

CHAPTER 1: The World of The Weight of the World

Our story starts in a little town called Setune Town. It's existed for over 300 years, and the people there are polite and kind.

Although it's a somewhat small town, its residents are quite content in staying.

That is, except for two newly minted young adults.



This is Atlas Cordoli. They're one of the stars of our show!

Atlas has been living in Setune Town since they were born. They're a touch shy, and they find it hard to assert themselves, but they have a good heart and a keen mind.



This is Janet Jason. She's the second star!

Janet is Atlas's best friend. She's much more assertive than Atlas, but she has trouble believing in herself sometimes, so she covers it up with a lot of bluster and energy.



Now, Atlas and Janet are adults, after a long 20-some years of being alive. As two excited young people, they're prepared to explore the outside world, to experience all it has to offer.



However, it seems as though no one's left town in quite some time. They're not quite sure how to solve this predicament, as neither of them even know how they would even begin leaving. The town is surrounded by very tall walls that one can't even see past.

...What's that? You say that each time you see Atlas and Janet, they look slightly different? You say that, rather than the full picture of their lives, you're only getting small snapshots of their emotions?

How peculiar... Perhaps that's simply the way our story is presented to worlds outside of its own. After all, that's how stories are told and retold, yes? Filtered through memories and impressions, allusions and metaphor...

That is to say, while your view of our story may not be consistent, it is still correct! So no worries, dear reader. So long as you can still follow along, you're just fine.

Anyway, our two protagonists find themselves whittling away the time on a sunny afternoon...



Atlas is sketching in their journal. They're perfecting a still life of the big tree in their backyard and the apples that have fallen to the ground.



Meanwhile, Janet is tinkering with a little gadget, sitting underneath the very same tree that Atlas is sketching.

"...Atlas, haven't you drawn that same tree a million times now?"



“W-well, yeah, but...” They look between Janet and their sketchbook. Page after page of the same things...



“I just... wanna get it right, y’know?”



“You still haven’t gotten it right after *how* many years?” Jeez.



“Well, you’re not going to have to worry about that for much longer, because I’m just about done here!” Janet stands up and trots over to Atlas.



“Huh?” Atlas watches her bound over before looking at what she has in her hands. They can’t really tell what it is by looking at it. It’s just a cube with a rod sticking out of it...



“Behold!” She holds the palm-sized device high in the air. “The auto-lockpick, capable of unlocking any door in only a few seconds! All I have to do is stick it in a lock, and it’ll calibrate to match the lock’s pin configuration!”



“With this, we can finally break the lock on your uncle’s old shed!”



“Oh, wow! That’s really n...eat...”



“W-wait, what are you talking about!? We can’t do that! Melody specifically told me to never go in there!”



“Aw, who cares what your sister thinks! We’ve been sitting here for ages, whiling away our golden years with nothing to do! She’s 30.” Janet, what does that mean.



“She told me that what’s in there is *really* dangerous, though...!” Atlas stands up, clutching their sketchbook in their arms. “What if we get hurt? She wouldn’t lie to us...”



“Atlas!” Janet puts a hand on their shoulder, the lockpick held aloft in her other hand. “Do you want to spend your entire life in your backyard, or do you want to interrogate your life a little and see what you’re not being told? You can’t grow without being a little scared sometimes!”
...That said, she does sound a little uncertain.



“I mean... I...” They still seem intimidated, but they’re glancing towards the shed...
For all intents and purposes, it looks like a normal shed—but it has a big, sturdy padlock on its door. It’s been there for as long as Atlas can remember.



“We’ll just go take a look for a couple minutes, okay? It’s a shed! It shouldn’t be that bad. Pleeaaaaaaase?”



“Guh...” They wobble with uncertainty... “If... if you’re sure. I trust you, Janet.”



“Yippee!” She gives Atlas a big hug and swings them around a little! “Thank you, Atlas! It’ll all be alright, I promise!”

With that, she bounds over to the shed and carefully inserts the lockpick into the padlock. It clicks and whirs as it goes through different formations, extending and retracting rods to match the intended pattern...



Atlas watches the lockpick work, still clutching their sketchbook. They couldn’t help but be impressed by Janet’s talents, but they *also* can’t help but be intimidated by what’s behind that door...

After a couple seconds, the lockpick clicks, and the padlock slips undone.



“Ah, perfect!” Janet takes the lockpick and the padlock off the door, tossing the padlock aside. “Now, let’s see what’s insiiide...”

She opens the door, and...



“...It’s...just a normal toolshed...”

From what they can both see, that appears to be the case. There’s various tools for carpentry, an axe and some shovels, a rusted lawnmower...



“Seriously...? That can’t be all there is!” Janet carefully steps inside, looking around for any sign of something more interesting. “It can’t just be some rusted tools and cobwebs! Why would your uncle lock it up if that’s the only thing in here??”



“You’re talking like you *wanted* it to be something worse...” Atlas peeks around from where they’re standing, not wanting to walk into the shed themselves. However...



“...There’s a hatch in the floor. I can see the seam under the lawnmower.” They point, and sure enough, they’re right.



“Hey, you’re right! I wonder what that’s all about?” Janet starts pulling the lawnmower out of the way before crouching down to get a better look at the hatch.



“The hatch doesn’t have a lock on it... We could see what’s down there.”



“Janet, you can’t be seriously suggesting...” Please god no.



“Pleeeaaase? Just for a second?”



“...Fine. But I have a really bad feeling about this...”



“We’ll be quick! Promise.” She doesn’t seem quite as enthusiastic as before, but she’s staying on-course.



Carefully, she grabs the knob and pulls the hatch open. There’s a set of stairs leading down below. She starts stepping down, waiting near the top for Atlas to follow.



Atlas tosses their sketchbook into the grass before taking her hand and following her down, looking around frightfully...

Down below the shed is what appears to be a series of pathways surrounded by water. The water is a murky green, and the pathways are an equally dingy looking cobblestone, made slippery by the moisture down below.

More importantly, something can be seen glittering on the wall farther down the path.



“Atlas, do you see that over there?” Janet points towards the glittering lights. “I wonder what that could be? Should we go check it out?”



“Why are you asking me when you’re the one who wanted to come down here...?” They puff one cheek indignantly.



“I’m not sure, though. It’s pretty far away, so I can’t tell what it is from here... It could be dangerous, but if it’s the only thing we look at down here, I don’t see why we can’t go look and then come back...” They’re trying to rationalize it in their head.



“I think we could handle the trek from here to there if we keep holding hands. I’ll make sure you don’t fall if you do the same for me.”

With that, she starts moving forward, making sure her steps are light and even.



Atlas does their best to watch their steps as well, staring at the murky water. They can’t tell why it’s so dark. After all, the area seems fairly bright, with lamps on each wall illuminating the waterway... So why does the water look *black*?



“We’re nearly there... Are those glittering lights more lamps, I wonder? They look smaller than the others on the walls...”

She makes her way over some disturbed cobbles before finally reaching the wall. From here, it looks like two palm-sized badges—one sporting a smooth, pearly white gemstone, while the other has a large hunk of what looks like polished amber—on either side of a metal mesh attached to the wall. The mesh is large, almost humanoid in shape, and bulging out of the wall.



“What *is* this? I’ve never seen anything like it before...” Atlas hesitates, not feeling safe enough to touch the mesh, but those badges...



“I’m not sure why, but those badges attached to the wall... They seem important, somehow. I don’t know if we should take them or leave them here, though...”



“I kinda feel the same way...” She ruminates for a moment...



“Well, think about it this way: if we take them and they end up being *really* important, then they’ll be in safe hands, instead of down here in this gross dungeon. If we don’t take them, then they’ll still be in the gross dungeon, *and* whatever’s in that mesh might eat them!”



“That...makes sense, I think. It’d be better for us to have them, then for them to fall into the wrong hands.” There’s some part of Atlas that wonders why they’re playing along, but admittedly, that part of them is very quiet.



“Should we...take them at the same time, then?”



“That’s probably a good idea.” She nods. “That way, if anything weird happens, we can both run away!”



“Alright. I trust you.”



The two reach out to take the badges at the same time...

And the moment they take them off the wall, a black sludge begins to ooze from the mesh.



“Definitely important!”



“Absolutely! Let’s get out of here!” Atlas grabs Janet’s hand again and starts making a break for it back to the hatch!

As they run away, the black sludge continues oozing from the mesh, growing worse and worse as time goes on. Some of it drops into the water—but rather than dissolving, it seems to pull what was left under the water *back up*, until the waterway is absolutely covered in it.



“What is this stuff...?! It’s following after us!”



"I don't know, but as soon as we get back upstairs, we need to close the hatch!"

They make their way back up, thankfully not slipping on the cobblestone as they do. The sludge is still building, its pursuit growing faster the more it does.



The moment they've made it back upstairs, Janet **SLAMS** the hatch shut.



"Pull the lawnmower over it! It can't open the hatch by itself!"



"R-right!" Atlas grabs the lawnmower and maneuvers it over the hatch, darting out of the shed as soon as they're done.



Janet follows suit, shutting the shed door, grabbing the padlock, and locking it tight.



“...Phew.”



Atlas takes a moment to catch their breath, hand to their chest.

“Is...is it over?”

...

Something’s leaking under the door.



“...It’s not over.”



“Crap! What do we do now?!” Janet steps away from the shed as the sludge continues pushing its way past the door, leaking at the hinges now.



“I—I don’t know!” Think, think... “Do the badges do anything? What even are they...?!”

Atlas looks at the white badge in their hands desperately, shaking it, knocking on its surface, anything at all...!

Before either of them can figure out what to do, there’s a very, VERY loud sound from above. It sounds like... a car horn?



“Wh...what in the...!?”



“No way...!”

Flying right above the two is a *giant airship*. Someone throws down a ladder, long enough to reach all the way to the ground right beside them. From inside, they can see a person with blue hair shouting down at them.



“IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIVES, CLIMB UP, **NOW!**”



“But what about everyone else in town!? If this reaches them...!”



“Atlas, if it reaches *us*, we won’t be able to help anyone else! Come on!” She grabs their hand and drags them over to the ladder, forcing them to go up first before she follows suit.



“Sorry...!” Up they go...!

Once the two make it all the way up the ladder, they practically collapse into the airship.



“Good grief, that was scary... Just what was that stuff, anyhow?” Janet sits upright on the floor.



“I don’t know, and I’m not sure if I want to find out...” Atlas sits beside her, rubbing their head.



...Meanwhile, there’s someone glaring holes through both of their heads, their arms crossed.



“...”



“...Um. H—



“Have you two...”



**“LOST YOUR
ABSOLUTE
MIIIIINDS?!”**



JESUS FUCKING CHRIST THEY'RE IN TROUBLE. FUCK

END CHAPTER 1.