, his girlfriend would be arriving from up north. He had a whole weekend planned for them together and was eagerly studying the notes he’d made in Journal 4. Weeks of detailed research into online rumours had gone into this latest page, he was determined that everything would go perfectly.

A ring from the doorbell signalled her arrival. He carefully closed the journal and hopped over the door. His enthusiasm was incredibly high right now. Pulling open the door, he saw her standing there. For once she’d avoided her usual pink dress and purple jacket look. Instead, she was wearing a baggy purple sweatshirt and jeans. She’d even eschewed her fur lined boots, wearing regular trainers. She still had a thick layer of makeup on though, some habits really did die hard.

He noticed that she was wearing something pink on her wrist. It was hair tie that she’d used when they were in space together. Dipper brought her into a warm hug, he of course was wearing the same wrinkled flannel hoodie as always. He needed to have those spacious pockets for journal carrying purposes after all.
“Hey Mason. I’m so glad to see you again.” Pacifica had gone back to her parents after the whole ‘running away’ incident and had tried to explain herself as best she could. She tried to be honest about why she’d left, though her parents still didn’t truly understand. She was sure not to mention the word ‘Pines’ at all though, she wasn’t ready to share that with them, nor did she say anything about any ‘weirdness’. What she said was enough though, and they’d relaxed their grip on her somewhat, loosening up her rigid schedule, and letting her have weekends off to do whatever she wanted. She still felt like they were controlling her, but these little freedoms helped. She always looked forwards to the free time she could spend away from them.

Dipper let go from the hug at last. “Me too Paz. I can’t wait to show you all the stuff I’ve prepared.”

“Sure sure, but nerd stuff later ok.” She pressed her lips to his. It was a sensation they’d both missed over the last few weeks. She smiled up at him. “Ready to head out then?”

He nodded. “Of course. Just one more thing to remember.” He called up the stairs. “Mabel! It’s time.”

Pacifica heard the sound of awkward thudding from upstairs, then she saw Mabel clumping down the staircase. She’d finally left her goth style behind. Now she was wearing a bright pink sweater, a star with a rainbow trail was stitched on the front. Her hair hadn’t grown back on one side yet though, and she’d taken a liking to the black lipstick and eyeshadow look, which somewhat contrasted with her bright clothes. A pair of wide-brimmed glasses sat on her nose. She looked a bit goofy, but somehow Mabel made it work. “Heya sis-sis! I’m ready for anything!”

Pacifica was pulled into a bone-crushing hug, but it was one she reciprocated openly. “We couldn’t go on a Mystery Hunt without you.” She raised up a fist. “Mystery Trio?”

Mabel happily fist-pumped her friend back. “Mystery Trio! Dipper’s come up with a cool mystery for us to solve, I’ve been so cooped up here without one!”

Dipper grinned, happy to see the girls filled with such joy. “So? You two ready to go on an adventure?”

Their eager smiles told him exactly how excited they both were. The three of them left the house, heading out to make a new future together.

Chapter End Notes

It's been a long time coming with this finale, initially when I started writing chapter 1 I only had the intention that it would be a one-off. That was quickly forgotten as I carried on with the rest, new ideas constantly spiralling around.

The season arc came into being between Chapter 6 and 7, when I started formulating concepts and where I wanted the story to go.

I hope people have enjoyed reading this, it's my first major long-form fiction that I've attempted. Writing again after so long has been very energising.
As of this moment I am working on a 'Season 2', with 8 chapters written already. My plan is to complete all the chapters, before publishing with a weekly schedule (instead of just uploading them whenever I finished writing them in Season 1).

I'm looking for Beta readers for the new season, so if anyone is interested in looking over the chapters before publishing, shoot me a message.

Until then, gyrtlqy twshr pjqlvlq.

Update 15/05/2019: Have 22 chapters completed for season 2 now.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!