In a few pages I’m going to show you the photo Mateo uploaded to our group chat.

We didn’t know it at the time, but that photo turned out to be a huge deal.

It changed everything.

First, though, I want to tell you about the Dragon Notebook, because none of the crazy things that happened to me in 7th grade would have been possible without it.

It looks like this:

(image of Dragon notebook)

It started out as my sister Paige’s sketchbook for an art class she was supposed to take after school, but she decided to quit art and do modern dance instead. Mom gave the sketchbook to me. I, in turn, made it my 6th grade Social Studies notebook.

But then 6th grade Social Studies went off the rails.

Our first Social Studies teacher, Ms. Burns, quit during week two. Then came a parade of substitutes, and finally, Ms. Whipitt, who mostly showed movies and told long, meandering stories about her life. That’s when I started zoning out and filling my notebook with sketches.

I drew giant robots, superheroes, spaceships, and eventually, a dragon. A giant space dragon to be more precise. It was destroying a city while parachutists floated in from above. I drew it during one of Ms. Whipitt’s long tangents about the “soul-altering trip” she took to the Galapagos Islands, as you can see from some of the notes I took on the same page.

\*(Sketch of space dragon with notes about Galapagos Islands)\*

That’s my name in the bottom corner of the sketch, by the way. Gavin Holloway. I didn’t normally sign my work like that, but Charlotte told me I should.

“You literally spent all of Social Studies drawing it so you should sign it and sell it,” Charlotte said.

Couldn’t argue with Charlotte’s impeccable logic, so I signed it and then I sold it. To Mateo. For one Dorito. Mateo taped that notebook page up on the wall of his locker for the rest of the year and I very much enjoyed that Dorito.

But then my notebook didn’t have a dragon in it anymore, and I was really into drawing dragons that year. So I drew another one, right on the cover, in black Sharpie.

(sketch of dragon on cover of notebook)

And thus, the Dragon Notebook was born.

I quickly realized that this notebook was special. Its thick, blank papers meant for sketching were far superior to the flimsy lined paper on a regular spiral notebook. It was far too nice a notebook for Social Studies, which, by that point, was my least favorite class, so I decided immediately that it was no longer a Social Studies notebook.

But I already had notebooks for math and science, and I was beginning to think this notebook should be for *my* things. It should be for my drawings, my ideas, *my learning*.

Not for school assignments.

Have you ever kept a notebook of your own learning, the things you do not because any teacher or parent makes you, but because you want to? I highly recommend it. As soon as I started keeping the Dragon Notebook just for me, as a place to write down thoughts and ideas, to take notes on whatever I wanted to learn on my own, to record the really good stuff that deserves to be written down not because it’s going to be on a test, but because you genuinely want to learn it and know it, *as soon as I started doing that*, I felt like a different person.

I felt like I could learn anything I wanted to learn if I just set my mind to it.

Seriously, I insist that you do this.

If you don’t already have a notebook that’s **yours**, for things you want to learn, you need to get one. Go online or to a store right now and buy one, or have your parents buy one for you. My Dragon Notebook was an expensive sketchbook of the sort that might cost a good $10 or more these days, but yours doesn’t have to be fancy. You can use any kind of notebook. Whatever’s available to you, even if it’s just a cheap spiral with notebook paper, even if it’s somebody else’s old and long dead notebook sitting on some shelf somewhere in your house.

Once you have the notebook in-hand, you need to do two things with it:

**1) Write down whatever you’re learning, working through, or want to learn**. It can be things related to this book, but also things related to life. Just make sure it’s yours, and what you’re writing is what YOU want to write.

**2) Come up with a theme for the sketches you’re going to mix into the notes you take.** As you’ve already seen, my theme was dragons. Yours could be cats or funny people or goblins or whatever. Just make sure the sketches find their way onto your notebook pages to make them more interesting and fun to look at.

Let me give you an example. Here’s a list of things I wanted to learn about that I wrote near the front of the Dragon Notebook once I decided it was for my stuff.

(make into a sketch in handwriting in the notebook)

Things I Want to Learn

1. More math, especially geometry about circles.

2. Electronics and robotics

3. Coding, video game design

4. More science and engineering

The dragon who appeared on the previous page, by the way, is Franz, who is most likely to appear when I’m thinking about big things, like what I want to do with my life.

Once you’ve decided you want to learn something, you start learning it, and take notes and make sketches and fun, interesting pages with your characters. Here’s a section from the Dragon Notebook where Hodgesmykal appears amidst some notes I wrote down when I was thinking about gear ratios. (image – gear ratio notes)

And here’s Jurgen Burgenlurg amidst some notes I wrote down about how to solve some kinds of math problems quickly in your head

(half one double the other with a different dragon)

So now that you know about the Dragon Notebook, and have seen examples of what’s inside, it’s time for you to see the photo Mateo uploaded to the group chat.

Reminder, this photo was of the back of the Galaxy Pizza Delivery poster he bought at the estate sale.

(photo)

![A drawing of a building and arrows

AI-generated content may be incorrect.]()

What do you notice about the photo?

And yes, the weird, obvious thing you notice is exactly what you’re supposed to notice.

**Me:** wait what? that wasn’t on the back of the poster yesterday

**Mateo**: turns out the back of the poster had this weird waxy white film that you could peel off

**Charlotte**: Are you saying there was a false back on the poster and when you peeled it off this was underneath?

**Mateo**: yes

**Me**: no way. you drew that

**Mateo**: I swear I didn’t

**Charlotte**: Go to the Atlas?

**Mateo**: the library

**Charlotte**: I KNOW IT’S A LIBRARY! Just weird that it’s on the back of your poster.

**Mateo**: That’s not the only weird thing. (insert weird emoji)

Quick aside here to let you know that Atlas is the biggest, coolest library in town, and it looks just like the sketch on Mateo’s poster.

But I wasn’t looking so much at the sketch of the building. I was looking at the dragon.

At first, I felt confused, almost in disbelief, about what I saw.

Thankfully, Charlotte chimed in that she saw it too.

**Charlotte**: I don’t understand. Isn’t that little dragon one of Gavin’s?

**me**: yep that’s Hodgesmykal

**Charlotte**: Then how did it get on the back of that poster?

**Mateo**: that’s what’s I’m telling you! something weird is going on!!!!

(illustration line break – dragons)

There are six dragon characters who make regular appearances in my notebook (regular, as in, on most every page).

This is Hodgesmykal (rhymes with “Lodge Cycle” and “Dodge Michael” ) (sketch)

Here are the others:

(insert all six dragons with names)

The dragons aren’t copied from any comic strip or cartoon. They are wholly original creations of mine.

They’re kind of my trademark.

Which is why it was really weird, like hair-standing-on-the-back-of-your-neck *weird*, to see one of my dragons on the back of Mateo’s poster.

An old, obscure poster that used to belong to an eccentric billionaire who died a few weeks ago.

Mateo had to be joking. He must’ve drawn it himself. That was the only explanation.

Except… it wasn’t like Mateo to lie, and it was especially unlike him to deny it when we pressed. We all liked to kid around, but Mateo would have known this joke wasn’t funny.

You don’t mess with my dragons.

And now I was, once again, thinking about the math problem I thought I saw in Hammerstrike.

My math problem.

It had been easy to brush it off at first. Just a trick of my brain, because it made no sense that my math problem would have been pasted on the wall in some old mansion I’d never been to.

But it also made no sense that my dragon was on this poster.

I started connecting dots in my mind. Dad said that Marvin was obsessed with wormholes through spacetime. Dad also said that, even though he seemed crazy at the end, Marvin was undeniably a genius.

What if wormholes through spacetime were real? What if, for some ultra-odd reason, my math problem and my dragon...

The thought was so stupid, so insane, that I started laughing. Like, out-loud, actual laughter. Sitting alone in my room on a Saturday afternoon, laughing to myself like a total maniac.

No. Mateo was messing with us. He drew that dragon. For all I knew, maybe he put the math problem on the wall too…

This had to be it. It was the only explanation.

I went back to the group chat.

**Me**: I think you’re pranking us.

**Mateo**: Why would I do that? I’m telling you, I peeled off the backing on this poster and this drawing was there.

**Me**: Mmm-hmm. And my math problem just happened to be on the wall at Hammerstrike

**Mateo**: ?????

**Charlotte**: what math problem?

**Me**: My WOMP entrance problem. I thought I saw it in the weird room with all the papers on the walls.

**Mateo**: OMG this is getting creepy now.

**Charlotte**: When were you going to tell us this?

**Me**: I didn’t believe my eyes. Thought I was hallucinating.

**Charlotte**: Since when do normal healthy 7th graders hallucinate!?!?

**Mateo**: Maybe you’re the one who’s pranking us.

“Gavin?” came Mom’s voice.

She came opened the door and poked her head inside. I flipped my phone face-down on the bed.

“Yeah?”

She pushed the door all the way open and came through. “I’ve got your grandpa on the phone. He would love to help you with your robot project.”