# Pokémon Reset Bloodlines

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Teen And Up Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Pocket Monsters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Ash Ketchum/Harem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Satoshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Peggy Sue, Time Reset, Alternate Universe - Time Travel, Time Travel Fix-It, Adventure, Friendship, Eventual Romance, Alternate Universe - Harem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series:</td>
<td>Part 1 of Pokémon Reset Bloodlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2018-03-20 Updated: 2019-09-08 Chapters: 44/? Words: 534833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Pokémon Reset Bloodlines**

by **FoxBluereaver**

**Summary**

Going back to save the world is tough; it's tougher when the process ends up radically altering your reality. When the new world Ash wakes up in differs from the old one in many ways, Ash will have to adapt his battle experience to a new world, and what are these mysterious Bloodlines that everyone fears? AshX Harem, Anime world with some Adventures and Game canon. Written by krspacelt AKA Crossoverpairinglover, posted with his permission.

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**Notes**
Hello there. Now for something completely different, here's a story I'm posting for another friend and fellow author. Some of you might know him in Spacebattles or Fanfiction.net, as krspaceT or Crossoverpairinglover respectively. This has been one of the best Pokémon stories I've read, and when he opened the chance for other authors to join in and create an expanded universe, I took the chance, plus also went and decided to translate it to Spanish for good measure. In any case, given that he has some reservations about AO3, he said that, should this story be posted here, someone else would have to manage it, and well, I decided to be that person. Now, before we get started, here are a few preliminary notes he posted in the original version, that I feel you should all know:

"1: I do not deal with HumanxPokémon pairings. While there are some Pokémon who have the required intelligence to be in the same category as a Human paired with a Togruta or Goblin, not all of them have the required level of intelligence, and if you pair a human with a Gardevoir, you conversely would have to let them pair up with something that is less intelligent, such as a Wurmple. So please do not request this.
2: I like specific numbers for pairings, if done as multiples if I feel like doing more. For example, Naruto with 9 due to Kurama and Harry Potter with 7, representing the magically powerful number. As this is Pokémon, a party of 6 Pokémon is used as the amount limit, and thus 6 is the main harem size, and before anyone asks, the initial and possible 6 are already chosen. You could probably guess a few of them.
3: The story takes a few cues from the story Ashes of the Past, but only in a few elements. Believe me, this will not be similar beyond those sparse few elements, because of some points that I don't particularly agree on in the elements of time travel and the effect of memory restoration.
4: Ash will be made more competent due to several factors, but he is still going to be, in essence, the Sweeper user, hyper energetic, compassionate trainer he is in canon, and many of these changes to him are going to be explained in a decent, realistic manner. I don't want to write an Ash who decides to turn into a Smogon guy who just happens to be nicer than Paul.
5: Speaking of Paul, note that there will be changes to the flow of the Pokémon anime, partially dealing with the long runner status, partially to make it flow better, and partially due to what you'll hear about this chapter. As Paul had travelled through the other regions and was known to be in Kanto at the start, he will appear during the Kanto arc (Heads up, I despise the guy and see him as the embodiment of the Stop Having Fun nuts who use perfect IV'd Scizor and Garchomp while I just want to have a good fight with my Grass team) and elements of the Battle Frontier and Serena's existence will pop up early on, as well as movepools of characters being updated for the new generations, for example Pokémon like Onix having Stone Edge or Stealth Rock.
6: Unless it's a really big berserk button to the readers, the four move limit is not applicable in this story, referring to Drake's Dragonite as validation for anime movepools being larger. However, it won't be absurd; the kind of Pokémon who will have 10 moves are types like Drake's Dragonite or Cynthia's Garchomp, and having more than 4 moves is characteristic of well-trained Pokémon, such as Gym Leaders and experienced trainers with a bit of League participation under their belts."

And now without further ado, let's dive into the story. Hope you guys enjoy it.
When one reality ends, another one opens

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

In the grand Multiverse of worlds, exist many multitudes of worlds home to many similar and wondrous beings. These beings can manipulate psychic energies, soar through the air, swim to the deepest depths and do a myriad of other amazing things.

We call these amazing creatures Pokémon.

From the most common pests to ones regarded with the same strength as gods, there are hundreds of species of Pokémon known throughout the world. A true number may never be truly known, but the last count had the number somewhere past 700, and said number is prone to change once someone revives a new fossil or discovers some mysterious ocean dweller.

Humans are believed by some to be a lost species of Pokémon, though this theory remains controversial.

Regardless of the controversial aspects of considering Human evolution, humanity has existed alongside Pokémon for generations, with a deeply rooted harmony for the most part that takes on many forms.

Some Pokémon exist as pets, others as workers, but the vast majority team up with humans to improve their strengths as a team; the Trainer and Pokémon traveling across the regions, competing in competitive battles (as well as other forms of competition, such as Contests and the Pokéathlon) for fame and growth on both ends.

Now, there happens to exist a particular young trainer who has something special in him, a young trainer shown to have an uncanny ability to bond with nearly any Pokémon he meets, a trainer with great potential barely restrained by his youth.

His name is Ash Ketchum.

Born in Pallet Town, this remarkable young man has travelled from region to region, competing in many tournaments, winning in the Orange Islands and Battle Frontier, and putting on a good show in Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, Sinnoh and Unova, if not coming in first place.

However, there was always next time, and on his new journey through the Kalos region he has a good shot of winning it there...

The Kalos Region; somewhere on Route 5 between Lumiose City and Camphrier Town

A floating air balloon themed after the Scratch Cat Pokémon Meowth was floating over the gentle wind swept Kalos landscape as the Meowth that the balloon was themed after looked up into the sky.

"Hey guys, you hear something?" Said the Meowth as he spoke to a duo of young adults, one being a blue haired man and the other a red headed woman with extremely long hair, both dressed up in white clothing with large red R logos on the front.

"No, not really," The female said absently as she was currently busy doing her nails.

"You didn't hear some voice in the sky stuttering like a malfunctioning machine?" Meowth pressed.
"Did you take the last Thunderbolt head on Meowth?" The male asked with more concern than the female showed.

"No, I'm quite sure that it was your ugly mug..." The female insisted loudly.

Her screams silenced both of them and Meowth soon regretted having said anything.

He turned back to simply looking up at the sky, partially in the hopes of spotting whatever had made that sound.

He regretted it.

Meanwhile on the ground...

The remarkable trainer known as Ash Ketchum was currently in the process of doing his second favourite activity, behind the intensity of a good Pokémon battle: eating.

The dark haired, tan tinted young man, his ever present variant of a red cap adorning his head alongside his blue jacket and jeans, seemed to be currently in a contest of out eating a little blond girl while a dusky brown haired girl smiled at their antics.

Meanwhile in the background, there was a minor explosion and a whimpering about 'the future is now', but that seemed to happen enough that the two in the eating competition seemed to pay it no heed after a brief glance over to check that the blue jump-suited blond was still alive.

Around them scampered about a few Pokémon; a yellow mouse known as Pikachu, the orange mouse Dedenne, the rabbit Bunnelby, the green woodchuck Chespin, the yellow and red fire fox Fennekin, the blue ninja frog Froakie, and the red and white songbird Fletchling; all bouncing about in energetic energy, having finished off their food and just letting off steam until the humans had finished their eating competition.

Speaking of which, the blue jump-suited blond, still covered in black dust after the latest gadget of his blew up, adjusted his oddly undamaged glasses as his little sister and Ash kept eating.

"I envy both of your metabolisms." He deadpanned in utter amazement, just before Ash was about to make a grab at the last cookie, which suddenly vanished...and not because Ash or the blond girl had already eaten it.

All four humans just stared at the vanished cookie in confusion as Pikachu, Froakie, Fletchling, Chespin and Fennekin stared at the missing food in similar confusion while Bunnelby looked on from afar and Dedenne fell asleep in the grass for no real reason.

"Are there Kecleon in Kalos?" Ash suggested, giving a questioning glance to the other male, who nodded in affirmation, but added:

"I don't think that is the case here."

He gave a glance over to the Froakie who looked oddly annoyed at something before continuing with. "I'm pretty sure Froakie would have sensed any hidden Kecleon in the area well before they could get close enough to steal the last cookie."

"FROAKIE FROAK!" The frog exclaimed in agreement, nodding his head to the ego stroaking compliment.

Well it was certainly a mystery and one Ash still wasn't happy about. He had wanted that cookie.
"So, what did happen to the cookie then?" The little girl demanded as the tree behind them suddenly vanished as well, just like the cookie.

All the beings in the clearing, bar the sleeping Dedenne, gave the empty space that was once home to a tree a greatly alarmed look, as the sky suddenly began to turn from the previous sunny day, to an endless abyss of dark, thundering clouds, as tree after tree began to vanish again and again.

Ash wondered idly if perhaps it was a Pokémon doing this and if it was which one.

He did however have some ideas, having witnessed an incident like this before...and it did little to reassure him.

"Brother...what's happening!" The little girl wailed quietly in warranted horror as she grabbed onto his arm for reassurance and comfort.

"I...I don't know, science has no answer for this!" He exclaimed, unable to hide his concern.

The various devices he tried to take out and figure out what the hell was going on was getting him nowhere, with absolutely zero data on what was transpiring.

In fact, his little scanning device vanished itself, right out of his hands as if had never been there in the first place.

The older female, however, did notice that both Ash and Pikachu seemed to have quite different expressions on their faces than the rest of them.

Less along the lines of 'what the hell is going on' horror, to something like 'not again, why Arceus why' horror.

"Ash, what's going on?" She questioned him as Ash could only mutter.

"It can't be Alamos Town all over again."

The ground around them began to vanish as well, coming towards them like a giant eraser was erasing the world itself.

"Alamos Town...?" The girl questioned.

She however only had a second to wonder about this, before the erasing got to the ground they were standing on as well.

With no longer anything left to stand on they all fell, screaming, into an abyss of clouds.

Their screaming resounded for a few seconds before nearly all of them vanished, except for one, who kept screaming as a golden light surrounded him.

**Thump!**

With a groan, Ash pushed himself up from a floor made of immaculate diamonds, holding his head like he had just fallen from a plane.

"What...what just happened?" He asked himself absently as he looked around a few times, trying to figure out where he was.

The place was a palace, seemingly coated in gold and silver, with jewels ranging from rubies to sapphires to emeralds and diamonds encrusted into the solid platinum pillars while large pearls hung
over each closed doorway.

The stark richness of the world he had landed in reminded Ash of something, it was nothing unless he had someone to share it with.

"Pikachu!" He called out first for his long-time buddy, and waited a few seconds for any sort of response.

"Serena?" He tried for anyone else who might be around, "Anyone?"

Still, the room was starkly silent. He seemed to be the only one there...

BOOM!

The grand palace suddenly was hit with a massive burst of energy that shook it strongly enough to knock Ash back to the ground and cause the palace to flash several colours rapidly; first red and green, then blue and yellow, then black and white...

The lights came out in a huge set of flashes that hurt like a Pokémon's electric attack in brightly lit explosions, so Ash had to close his eyes, and only open them when the light seemed to have vanished and did not blaze as harshly as a sun, instead with the gentleness of a moon.

When he did however he saw something familiar in front of his face.

A mostly golden foot, leading up to a white leg, which was connected to a large, white skinned Pokémon with four quadrupedal legs, an elegant head and several golden like structures surrounding him in a rather lightning-like pattern.

This was a Pokémon that religious extremists climbed the highest peaks to hear in the hopes of hearing his message, or prayed that every bush they passed would instantly light on fire as a sign of his presence.

Ash had met him on a slow week apparently.

"Arceus!" Ash exclaimed in shock and awe as the creator of the Pokémon world nodded in reply.

"Hello Ash, I do believe we have much to discuss."

Dominion of Arceus.

"I'll be frank with you; reality as we all know it is no more." Arceus began without preamble as Ash gaped at the creator in a way that would put a Magikarp to shame.

"...You mean it's..." Ash began talking, when he realized his voice changed. "Huh..."

His voice appeared to now be back to normal.

"Oh yes, you might notice your voice change, reality distorting itself can have that effect on a person." Arceus admitted.

Ash felt like Arceus might have raised an amused eyebrow if he had them

"I will say this, your original voice is better," Arceus added.

"Original voice...my voice has always been the same," Ash insisted as his voice changed between two different tones with each word, making him sound kind of disturbing.
"Er, yeah that's related to the problem at hand." Arceus noted with a frown. "To answer the question of why reality is gone, you can blame the one they call Cyrus."

"The leader of Team Galactic!?" Ash inquired in alarm.

He had thought the guy was dead, having walked into a parallel plane of existence to never be heard from again...or something like that. He didn't really understand the explanation all that well.

"Yes, he did wander into a different plane of existence, and by doing so managed to learn the ways of natural space-time fluctuations. This would have driven any mentally sound human insane, but his warped mind was able to comprehend the space-time forces that naturally occur to ensure the world does not fall into entropy, or fray at the ends. To put it in a phase you may understand, this process included introducing new types of Pokémon, separating physical and special attacks more logically and changing the amount of Pokémon that were known to science. It was quite similar to what human writers knew as a retcon."

"With this knowledge, he managed to get around Dialga and Palkia and alter the end results of their birth, essentially shattering reality and slowly remaking it into his desired world without spirit. In fact, of the previous world, there remain but three lifeforms; you, myself and Cyrus."

Arceus let that sink in for a few moments as Ash got the gist of what he was saying.

"Wait...are you saying that..."

"Yes, all your friends are more than dead." Arceus stated matter of factly as Ash look at him in abject horror. "None of your Pokémon, family or friends were ever even born."

That made the fact that Ash existed a complicated temporal mess, a rather minor detail in the current decay of all reality but had it not been in the process of detonating, Arceus would have to smite Ash to preserve reality.

But, paradoxes aside...

BOOM!

The mysterious hall of Arceus was suddenly hit with a massive force that shook it to its mystical foundation as Ash again lost his balance, only for the creator's eyes to glow blue and lift him back up using a Psychic attack.

"We do not have much time." Arceus noted as he viewed the attacks on his palace. "The temporal distortion is currently trying to remove me from existence just the same as everyone else."

Arceus decided to get a move on with his explanation because he hurriedly then explained:

"The only way to alleviate this disaster is to send someone competent back through time with their memories intact, someone who will be able to keep Cyrus from discovering the answers to time and space. That someone, by default, is you."

As Ash looked overwhelmed, Arceus decided not to mention Ash had been his third choice. He was originally going to send back the Sinnoh Champion Cynthia, but she vanished before he could bring her to his hall, same with Lance the G-man.

"I...I can't." Ash stuttered in utter shock. "I can't save the world!"

"Last I checked, you saved the day a few times before." Arceus noted about the trainer. "At
Shamouti and Michina you saved the world, let alone the saving of major land areas as opposed to the world as you're prone to do rather often. I can't understand why you don't think you're capable."

"Since I can't win anything." Ash exclaimed, some buried angst bubbling to the surface all at once. "I lost in Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, Sinnoh and Unova, and lost to the first gym leader challenge in Kalos, with a huge advantage on my part type wise. If I'm all the hope reality has, we're all doomed."

Arceus studied him for a moment, before he glowed as a circular field of energy surrounded the two survivors of reality as several scenes began to play around them.

"...Gastrodon is unable to battle, Torterra is the winner..."

"...Ninjask is unable to battle, Buizel is the winner..."

Ash's eyes went wide as he watched his battle with Paul in Sinnoh, but it seemed different. Aside for the change in defeat order, there seemed to be more intensity to the battle than before; like there was even more at stake in it than their last battle (which was perhaps his most satisfactory win of all time, bar Drake and Brandon, possibly.)

Then, in a familiar scene Infernape defeated Electivire, as the call was made:

"...Electivire is unable to battle, the winner is Infernape. The battle, and the Sinnoh Championship, goes to Ash of Pallet Town."

Ash stared wide eyed at the scene as Arceus rewound the scene once more, to some quick montages of battles before it.

"...Ash defeats Nando and goes on to the final eight..."

"...Ash defeats Conway and advances to the final four..."

"...Ash defeats Barry and advances to the finals..."

Then the scene was fast forwarded again, to Unova

"...Ash has defeated Cameron, our foreign favourite Ash has passed the top 32..."

Cameron's Lucario found itself at the mercy of Pignite's Fire Pledge while Hydreigon was decimated by Leavanny's X-Scissor with Swarm's boost.

"...By defeating Bianca, Ash goes on to top 16!" The announcer yelled, with an image of Palpitoad taking down Emboar with Hydro Pump.

"...Virgil has been defeated, and with that Ash goes on to the final 8..." Virgil's Eevee was knocked out by a powerful Rock Smash from Boldore.

"...In his victory over Stephan, Ash has advanced to the final four..." Like what was true to Ash, Krookodile took down Sawk with Aerial Ace.

"...With that victory over Trip, Ash is going on to the finals!..." Pikachu again took down Serperior while scenes from prior battles showed Oshawott taking down a Vanilluxe while Unfezant bested Conkeldurr and Snivy a Jellicent

Ash then found himself watching a brutal battle with Tobias of all people, whose Darkrai and Latios were the only Pokémon of his Ash got a good look at as it seemed the other him had decided to go fishing in the old Pokémon pool, considering he was seeing Sceptile fighting Darkrai again while a
later scene showed Krookodile battling Latios, with a scoreboard that revealed Heracross had battled Darkrai, and lost, and a returned Sceptile after battling Darkrai.

The match fast forwarded, with a scoreboard showing Heracross, Sceptile, Krookodile, Infernape, Charizard and Pikachu as having battled, and defeated, Tobias, hoisting the Unova trophy with the Unova Pokémon in the background cheering...

The series of fast forwarded images just left Ash in a confused state of shock.

Did Arceus feel like trying to taunt him with what he should be like, yet didn’t seem to be?

"One doesn't simply destroy reality with one stroke of his hand." Arceus noted to Ash. "You have to practice manipulating time, and you were his test subject in that matter."

Ash looked on with growing horror as Arceus elaborated.

"To figure out the way to do all the temporal alterations he wanted in one go, as to prevent me from detecting him, he practiced with far smaller changes. To phrase it in human terms, he choose to do so by being a complete dick to you and pretty much randomly screw up your competency level of both your mind and your Pokémon's physical abilities. Practically every odd loss you had in Sinnoh, Unova and Kalos is a result of Cyrus messing with you."

Ash just stared at the future that should have been in astonishment, "So...I'm not a failure?"

"No." Arceus noted with an affirmative nod.

"And all my losses since the Battle Frontier were all because of..."

Arceus suddenly laughed as the scenes around them showed the battle between Gary's Electivire and Pikachu, as well as the battle at Lake Acuity.

"Oh no, you still lose fights every so often completley of your own accord; no one is perfect."

Arceus almost sounded amused at reminding Ash he wasn't perfection incarnate.

After Ash regained his composure after that scathing reminder, Arceus re-railed the conversation back to saving the world.

"So, now that we've gotten that sorted out, I shall send you back to the past to the day you first became a trainer."

At Ash's questioning gaze, Arceus gave him a stare to silence his question and explained, "I do this because the world cannot afford a second disruption of all time and space, thus requiring you to prepare as much as possible for Cyrus's scheme, though I do recognize sending you back to the day of your birth could possibly ruin your sanity. Also, as I realize that as a Pokémon Trainer, you understand the need of teamwork, thus I shall grant you the ability to restore the memories of..."

BOOM BOOM BOOM

A much more powerful explosion shook the palace of the Pokémon creator, as Arceus stared at Ash in quite evident alarm, more so than when he had believed himself betrayed by Damos.

"...There isn't enough time to do this nearly as complete as I'd like it to." Arceus focused on Ash as an orange glow surrounded Ash while the entire palace shook more and more violently. "Unlike Dialga, I need more focus to send someone cleanly through time like you experienced before. You
will be able to restore memories, but not as perfectly and evenly as I’d had hoped to grant you, and not as flexibly, and the distortions to the original timeline may have unpredictable consequences, but it's the best chance we all have...

**BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM**

The shaking got worse as Ash's orange glow stopped in a manner similar to a blacked out video game, with a similar feeling of being incomplete as a somewhat shaky blue orb formed around Ash.

"Best of luck to you, hopefully you won't wake up to find yourself of the opposite gender or a Pokémon or something that offsetting to you, and don't expect me to remember anything in the new timeline, so I may try to kill you next time we meet, no offense."

Before Ash could voice his confusion and horror at such a scenario, the blue orb burst into light as Ash vanished, just seconds before the entire palace imploded out of existence, with Arceus in it.

The folds of time

Strange lights and sounds overloaded Ash's mortal senses as he fell through an indescribable vortex, screaming all the way as his voice kept changing from one voice to another, as phrases began to be whispered into his ear in a tongue that seemed to be made of every voice Ash had ever heard, all as one and yet all off.

"Bloodline"

"Dominion"

"Species"

"Heart"

"Attack"

"Merge"

"Prophecy"

"Family"

"Shadow"

"Aura"

"Power"

"Love"

"Rage"

"Hate"

"Mega"

"Secrets"

"Death"
These and hundreds of other words assaulted Ash, the boy barely able to keep them all straight as a new, burning light filled the unspeakable vortex.

The bright light engulfed Ash, and for the moment, he knew no more.

Chapter End Notes

And that's it for the time being. One more thing: this story was first posted when the X&Y series was just beginning, and just so we're clear, the events are starting between episodes XY011 and XY012. Anything beyond that will probably be referenced, but Ash won't know about it for obvious reasons.

Unless there's something up, I'll be posting chapters on a daily basis, and every once in a while I might add one or two sidestories for the expanded universe. A few of them are mine, and there are other authors who have contributed to it as well, so I'll be adding them as I progress with the posting.

See you tomorrow!
Of starters and Spearow: The new reality

Ash opened his eyes to find himself in a dark place, with no lights, yet oddly enough it felt familiar to him, despite the lack of visibility.

Blinking, his mind, rightfully confused about what had just happened (End of reality and all), he looked around for a moment and figured out why the place felt familiar to him.

It was his room, and the clock by his bedside that he did not have the last time (It had numbers on it, how fancy) said it was about 3:00 in the morning.

Pushing himself out of bed, Ash moved a hand in front of his face; glad to see it was the same as he recalled it; with no fur, claws or wings.

Or a tail for that matter.

So, he was still human, and a quick feel over his chest revealed he was also still male, so nothing really seemed to have changed...

It was when his hand made contact with his face that he felt something to be very, very wrong...

There was hair on it; short and stubby but present in places it had never been in before.

In alarm, he bolted out of bed, flipped the nearest light switch on and stared at himself in the mirror to view something he had never had to deal with before.

Facial hair.

He had a 5 o'clock shadow on a face that looked somewhat older...and in retrospect Ash realized he felt taller than before.

So...it would seem he was older...the question was how older...

All he could really tell was that he was likely in his teens, so looking on the bright side he was not waking up to find himself as old as Professor Oak.

After a few moments of trying to think, he found his mind to be in a state of chaos...it seemed as if any attempt by himself to get a grasp of what was different was virtually impossible. The whole "going back in time with all your memories into an altered timeline with its own memories" was a way to have issues with accessing either memory in great detail.

Though it seemed to be slowly righting itself; Ash found in a few moments that he had regained a momentarily useful memory from this timeline about learning how to shave off the off-putting facial fuzz.

With that minute annoyance dealt with, he was starting to have a clearer head and could actually recall a bit more.

"Okay...I still live in Pallet Town, my mom is still the same, Professor Oak is still here and as far as I can recall isn't any different..."

He spoke to himself out loud due to the difficulty of getting anything straight in his mind at the moment (that and he had heard saying things out loud was good for recall) "...and my father is..."
After trying to ponder that question again, Ash gave up. It was, for whatever reason, still a mess for him to recall from either timeline and he had other things to consider.

Like why the hell he was still at home; if he was the age he was... whatever age it was people started to grow facial hair.

With the light on, he did manage to spy something potentially useful, a video tape with a Pokéball on it and the remains of a mail package that had the name Oak on it.

Ash moved to put the tape in, before recalling the time in the original timeline he had the radio on (low volume) at night; his mom was many things but a heavy sleeper she was not.

This also seemed to be similarly true in this timeline.

Grimacing at the possible premature end of his Pokémon journey, he finally managed to spy a pair of headphones and the jack for them on his television, oddly sitting on a letter.

Ah, technology is so amazing.

Ash picked up the large headphones, big enough to fit even Pikachu's ears, when he saw who the letter was from.

Serena.

"Oh yeah, I remember now," He observed, seeing that the letter accelerated that part of his still distorted memories, "I actually stayed in touch with her..."

Memories came to him about her mother and an accident with a Rhyhorn causing her to leave camp earlier.

Man that made him feel less like a jerk, and oddly at the same time more like a jerk for not doing it in the old timeline...

"Er, maybe I should just plug in the tape before I start feeling bipolar again," Ash said to himself before adding "...and I probably need to stop talking to myself before it becomes a habit."

...A tape plop later

"Greetings Trainer, I am Professor Oak. If you have received this Video Tape, you have passed the Pokémon Trainer Test and are soon to become a Pokémon Trainer."

The screen showed the world renowned Pokémon Professor in his laboratory, which didn't seem to have changed either.

"This test can be taken in many ways, but to receive a starter Pokémon from me you would have had to complete my Pokémon Summer Camp and complete the test at the end of it, after passing it at a 90 percent or higher. You also have to be 15, but seeing as the Camp is only open to 14 year olds and the 151 question test takes far too long to grade, I believe you should all be 15 by now."

Far too long to grade, yeah right. Professor Oak was probably just too busy doing Pokémon research and put it off.

Well at least he found out he was 15. Good to know...

He suddenly flinched in pain as he recalled the 151 question test. He was pretty sure he got question 137 wrong (Porygon could not learn Safeguard).
"Any trainer starting from my Laboratory can begin with either Bulbasaur, Charmander, or Squirtle."

To emphasize this, the professor released the specifically named one from a pair of Pokeballs on the table.

"As trainers, you will grow with your Pokémon, becoming stronger together and learning more about yourself and the world at large. Now, while you can start out with any Pokémon, as do many famous and skilled trainers, only those who pass my Summer Camp can start with the Kanto Starter Pokémon, which are extremely rare in the wild."

"Now, all trainers must arrive at my Pokémon Laboratory at exactly 8:00. Any trainer who fails to show up will not receive a starter."

Ash had never heard the professor sound that serious, and that brought up a really, really worrying question.

If he couldn't be late; that means that he would have to choose one of the starters (and not Pikachu).

What happened if he couldn't go about it with his best buddy? Or would his Pikachu be a Charmander this time around? Then what would happen with his Charmander/Charizard?

"...Now, allow me to remind you about the legal obligations you agreed to upon taking the Pokémon Trainer Test and start from my Laboratory..."

Thankfully, all deep trans-timeline questions in Ash's head were drowned out by hearing the totally boring legalese, which promptly knocked Ash out like a light.

7:55 AM; just downhill from Professor Oak's Laboratory

Ash made it.

Somehow Ash had made it through what remained of the night without breaking the alarm. He ate the breakfast his mother cooked for him (which was just as good as in the old timeline, oddly enough she already had Mimey who spared him clean up duty today) and got to the lab with 5 minutes to spare.

Best of all; he finally recalled that in this timeline, Gary was the only one to pass the test aside for himself, and if he took Squirtle like he did the last time...well the question of Pikachu possibly reincarnating would still have to be figured out.

However, his thoughts were quickly broken free of their temporal depths to the sight of Professor Oak arguing with a rather tall guy (AKA, the same size of guy LT. Surge was) in a black suit like something out of the Men in Black myth.

"...Your cooperation was most...appreciated professor," the man stated in a cold voice as he began to walk away, leaving behind a despondent professor, "I'll be sure to inform him of your cooperation in time for the next meeting on grants."

It was this dejected professor that Ash approached, as the old man looked up to see him, and looked like he had aged another decade.

"Oh Ash...," he said in a depressed tone, "I'm so...so sorry, but..."

"But what, Professor?" Ash wasn't sure what was going on.
Who was the big scary man...did Oak get foreclosed or something?

"The starter Pokémon are gone...I'm sorry."

7:57 AM; the Oak study

"...The man you just saw was the crony of a Government official," Oak began as he sat down with Ash, a cup of tea shared between devastated Professor and just plain shocked Trainer to be.

"He was sent by the father of a pair of twins who attended the Summer Camp the same time as you, but in a different cabin so I don't believe you would know them. While the twins passed the test by regular standards, they did not pass it by the standards required by my laboratory, so they were not selected to receive Starter Pokémon. This is in part, as you may recall, due to the Starter Pokémon International Treaty, which states the rare Pokémon given to trainers as starting partners need to be the highest caliber in part to control the black market trade of them."

"However, their father decided to... enlighten me of upcoming budget cuts."

Oak hunched over in greater depression as Ash listened on, vaguely aware of some of these regulations due to still fuzzy memories (In his defense, two timelines of memories took a long time to settle down.)

"He sits as the head chair of the research grant committee, meaning he has say of where the money goes, and I barely get enough money as it is to run this facility even with my writing income. So, it was either hand over starters for the twins, or have to cut back on the Pokémon's feeding bills just to ensure the bare minimum scientific work required to get government funding in the first place. The only good thing about all this is that, while the father is an outright ass, his children are spoiled sweet and actually love Pokémon, so I believe nothing ill will come of either Charmander or Bulbasaur."

Ash was feeling what the Professor went through; that was a difficult, yet easy decision to make. It ruined him, but saved the lab.

He couldn't fault him. It might possibly have just doomed the world (Again), but it wasn't like Professor Oak was aware of this.

"I understand, Professor," Ash said in a disappointing, but understanding voice "...guess there's always next..."

Oak suddenly looked like inspiration hit him.

"I've just thought of a splendid idea my young friend. I may not be able to give you a traditional starter Pokémon, but I can still offer you a proper selection."

Ash rose a confused eyebrow, though he had an oddly good feeling about where this was going.

8:00; Oak Pokeball storage room 25.

"...See my boy, this laboratory is the home away from the pokeball for all the trainers who started out from here. Part of the reason I give out starter Pokémon to trainers is the agreement for them to keep their additional Pokémon here, allowing me to study the Human-Pokémon dynamic in greater detail," Oak continued to explain to Ash, unaware of the fact Ash had gotten a version of this talk when he came back to Pallet after his eight badge was won.

"While this is beneficial in many ways, it does cause the food bill to be astronomical, though it does have one, somewhat interesting side effect."
The two of them were in a storage room lined with several dozen Pokéballs.

"I have often found myself with Pokémon eggs, which I hatch and keep around the research facility, as I am unable to send them to trainers in far away lands safely. I keep a few around the lab in case a well meaning, non camp student needs a leg up for their Pokémon journey if they have the right stuff. While you will be given a Pokédex as part of passing the starter requirements, you will have to begin with one of these Pokémon."

Ash gulped, hoping to Arceus in whatever timeline his buddy was in one of these Pokéballs,"...So, do I take the first one I pick or..."

"Oh no, you can have a look at as many as you need to until you find the right fit," Oak announced and then smiled as Ash took the first Pokéball on the row and called out:

"Pokémon, I choose you."

The ball released a burst of light that began to form into a shape that Oak recognized, and mentally prepared himself for Ash's imminent pain, as the mouse-like form solidified.

"Er, that one is a little...irritable, you may want to try another one..."

Oak recalled the last few trainers who tried to connect with this one, and got shocked.

However, as the yellow mouse Pikachu formed in front of Ash, and did its initial glare, cheek spark routine, Ash smiled a smile Oak couldn't see as he reached his hand out towards the mouse Pokémon.

Pikachu sparked his cheeks again, trying to scare him off, before Ash's hand touched Pikachu on the head and it suddenly stopped looking ready to fry Ash.

In fact, it ran over to him and let Ash pick it up as Professor Oak stared in shock.

"Well, that was impressive. That Pikachu has a nasty habit of trying to kill anyone who tries to interact with it that doesn't bribe it with ketchup. So, I'm taking it you want to start with an electric type?" The professor inquired, hoping so because he had just ran out of ketchup and didn't have any more room in the budget for it.

Ash nodded, Pikachu squirming out of his arms and retook its old place on his shoulder.

"Well, all I can say is good luck to you my boy, now allow me to set up your Pokédex and pokeballs before you head out."

*Far too later on, outside*

"Oh, its so cute!"

His mother was all over the Pikachu that rested on his shoulder, though this time around she was the only one here aside for Mimey, as opposed to a semi unruly mob of local citizens.

She didn't have to bring his stuff this time around; he had fully dressed in the same sort of clothes he started his journey with (if made to fit his 15 year old body). She looked the same as ever; a brunette dressed in pink and looking quite young and attractive, even though he was now taller than her due to having aged so much.

"So, you're letting it stay out of the Pokeball? How Johto of you" She nodded as she gave him one
last hug, "Well, take care now."

She let him go as Ash waved goodbye and started walking towards Route 1.

"I will."

"Don't push yourself or Pikachu too hard"

"Mime Mime!"

"Don't worry, I won't."

"Be sure to chance your..."

"Got it, Mom!" Ash flinched as he found out she'd still do that to him as a teenager. After this, he was completely out of the sights of his loving, if somewhat overprotective mother, who looked sad to see her only child leaving home.

"It was interesting, my dear."

Delia jumped as the Pokémon Professor spoke behind her, turning around to face him in a minor fluster.

"He somehow knew the perfect Pokémon for him on the first go, and somehow tamed a virtually untamable Pikachu with just a touch. It was quite remarkable."

"Well, you know, we Ketchum's have always been good with connecting to Pokémon," Delia noted as Mimey spoke out in agreement.

"Mime Mime."

"The question is, however, was that just natural talent? We both know that he has a potential he only previously demonstrated as a young child...I partially gave him a scholarship to the Pokémon Summer Camp to see if it would ever come forth again, yet it was only just now that I saw anything like it again. The question is, though, is it just an unconscious thing?"

"My concern is more about who sees it," Delia mused in a dark sadness and worry.

**Route 1**

After being along the route for long enough, Pikachu jumped off his shoulder and stared at him in confusion and plain deja vu as Ash stopped in front of his old friend.

"Pika, Pika chu?!"

Ash shrugged, "Its complicated. See, do you remember reality sort of, imploding?"

Pikachu shook his head.

"Oh, then what do you remember last then?"

Pikachu proceeded to do an impression of a really angry gangster with a long jacket.

"The Pangoro and Pancham?"

Pikachu nodded.
"Oh, good then, that wasn't too long ago then."

Ash started walking with Pikachu jogging alongside him as the semi-one sided conversation continued "So, shortly after that incident, Cyrus...you remember him right?"

Pikachu mimicked a face of emotionless loathing.

"Oh, you do then, good. Anyway, he figured out how to destroy reality as we knew it, and Arceus managed to pluck me out of the impending destruction to send me back with the mission to stop Cyrus. However, because of some issues reality didn't exactly come out the same way as before".

Pikachu looked up and down him, as if making note of how tall he was now (Brock height at least, Pikachu hadn't seen Brock in long enough to really verify the exacts).

"Yes, me being older is one of them, and a few others now that I think about it; I actually kept in contact with Serena."

(Pikachu gave him a look that he couldn't describe, but he found it mildly unnerving) {AN, a 'Oh yes you do, sort of shipper look].

"Apparently the Pokédex actually has data on Pokémon not native to Kanto in it this time starting around."

At that, he activated a random Pokédex entry to drive it home "**Dunsparce, the Lane Snake Pokémon. Dunsparce are avid diggers who use their drill like tails to burrow under the ground. Why this Pokémon has wings is unknown to science, although there are cults who worship this Pokémon as the son of Arceus due to them.**"

"And I'm apparently smarter than a vast majority of people my age when it comes to Pokémon."

Pikachu at that one stopped and just stared at him.

"Yeah, its sort of hard to believe, but I apparently had to pass a 151 question test with a 90 or better to have started with Professor Oak and get a Pokédex, and that's about..." Ash began to try and figure out how many questions he had to get correct, (A/N, about 136) "and other than myself, Gary was the only other one to do so, so I guess that makes me smart."

Pikachu sighed and shook his head, in a similar way to an old person going on about how young people were going to doom the world.

However, before Pikachu could mock the notion of an intelligent Ash, or Ash self deprecate about it...

"Chirp!"

Ash and Pikachu were suddenly being swooped upon by a pair of Pidgey, who seemed to be determined to grab at the both of them with their extended and painful looking talons.

"What's that about, we didn't even attack them?" Ash questioned as Pikachu let loose sparks in its cheeks again as the Pidgey swooped at him again.

"Okay Pikachu, use Electro Ball!"

Pikachu nodded and began to gather electricity into its tail, which fizzled out to both of their shock as both birds tackled them in the chest, knocking them both to the ground as they flew up for another air
raid and began coming back down.

"Try Iron Tail to block them!"

Pikachu nodded as he leapt up, sending energy into his tail, which didn't glow at all and thus had him get smacked in the face twice by the Pidgey and knocked to the ground as they flew around for a third attack.

"..." Ash was trying to figure out what was going on, before he had a crazy thought "Pikachu, Thundershock now!"

Pikachu stared at him like he just suggested to a human they crawl like a baby, but relented and let loose the weak electric attack, which actually worked and flew at the Pidgey.

The two birds were hit, and after the shock promptly flew away as the two old friends dropped to their knees in shock.

"...Going back in time may have brought back our memories, but all our moves are gone. We're back to where we started move wise."

Pikachu wailed into the sky about the loss of his hard work and promptly began to cry.

A devastating realization later

A thundershock struck the similarly aggressive Rattata to the earlier Pidgey, which fled as the two old friends staked out a tree.

"Man, my heads still a mess so I can't figure out why the wild Pokémon are more aggressive this time around," Ash complained as he noted the dead and hollow tree in front of them, "but I guess its good for training at least, and I had just thought of something. Pikachu, just because you can't use your old attacks anymore..."

Ash stopped as he saw Pikachu hang his head in shame "...it doesn't mean we can't train to use them again. We learned to use Iron Tail once, and we can do so again"

He pointed at the dead tree

"So lets start practicing!"

They stayed there for a few hours, oddly not encountering any more aggressive Pokémon, to which Ash got a mental answer to as to the cause of it.

The territorial instincts of Pokémon were stronger in this timeline, and thus were prone to attack people who entered their territories if wild or tamed (And dealing with unfamiliar people as guard Pokémon).

Mildly unsettling, but not too bad...at least until they ran into wild Rhydon or Hydreigon, then it would suck a lot.

He also discovered the Pokédex constantly emitted a scanning signal that would take notes on any Pokémon a trainer was to come across. So, even though Ash did not need to have the Pokédex scan the attacking Rattata or Pidgey, it would still say on its own: "this trainer has encountered Rattata and Pidgey along with Pikachu and Mr. Mime."

Why did the Pokédex need to keep track of that anyway, considering that it was more of a
encyclopedia than a research tool?

His memories were still a jumbled mess in a lot of ways, so he wasn't sure why the idea of the Pokédex being able to use its encounter radar thing to catalog Pokémon health, strength, age, status of wild or tame, and other scientific curiosities in a non-invasive manner came to him as a possible answer.

By this point, the light was starting to fade, and Pikachu had managed to partially regain use of Iron Tail; leaving a sizable crack in the dead tree, but nowhere near the same level of control Pikachu had after Rustboro.

"That's enough for now Pikachu," Ash told the mouse after it struck the tree again with a Iron Tail after three earlier attacks fizzled out, "we should find shelter for the night"

Pikachu looked around as if only realizing it was getting dark.

"We won't be getting to Viridian as fast as last time, but considering the last time we only got there that fast due to a flock of psychotic Spearow I personally think the Torkoal beats the Bunnelby here..."

"CAW!"

Both Ash and Pikachu froze in horror as the infamous bird call rang out from behind them, as they turned to see a huge flock of the red, black and brown Spearow, numbering in the hundreds, with about ten Fearow (larger, brown birds with red crests) spearheading the mob.

"What did I do this time!?” Ash demanded in horror as both trainer and Pokémon did the only sensible thing and ran like the dickens, the death flock pursuing them in murderous gusto.

Somewhere ahead of the death swarm, about same time

A fishing line dangled in the fast flowing stream; its owner sitting on top of a slippery rock with only the yellow upright duck Pokémon Psyduck to bare witness to her, said duck sitting on another rock with a confused look on its face.

"Psy?" 'You know mistress, do you really expect any thing to fall for a replica of yourself as bait? Seems more like a way to repel them without that spray stuff.'

Said mistress glared at the duck. She was about 15 like the earlier seen protagonist, with orange hair done up in a pony tail with a single green band. She was dressed in a pale yellow blouse and shorts with no undershirt, the clothes were old with visible age to them and a sizeable bust that the blouse covered, but did not hide the depth and size thereof.

Her limbs (and body in general) were gently tanned and well developed, like that of a professional swimmer, and tied to her back was a single sheath for a fishing pole, said pole being in the water.

And its red and white bobber were where the girl's sea blue-green eyes were focused after finishing glaring at the duck, "My special lure is perfectly capable of catching any water Pokémon. It caught you after all."

"Duck." 'No, I believe it was the doughnut that your lure got stuck in that I ate. Can I have another doughnut Misty? I'm hungry.'

Misty promptly ignored the duck as the bobber vanished into the stream.
"Ha ha!" she gloated to the duck as she pulled on the line with all her strength, as a shape was pulled out of the water; a large white and red fish.

"Goldeen Goldeen..." the Goldeen chimed as the duck looked worried.

'Psy y y?' The duck asked which could be translated as: 'Let me guess, I have to use Scratch now?' Or perhaps Water Gun, so I don't have to move and get washed away and probably drown?'

Misty smirked and said, "Oh no, this time around I'm doing it."

She yanked the line towards her as the Goldeen looked ready to use a Horn Attack on her.

"Stop," Misty commanded the water Pokémon, whose eyes promptly seemed to lose focus and the attack ceased as the fish Pokémon dangled in front of her.

"Goldeen. 'What is it you command, mistress?' the still wild Pokémon enchimed as if in someone's thrall.

"Duck." You know that is incredibly disturbing, correct?"

Misty frowned.

"Yeah, you're not the first person to call it that," she said sadly, "but might as well have seen if I could actually do it."

She reached for the single Pokeball she had on her.

"Now, I'm going to capture you now. You will not break out of this ball, understand?"

"Goldeen deen" which could be translated as: "Yes mistress. I will be yours forever."

Misty threw the ball at the fish, which promptly energized Goldeen and captured it without hassle as she promptly posed, "Yeah, my sixth Water Pokémon is mine!"

"Psy," The duck tilted its head as he pointed out 'yes, and you still have over a hundred more to catch to make your dream a reality. Why are you posing on a slippery rock, by the way? Seems like you want to fall into the...'

Misty promptly slipped into the fast flowing river and was washed a few feet away before she yelled "Waterfall."

Water around her began to burst in the opposite direction of the current, allowing Misty to rapidly swim against the current and regain her rocky foothold, still with all six Pokeballs on her belt, including Psyduck's empty one.

She promptly gave the duck a look, "Why do I even keep you out of your ball anyway?"

The duck tilted its head. "Psy." Because you get lonely and I have an amazing personality?"

Misty huffed, though not denying her loneliness, and looked up at the dark sky, "We better find a place to rest for the night..."

"Caw! Caw!"

"AHHH!" Some male voice screamed in the distance while a faint sound of electricity rang out.
As Psyduck angled his head, Misty sighed in disinterest.

"Oh great, another human got himself into trouble with the local inbred Spearow flock again."

Admittedly with those birds, it was more or less someone breathing that would set them off in a rage.

"Psy-duck? 'I'm getting a headache from all the noise.'

"You always have one..." She sighed "Well, if I let the fool get mauled to death this place will be swarming with humans, might as well save the fool. Come on Psyduck."

"PSY Y Y 'Can you get me off this rock first, I can't swim!"

Misty sighed as she drew for Psyduck's ball.

The 'Human' in peril

"Pikachu, Thundershock!"

As the pair did the smart thing and ran for their lives, Pikachu glowed yellow and several streams of electricity flew from the fleeing mouse and struck several Spearow.

All struck birds fell to the ground unable to battle or chase after Ash anymore, but the flock was hardly diminished.

"Damn it!" Ash swore without realizing he even knew how to, "what is their problem?!

Hoping to have any hint of what to do, Ash activated the Pokédex and scanned the bird Pokémon.

"Spearow the Tiny Bird Pokémon. This highly territorial and aggressive Pokémon attacks those who anger it in huge swarms. They are known as the Carvannah of the sky for their ability to strip flesh from bone."

"Fearow, the Beak Pokémon. Fearow are capable of continuous flight for over a week to pursue food and anything that irritates them. Fearow are known for being able to pierce airplane hulls with their beaks and kill approximately 20 humans a year."

"That didn't help at all!" Ash complained as he shook the thing "Do you have any more information!?"

Pokédexes in the old timeline did seem to have multiple entries that would be alternated every so often. One of them had to be helpful here.

"Spearow, the Tiny Bird Pokémon. While some populations of Spearow are purely vegetarian, the loss of plant diversity caused by human agriculture in the last 200 years has increased their tendency to devour meat in its entirety for their diet."

"Fearow, the Beak Pokémon. Fearow were among the first Flying type Pokémon used by the military in the middle ages due to their beaks being able to easily get around chainmail armor and pierce the enemies vital organs."

"Spearow, the Tiny Bird Pokémon. Spearow can only see in black and white, but it has an uncanny ability to find people. They have been used as both mail birds, and by the Yakuza to find and kill people who won't pay their debt."
"Fearow, the Beak Pokémon. Fearow accompanied Unovan Pilot Charles Lingbergh on the first cross ocean flight from Unova to Kalos. They are later believed to have mauled his infant son to death and ate what remained of his flesh when Lingbergh did not feed them for a week."

Ash gave up trying to figure out anything and simply ordered Pikachu to keep spamming Thundershock until they were all knocked out.

However, inbred or not, the flock still had enough intelligence to circle around the two and box them; trapped in the eye of a storm of ferocious birds.

Ash and Pikachu ended up back to back, surrounded by birds on all sizes and degrees of murderous intent.

"So, I guess you shock and I just shield your back?"

Ash really couldn't due anything else at this point as the mouse nodded.

And so the birds swarmed, swarmed in a massive onslaught not even Alfred Hitchcock could have imagined.

From one side, Thundershock rang out, each bolt striking down at least five of the ferocious flying types.

On the other, as a pair of Spearow came for Pikachu's back with Peck, Ash blocked it with his ever trusty backpack, which somehow withstood the pecks without tearing. The repelled birds fell onto their backs on the ground, stunned due to their inbred lack of defense or HP.

Meanwhile on the Pikachu side, a Fearow flew at Pikachu with a spinning beak.

"Look out, its a Drill Peck!"

Pikachu noted Ash's warning, and aimed all of his Thundershock right at the bird.

Well before it could even make contact, the bird's attack was stopped and it fell to the ground.

However, even after the two of them had shocked off or repelled a decent chunk of the flock, there were still too many to take their place...

As both trainer and Pokémon grew tired, a Fearow made a break for the kill blow as it folded up its wings and dived towards them like a missile.

"Is that freaking Drill Run?!" Ash exclaimed in horror as the ground type attack flew closer and closer towards the exhausted Pikachu.

While in the mouse's defense all the Spearow attacks probably helped it regain a lot of its lost experience points, he was still too exhausted to fire another electric blast.

"No!" Ash exclaimed as he, in a blind desperation, got between the downed Pikachu and the incoming Drill Run from the head of the death flock, "I am not going to watch my friend die again!"

From a separate viewing angle to this Ash one

Misty and Psyduck, who had not been in range to hear the time travel based remark, observed the situation with slightly concerned looks.
"Well, he fared better than the guy who started off with the Weedle, but he's still going to be killed."

Misty was admittedly impressed the boy had lasted as long as he did.

Most trainers who got stuck in that situation would have at least lost an ear by now. There was a reason why the Viridian Officer Jenny often rode up and down Route 1; more than once a Flamethrower courtesy of her Growlithe was necessary to spare a trainers life.

Still, she'd have to save him or people would come looking for him, and stumble upon her, and call them, and then she'd be blamed for absolutely no real reason when they blabbered out what she was.

"Psy?" 'So, tell me again what we could actually do here? Its not like you have a Swampert with Stone Edge on hand or anything, and I would be useless...' "Psyduck?" Misty sounded like she thought that was a good idea.

"Psyduck!" 'Please don't, I want to live!' "Duck Psy Duck!"

Misty seemed to have decided not to do such a thing, and instead reached for one of her goldeen Pokeballs, when the boy suddenly glowed in an orange outline.

"Wait...that looks almost like Counter..." Misty trailed off as the drill run struck the boy head on, as a huge burst of energy let forth from the boy and radiated into the flock.

The huge burst of energy knocked out all the bird Pokémon, who promptly fell to the ground as the boy collapsed, a nasty looking wound on his chest. The Pikachu looked just as stunned as Misty was.

"Psy?" 'Wait, its over? How gory is it, I don't like gory things?'

Misty ignored the duck as she walked, absolutely stunned, towards the now flying death swarm free boy, as the Pikachu initially glared at her, then oddly enough stopped as if it recognized her.

Misty had never even encountered a Pikachu before, so she couldn't understand why it would somehow look at her and not see a stranger.

"I've never met another one like me before..." She said to herself seeing as the other person she was talking to was currently out cold. Taking out her old undershirt, she ripped it up and bound the wound as quickly as she could before she made a grab for the boy, "well, better get you to Viridian City quickly to get that wounded looked at..."

As soon as his hand touched her, however, a strange feeling came over her. It lasted for about half a minute, during which her Psyduck caught up to them and stared at the still shocked mouse.

As the feeling left her, Misty shook her head and reexamined both man and mouse.

They both seemed...immensely familiar, yet she couldn't recall who they were, where she knew them from or really any specifics.

All she knew was, she could not let them die.

And so the marathon run to Viridian city began; with a few Pokeballs being released as to allow a pair of star shaped Pokémon (the brown one star Staryu and the purple, two star Starmie); with Starmie using psychic to levitate the boy (and hasten the trip as much as possible), while Starmine
used Water Gun at anything that looked like it would delay them.

Misty only wished she knew why she felt she had to save this boy so badly.
In the year that Misty had been on her own, she had learned many street rules that she had to follow if she wanted to survive on her own due to her bloodline.

One of the first she learned was that the Nurse Joys and Officer Jennys of the world were not a threat.

While most private doctors or regular policemen, upon seeing anything vaguely reminisce of a bloodline, would refuse aid or attempt to arrest her, the identical supe family was different.

No matter if she came in with the most bizarre of wounds, or had a witness statement that suggested she was underwater when it occurred, she was never ignored. Perhaps they had a really strong honor code about helping anyone in need and serving people equally, Misty had never asked.

So, for the first person she had ever seen with a bloodline just like herself, there was no other place to go.

Misty, hunched over in the waiting area of Viridian City, with nothing to do as the boy was being treated for his injuries but stare at the ancient image of legendary Birds of Kanto (And Arcanine, known as the legendary Pokémon due to being the only aide to a legendary knight of Cameron Palace, in the remote Rota nation to the north of Pewter City, who with his faithful beast defeated the Legendary Birds who were under the control of a Flying Bloodline Warlord. This knight would later train a squire named Aaron) that hung over the reception area, and ponder the question of the boy.

Who was he?

Why did she feel as though she knew him, yet she had no clear recall?

Was that just some Bloodline thing (She had never met another person like her before, after all) and any other bloodline user would feel oddly familiar to her, or was it something more...

Grumble Grumble

Misty's hunger derailed her train of thought instantly.

There were many, many problems with having a bloodline in Misty's opinion, and one of them was a very, very, very strong metabolism.

It would explain why the boy's backpack's food supply had been reduced to mere wrappers. Not that Misty was going to steal food from a injured boy or anything...

"Psy y y." 'Ah, doughnuts, the hallmark of civilization.'

Misty's head rapidly turned to her right, where her Psyduck was gorging himself on a box of donuts (The box being mostly white with orange and purple trim).

"Hey, don't hog them all to yourself!" Misty snapped as she tried to get a doughnut for herself...and found an empty box as the duck belched.

"Duck duck duck duck." 'Hey, you snooze, you loose. Oh, um, by the way that was the last of the
food in the Pokémon center until tomorrow.'

Due to her bloodline, Misty could hear what Water Pokémon were saying, as opposed to telepathically being told, but there were times she wished she didn't have to listen to 'certain' Water Pokémon talk.

This was one of those times.

In her annoyance at him, Misty looked ready to eat the annoying duck, but thankfully the duck was saved by the cop who spoke up behind the girl to be noticed.

"Misty." The girl stopped in her impulse to roast her Psyduck with the sheer heat of her rage as she turned to see the impeccably identical, blue haired and dressed Officer Jenny.

The cop looked troubled.

"Yes, officer?" she replied as the Officer frowned.

"I really can't thank you enough for saving that young man."

The Spearow flock on Route 1 were among the last of the "hyper aggressive Pokémon of old" at least according to the officer's mother (another Jenny, the one before her). Apparently, all Pokémon were that aggressive to humans if not caught before Professor Oak's research took effect. Ever since, Pokémon had become far less aggressive towards humanity; most species now would only chase intruders out of their territories and would leave them alone if sufficient force was used.

"However, while I did find the area where the Spearow had attacked the poor boy, and it was quite clear that that is what had happened...the Spearow were all gone."

Misty looked surprised to hear that, how was that possible?! Those birds weren't going to go anywhere anytime soon.

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Team Rocket HQ

It was rare that Giovanni was happy after hearing about the trio of Jessie, James and Meowth, but today was one of those rare days.

Normally, they would either annoy him with their cheerfulness, or they would be late on their Pokémon quotas, but this was a rare inversion of such irritations.

After all, an entire flock of powerful Flying type Pokémon was a worthy additional to the Team Rocket arsenal after all, and there were enough of them so their debt was paid off, and would be for some time into the future.

(Of course, this just meant more time for them to mess up, but then again that was normal for them.)

The standard black business suit the man wore (bar its R insignia on the breast pocket), with his black hair short on his head, made him all the more sinister looking as he gave a once over to the white uniformed trio of a red head, a blue haired fellow and a talking Meowth (A/N, Origin Giovanni design and no change for the Trio as they were at the start).

They looked nervous at his silence, and the Persian who sat by the Team Rocket leader seemed to enjoy the Meowth's misery. Giovanni decided to milk it for a bit more, slowly tapping his fingers and
enjoying how they all seemed to flinch with each tap.

"Well done" he finally spoke as the trio seemed ready to burst into tears of joy at a rather simple bit of praise.

A quick glare at them silenced them before they actually did so.

The fact they seemed to be...unnaturally loyal was one of the very few reasons he had not had them executed for their failures. Even if they were generally incompetent nimrods, it always paid to have minions with undying loyalties to you in your criminal organization, as measures to deal with inevitable take over attempts.

Though with them, they were less 'enforcer' material to take back power as 'disposable pawns who would sacrifice themselves while he begun his contingency plans'.

"The fact that you have granted Team Rocket a substantial boon in our resources is commendable, but we are not finished yet. Not until Team Rocket is in full control of the world, and to do that, we will require many, many more Pokémon. So go forth and obtain some more."

The often bumbling, yet at the same time occasionally efficient trio left his office in a hurry, muttering about going hunting in Viridian City or something of that nature.

"Viridian City..." Giovanni mused of where his Gym was located, though at the moment it was closed down for repairs, "You know my pet, I remember when I first went to Viridian City as a young, foolish trainer. It took me three days to get there you know, the roads were horrible back then."

---

The Pokémon Center

Opening his eyes for a moment, Ash could have sworn he saw the rainbow light of Ho-Oh flying overhead...

That was due to happen roughly at...

Hey, where was he?

This wasn't a hill on Route 1.

The outdoors did not have a skylight...

"Pika-Pi!" 'Ash! Oh, thank Arceus you're alright!'

Ash blinked as he heard...a voice alongside Pikachu's. It was familiar...yet he had no idea who it was.

He quickly rose up, only then realizing he had been lying on a hospital cot and Pikachu was perched on the side table, tilting its head "Chu?"

"Hey buddy..." he looked around a few times, to find that the only other person in the room was Pikachu "Hey, who was that just earlier?"

"Pi?"
"There was someone else in this room...I heard him, and I could have sworn I knew him from somewhere..." Ash trailed off as he got a better look around his hospital room "Er, how exactly did we get here anyway?"

"Pikachu-Pi!"

"I brought you here," a familiar voice spoke up as Ash saw a red haired girl about his age staring at him from the doorway.

Ash wasn't quite sure who she was, she looked familiar...her voice, while changed by age, was still ringing more than enough bells to summon Ho-Oh, Lugia and Giratina (Who came just to shut them up after the sound crossed into its space.)

"Now tell me, have we met before? You and your Pikachu seem familiar somehow...before I have to pound it out of you!"

Ash just blinked.

Misty?!

Ash really couldn't believe his eyes as he saw her; the short, angry, tomboyish girl just a bit older than him now was a tall, angry, tomboyish girl who actually looked like one of her sisters in body shape.

Of course, even Ash had the sense to realize that comparing Misty to her sisters, no matter how you did it, was a way to be physically harmed.

But...she didn't seem to remember him fully, what was that...

'You will be able to restore memories, but not as perfectly and evenly as I'd had hoped to grant you.' Arceus's words rang in Ash's ears as he recalled what was the problem.

Oh...yeah there was going to be no right way to do this. He could either lie and say he didn't know her, then Misty would leave and he'd never see his old friend again. If he said he did, she'd inquire how and he'd have to lie, be found out and slapped. If he told her he knew from an alternate timeline...he was pretty sure the Pokémon League had a sanity clause somewhere in its rules.

However, he was saved from having to either lie, or sound insane, by the huge explosion up front.

---

**Up in the front of the Pokémon Center**

"Prepare for Trouble, today we are on fire!"

"Make it double, now listen up or earn our ire!"

Misty and Ash, who had managed to force himself out of bed due to the shock of the explosion, only just remembered it was at this Pokémon Center where he had first ran into Team Rocket.

He had almost hoped they had simply not existed in this new timeline, but since when was luck ever on his side, as the bothersome threesome posed right below a hole in the ceiling that had not been there previously.

"To protect the world from devastation!"
"To unite all peoples within our nation!"
"To denounce the evils of truth and love!"
"To extend our reach to the stars above!"
Misty just stared at them in sheer...confusion.
"Jessie!" the red head looked the same as she always did.
"James!" the bluenette guy was likewise. It would seem they were the same.
Of course, having said that, Meowth was going to end up being a Garchomp now.
"Team Rocket blasts off as the speed of light!"
"Surrender now, or prepare to fight!"
"Meowth that's right!"
Thankfully Ash's worry was for naught, as the scratch cat Pokémon was exactly the same as he was once before.
Misty just stared at them. "Are you for real?" She didn't even seem to be confused as much by Meowth being able to talk as...them in general
"We're more than real," James boasted, "and we're here for every Pokémon in the Pokémon Center, but since we're nice we'll spare you all a few Caterpie so you can go train it up into a Butterfree, use it to capture more Pokémon, and then come back to steal those too!"
"You steal Pokémon..." Misty sounded just...horrified. While Ash knew that his, no the original Misty was opposed to the practice, but this Misty was beyond that; she sounded like a mother who was just told to eat her own newborn.
The sheer...disgust at the idea of Pokémon being stolen made Ash wonder why her distaste had become so much greater.
"Well, got to pay the bills somehow, little girl. Not all of us can survive merely by traveling the world after all. Now, hand over your Pokémon before..."
"Go Staryu!"
Jessie was interrupted when the single star Pokémon flew at her in a rapid spin and nailed her in the chest, sending the attractive red head right into the wall with a bang.
Of course, Team Rocket had an uncanny ability to avoid being killed off a la 'darker and edgier work that shoos off the clowns'
"OW! How dare you hit me you little brat, Ekans go give her a taste of your Bite attack!"
"Koffing, Tackle now!"
From each trainer let loose one of their original Pokémon (What ever did happen to them anyway? Ash had never found out.)
The purple snake Pokémon Ekans promptly bit down on Staryu while floating gas sack Koffing
slung itself towards Pikachu.

Ash was going to order Pikachu to use Thundershock, but after what happened last time...well Ash decided to air on the side of caution in case that this explosion actually might kill someone (or himself.)

"Staryu, use Water Gun to blast it off!"

As Misty got in her non violent attack option to blast the Snake off her Starfish, Ash called for Pikachu to use Iron Tail.

The tail glowed a solid white, Pikachu swung it into the thing bag of air pollution successfully, causing it to fly back as the astonished James gaped at him.

"Ekans, Acid!"

"Water Gun!"

The two female trainers Pokémon exchanged range attacks, the two attacks colliding for equal power, while Meowth managed to get behind Pikachu.

"Quick, use Iron Tail!"

Pikachu's tail glowed white, but flickered out.

"Ha, looks like your still working on that move pal...now let me show you a real move, Fury Swipes!" Pikachu promptly unleashed a barrage of claw attacks on the mouse, before the poor cat suddenly was covered in electric static.

"PiPi-Kachuu!" Pikachu taunted the cat after flinching a bit from the stinging scratch attacks *Never use a multiple hit contact move on a Pokémon with Static, cat!*

"I envy Persians and their Limber” Meowth muttered in his paralysis.

Ash blinked, there was that voice again.

Who did he keep hearing? It sounded really familiar...

"Koffing, Sludge Attack!"

Pikachu narrowly avoided a wad of the disgusting gunk that shout out the now recovered Koffing, who floated alongside James

"You know, that Pikachu doesn't seem to be that bad. It might actually be worth something to the boss."

"**Koffing, the Poison Gas Pokémon. Levitating in the Air with its balloon like body, Koffing are quite violate and explosive when exposed to heat or electricity. These explosions have a 40% mortality rate.**" Ash's Pokédex rang out from Ash's pocket on its own accord as James quickly looked at Koffing, then Pikachu, then panicked.

"Oh no! Get that horrible rodent away from my Koffing!"

Ash and Pikachu exchanged glanced, Pikachu smirking as he turned back to the two and let some sparks fly out of his cheeks. Both James and Koffing had looks of terror on their faces.
"Koffing, return!" the nice Team Rocket member quickly recalled his Pokémon from the very real danger of the electric mouse as the two heroes smirked.

"Ha, now you can't hurt my Koffing! You will now surrender to our superior intell..."

"Pikachu use Thundershock!"

A huge burst of electrical power flew from Pikachu right towards the Bluenette and the downed cat, who both promptly were shocked and began comically withering in pain.

Jessie was knocked into the attack as well with her Ekans due to a Swift attack from Staryu, getting caught in the attack just as the electricity caused them to explode.

Thankfully for Ash's innocence, it was as it had always been, with the trio flying straight through the hole in the roof they had used to get in.

"What, how did a minuscule mouse pack that much power!" James questioned as they flew away that somehow Ash could here.

"Why did you call back Koffing you dolt!" Jessie grabbed James by the collar as Meowth shook his head.

"'Cause he's more scared of losing it than you, but it looks like..."

"Team Rocket is blasting off most unusually!"

Twinkle.

Nurse Joy and Psyduck poked their head up from behind the nurses counter as Misty returned her Staryu, then the duck after she gave him an annoyed glare for hiding like that and leaving her to deal with Team Rocket.

"Oh...you beat Team Rocket? I thought the only way to get rid of them would be to get Officer Jenny here as quickly as possible...now I feel like a fool," the nurse said before blushing as she flipped open the cell phone she had been holding "Maybe now I can avoid having to redo the tiles again..."

The doors to the Pokémon Center barely opened in time before a police moped burst through and skidded across the tiles before coming to a stop right in front of the Nurse, who had an anime sweat drop.

"Or, maybe not."

Removing her white helmet in a rush, the unchanged appearance of the Kanto Jenny; blue hair and uniform in all, looked around in confusion.

"Wait, where's the emergency...?" The officer questioned, looking around for anything obviously wrong before she looked up to see the hole in the ceiling. "Oh, that probably has something to do with it."

"A trio of Team Rocket grunts broke in and tried to take over, but those two fought them off" Jenny explained as the Officer noted the two teenagers.

"You did huh? That was a great service to the entire community of Viridian. If there is anything I can do to thank you both for your..."
Grumble Grumble

Misty blushed as her stomach grumbled again as the Jenny lit up

"Oh, you're hungry? Well, it may not be a key to the city, but I can get you a pizza, what's your favorite..."

Grumble Grumble Grumble

Ash blushed as he now sounded hungrier than Misty was.

"Okay, make that two pizzas. What toppings do you both want?"

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*Back at Team Rocket HQ, about two hours later*

Most people have their vices.

Some drink, some smoke and some watch shows about fat idiots, but Giovanni had a completely different sort of vice.

He enjoyed watching those who fail get punished for it.

Every time he saw one of his grunts get arrested, he chuckled. Whenever a engineer failed to properly construct a bomb, he shook his head in merriment as the poor fool blew up.

In particular, he got a laugh whenever he found the trio of Jessie, James and Meowth blow up.

He had no idea how they didn't die; they were genetically normal humans (and Meowth), but it made them all the better to distract any usurpers if Proton or one of the other executives decided to try something.

Standing over the crispy and twitchy forms of his minions, he reached down into Jessie's hair and removed a little clip on device; a high tech spy lens that also could detect certain informative tidbits of information; Pokémon Levels, access government databases for identities and myriads of other things.

Drawing an tablet device from a laptop bag hung over his shoulder, the mafia kingpin shook his head as he removed an SD card and info card from the camera and inserted both into his handheld device.

"So, what happened this time? Try to use a net on a Magmar again?" he asked sardonically as he began to view the data from whatever wrecked his minions, and determine if he would have to chastise them for attacking too strong a target, or being beaten up by too weak of a target.

However, as the data began to display itself, Giovanni's eyebrow rose up in surprise.

It stayed that way for a few minutes, enough time for Jessie, James, and Meowth to recover from their crash landing and stare up at him.

"Er, boss..."

The well dressed crime lord quickly tapped a few buttons, hiding a few statistics as he turned the tablet towards the trio, causing James to whimper about the Koffing killer in the making.
"See this boy?"

The image on the tablet clearly showed Ash as the trio had first spotted him. As the trio nodded, (James in slight terror), Giovanni continued, "You are to follow him, monitor his skill level and report back to me on everything he does. Every captured Pokémon, every girl he kisses, what his goals are, you will keep me informed of everything this boy is and will be! No detail is too small!"

"But boss..." James whined before the most feared man in the underworld of more than four regions (Kanto, Johto, Orange Islands, and SeviiI slands) glared back at him with a glare that could paralyze a Arbok.

It in fact did paralyze them just long enough for him to replace the data cards into the spy camera, after downloading all the information it had gathered to his personal device of course. The trio was still none the wiser he was somehow monitoring them.

"We're on it boss...come on you big crybaby!"

"He's going to blow my Koffing to bits and pieces!"

As Jessie and Meowth dragged the terrified bluenette away, the head of one of the world's major crime syndicate seemed to be in his own world.

"So, it has finally begun," Giovanni said to himself.
A Chapter in the Forest: Answers or not?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Entrance to Viridian Forest

"Why exactly are you following me?"

When his original journey had begun, Misty hadn't exactly followed him for reasons of friendship...at least not at first.

She wanted him to pay for her bike (which were unusually expensive for some reason that Ash had never quite understood for things so vulnerable to electricity, and Gible hunger pangs), which he had borrowed from her, and accidentally fried.

Well, Pikachu did, but legally Pikachu could not purchase a bicycle in the old timeline, and in the new timeline there was no evidence to suggest that he could.

This eventually turned into their friendship they had in the original timeline, which lasted even after her bike was finally restored after the Silver Conference.

However, despite a lack of a crispy bike, she had followed him all the way to the entrance to the Viridian Forest itself, whose woody confines was preceded by several warning signs (Beware Beedrill hives, known lethal hazard) (Finding a Pikachu is not worth your life) (Viridian Forest will not grant you superpowers, do not lick the tree sap) (Stay on the path to avoid damaging the forest and your hopes of reaching tomorrow) (251 days since last known fatality) made out of Weedle proof metal.

At least the fatality warning sign was reassuring.

Her initial 'I feel as though I know you somehow but have no idea how' couldn't be it, could it? There had to be something else...

As the trainer with the perched Pikachu questioned the red head, she held his gaze as she told him smartly, "I have my reasons."

"I didn't accidentally destroy your bike, did I?"

He had to check to make sure.

"I never had a bike." The girl shook her head "Wish I did, but I don't. I'd explain, but its too open out here. I'll tell you in the forest, where we're less likely to be overheard."

Misty's gaze briefly slid over towards a group of local Viridian trainers battling their Rattata and Pidgey off to the side of the forest entrance before, with some trepidation, she walked into the dark forest before them.

"Pikachu-Pi, pika chu ka chu." 'This reminds me of those shows the old man watches late at night with serial killers tricking victims to their bloody doom.'

The same unknown voice that Ash heard twice back in the Viridian Pokemon center again sounded out in his head.
"You know buddy, I don't know if its the two timelines in my head (which I still can't get straight, I can't remember who my father is in either timeline, nor can I recall what my elementary school was called except that it had a different name this time around), but I swear I keep hearing a somewhat familiar voice, and it just suggested that Misty is a serial killer. If that is the case, you wouldn't mind having back, would ya' buddy?"

"PikaPi Pi..." Pikachu stated absently as Ash, now with a slight bit of concern, entered the forest, unaware of what his favorite furry friend was thinking.

‘But...I was the one who said that. Ash can't understand me, right?’

Ash didn't seem to hear that one though unfortunately.

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**Viridian Forest**

Any thought of Misty being a serial killer who used Viridian as a dumping ground was quickly extinguished when she let out a girly scream and jumped three feet in the air as she rapidly backed away from a small green worm Pokemon, showing that her almost comedic fear of Bug-type Pokémon was still quite intact as it approached her slowly.

Yep, Misty was totally dangerous, Ash thought sarcastically. At the moment that Caterpie looked more intimidating than her, which at this rate would take maybe...never to eat her.

"Caterpie, the Worm Pokémon. Caterpie consume plant life at a rapid rate to allow for evolution to occur. It breaks down certain plant toxins to unleash a potent odor to repel predators," Ash's Pokédex rang out from his pocket.

Pikachu sniffed the air a bit, before he hopped to the ground and rapidly pointed at the bug.

"PikaPi! Pika Cha Pi Chu Pi-Pikachu!"

Ash tilted his head in confusion before Pikachu, looking annoyed at him, promptly shouted at him "PikaPi! Pi Pi Ka Chu Pika Chu-Chu Pikachu-Pi Cha!" 'Oh come on, now you can't understand what I'm saying. That's our Caterpie currently terrifying Misty the not serial killer into near hysteric!'

Ash just stared at Pikachu in shock as he finally realized who that voice he kept hearing belonged to, but put it aside for the moment as he realized what Pikachu was originally intending.

"Okay then, Pikachu use Thundershock!"

A burst of electrical energy flew straight at the insect Pokemon and shocked it, causing paralysis and stopping its advance towards the terrified Misty...saving her from certain...possibly a hug.

"Pokéball go!"

Ash threw one of his original six balls at the insect, energizing him and sucking him in as the ball fell to the ground and began to shake. After three shakes, white sparks were emitted from it as Caterpie was officially captured.

As Ash picked up his ball and posed as he was prone to do with it with Pikachu (I caught a Caterpie! Pi-Pikachu!), Misty regained control of herself after a few, deep calming breaths.
"Oh, sorry about that," Misty blushed in embarrassment as she looked ready to slap herself, "I had used the last of my repels on my first journey through this forest and forgot to get more before I went through again. I...have a problem with bug types, and I was too freaked out to take out a normal counter to them."

Before Ash could ask exactly what her counter for bugs were, she drew out one of her Pokeballs and tossed it, releasing a white and blue bird Pokemon.

"Win-Wingull!" The Wingull of all Pokemon promptly perched on Misty's shoulder and let out a cawing noise.

"Wingull the Seagull Pokemon. Wingull are common in coastal areas, where they fly overhead and dive bomb their prey, which include small, non Pokemon fish and any idiot eating French Fries within 20 miles of the open ocean." Ash's Pokedex provided some information that may or not be necessary but was slightly amusing to imagine nonetheless.

Misty seemed to fully regain her self composure, more than any time he had seen Misty within the vicinity of wild Bug types in the old timeline.

"Okay, now that we're alone, its time to talk. See Ash, I'm not sure if you've realized this yet, but your different from regular people."

Ash briefly stared at Misty in shock, before jumping on what he thought she was going on, "Wait, you know that I'm starting to understand Pikachu."

"What? You can't understand a Pikachu!" Misty stated in a shocked tone of voice.

"What are you talking about, you just said I was different from regular...!?"

"You should only be able to understand Fighting-types."

"Huh/Pika?"

---

"Silph Co; 11th floor

"I now call the 40th annual meeting of the Pokemon Professor Association to order." Professor Oak, the chairman and one of three founders of the global group, spoke from the front of a long meeting table as many of the other highly regarded Professors of the world (who could make it this year), representing various members of the Trainer Aligned Treaty Organization (T.A.T.O); including Kanto (Professor Oak), the Orange Islands (Professor Ivy), Johto (Professor Elm), Hoenn (Professor Birch), Orre (Professor Kane), Sinnoh (Professor Rowan), Unova (Professors Cedric and Aurea Juniper) and Kalos (Professor Sycamore).

Professors from members of the Fall City Pact (Or Ranger Union as it was also known), such as Professor Hastings, were barred by T.A.T.O law from being members, just as it was illegal for any citizen of a T.A.T.O nation from going to, or even talking to anyone from, regions such as Fiore, Almia or Oblivia due to the extensive Pokemon Wars that had occurred for centuries between T.A.T.O member states and signatures of the Fall City Pact, that had mostly settled down into a Cold War that had persisted for roughly 40 years or so, roughly around the time when Oak also was able to instigate the changes that would lead to the safer world of the present.

The fact that Oak was old friends with Professor Hastings, and often collaborated with him in secret
to better Pokémon kind, could easily lead to both of their executions if ever discovered unless they both managed to be granted asylum in a neutral third party nation such as Rota.

But, world building facts aside...

"Before we begin, allow me first to welcome our two newest members; Professor Aurea Juniper of Unova, daughter of my fellow founder Professor Cedric Juniper, whose groundbreaking research into Pokémon origins is astounding to say the least."

As the young woman got a round of applause from all present, including normally stoic fellow founder Professor Rowan, she blushed heavily, more so as her father slapped her on the back in good cheer, but nodded her head in acknowledgment.

"We must also give a warm round of applause to our first representative from Orre, Professor Krane, whose research on the effect of the absence of Pokémon on humans makes me never want to go anywhere near Orre at all."

Even the brown haired Gateon Port native couldn't help but laugh at Professor Oak's joke as he also got a healthy round of applause.

"Now, before we get started on pleasantries," Rowan stated in his commonly serious tone, "I do believe we must address something that we all are suffering from as of late: a recent string of budget cuts, am I not correct?"

As Professors Oak, Ivy, Elm and Birch nodded in agreement with Rowan, the rest shrugged.

"Nope," Cedric couldn't recall any difference in funds.

"I just got started, my budget's low but it was that way to begin with" Kane confirmed.

"I actually got a pay raise this year," Sycamore recalled his recent increase in funding; for some reason all the female senators and deputies were always willing to help him out.

He now had a lab in Lumiose City itself, where renting a single building cost more than renting half of Pyrite Town.

Elm and Birch looked dejected as Rowan recomposed himself.

"Well...most of us suffered budget cuts as of late, and I do believe we all know the culprit in all this."

At that, all the non freshman scowled.

"That fool Dr. Yung," Birch said angrily as he slammed both of his hands into the desk with enough force to shake the entire table, "the militaries seem to believe that his Mirage Project is more important than Pokémon, it's disgusting. That fringe science is nothing but a money pit, all the while money that could be used to figuring out the habitat requirements for Gyarados to be satisfied, and not rampaging in human inhabited areas, is unavailable!"

"What do you expect, Bloodline hysteria has caused a unnerving trend towards militarism in all our nations," Professor Ivy pointed out as she shook her head, "sure, we need to take steps to deal with the threat that Bloodliners present to Humans and Pokémon alike, but not at the expense of Pokémon."

"Dealing with the threat, is not the term I'd use," Professor Oak said with a bit of steel in his voice, "Rather, I'd be more interested in finding out more about them first."
"I'm sure we could, as they enslave us all and take over the Earth," Elm muttered to himself, but loud enough for all to hear.

"Perhaps less researching them as a race or species, and more research aimed into finding out why there are more of them in recent memory than in the past," Cedric Juniper suggested, "Starting roughly sixteen years ago, the number of Bloodliners in the world has multiplied drastically. Where once there used to be maybe, ten in Unova at the most since even before the birth of Resharim and Zekrom, now there are thousands, with a vastly female majority. Similar changes in numbers have occurred all over the world, all in the same time frame and gender scale. What has caused this drastic change?"

"I'd certainly like to know," Aurea Juniper thought out loud, "I wrote my thesis paper on the origins of the Trubbish evolutionary line, and Bloodliners are in between Pokémon and humanity after all..."

"As interesting and groundbreaking as that research would undoubtedly be, I would advise against it young lady," Rowan told her with a gruff sort of caution in his voice, "Politicians have a nasty habit of cherry picking your research to justify heinous things you never intended your research to be used for. They also have a unpleasant tendency to ignore anything that they don't want to be there, just ask Professor Oak about how it was when he was trying to publicize his findings on the causes of Pokémon on Human aggression, right Professor?"

Professor Oak seemed to be deep in thought, which Rowan interrupted with a gruff cough.

Sheepishly he came out of his thoughts enough to remember what she had actually asked him.

"Er, yes...believe me you wouldn't believe the death threats I got, and even still get today," Oak joked about it as his mind attempted to get back on track of his previous thought.

How to go about researching Bloodlines, starting of course with the Bloodliner (one of many terms used to describe them) who had just left his lab with a Pikachu.

Deep in the Viridian Forest; closer to Pewter City

"I think we missed him, perhaps we should get out..." Jessie suggested.

"Quiet!" Jessie snapped at her partner in crime as they held vigil in a little stand up top a non-Kakuna studded tree, which lay in perfect observation of the main path out of the Viridian Forest.

From what they had managed to gather, their target had left Viridian City and was heading north to Pewter City. He was registered to compete in the Kanto League after all, and with Viridian's gym currently closed (Giovanni was removing asbestos that had been installed by his predecessor and mother Madame Boss), Pewter City was the closest gym the boy could go to.

"We could be here for days though, can't we at least go back to Pewter City when it gets dark and get a portable DVD player or something?" James suggested.

That sounded like a pretty good idea at the moment...certainly better than sitting around in a tree with nothing to do.

"The boss gave us a direct order, and we will man this post until the target passes by..."

ZZZZTT
A loud burst of electrical energy exploded about a quarter mile into the forest center silenced both grunts as Meowth popped his head up from ground level, holding a white plastic bag filled with sub sandwiches with one of Team Rocket's human disguises that only Froakie could see through making him resemble a midget.

"You clowns better like eating and running, I think we just found our target."

---

With Ash and Misty

"You shouldn't be able to understand Pikachu, it's not a Fighting-type," Misty reiterated as Ash just gave her a confused stare.

"Why would you think I should only be able to understand Fighting-types?"

"Win-Wingull!"

The bird's loud calls briefly took their attention as a swarm of territorial Beedrill came out of the trees around them in a huge swarm.

Misty briefly looked terrified, before she decided to take advantage of the situation to give a demonstration before Ash would say the customary 'you must be crazy/think I'm stupid/ on something line.'

"Whirlpool!"

Wingull flew off of Misty's shoulders as Ash and Pikachu gaped at her in shock as she briefly glowed white, raising her right hand high into the air before a huge, swirling vortex of water was held over her head.

The move that Dawn's Piplup had used to win many a contest had been created by a human, and was now catching the Beedrill in its watery confines.

With a ferocious yell, Misty sent the attack flying over head, the water attack losing cohesion after about thirty seconds of flight and caused the Bug-types to fall to the ground in a heap quite a distance away.

"I know you're different Ash, because you used Counter when you were attacked by the Route 1 flock of homicidal Spearow," she stated as if what she had just done was a trivial matter.

"I did!?" Ash said, utterly surprised.

"Pika pika chu. 'I was as surprised as you were.'"

Ash turned to his mouse companion and demanded, "Then why didn't you tell me!?"

That little detail might have been important to know.

"Chu pika chu-pi"

Ash and Pikachu simultaneously looked annoyed at the fact that for some reason Ash couldn't consistently hear what Pikachu was actually saying.

"Is it normal to only hear half of what your Pokémon is saying in your head?" Ash questioned Misty,
"What, do you mean telepathically? When I hear my Pokémon, it's just like regular speech," Misty answered looking pensive. "Then again, for all I know this is normal. I've never met someone like me before, maybe the rules are different with each Bloodline, I'd have to think about it a bit."

"Blood what?"

---

With Team Rocket

Stealthily the two agents and their Meowth hid behind a pair of trees, poking their heads out into the clearing where the electrical blast had come from.

"You know, I don't think this is the Koffing killer's work," James noted as he surveyed the damage to the clearing.

It was clearly the place of a Pokémon battle after all; though in addition to electrical burns on the sides of trees, regular burns were scattered around and damp patches were everywhere, probably the fault of the fainted Squirtle lying on its back in the center of the clearing.

Its trainer was sitting on the ground in front of it, looking despondent. He had brown hair, done up all spike like, and was dressed in blue with blueish-black pants. He was around the same age as the kid they were pursuing.

"For all we know the Boss wants him because he can summon Ho-oh to do his bidding, now shut up!"

"I lost..." the kid muttered to himself in utter shock as the TR trio exchanged glances with one another, non verbally coming up with a plan to question the kid.

Five minutes later, as the boy finally returned his Squirtle to its ball and began walking towards Pewter City, still in a slight daze, the trio jumped out in front of him, disguised with their R shirts turned inside out and Meowth sitting by their feet akin to a regular Meowth.

"Why, don't you look down in the dumps?" James kindly asked the boy who averted his gaze.

"Leave me alone," the boy muttered as Jessie jumped in.

"Aren't you all down in the dumps today, did you lose something?"

The boy gritted his teeth, but responded "Yeah, I lost a battle. Some jerk with a Pikachu and a C..."

The TR trio exchanged urgent, if terrified from James, glances before pressing.

"Say, this Pikachu trainer didn't have a blue jacket, a official Pokémon League hat..."

As they asked this, Gary suddenly burst into laughter.

"Wait, are you trying to describe Ashy boy!? Like hell would I ever loose to him. Thanks though, I needed a laugh. Now, I'm off to Pewter City for a Gym Battle."

He got about a eight of a mile down the path before the TR trio, who were internally wondering why there was another Pikachu trainer running about, recalled that he was prime for a Pokemon poaching...
and promptly ran after him.

"Prepare for trouble...!"

**Buzzzzzzz!**

A swarm of the giant bee Pokemon Beedrill descended around them before Gary could hear their motto, disturbed by TR’s loud racket.

"...Well, I guess we have to prepare for trouble," Meowth gulped as Koffing and Ekans went out to protect their masters.

---

**Later that night**

A desperate need to consume sustenance later confirmed that one rule at least was in common for people like Misty and himself, or as Misty called it, those with Bloodlines.

As Misty seemed confused why what he was able to do differed from how it worked with her, she had no answers, and it wasn’t worth asking her now. Not only was there no way in hell that Misty was going to make any sort of noise in the dark of night in an area home to known Ariados nests. (Apparently, some Johto Pokemon could be found west of Mt. Moon, but in low numbers), but she was also fast asleep in her own sleeping bag on the other side of the campfire as Ash silently prayed that Misty's sleep cycle was the same as he reached for Caterpie's Pokéball, using the inside of his sleeping bag to muffle the noise of the released Caterpie; Pikachu's own ears perking up as he heard it.

Ash placed a finger on Caterpie's crest, causing the bug to lose the apprehension in its eyes as he regained all his lost memories.

Placing two fingers on each of his temples, Ash stared intently at Caterpie 'Caterpie, I am speaking to you telepathically. Do you understand me?'

The bug just stared at him before making a few bug wheezy noises *'Pikachu, why is Ash doing a Patrick Stewart impression? For that matter, why am I a Caterpie again? Last thing I remember I was flying around north of the Kalos region...now I'm back where I was born again...and somehow Ash can apparently comprehend what we're saying in full.'*

The mouse, who had squirmed in deeper into the bag, swatted Ash in the nose to stop him from attempting telepathy from his end of the conversation. "Pika chu cha pi." *'Its sort of complicated, with time travel distorting space and the end of all reality to prevent from reoccurring, that sort of thing...and who's Patrick Stewart?'*

Caterpie seemed to be unamused as he made a few more noises the author has no idea how to type *'So basically, the space-time continuum has been broken and time reset, and its our job to keep it from breaking in the first place?'*

"Pi?" *'Space-Time wha?'*

Ash continued to try and focus as he told them rather upbeat, "Hey, I'm actually starting to get the hang of this. I just need to focus on it."

"Chu-ka pi-ka-cha." *'Just don't try to figure out Poke Language to a point you don't need it; humans
can not comprehend the 500,000 basic rules to it without getting to the semi complicated ones, mildly complicated, rather complicated and unholy complicated ones.'

Caterpie crawled his way up to the top of the sleeping bag to stare up at the moon as he was prone to do in the original timeline, commenting, 'You know, regardless of the fact that the space-time continuum may be in danger of shattering for a second time, it might not be so bad to restart everything again. It was a lot of fun training with you in the original timeline back when you were a rookie...at least I assume you weren't a rookie when the original timeline ended. That and maybe I can avoid a few bad calls with my mate that put me in the Growlithe house, so to speak.'

Ash looked insulted as he replied, "Oh come on, I'm not that bad. I won the Orange League and Battle Frontier, got into the top 16 in the Indigo conference, top 8 in the Silver, Ever Grande and Vertress conferences and the top 4 in the Lily of the Valley conference...still wish I won though."

"PikaPi Pi-Pika Chu..." 'You know Ash, all the trainers who won the conferences, John Dixon, Tyson, Tobias, Virgil were at least 16. Considering you were...' Pikachu drew a blank at how old Ash was.

"Oh come on Pikachu, you know I was..." Ash also drew a blank on exactly how old he was.

Stupid temporal distortions/Cyrus being an ass.

"Pika Pi-Pikachu Ka-chu" '...well I'm pretty sure you were not that old. For however old you were, an average of the Top 8 is quite an accomplishment. Even if at times you made questionable calls, you've gotten better over time. Look at how you learned how to better use Flying types after Hoenn and how you managed to make full use of Bug-types in Unova, not to mention you were able to maintain a team of 10 Pokémon in rotation for the first time.'

"I still lost in Unova, and went down a seat," Ash seemed to be somewhat prone to depression about his past actions.

"Chu." 'Yeah, that's Professor Juniper's fault.'

Caterpie and Ash stared at Pikachu in confusion as Caterpie asked, 'There's more than one Professor?'

"Pikachu, why would you blame her? For all I know I was eternally 10, and I'm more mature than that"

"Pika ka-Cha" 'Ash, what is the difference between Professor Juniper's lab and Professor's Oaks? Professor Oak's has a expansive outdoor area where Pokémon are let loose to continuously train themselves as we are warrant to do. He even helps out in doing so to better study Pokémon-Human relations. Professor Juniper does not have this, instead the Pokemon you kept in rotation at her lab were kept in their pokeballs in stasis. Had you had the ability to reliably send your Unova Pokémon to Kanto for rotation, you could have possibly have won Unova. It might have worked out more to your favor if you fully rotated your team, but considering how I'm pretty sure you lost my Pokéball at some point and Pignite had abandonment issues that could have really negatively effected him if you swapped him out until he got over it after the Team Plasma thing, but still it was the right idea, but perhaps the wrong time to implement it.'

Ash thought about that for a moment. That did make some level of sense; after all he didn't teach Noctowl Air Slash, Herracross Sleep Talk, Torkoal Heat Wave or Snorlax Ice Punch. They learned those moves at Oak's Lab.
Still, he didn't believe that it was right to blame Professor Juniper for every loss in Unova after all.

"I'm sure I must have done something wrong. I mean, perhaps I should have seen if it was possible to carry more than six Pokémon or something."

Caterpie shook his head and told him, 'After I left Ash, I've traveled across the world. At no point did I ever see a trainer allowed to train more than six Pokémon while on the move. If you were in a fixed place, like a Gym or Oak's lab, you could have more than six Pokémon active, but once you leave the confines, having over six goes against international law, but who knows, maybe that is different in this new timeline. The Pokédex might have something on it though.'

Ash curiously decided to check this, after lowering the volume of course.

"Pokemon Trainers are allowed to carry a maximum of six Pokémon on them at any given time outside of specifically allowed areas with Pokéball limit jammers. This number has in the past been higher or lower based on the cost of Pokémon food, trends of battling and wild Pokémon, as well as human hostility. The six Pokémon limit of modern times was implemented forty years ago by Professor Samuel Oak in part after the near leveling of Coastal Johto by infamous outlaw 'Twenty Gyarados Bill'."

"Guess not."

'Twenty Gyarados Bill?' Caterpie was both amused and terrified by the name.

"Makes me wish I was known as 'Twenty Charizard' Ash," Ash commented before he thought about some of the disobedience issues his Charizard had had, "on second thought maybe that might not be such a good idea."

The Next day

Contrary to what it may appear, Ash did not abandon his Pidgeot.

During his time in the Orange Islands, Route 1 was affected by construction, which caused habitat disruption. This, coupled with the environmental chaos caused by a overzealous collector trying to capture the original Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres, resulted in the flock migrating elsewhere.

Ash cried himself to sleep the night he found a familiar feather left in his window as a parting gift.

Thus, at the first spotting of the as of now Pidgeotto he had caught prior (quickly confirmed by the scent detecting skills of Pikachu the wonder mouse) just as Ash and Misty finished off a box of poptarts each and their released Pokémon (Pikachu, Caterpie, Wingull and, on his own will, Psyduck) were dealing with another round of Pokémon food, capture was a immediate must as the bird landed on the ground on the other side of the little clearing they stopped for the night in to peck at worms in the ground, before noticing them and glaring.

"Pidgeotto, the Bird Pokémon middle evolution of the Kanto-Johto region. It constructs its nests in the center of their large territories, held by various migrating flocks of this Pokémon and its evolution and pre-evolution Pidgeot and Pidgey. Pidgeotto are loyal and determined creatures, but will use vicious force to defend themselves and those in their flock." Ash's Pokédex recorded another Pokémon seen as Ash and his Pokémon immediately disengaged from eating.
Misty noted his interest and asked, "You want to catch it?"

Ash nodded before he gave a glance to Caterpie.

As much as Ash would prefer to possibly do this the easy way and just touch them and regain their memories, there was the problem of touching a wild Pokémon that could fly, and also to a somewhat dangerous one.

So thus, violence was necessary, but with Pokémon battle honor and all Pidgeotto should forgive him.

"Use String Shot to prevent Pidgeotto from flying off."

Caterpie obliged with a blast of threads from its mouth, though Ash didn't hear anything from him (perhaps it was just his eagerness to get one of his old friends back messing with his concentration or something), which promptly restrained Pidgeotto from flying off by binding its right foot.

The bird gave an annoyed look at the bug that was restraining it, yet also a confused one, in the sort of 'why is the prey preventing the predator from flying away and leaving it alone' sort of look, to which it responded by flying downwards at Caterpie in a quick attack.

"Meet it head on with Tackle!"

The two charging attacks met head on, but it seemed Quick Attack was faster, causing the now airborne Caterpie to swing backwards.

"Now, use the String Shot to sling yourself around and Tackle it again!"

The string shot still attached to Pidgeotto's leg, the Bug-type took the energy from the Tackle-Quick Attack collision to speed itself around and above the now startled Flying-type.

The Tackle was a critical hit, causing Pidgeotto to crash down into the dirt as Caterpie landed right next to it. Similar to the old timeline, that fall would have killed (or severely injured) a human, but the Pokémon were perfectly fine.

Pidgeotto wasn't going anywhere without a potion though.

Ash promptly threw the Pokéball, which energized the downed bird and caught it with no hassle after the third shake.

Misty rose an eyebrow in surprise at his capture. "Are you sure you're a rookie trainer? That was pretty good."

He just shrugged his shoulders and told her, "Guess I'm just a natural."

When he sent out Caterpie, she was promptly ready to give him a lecture about typing once he was forced to return Caterpie. She had no idea that was actually legitimately planned.

Ash, Pikachu, Caterpie and Psyduck each gave their own version of a nervous laugh; the former for being time travelers and the latter because Misty would now expect him to be that awesome.

However, before Misty could press on about the origin of the laughs, Caterpie promptly glowed in the well known light of evolution.
"A day later, with TR"

"This isn't the Chicken and Bacon Ranch Melt Meowth! I told you I wanted a Chicken and Bacon ranch melt after two straight days of Meatball Marinara, not the Roasted Chicken!"

"What do you take me for rich boy, a cat that can make money out of thin air? Those things cost more than your fancy bottle cap cases."

"You're a Meowth! Your signature move is Pay Day and we're members of a criminal organization!"

"Yes, but do you think that a government in Kanto could last if they didn't have the ability to control Meowth financial..."

"Silence, we have to take notes, the kid's battling some Samurai wannabe!" Jessie hushed them both as they observed the battle that was about to go down.

"Trainer from Pallet, your compatriot has dishonored me in combat and after combat with his dishonorable behavior! As his townsman, you shall pay for his dishonor!"

"Uh, sure?" Ash didn't think he was this high strung last time.

"Now, go Pinsir! Avenge my honor!"

In a flash of white light, the huge, brown beetle Pokemon with its large, steel gray crushing pincers on its head glared down at Ash with a metallic clash of its crushing claws.

He was about to get out his Pokédex for more information on it, but it beat him to it.

"Pinsir, the Stag Beetle Pokemon. Pinsir are well known for their feud with Scyther and Heracross for forest territory. Using its pincers, this Pokemon can snap flag poles in half,"

Ash's Pokédex rang out from his pocket.

"Metapod, go!"

Ash threw his own ball, releasing the green cocoon Pokemon that had evolved from his Caterpie after the successful capture of his Pidgeotto.

"Metapod, the Cocoon Pokémon. While this Pokemon usually does not eat or move, a trained Metapod is capable of everything a Caterpie can do. A wild caught Metapod, or one trained by a complete rookie, is incapable of anything. Despite this, it is the icon of Playtrainer magazine."

What kind of messed up people or Pokémon...

Ash just removed the Pokédex from his pocket with a confused look as he asked it, "Do you have to randomly give out information like that?"

"Yes," the Pokedex stated before Ash repocketed it.

His opponent yelled at him and said, "Just like that Pokedex, you are a fool, and shall be dealt with as one. Pinsir, Vice Grip!"

The huge, imposing bug type loomed over the green bug cocoon, his pincers clicking together ominously like rusty sheers as Metapod looked vaguely alarmed.
"Use String Shot!"

The Metapod released a gush of string from below its eyes (where one would assume it once had a mouth), which bound the pincer's together and caused both scary bug type, and samurai trainer, to freeze in panic.

"Impossible! A Metapod cannot use any attack that is not Harden!"

As if to doubly prove this thinking false, Ash had Metapod use another attack.

"Now, Tackle!"

Metapod proved it retained its other attack as well, with a solid thrust into Pinsir's face. The attack caused the much larger bug type to stumble back, before tripping over and fainting.

"What! You dishonor me with your treachery! That is simply a Caterpie in Metapod's clothing, is it not?"

"...No, it's a Metapod I trained from a Caterpie," Ash asserted in an annoyed tone as the Samurai recalled the downed Pinsir.

"You shall be punished, go Metapod!"

The Samurai's own Metapod appeared before him as Ash returned his own Metapod and threw out another Pokéball, releasing Pidgeotto.

"Allow me to show you a true Metapod, Harden!"

"Gust."

Contrary to what was once taught to Pokémon trainers in the Kanto, Johto, Orre and Hoenn regions, what attack stat a move was based on was not based on the type of attack, but the attack itself. So, despite what was once taught, Gust was a special attack, not a physical attack.

So, when the flying attack hit the bettered defensive power of the Metapod, all Harden did for it was to make it hurt more when the Metapod was blown right into the Samurai, who was blown along with his Metapod into the sky.

There was even a Team Rocket-esque twinkle to announce that he was well and truly gone.

Ash and his companion blinked in confusion about how easy that was.

"Wow, I guess all that battling for our lives against that swarm of Beedrill was good for more than just perfecting Pikachu's Iron Tail, huh Pidgeotto?" Ash muttered to himself.

"Uh Ash?" Misty asked him as she pointed over at Metapod.

He turned to look as to his surprise he saw a glow already surrounding his bug Pokemon.

"Metapod's evolving!" Ash exclaimed delightedly.

He watched as his old Pokemon became a Butterfree again, gaining large white wings and attaining a more purple middle with large red eyes and the iconic black markings of a male Butterfree.

Once Metapod was done becoming well and truly a Butterfree, Butterfree stretched out its wings in triumph as it flew around.
"Free-free!"

Meanwhile Team Rocket was watching him and making a verbal report on what they'd seen.

"Okay, Trainer whose name we are pretty sure is named Ash stalking report volume 1: Trainer in forest with red head Water-type trainer female. Trainer has captured and trained a Butterfree, Pidgeotto and has apparently perfected Pikachu's Iron Tail attack. Victorious battle with Bug-type samurai trainer and now on the move north to Pewter City. Stalking shall continue, send more sandwich money."

Jessie verbally recorded the information to be send to Giovanni while Meowth and James continued to argue about sandwiches, missing the latter part of the conversation visible to only Ash's perspective.

'Free-Free!' "I so did miss being able to fly around, and look at my beautiful wings," his Butterfree said in delight.

As he looked at his newly evolved Pokémon, he had to agree with Butterfree there.

"Now, to Pewter City, and away from this forest!" Misty seemed too happy to leave.

Omake

Canon Relativity to Reset Universe; Not Canon

Welcome to the Omake

Crossoverpairinglover Studios

"Today is the day."

"Hey, you're stealing my line."

Ash, back in his 10 year old form as seen in the Original Series, with Pikachu at his side was standing within a see through elevator going up the sides of a large building deep within a large city.

Next to him was a red head dressed in a yellow body suit with a lightning bolt symbol on his chest.

"So, you're Quicksilver, right?"

The red head turned to Ash with an annoyed look and stared at him as he questioned, "Do I look like an irritable mutant who jumps ship from hero to villain like its hopscotch? I'm Kid Flash!"

"Oh, sorry..."

"So, somewhat idiotic anime character, how are you enjoying your recent promotion to the top of the Studio? You're now one of the front running stories, and the only one really active now. The future of us all rides on your shoulders."

Ash blushed as he urged, "No need to put so much pressure on me."

"I have to. Here at this studio, we've done all sorts of stories; starring blond ninjas, boys who lived and seaweed brained demigods, along with yours truly..."
"Didn't you co-star?"

"Please use present tense, I am just in hiatus. Of course, that means you're going to have to cover all the omakes."

"Omakes?"

"Shouldn't you know what they are, you're an anime character?"

"That's a stereotype!"

"Pi-Pika!"

One of the original sidekicks just shrugged and said, "Well you're more likely to be shown doing something comedic than Batman or Goliath...well anyway basically you're going to have to be ready for anything. You could crossover across any fandom the author likes..."

"Pika Pika. 'As long as I don't end up a card in some Pharaoh's deck or start sparkling I'm fine with anything.'"

"Yeah, and I'd better not be finding out the leader of Team Rocket is actually my father Darth Vader..." Ash commented.

"...you could be used to show off some random fact the author found out as he was writing the chapter..."

Iran teaches evolution to all its students and has no religious problem with it/ There are roughly 12,000 species of Fern in the world/ J.A.R.V.I.S is Vision's Voice actor in Avengers 2/ J.K Rowling is now a Harmonian.

As the loud and imposing voice showed off this point, Kid finished.

"...I know Naruto ended up involved with Pleistocene Rewilding in his last project, among other things (Plesi wha?). You could even show off a challenge the author coughs up that he hopes a reader will take on. Hopefully you won't be used to vent out the author's political views, it offends too many fans. The big guy is working on it, but sometimes he just has a bad day..."

**Beep**

The elevator reached the top floor, silencing the kid hero as the three prepared to exit the elevator.

"Omake or not Ash, be ready to have fun with it, and remember; you only have one shot. The author has proven he can only do a well liked story in a fandom once; ignoring that side project he did in a different section of your fandom, if you mess this up, you're never going to get another chance. Now, I'm off to get that free ramen before that Ninja beats me to it."

As Kid sped off into the exclusive 'your story is a top priority one V.I.P penthouse' floor, Ash and Pikachu sighed.

"Well Pikachu, I guess we have to take this one step at a time. Let's just try to get to 100 reviews and see if we can make it. I mean, we already have 44 with three chapters, I'm sure we'll be number 1 at this studio before we know it"

"You have to overcome the other stories first, and you're barely half way to the next milestone dobe," a duck haired anime character rudely told Ash before walking away to brood some more, "Of
course, even if you beat Olympus Divided and Moon Heir 2 right after it, to best the next highest reviewed story, Next Gen you'd need over 250 more reviews. You'd need nearly 2000 reviews to take Mysterious Power's crown at the top. You should give up now dobe."

"...Maybe we can get some Espurr to terrify the readers into reviewing more" Ash suggested as he and Pikachu promptly fell into a depression.

Chapter End Notes

Heads up, some of the chapters have omakes at the end. Sometimes they're canon, others not, but I'll keep them regardless. This one was written obviously when the story was starting at Fanfiction.net, so the 100-review thing doesn't necessarily apply (though we would appreciate it).

See you tomorrow!
**The Stone Hearts of Pewter**

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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**Entrance to Pewter City**

"...So, you plan to enter the Indigo Conference, win all eight badges and all..." Misty spoke in a tone that was both conversational and questioning as the two walked down the hills into the valley Pewter was located in.

"Yep."

"...And I'm taking it you plan to challenge the gym leader of Pewter City?"

"Pi-Pikachu Pi." 'Preferably without that wheel thing again, me being squeezed to death roughly twice and having to win by sprinkler ex machina.'

Ash internally flinched at being reminded of how some of his earliest 'victories' were somewhat less victory and more reward. That and he hated to win because of unfair circumstances.

He still felt bad about Mauville Gym supercharging Pikachu during his battle with Watson. Cheating, directly or not, was something that Ash could not stand in anyone, particularly himself.

"That's the plan. Not much else to see in Pewter if you're not a geologist or astrologist."

Misty nodded and said, "You know that Rock-types are super effective against Flying and Bug-type Pokémon, and that most of the ones in Kanto are also part Ground type, so you can't just shock them to defeat them."

"Pi?" 'We could just aim for a horn and hope for the best.'

Ash thought about how that had happened, and decided that he should not rely on that this time around. Considering how Pokémon seemed to actually be somewhat different (More aggressive for one thing) in this new timeline, Ash had the oddest idea he couldn't use Gainax logic to overrule physics with willpower and awesomeness.

"Well, Pikachu perfected Iron Tail while we were in the forest..." Ash pointed out as Misty shivered involuntarily at the memory of being in said forest, "Steel beats Rock."

"You know, I was wondering why you taught it Iron Tail, wouldn't Brick Break do the same thing but with more versatility?"

"Pikachu can learn Brick Break?"

The mouse on his shoulder shrugged, having no idea if he could learn it.

"Iron Tail would still work, and maybe you just want to make sure Pikachu can have a move capable of hurting a Ghost-Ground type, but to each his own I guess," Misty commented as she shrugged, "You know, this actually works out well..."

She had a thoughtful look as Ash and Pikachu cocked their heads in confusion at her.

"I want to check a few things out while we're here, and if they pan out they should come out nicely."
At no point as they went into the city while Misty was pondering plans or discussing the logic of Iron Tail over Brick Break, did they encounter a rock salesman...which was a real shame not only for getting to possibly meet Brock's father but also because Ash had been looking forward to starting a rock collection that he would have to lug all over the world and would be entirely useless to him.

Well, maybe at least Gary was that stupid and already bought all the rocks...doubtful, but hey a guy could dream.

*Gate of Pewter City*

Ash had come to accept that time travel had caused several disruptions in time, ranging from people's ages to, as he recalled from his still hazy sets of memories, more wars.

However, it was quite obvious that there were more changes yet, and he hadn't expected this one.

A familiar figure was waiting up front at the gate, a large, muscular man with a large round nose, huge mustache and dressed in a karate-esque uniform.

"I am Don George, of the Pewter City battle club. I take it you're a trainer here to challenge Brock, the Pewter City gym leader?"

Don George, the battle club manager family from Unova...was now in Kanto. Of all the possible...

Ash would have expected Brock to become a woman before something like that...which would admittedly be seriously awkward and wrong but would evoke the question would Brock then be boy crazy?

Ash managed to absently nod through his confusion and shock, while Misty shook her head, "I'm just traveling with him; I don't have any interest in the Pokémon League challenge."

"Well then, you're going to have to come with me young man, and why not you as well miss."

*Pewter City Battle Club*

Iris had said before about the Battle Club, that it "was an awesome place for trainers to sharpen their skills", or something along those lines, about the battle clubs of the old timeline, and these ones didn't seem to differ from that.

The educational lecture part...was different, as Ash found himself in a room with roughly a dozen plus other trainers around his age, as Don George stood in front of them, more like something out of a school than a battle facility.

"Each and every one of you has come to Pewter City for the purpose of challenging Brock, the leader of the Pewter City Gym," Don George spoke in front of the class, "A noble first step for many of you in your journey to the Pokémon League championships at the Indigo Plateau, however at this point I must ask...how many of you are not from either the Pewter, Viridian or Pallet areas?"

Only four hands went up.

"...And of that, how many of you are from anywhere east of Mount Moon?"

The hands dropped.

"As I suspected, so allow me to be straight with you; the Pokémon found within this area are not known for their general ability to fight Brock's Rock-type Pokémon. Allow me to use video
demonstrations to explain what used to happen before you were all required to attend this seminar."

The room darkened as the sound of technology activating preceded the projector's activation, revealing a video footage of a gym battle, with Brock (Who looked older, but no more so than twenty if Ash had to guess), once again commanding his Onix, with a young trainer's Pidgey bravely staring it down...

**SWAT**

Before being whacked by Onix's tail and KO'd.

Similar scenes were shown with Onix easily defeating a Caterpie, Weedle, Rattata, Spearow, Ekans, Jigglypuff and Metapod, then a few scenes that initially brought up the non-Ash's in the room's hopes, but quickly squashed them when a Beedrill, Paras, Mankey and Sandshrew were similarly swatted.

"You cannot just bring in a poorly matched Pokémon, or even a correctly matched one you just caught, into a gym battle. You must train your Pokémon before you battle them. It's in bad taste to use a Pokémon just for a specific battle and never use it again*.

"As Pokémon trainers, you have a long journey ahead of you. There are many paths to take, and there is no 'correct' way to go about it, though there are wrong paths. It's equally as professional to use the same team of Pokémon again and again as it is to occasionally start from scratch in a new region or a mixture of these paths. Just as it is equally as respectable for a trainer to travel to compete in the Pokémon League, the Grand Festival, or for any other goal."

Ash felt a bit better after hearing that. Glad that his tendency to reset his team to just Pikachu in order to catch new Pokémon and learn was just as valid as using Pikachu, Charizard, Squirtle, Bulbasaur and the rest of the old guard from region to region.

"As you are now, you will be battling Brock's first badge team," Don George stated as the projector changed from showing the Gym's epic fail reel 'Onix smashes Com Mon' collection and going to a more directly educational one, showing a single boulder badge next to a image of a Geodude and Onix. "Brock is a Pokémon Breeder, who breeds his own Pokémon as well as the Pokémon of other clients. In doing so, he is one of the most flexible, and most powerful, of the Kanto Gym Leaders. While most, such as certain jerks in Vermillion City, have to catch weaker Pokémon for first timer challengers, Brock breeds them, and thus has more control of what Pokémon he fields"

"For those who may not have picked up what I hinted earlier, Gym Leaders are required to field different teams for different badge numbers. For example, if you had four badges and challenged Brock, his team would look like this."

The display changed to show four boulder badges, and Geodude was replaced by a Graveler, while a Rhyhorn was added.

"Pika Pi?" 'You know, this makes a lot of sense.'

After all, it wasn't like you had to go on a specific gym route or anything. A trainer starting from Cinnabar, for instance, couldn't exactly fight Magmar, and it would seem somewhat anti-climactic if the final gym battle that a trainer from Blackthorn city had in, say, Azalea Town involved a Metapod.

Ash just shrugged, perhaps because of his battle style he didn't really think about tiered strength levels like this. Because he didn't focus on evolving his team, he would hold the one badge level
team to the same standards as he would hold the eight badge team.

That was just him anyway, but when your Bulbasaur and Corphish could stand at the same level as a Meganium or Alakazam, you could be forgiven for not really considering things that way.

"As you earn more and more badges, the Pokémon that you could have to face diversify. These are among the Pokémon that Brock has been shown to use."

The display started to show a wider amount of Pokémon with a number of badges around them, including some Golem (7,8), Rhydon (6, 7, 8), Omanyte (2, 3), Omastar, Kabuto (2, 3), Kabutops (7, 8), Aerodactyl (7, 8), Sudowoodo (5), Shuckle (3), Larvitar (2) and Rhyperior (8), as well as more Onix (2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8), Geodude (2, 3), Rhyhorn (3, 5, 6) and Graveler (3,5,6).

"Man, I am so glad that Brock never used one of those teams on me," Ash muttered quietly to himself as Pikachu gave him a look.

"Pi-Kachu Pi-Pikachu Cha. " 'Ash, I don't think Gyms were quite like that back in the old timeline. For all you know, gym leaders used only singular sets of Pokémon, seeing as Lt. Surge only had one Raichu and seemingly no other Pokémon, Maylene only had one Lucario, Flannery was definitely too inexperienced to have trained more Fire-types, Sabrina definitely didn't go easy on anyone...'

"Point taken," He whispered so only his mouse heard. Though he had to wonder how many other things about Brock had changed.

"Before any of you can battle Brock, you must prove to me that you are ready to do so. Per the Gym Leader code of conduct, a Gym Leader may set specific restrictions for who can or cannot battle them; as I'm sure many of you are aware with Viridian's restriction on anyone battling without at least six badges, and Brock's one and only restriction is that you must prove that you have actually trained for your battle and know what you're doing, in addition to making sure you are all properly registered for the Pokémon League of course."

A few minutes later

Ash found himself in a lengthy line for access to a Pokéball registration machine, utterly bored.

"Didn't I already do this or something?" He muttered to himself.

Ash was pretty sure that he had handled all this paperwork at some point previously.

Then again, he did have a unique favorable relationship with Professor Oak that most trainers did not have; perhaps this was how most trainers who didn't get starter Pokémon (such as Stephan or Nando) had to deal with.

Or perhaps it was a just new timeline thing.

"Next."

Ash found himself up now, as Pikachu hopped down from his shoulder and Ash placed the balls containing Pidgeotto and Butterfree in the registration machine as he then reached into his pocket.

"Oh, a Butterfree and Pidgeotto? Not bad, at least you don't think you can defeat a gym leader with a Rattata and Caterpie..." Don George fell silent at seeing what Ash pulled out.

"Is that a...Pokédex?" Ash nodded as Don grabbed the dex and activated it, similar to how the first Jenny Ash had met had once did.
"This unit, to be identified as Dexter Mark 1, is a sixth generation Pokémon Digital Database programmed for trainer Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town by Professor Samuel Oak," the dex blared out, now showing Ash's appearance, "My Function is to provide information on the various Pokémon this trainer is sure to encounter and general relevant information, as well as act as a general identification, including Passport, Credit Card and Insurance Card. If I am stolen and shown to be in the hands of another trainer, please arrest the thief and see me returned to my trainer before he suffers a humiliating incident. Currently, this trainer has seen 21 Pokémon: Those being Pikachu, Mr. Mime, Pidgey, Rattata, Spearow, Fearow, Psyduck, Chansey, Meowth, Ekans, Koffing, Staryu, Starmie, Wingull, Caterpie, Metapod, Butterfree, Weedle, Kakuna, Beedrill and Pinsir and has caught 5, and is unlicensed to drive or operate automobiles, drink alcohol or purchase tobacco. If he attempts to do any of these things, please call his mother at..."

Ash and Pikachu just stared at the electronic device in annoyance while Don George kept looking on in amazement, not even registering Delia's phone number.

"You're a Pokédex Holder!?"

Pokédex holder? That was a new term.

Ash nodded as Don, of all things, bowed.

"My humble apologies for keeping you waiting. As you did not have a Kanto Starter Pokémon on you, I did not immediately recognize who you were. Allow me to speed you along sir, you certainly will not need to go through the required testing period and thus should go straight to the training section."

He was quickly pushed along in his stunned state of paralysis by the overly cheerful Don.

_Gym room_

In the original timeline, Ash had made use of the Battle Club's training facilities a number of times. Starting after he had trained for his rematch with Lenora and teaching Tepig Flame Charge and Oshawott Aqua Jet, he had later used the facilities to aide in the teaching of several moves, including Pignite's Brick Break, Leavanny's X-Scissor and Krookodile's Aerial Ace.

Of course, the fact he had to work out in the process as well was odd, but not unwelcome, as Misty walked into the training area while Ash and Pikachu were simultaneously on a treadmill for the re-teaching of Quick Attack, while Butterfree was flying in a wind tunnel and Pidgeotto flying through an obstacle course and smashing through targets, in their own training.

"Huh, I could have sworn it would take you far longer to get through those tests," Misty said matter-of-factly as Ash kept up the pace he had been on for a while.

"Apparently, a Pokédex lets you cut in line," Ash absently stated as Misty looked at him in surprise.

"You really don't realize how big in value a Pokédex is, do you?"

"Well, apparently it functions as a passport, credit card and a 'do not give this minor alcohol' warning, and probably a few hundred other thing's I don't know, so I guess I don't," Ash had to admit and that wasn't even because his memories were still crazy mixed up, that was never covered by Oak or summer camp.
"Pokédexes were only first produced in the last ten years, and so few of them have been made. The first five versions were given out only to the greatest trainers: such as Alder, Cynthia and Eagun, because they take a lot of time to create, and the current model is only given out to trainers who start at Pokémon labs. Each Pokédex is hand assembled by a Pokémon Professor, and constantly have to be upgraded for the latest in Pokémon research, which each Pokédex aides in by taking details on every Pokémon its owner comes across and sending them to the national Pokédex database," Misty explained before blushing, "At least, according to the last National Poké-Geographic I read, anyway."

"Pi-Pika" 'Well, one timeline's common device is another timeline's uber rare tech.'

Don George then chose to pop his head into the gym at this time as he said, "Sorry to keep you here so long sir," Ash couldn't help but feel a certain level of satisfaction for being called 'sir'. "The last part of the testing must begin now, it's a battle round and thus it requires your presence..."

He then noted Misty as he then addressed her. "Er, excuse me for asking miss, but there is an odd number of trainers for this last round. I'd like to make it an even number if possible..."

Misty shrugged and replied, "I got what I needed done, so I guess I have no reason not to."

In the battle club tournament area

"As per the Gym Leader code of conduct, each and every gym leader may set restrictions for those who wish to challenge them. Some require you to navigate a maze, others may quiz you in a volcano. Some may have no restrictions at all. The gym you are all applying for, however, requires a proper show of aptitude before you are given my final approval to enter into the waiting list for challenging Brock, and it shall be done so in a tournament."

"There are sixteen of you here today, and of you any number of you are going to prove yourselves ready to fight Brock. The goal of this tournament is not to prove you're the strongest or the luckiest, but that you are competent. Last week’s exam, in which sixteen trainers battled to show their worth to me, I passed five, and three of those five have managed to defeat Brock. The other two, whom managed to get farther than most of the pre-exam first time challengers and defeated his Geodude, are currently training for their rematches."

"Pi." 'How much you willing to bet that Gary was one of them?'

Ash frowned. While Gary at this point in time was an outright ass, Ash was not going to say he was a talentless idiot. Gary knew what he was doing, and probably more so this time around because he no longer had a car or cheerleader squad with him.

Still it would be nice to think to think that, nor would he mind knowing who the other two trainers were who had recently defeated Brock.

"Now, let the battles begin. Show me you know what you’re doing."

The Tournament

Ash was in the third battle, and had his Pidgeotto against a Rattata. The rodent looked outright terrified with a bird that stood over two feet over it staring it down.

The trainer of the Rattata, however, didn't seem as concerned as he should be about it.

"Rattata, the Mouse Pokémon. Rattata are incredibly common and adaptive Pokémon which are capable of colonizing a wide variety of habitats, generally with the aide of stupid travelers."
"This was the first Wind-Up Toy Pokémon known to have been made by Rumble. Inc," the Pokédex rang out from Ash's pocket as the battle began.

"Use Focus Energy," Rattata's trainer called out as the rodent began to glow white.

"Counter with Gust."

Pidgeotto took into the air and began to blow a powerful burst of wind into the rodent, which lost its grip on the ground with its little claws and was blown into the air.

After a minute, the gust relented and the mouse was on the ground, struggling back up.

"Now, counter with Quick Attack!" The Rattata's trainer ordered as a different white aura surrounded the little nibbler, before it burst forward at an impressive speed.

"Meet it head on Pidgeotto."

A similar, but somehow more impressive white color surrounded Pidgeotto, who took off at the charging mouse at a faster speed. However...

As the two speeding Normal-types approached, Rattata was able to avoid being hit due to its smaller size, and ended up striking a critical hit in the joint of Pidgeotto's right wing.

Out of context, one could refer to this as a 'farmboy destroys ultimate weapon of uber sith lord' technique, minus a Y wing. It could also be considered a 'David vs Goliath' esque trick for those who do not believe in the Force.

As Rattata landed on uneasy legs from the previous gust attack, Pidgeotto just plain crashed to the ground.

As Ash looked on with alarm, his first battle captured Pokémon struggled up on her (yes, it took Ash two timelines to realize that his Pidgeotto was female, but he was never really taught to look for it. Not only were Pokémon 'boy/girl bits' not nearly as large or as noticeable as the biologically stacked [in comparison] humans, but it was considered weird, and abusive, to poke around trying down there to figure out the gender) feet, before flinching on her awkwardly angled wing 'Ow...I think it's broken.'

His opponent however looked pleased.

"Now, finish it with Tackle Rattata!"

As the rodent charged for the injured bird for the knock out, Ash briefly was overwhelmed with fear for his Pokémon, just before his spontaneous side overtook his caring side as he told Pidgeotto, "Hurry, use Steel Wing to protect yourself!"

"Caw!" 'Use Steel Wing to...you know I really did miss your spontaneous side all these years.' with a voice that went from an 'are you crazy' tone to a 'that's brilliant' one.

Pidgeotto lifted her uninjured left wing up, which was glowing steel gray, and slammed it in front of itself like a wall with enough force to pierce the ground of the battlefield.

The Rattata didn't have time to stop, and crashed into the Steel Wing, tottering backwards from it in a bit of an unnerving daze.

"Pi pi pi." 'That Rattata looks like it might have a concussion' Pikachu observed as Ash had an
unnerved look. He didn’t mean to do that. That rarely happened in battles in the old timeline; the only battles that did that much damage to a Pokémon were either long and intense (Charizard vs Harrison’s Blaziken), or done with that goal in mind (like Team Galactic and Paul).

Pikachu quickly noticed Ash's anxiety. "Pikapi chu" 'Ash, if it makes you feel better, we Pokémon heal from things like that much easier than humans. I'd say it would be more the equivalent of you scraping your knee after crashing a bicycle recovery wise. Effect wise, however, a concussion, while not as long term as in a human, is still a bad thing for a Pokémon.’

The other trainer apparently did not see this or simply did not care as he insisted, "Come on Rattata, finish it!"

"Hey, your Pokémon is too hurt, you should call it back before it really hurts itself!” Ash yelled at his opponent.

"Oh shut up, I know what I'm..."

"Rattata is unable to battle, the victory goes to Ash Ketchum and Pidgeotto!” Don announced, apparently agreeing with Ash, with said muscled man now getting into a shouting match with the Rattata's trainer about Pokémon treatment.

During this shouting match, Pokémon Ethics, decent human decency and ‘you are not a Johto born savage’ being thrown into the mix, Ash really wasn’t paying much attention to the specifics as he was more concerned about his injured Pidgeotto.

"I'm sorry," he apologized as he knelt down in front of his bird and gently stroked her back, "This caught me off guard."

His first flying type captured softly cooed and rubbed herself against his hand and told him, 'It will heal with Nurse Joy quickly enough, that much hasn't changed at least. However, I don't think I can battle Brock again...sigh I was hoping to settle the score with Geodude, all that effort with Steel Wing wasted.'

"Hey, you can have the next..."

Ash paused for a moment, considering Misty's changes in this timeline, was her family even still in charge of Cerulean Gym, if there even was one?

Then the next gym leader that he thought of in Vermillion City would be even worse. With that thought came a horror filled image of Lt. Surge's Raichu destroying Pidgeotto rather literally with Thunderbolt.

He decided to finally finish by telling her, "You know, let's just play it by ear about your gym battle."

Ash returned her to her ball, where the damage she took would not cause her more pain.

Later in battle number 8...

"Wingull use Wing Attack!"

Misty's Wingull slammed its glowing wings into a crab like, pinkish red mushroom crab, who was knocked to the ground defeated.

"Paras, the Mushroom Pokémon. Paras is covered with mushrooms, which are actually slowly
taking over the mind and body of the Paras, which is completed by its evolved Parasect state. Other Pokémon do not eat this evolutionary line, for doing so will infect them with the mushrooms. The result of this idiotic action in both Humans and Pokémon is the basis of PokéStar horror films. That means you Ash."

The Pokédex was again giving Ash not only information he never needed to know, but also having attitude.

Did it really think that he would eat strange mushrooms...from the back of a Pokémon?

Well maybe he could try offering some to Gary the next time he ran into him he thought maliciously, then have his grandpa Professor Oak screen him for a drug test.

He'd never do it, but it was oh so fun to imagine it as he grinned.

Still he managed to focus back on the task at hand, namely round 2, and another young trainer.

"Beedrill, go!" His opponent announced, letting loose the infamous giant bee of doom, its twin stingers dripping a poison from them that made the ground steam as it dripped down.

"Butterfree, I choose you!" Ash countered, his Butterfly battler coming out to combat its fellow final bug evolution.

"Beedrill, the Poison Bee Pokémon. Beedrill attack their enemies in swarms and sting them rapidly with their stingers. During the pre-Oak centuries, human attempts to exterminate Beedrill populations led to a decimation of weaker Beedrill, unintentionally accelerating biological battle evolution to allow for post sting survival and increasing human by Beedrill fatalities by 251%. This unit needs no more evidence that humans are flawed creatures..."

Ash just whacked the thing to shut it up even if it did have a point, Beedrill were near the top of the list of Pokémon you wouldn't want to make more aggressive or deadly.

"Begin!"

"Go Beedrill, use Twineedle!"

The Bug-type came flying at his first Pokémon caught, with barbs coated in poison.

"Time to try out that new move of yours, use Gust!"

Butterfree began flapping its wings rapidly, unleashing a powerful Gust attack that stopped the bee in its flight, and blew it back and caused it to crash into the ground.

Ash briefly was worried he might have injured the bug, but it got up pretty easily.

"Counter with Poison Sting," his opponent called out as the insect, standing up on the ground pointed its left stinger at Butterfree and let the purple barbs fly towards Butterfree.

"Dodge and use Tackle!"

Its wings still fine, Butterfree dodged the barbs and flew right into the bug.

"Harden!"

The carapace of the Beedrill shimmered briefly, causing Butterfree's Tackle to fizzle out and seem to
do more to Butterfree (in a headache), than Beedrill.

"Free" 'Ow...did someone catch the number on that oak tree?'

Great his Pokémon had a thing for oak trees, that was just perfect. He seriously hoped Butterfree just had its mind seriously addled.

"Twineedle while it's distracted Beedrill!"

The bee held its purple tipped stingers up like a pair of swords and began rapidly stabbing them at Butterfree, who dodged the attacks, if in somewhat of a daze.

"Stop it with Confusion!"

Ash had not particularly wanted to use this move, if simply because they were still working on mastering it. This was a particular issue as, of the moves he had been working with his Pokémon to relearn, or in some cases, learn for the first time (Iron Tail and Quick Attack for Pikachu, Steel Wing for Pidgeotto and Gust for Butterfree), he had some idea of how they worked, though Steel Wing not to the same extent as it was a move that his Fletchling had known when he caught it and, due to the world ending, he hadn't the time to really grasp the basics of how it works or how you would go about teaching it.

However, it was the best choice at this point, considering that Twineedle could poison Butterfree even if he could use Harden as a defense.

Butterfree responded with glowing blue eyes, surrounding the large bee with a blue aura. The aura blinked on and off, the move not being completely mastered being a problem that Ash was quite aware of.

However, it gave Butterfree the time he needed to fly out of the way of the Twineedle, and end up behind Beedrill.

"Now, give it a Sleep Powder!" he commanded Butterfree.

A storm of shimmering powder was blown from Butterfree's wings, covering the outflanked insect and causing it to fall to the ground below, deep in sleep.

Luckily for Ash's morality (and concern about the differences in effects of battling possibly meaning it was now far less ethical to use flamethrower on a sleeping Pokémon), Beedrill's trainer was less of an ass.

"This is enough, you won!"

He returned his Beedrill and Ash his Butterfree, as the two foes walked up to one another, and shook hands.

Always right to be polite, after all...unless of course it was a member of a criminal organization trying to steal your Pokémon, but they usually tended to blast off somewhere at this point anyway.

The trainer on the other side of the tournament who saw his Pidgey blasted out of the sky by Staryu's Water Gun, however, was far less polite about it.

"So, you think he's going to let me go on to fight Brock?" Ash inquired to Misty after she had finished, who shrugged.
"Probably, aside for the fact that you're a Pokédex holder and thus he worships the ground you walk on," Misty commented which Ash still found that to be somewhat unnerving. "You've done well in your last two battles. You have a decent strategic mind and are concerned with the wellbeing on your Pokémon. With a lot of people, particularly in Kanto and Hoenn from what I've heard, you could be the next Cynthia when it comes to battling skills, but if you were an ass to your Pokémon, no one would give you a pass."

At least if it was visible.

Region talk again...Ash thought for a moment about how to phrase the question he wanted to ask before going for it, "I never really was that interested in politics, and neither was my mother. She often turned any political talk off on the television at home, so I might be a little clueless on what you mean by Kanto and Hoenn."

"Pokémon abuse laws first started being proposed forty years ago" Misty began. "However, some regions are more progressive on them than others. Hoenn was the first to pass them, and has some of the most comprehensive. Kanto is the next most liberal; the laws are somewhat newer, but just as comprehensive. On the other end of the spectrum, Johto has barely passed any such laws, it's a rural and conservative place where Slowpoke tails are still treated as a delicacy, and the Orange Islands are only slightly better. Sinnoh is somewhere in between the two extremes. I don't know the exacts of the laws in Unova and Kalos, but I'm told they are generally akin to Kanto and Hoenn in that regard."

Ash thought on that. While the thought of anyone abusing Pokémon was horrid to him, he knew that it wasn't a universally held idea. While he had no idea why Hoenn would be the most friendly region (Then again, he had a hard time imagining any region being unfriendly to Pokémon), Ash did have to recall that the villainous teams of Hoenn, Team Aqua and Magma, weren't as bad as the other villainous teams he had encountered.

They were by no means good teams, but he had seen far worse deeds done by Teams' Rocket, Galactic and Plasma in the old timeline.

Of course, they still did attempt to control environmental altering Pokémon of mass destruction, so they were still evil, but perhaps just not as evil as Cyrus or Ghetsis.

Not that being less evil than those two was that hard. Though, it was possible that Ghetsis in this timeline was a benevolent orphanage operator who had donated his millionaire status to charity.

Not likely but still possible.

With those thoughts on his mind, Ash found himself up against a third opponent, who looked confident.

"Go, Spearow!"

The, agonizingly familiar bird Pokémon flew out of its ball, fluttering to the ground as Ash and Pikachu looked mildly upset; they had hoped to get a chance to test out quick attack's successful re-training, but still, payback was in order.

Ash motioned for Pikachu to jump off his shoulder, as the Spearow and its trainer both suddenly had looks of sheer terror.

With some degree of glee, he thought: this is going to be fun.

"Pikachu, Thundershock!"
"Spearow is unable to battle, Pikachu is the winner!"

That was easy.

The other battle

Misty's Psyduck hadn't been planning on being used to battle, but he did manage to blast a Zubat out of the picture after it had used supersonic and given it a headache.

Some things had remained the same, and it would appear that Psyduck was just as dangerous as Pikachu in its own way.

Don coughed as the two remaining trainers; Ash and Misty, stood before him. Specifically, he coughed after Misty gave him a sharp look.

"When we began this exam, there were fifteen trainers who sought to get my permission to challenge Brock, so I had asked an additional trainer to come in to make it a simple 16, and save us all the headache of a misnumbered tournament. As her opponent has shown himself ready for a Gym battle in my eyes, and in part because she is glaring at me," the last part was muttered more to himself, "we shall conclude this exam with four trainers out of fifteen having shown themselves ready to face Brock, though technically five out of sixteen in all accounts."

A lot of annoyed commotion followed as the two other passing trainers joined him up on the stands, the noise preventing him from getting any sort of name identification, however informally in his head he noted them as 'Beedrill guy', 'Zubat guy' and 'Spearow guy'.

"Please train further, regardless of if you have passed or not, for the challenges to come. I'll fill the three passing trainers in on their appointments with Brock after I confirm it with Brock himself so your appointments can be made. Please note that, if you lose your gym battle, you will have to re-schedule on your own time."

Later that night, at the Pokémon Center

Pidgeotto had a cast on her wing, and would have it for at least a week.

That was the bad news, and it was hard to figure out who was taking it worse; the trainer who had put her out in a battle that could hurt her like that, or the bird who wasn't going to be able to fight for a while.

At least the Nurse Joy in charge of the Pokémon Center (Ash had been concerned that the Jennies and Joys would no longer be identical individuals. That would be...weird...and a different kind of weird than their general identicalness) didn't bear down on him for it.

She had actually praised his concern and promptness with her injury. Ash didn't know if he should blush at the praise, or pale at the idea that concern about your Pokémon was warranted of such praise.

Though the free food was quite a nice reward, particularly because they were always hungry, for both humans and Pokémon however they also had to eat next to a large tank in order to allow the feeding of all of Misty's Pokémon (In particular, her Goldeen and Horsea, which Ash had not expected her to have had so early).

"You did well today Ash," Misty told him with a smile, "You know, it's sometimes hard to actually
believe you started out with Pokémon not even a month ago. Most rookie trainers lack the connection and understanding you have with Pokémon."

"Well, I went to a Pokémon Summer Camp to qualify for a Pokédex, so I managed to learn a thing or two," He admitted before blushing as he...was he even lying for that matter? For all he knew, that was the truth.

"So, you're using Butterfree and Pikachu in your gym battle, correct?" Misty inquired.

"Yep" Ash nodded. It was his only plan anyway, it wasn't like he was going to only bring a single Pokémon to a gym battle (Again...he had learned that lesson with Elesa).

"After you finish that battle, I happened to have done some fact checking, and remember how I said I was going to check some things while we were here?" she asked.

At Ash's positive nodding, she elaborated on it "I recall learning of a public library in Cameran Palace, a location that has a lengthy tradition of Bloodline users. Their legendary hero, Sir Aaron, was said to be one, and if there is any place we can figure out why your powers are different from mine, it would be there. Plus, it allows us both to take a detour around Cerulean City."

That caught the four fully returned individuals who had been previously eating (Ash, Pikachu, Butterfree and Pidgeotto), off guard. That was certainly...an unexpected request.

Cautiously, Ash inquired further, "But isn't there a Gym in Cerulean City? I could have sworn I had read it was filled with Water-types."

He gestured at Pikachu trying to write off his inquiry about Cerulean as a completely gym based question, with no possible context related to Misty's possibly no longer present genetic connection to the gym staff.

Misty looked grim as she asked, "Do you want my help Ash?"

Ash nodded without hesitation.

"Then we don't set foot in Cerulean City, at all," Misty declared and that was all she would elaborate on the subject.

Later that night.

Pikachu trotted alongside Ash as he took a late night stroll through town, trying to think.

Cameran Palace...and this Cerulean thing, what did they mean?

"Pika-Pi Chuuuu. "'Okay, how much are you willing to bet that aura has something to do with it'

Ash just stared at Pikachu as he pointed out, "You do know Aura isn't the answer to everything, right Pikachu? I actually did ask Riley about it on Iron Island, and he stated that if I wanted to learn Aura, I'd have to seclude myself away from civilization for a few years. As much as I'd love to hide out as some mountain hermit with you, Charizard, Bulbasaur, Squirtle, Snorlax and whoever else for a few years, I can't isolate myself like that. It's just not me."

However he'd no longer have to worry about washing himself so much even if it would earn him the nickname Ash Stinkum. On the other hand, he'd have to learn to feed himself.

"Chaa Pi-Chu." 'Yeah, but look at it this way Ash; you have strange powers, and Misty is directing
you to the place that stated directly you already had strange powers. For all you know, you’re going
to have to learn to sense the living aura in everything, fight the dark side of aura on a daily basis and
possibly have to go to some hidden aura school to learn it for seven years before rejoining a hidden
aura world or something.’

Ash just stared at his walking companion as he remarked, "You do realize that this is neither
Tatooine nor Hogwarts, right Pikachu?"

Pikachu just shrugged; he had seen the movies at Oak's lab, and liked them. He would have loved to
meet Hagrid or R2-D2. R2 and he could even have electric shock wars.

However, as they discussed the question of how likely it was Sir Aaron, Lucario and destiny was
going to be involved (More of Ash trying to figure out any possible alternative really), they
unintentionally ran into a problem.

They ran out of road and found themselves in a place filled with fog.

"What the...damn it, it’s Johto all over again!” Ash stated in a fury. They were lost.

Deeply, utterly, lost.

"Pi?" 'Why is it all misty all of the sudden;? When does Pewter have fog?'

Ash drew a Pokéball, but quickly de-activated it. It was Pidgeotto's ball, and she was not up to de-
fogging anywhere.

Or, de-smokescreen for that matter. Hopefully Team Rocket was not around today, and he was not
in the mood for them to pop up.

Thankfully, Team Rocket, having reported in to Giovanni that Ash had been training all day at the
Battle Club were currently in a hotel with room service and a rented Breaking Bad DVD for the
evening. They wouldn't be coming out for a while for obvious reasons.

Of course, Ash had no idea about what they were doing, so he had just the same urgency as if they
were breathing down his neck (As they had done in the old timeline. Heck, the lack of them was
getting to him a bit).

Thankfully, this was one of the few times in his journey he had two fliers on hand (And who would
not scorch his face or just make things worse).

Ash quickly let loose his other Flying-type out, and his Butterfree fluttered up in front of him and
Pikachu.

"Free?" 'You know Ash, I adore any moment to fly after having to spend time in a cocoon again, but
this isn't exactly what I'd call ideal flying conditions. It's all foggy.’

"Yeah, can you blow it away so we can at least figure out if we wandered all the way to Snowpoint
City or not?"

"Free!?' 'I don't know Defog though.'

"Pi!" 'Did that ever stop any of us from blowing away Smokescreen from Weezing?!!'

Butterfree couldn't figure out anything wrong about that logic, and commenced to blow with his
wings with all the force he could, causing the fog to be blown away, just with a bit less flair and
permanence than if the proper move had been used.

As the fog began to dissipate away, Ash began to see something faintly visible, which he began to squint at to figure out what it exactly was.

As soon as he could see it, he wished he couldn't.

Here lies Flint and Lola Harrison
Beloved Husband/Wife/Father/Mother

He was looking at a pair of graves...of Brock's parents.

It was so shocking that he willed his legs to get him as far away from it as possible, and they did...with a familiar white glow.

Pikachu and Butterfree just stared in shock as Ash Quick Attacked himself into a tree behind him.

It couldn't be...this wasn't supposed to happen...

He began to weep. At least in the original timeline Brock's dad had been around, but now...it appeared that Brock and all of his siblings were orphans, just how messed up was that?

Several awkward minutes later...

"...I killed Brock's parents..." Ash muttered for the tenth time as his two released Pokémon walked and fluttered alongside him.

"Free..." 'Should we focus more on the fact that Ash just did, apparently, another Pokémon technique that goes against what Misty said was possible.'

"Pi...Pika-Chu." 'No, let's focus on Ash and Brock's parents before we question Ash's ability to defy logic.'

"...I killed..."

"Pi!" Pikachu decided to take the tough road and just take a tough love approach and yell at Ash, "Cha Chu Pika-Chu cha!" 'You did not kill anyone!'

"Brock's parents are dead because I caused time..."

"Free." 'To restart after a crazed bluenette decided to break it. They'd have been dead if you hadn't done anything.'

"Cha." 'And it's not like you even know what exactly killed them.'

Ash would have continued this conversation, but they had managed to walk all the way back to the Pokémon Center, where Don George was waiting for them.

It wouldn't do to talk about time travel around someone who was quite out of the know after all.

"Oh, there you are champ in the making," Don greeted in a cheerful tone totally unaware of the somber mood that Ash was still in. "Glad to see you made it back, I have great news. You're first up for battling Brock, it's scheduled for tomorrow afternoon at 2:00, right after Brock is finished with his date with his girlfriend. I heard their getting pretty serious, heard a rumor he was browsing the local jewelry store for diamonds the other day. And to think they had met at SteelixCon just two years
ago." The last part was Don muttering to himself.

It took the limited amount of tact Ash had (which was normally used for battle tactics, such as hiding the ace in the hole) not to outright express how...shocking that was. The idea of Brock having a girlfriend was just ludicrous, and against cosmic law.

Pikachu had no such restraint, and collapsed. Butterfree, having had less exposure to Brock's antics (particularly when they got more desperate), just fluttered in place.

"Your Pikachu looks all tuckered out. You better make sure it gets some rest for tomorrow. Brock has nine younger siblings, and they will want to hug the poor thing. You better make sure he can run away from them," Don told him and with that jolly note, Don George walked away as the fainted Pikachu revived himself.

"Chu? "I had a nightmare that I just found out Brock had a girl..."

He looked at the astonished Ash.

"Ka" 'He has a girlfriend, doesn't he?'

Ash just nodded, still in shock about it himself.

"Free Butter Free" 'Well I suppose it shouldn't be a nightmare Pikachu, I think that's what humans do for some odd reason including Brock. Besides he was bound to get lucky sometime."

"Yeah, the 1000th time is the charm," Ash replied in the most conservative estimate for Brock's antics.

The next morning

Ash, Pidgeotto, Butterfree and Pikachu were sitting around their room in the Pokémon Center hotel, in part to discuss the Brock question, and in part to avoid accidentally encountering a showering Misty.

She had stated quite often during the trip through Viridian Forest she needed a shower. While she probably could do that whirlpool thing of hers as a shower, Ash didn't know if she could, plus there was that whole 'guy walks in on showering girl' routine that Misty probably was aware of.

Ash didn't trust his luck not to end up ruining his first companion's friendship in this new world by unintentionally seeing her naked even if his Pokémon didn't consider being seen naked a big deal as they were always naked.

"Caw." 'So, Brock has a girlfriend at last, and with his parent's...he is now the sole caretaker of his siblings, assuming the girlfriend doesn't live with him or something,' Pidgeotto surmised, 'So, what does this mean for possibly...'

"Pi Pika-chu Pikachu-Pi." 'Assuming we can actually fully restore his memories, which based on Misty isn't quite the case with people...can we really give him back any sort of memory at all?"

At Ash's alarmed look, Pikachu elaborated, "Pi Pika-Chu Cha-Cho." 'Look at it this way, let's say that we did try to fix his memories, say using my own shock therapy, and only a part of them came back. If he gets even a faint bit of his old memories back, he will want to help by his nature alone. What happens if he gets torn between his siblings and girlfriend/quite possibly fiance, and a feeling he needs to be saving the world?!'
Ash paled as he questioned, "What if...he hates me for causing his parents to die?"

Pikachu resisted the urge to shock him due to that being a legitimate concern.

"Free" 'Ash,' Butterfree said remorosely, 'I fear that, for the good of Brock...he can't remember a thing.'

"Brock..." Ash sounded remorseful at the thought of having to abandon Brock.

Pidgeotto and Butterfree gave him sad looks as Pidgeotto said, "Caw." 'Ash, you once let Butterfree go for him to find love, and you let me go to protect those who could not protect themselves. You must let Brock go for these very reasons.'

A sad looking Ash nodded at their reasoning, but still, tears were visible from his face.

This stunk. No Brock with him on his journey...well he'd definitely miss him and not just because of his cooking.

Of course he had to think of food at a time like this, he chided himself.

"Free." 'So...when do we talk about Ash teaching himself Quick Attack?'

"Sure...do you think it's worth trying to figure out who he could possibly be dating?" Ash brought up the big question, and got no good responses.

2:00 PM The Pewter Gym

The stone battle arena that had been the host of Ash's first gym battle, his first lost battle and his first gym victory, was revisited for a battle that meant more to Ash than a simple gym battle ever did.

It was a battle Ash did not want to fight (A rare event indeed), yet Ash did not want to have to come back for another one. It was something he doubted he could repeat, or even gather the nerve for.

Ash didn't know if he should have been happy or depressed that nothing happened when he shook Brock's hand to start the match. No memories at all seemed to go back to Brock.

Even if that meant that Brock wouldn't get the emotional chaos as he struggled between his family and the world, it still was depressing his friend would never be coming back.

"Let's make this a good match, I am grateful that you could battle me so quickly." Ash managed to keep the sadness out of his voice as Brock smiled in a heart-aching familiar way.

"You actually seem to be a polite young fellow, so much nicer than the last three trainers I've fought," Brock admitted, "The two other Pokédex holders I ran into were...well asses."

He said the last part somewhat quietly as his siblings were in the stands watching the battle, alongside Misty and a few gym personnel and local people, including a disguised Team Rocket Trio among them (not that Ash could tell.)

"And the other one, another guy with a Pikachu, was not much of a talker at all."

Ash barely even registered what Brock said. He didn't put much thought into the other Pokédex user who was not Gary or the other Pikachu guy.

"However, I doubt you came for small talk."
"The official gym battle between the gym leader, Brock, and the challenger, Ash of Pallet Town, will now begin. Each trainer will use only two Pokémon, and the match will be over when either side is out of usable Pokémon. In addition, only the challenger may substitute his Pokémon. Trainers ready?" The next oldest sibling, Forrest, was refereeing as both trainers drew Pokéballs.

"Go, Geodude!"

"Butterfree, I choose you!"

The battle began as the animated stone with arms faced the giant butterfly, and while the Pokédex was rolling, it, perhaps sensing the mood, did not make a witty comment about Geodude.

"Geodude, start this off with Tackle!" Brock commanded his Pokémon.

'Squirtle use Hydro Pump!' Ash thought to himself. Unfortunately he did not have Squirtle yet so he supposed he would have to make do.

The stone being used its muscular arms to launch himself upward to the Bug-type, intent on knocking it down.

"Counter with Confusion!" Ash called, wanting to end this quickly as Butterfree's eyes glowed blue for just long enough to slam Geodude back down.

Brock gritted his teeth as he told his Pokémon, "Don't give up Geodude, use Rock Tomb!"

"Geo!" Geodude shouted as a large gray boulder began to form above its arms.

"Snare it up with String Shot before it can launch that attack!" Ash countered just as quickly as string flew from his first bug type, ensnaring the stone and binding it to the ground like a fun house, with four lengthy string segments going from the center of the stone into the ground, barely avoiding crushing Geodude.

"Impressive," Brock commended, "Glad to see a nice challenger who knows what he's doing, but we're not done, not by a long shot. Geodude, Rock Smash!"

Geodude's fist glowed reddish orange as it launched itself at Butterfree.

"Tackle!"

The quarter effective move clashed with the half effective move, as the two clashed again and again across the battlefield once, than twice, than a third time as the two seemed evenly matched due to stats and type.

"Stun Spore!"

"Mud Sport!"

Geodude launched itself into the air and impacted himself into the ground, sporting up a protective mud spurt that caught all the status powder in its tracks.

"Now, charge up a Rock Tomb while the mud protects you from String Shot!" Brock commanded as Geodude began to form the boulder from beneath the rising Mud Sport.

"Use Gust to blow that mud back to Geodude!"

Butterfree flew up into the sky as he let loose a powerful wind burst into the mud, rebounding it
downwards and on top of Geodude.

"Dude!" Geodude stopped the Rock Tomb charging as it began to feel the effects of the spore.

"Oh no!" Brock shouted in shock.

"Now, use Confusion to send it into the wall" Ash shouted as Butterfree fluttered down in front of the paralyzed stone Pokémon with glowing blue eyes, causing Geodude to be surrounded by the glow and slammed into the wall, where it laid KO’d.

"Geodude is unable to battle, this round goes to Ash and Butterfree," Forrest sounded depressed, clearly not happy about the results as Brock returned his Geodude before turning to Ash.

"Using a flying attack to counter a Rock-type, in particular my defense I developed for Butterfree specifically? I must say Ash, you're quite clever. However, Boulder Badges don't just grow on trees, nor are they free to pluck as you wish. To win, you still have to defeat my second Pokémon, Onix!"

'Of course he did,' he realized grimly as he wished that Brock had chosen a Bonsly instead.

Pikachu could just make a face and the match would go to him.

Instead he could only stare with determination (and still some sadness) as the giant rock snake, no longer an evolved Steelix, rose up from the energy of Brock’s Pokéball to stare them down.

"Begin!"

"Let's start this off with Screech!" Brock decided to get things going on a high note, literally speaking as a sonic blast flew out from Onix's mouth and straight at Butterfree.

"Hurry, dodge..."

It was too late, as Butterfree was caught in the sound blast and slammed down into the ground of the arena.

"Now, use Tackle!"

The great train that was Onix charged towards the downed Bug-type, who was still struggling back into the air from the force of the impact.

"Sleep Powder!" Ash called out as Butterfree managed to, with some cringing, let loose a few of the sleep causing spores.

"Onix, stop and use Screech again!" Onix ceased his charge attack as another sound tunnel flew from its mouth, blowing away the sleep powder and striking Butterfree with all the force needed to send him right into the air, from where he dropped like a lead balloon.

Thankfully Ash managed to run right into the battle and catch his falling Pokémon, not wanting another injured friend on his hands with the severity of Pidgeotto.

"Butterfree is now forfeited from the match, the winner is Onix," Forrest called as Brock nodded.

"Saving your Pokémon from a potentially severe injury is always the right thing to do, and I applaud you for it. While I could disqualify you for running onto the field like that, I do not need to, nor shall I. I only wish that the young man from Sinnoh had that same instinct."

Ash returned Butterfree to his ball, not registering that last part.
"Pikachu, it’s all up to you buddy..." He told his electric companion of many a year (in theory, considering how Ash couldn't recall how old he had been in Kalos) as his electric mouse burst onto the battle field.

To Brock's credit, he didn't even raise an eyebrow over the type issues.

"Begin!"

"Onix, let's finish this off with Screech!"

"Dodge with Quick Attack and get in close!"

The white outline around Pikachu sped him up enough to easily avoid the sound tunnel that had gotten Butterfree as the mouse approached the snake.

"Use Rock Throw!"

Stones shot out from Onix's body and flew towards Pikachu like missiles. Expertly, Pikachu dodged each and every one as he got up close and personal with Onix's body.

"Gutsy, but foolish. You can't beat Onix with Quick Attack, and Thundershock will have no effect what so..."

"Pikachu, use Iron Tail!"

"Wha!?" Brock said in alarm.

He grinned a bit at taking Brock by surprise like that.

Pikachu's tail turned to a steel like color as it began to swing it.

"Onix, quickly use Harden!"

A shimmer covered Onix's entire body just before the Iron Tail struck, dropping the damage it did to the powerful beast.

"So, we're going to have to force our way through is it? Fine, Pikachu, rapid Iron Tails!"

"Onix, use Bide!"

Ash only registered what Brock had called for as Onix began to glow a brownish white.

"Wait, Pikachu, stop and get out of there with Quick Attack!"

Pikachu did stop, but by the time it had, it had already delivered three Iron Tails, but responded just fast enough with a Quick Attack spring boarded from Onix's head.

"Now, let's end this, unleash the power of Bide!" Brock called out as the brown light all congealed in front of Onix's mouth as a huge burst of power flew from Onix and straight towards the retreating Pikachu.

"Block it with Thundershock!"

"Pika-CHU!"

Pikachu began to glow yellow as a powerful electric burst flew right into the oncoming Bide blast.
"You overestimate yourself if you think a simple attack can equal the power of three super effective moves..." Brock began before the two energies met, with the Bide briefly dominate before all the power was absorbed into, and fire with, the Thundershock straight into Onix.

The power from Thundershock didn't harm Onix at all, but the Bide did, as it got a face full of all the damage it had taken previously, times two.

This was too much for the rock snake, and it fell over, defeated in a huge smack to the ground.

"Impossible! It cannot be..." Brock said in complete surprise.

"Onix...is unable to battle," Forrest announced lamely, "The winner is Pikachu, and the battle, and the badge, go to Pikachu and Ash of Pallet Town."

The two old companions just stared.

"Pi-Pi." 'We beat Onix with electric attacks...again!?’

Ash, who had asked Butterfree and Pikachu to not mentally be commanded due to Ash finding it harder to hear them when he wasn't focusing on it (with his focus instead on the battle at hand), only just nodded in shock as Brock returned his Onix and walked towards Ash.

"Of the last three trainers to battle me, two of them began with type advantaged starter Pokémon, and the third was a tactician of impressive merit, who used similarly type-disadvantaged Pokémon. You, on the other hand Ash, think on your feet with such astonishing skill, I am inspired myself to learn from it." Brock mused as he reached into his pocket, and took out a badge in the shape of a gray octagon, as well as a USB drive of some sort.

"Take this Ash, the Boulder Badge is yours. You have more than earned it today, and I expect great things from you. If I don't see you in the Indigo Conference, I'm going to be disappointed. So, to help you along, I'll give you this” He noted the USB drive. "This is a TM, or Technical Manual. It contains the instructions for training most any move a Pokémon can learn, and which Pokémon can learn it. Gym Leaders and Breeders get these in the mail, so I have plenty to spare. You have to occasionally update it when someone manages to teach a new move to a Pokémon species, like the guy in Kalos who got Squirtles to use Aura Sphere, but it's pretty much up to date with everything you could need to know. You can plug it into your Pokédex I believe, so good luck out there. There are all kinds of trainers in the world Ash, and I can't wait to see what kind of trainer you turn out to be."

While Ash tried to be strong as he got the badge and TM, nodded to Brock in respect, and turned to leave to get Butterfree and Pikachu healed (plus to get ready to go to Cameran Palace with Misty), only a single thought remained to him, a thought that prevented him from doing his traditional victory pose (which somehow did not stand out as strange in this world by any means).

'Goodbye Brock...' Ash thought with a level of sadness that was alien to him.

Even if he wasn't depressed, he probably would not have noticed Team Rocket watching him, and then sneaking off to report to their boss he had just won a gym badge.

Mt. Moon

The shadowy caverns of this great mountain were famous for many things.

The Zubat swarms, the fossil deposits, the Zubat swarms, the many extra-terrestrial sightings, the Zubat swarms...the deposits the Zubat swarms made...
Yes, there were in fact a lot of Zubat in Mount Moon. However, Ash would not be running into
them this time around.

"Pikachu, use Thundershock," An unknown voice shouted in the echoed confines of the cave as a
burst of electricity struck into a Zubat swarm, blasting all of them away from a shaking mass beneath
them.

The Zubat, upon being electrocuted, flew away en mass, as the shaking mass stopped.

This mass, when no longer covered in Zubat, was quite noticeable to be that of a female human,
though not female in the same way as Misty, for this girl was far younger.

She looked to be only ten in fact.

The girl's clothes, formerly a yellow vest and a black undershirt and pants, were torn in several
places from Zubat bites. Her pony tailed blond hair was in disarray from the attack, and a straw hat
she had previously been wearing lay off her side, now utterly ruined with all sorts of holes and
gashes.

She looked up at her savior in shock and wonder.

As for the identity of this still as yet unknown stranger, his face was veiled by shadows, with only his
fiery eyes visible through the darkness; and a Pikachu quickly climbed up his shoulder, though not
with the same familiarity and expertise that Ash's Pikachu had in doing the same such task.

The girl looked up at her savior, her brown eyes wide in awe and admiration; the little marks under
her eyes making her look even more adorable as she did so.

Omake

Canon Relativity to the Reset Universe; Non Canon

Get an original idea!

CrossoverpairingLover studios

The four main characters of Cross studios; the blond haired, orange ninja Naruto, the bespectacled
wizard Harry Potter, sea green eyed demigod Percy Jackson and Ash of Pallet Town were reading
the latest story ideas to come down the pipe, all looking nauseous.

"Not again!" Ash yelled, slamming his paper to the table, not willing to look at it anymore.

"Really?" Percy remarked next, looking quite peeved as well.

"This has to be the third one this week," Harry added.

Naruto just stabbed his huge stack of paper with a kunai knife.

"What is with all these betrayal fic ideas?!" Ash complained, "It seems like nearly every story
coming out into the market now a days involves everyone betraying me, including most of my
Pokémon. Does the, at times admittedly disturbing idea of Pokéball based absolute loyalty mean
anything to these writers?"

"I mean really, just because some new Son of Poseidon or Zeus or Ares or anyone really comes into
Camp Half Blood and kills a monster doesn't mean everyone's going to admire him like the second
"At least you don't get thrown into Azkaban all the time," Harry sulked, "I'm tired of going to prison for something I didn't do."

"I get thrown into a literal hell far too often, does that count?" Percy offered, "I'd count House of Hades as that being literal, but I wasn't banished there by the gods, Annabeth and I fell into Tartarus, and I don't even want to see if that increased the amount of fics sending me down there or not."

"That might be canon for me with that Blood Prison thing...do the movies count for me? I mean, some of the Shippuden arcs are borderline canon ish, Utakata and the Three Tails..." Naruto offered.

"Canonicity or not, you got framed by a shape shifter. These fics seem to think all our friends are going to one day betray us all, and somehow lead us to turn into dark anti-heroes" Harry observed with a frown, "Do the fans really think so lowly of our friends?"

"Some do, but I think it's more than that," Ash suggested, "The problem is that fanfiction writers do cliché stories far too often, and do them shallowly. Where once there might have been betrayal fics and ignored Uzumaki twin fics and Wrong Boy Who lived fics, people don't put the same effort into making them deep and semi plausible."

"So what, we send a request to ask fan fiction writers to be more unique?" Harry suggested.

"Fan Fiction and unique don't go that well together. Recall we're pretty much stolen ideas," Percy snarked.

"No, Harry's right. Fan fiction writers need to be more aware of what fics are out there and put more effort into avoiding copying other ideas, shallow or not. Hopefully if they do that, the author can actually find new stories that are not all the same old, dark idea done poorly," Naruto added.

"Like what?" Ash questioned, "Having betrayal fics where people turn on me because they were all paid to go with me by my Darth father Giovanni? As somewhat doable as that sounds, its possible for people to actually become real friends. Pokémon special pulled the false friends become real friends cliché off a few times last I checked, in the Diamond and Pearl chapter, and perhaps in the Black and White chapter, I'm not sure."

"Or, perhaps if they really want to write betrayal fics...you know, I actually have no clue where they'd be actually a good idea. I mean, I would say Star Wars and have Anakin be betrayed by the council, but that could also affect Padme, who the author sees as the holder of Anakin's sanity, particularly after Season 5."

"You know, maybe some people just like dark and broody stories while the author is abnormal in his dislike of them. I mean, he is sort of crazy, just look at some of his ideas," Harry offered "There was Devil Luna a while ago, not sure where she got off too, he apparently thinks that that Teletoon/XD character Heliose is what happens when Hermione and me have a kid, and then gets raised by Voldemort and Bellatrix, and I've heard rumors of the alternate universe Darth Sidious just waiting to appear..."

"Who has spoken my name..."

A multi-layered, nightmare inducing voice surrounded the four as a dark mist surrounded them all. As Naruto formed a hand sign, Harry drew his wand, Percy his sword and Ash a Pokéball, a figure began walking towards them...a tall, eye stalked amphibious figure.

"...Now, Mesa shall smite you for it," the evil Jar Jar Binks who exists in the author's plot bunny
farm spoke in a tone that overlayed his own with the voices of beings like Trigon, Darth Sidious, certain Megatrons and Thanos, as he drew a huge chakram that looked like a oversized version of something Axel would use, which ignited four red light sabers from each spike, as the billed creature let loose hell fire from its mouth, ending the omake on a epic level as clones and Pokémon swarmed him, while several spells flew in support with a huge tidal wave of water.

Chapter End Notes

And, I suppose this is a good moment to make a quick stop. A few things get established here: namely how Pokémon Gyms work in this timeline, Battle Clubs, TMs... and quite a few details about Brock's backstory. I'm sure many are going to be sad about him not traveling with Ash this time around, but if it makes you feel any better, we haven't seen the last of him.

As a matter of fact, if you're curious about Brock's girlfriend and how they met, there's actually a sidestory about that, written by yours truly in cooperation with another sidewriter named Ander Arias. Maybe now it would be a good time to post it. Would you like to see it? Please let me know with your comments.
Of memories, hunger and a bad deal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Giovanni, Realgam Tower, Orre

To deal with others of the Criminal Underworld was risky at its best.

Giovanni was not the only criminal mastermind; no there were others in most regions. However, while they generally had their regions in which they tried to maintain exclusive influence, they had agents elsewhere.

After all, if Team Magma was to develop a lake destroying bomb, there were others who would want it. Team Galactic from Sinnoh had an odd desire to find the secrets of lakes, after all.

Giovanni had no idea why, something about a legend.

Team Rocket was not like the fanatics in other teams; they believed in profit. No prophecies, no destroying the world, just profit. Their technology was thus developed for money making purposes only.

However, sometimes their projects didn't quite pan out as Giovanni had hoped. Some devices meant for making money were, as had been originally envisioned, useless.

However, it wouldn't make do to just keep them in storage when you could sell it to another criminal organization for large profits, as opposed to waiting for some infiltrator to steal it and thus make no money back, or destroy it and get no return at all. Particularly when Giovanni couldn't quite understand why they'd want it.

"Oh, well aren't you early, Giovanni?"

The well-dressed man, accompanied by a protective force of six grunts flanking him, was approached by a young looking man dressed in a high collared lab coat with a large bang of hair zigzagging along the side of his head.

With his pointy glasses and nasty smirk, he seemed particularly malevolent.

Giovanni just glared at him as if totally unimpressed, so the man chuckled darkly, "No need to look so cross with me, I am Ein, Admin of Cipher's science division. I'm told you have something for us."

"Do you have the money?" Giovanni asked right up front.

He wasn't here to make small talk. There was no way that he was going to stay in Orre any longer than he had to. It was a miserable crime ridden hell hole, and it was hot.

And he was in a black suit.

His potential business client however did not seem to like his show of disdain however.

"Why, what do you take Cipher for, Giovanni? Cheap? Have you seen this construction project?" Ein questioned proudly as he extended his arms to emphasize the large, ivory tower, being built in the middle of the desert wastelands. "This tower costs more than the total worth of Pyrite Town and Agate Village combined, and it probably cost more than that fancy Cycling Road you Kantonians
built. We have your money, don't worry."

An armored Cipher Gru...Peon, descended from the ceiling with a suitcase in hand, which the peon promptly handed to Ein, who opened it and revealed its contents to Giovanni.

"One million Dollars, as promised."

Giovanni eyed the money for a moment, before raising his hand. A Grunt in his entourage stepped forward, drawing a PDA type device that began to scan the money with a visible purple beam.

Ein rose an eyebrow in theatrical surprise, "You don't trust us?"

"Forgive me but if I trusted people, I'd be a dead man." Giovanni said darkly as the grunt seized and checked the results of the scans.

"It's all legit sir," the Grunt confirmed for Giovanni as he gestured for another grunt to come forward with a suitcase of their own, which the grunt opened and presented to Ein; a gauntlet type object of a shiny metallic coloring, which Giovanni promptly picked up and placed on his own arm.

"The Duel Anchor," Giovanni demonstrated as he pointed the device at the scanner Grunt and a red energy rope rapidly flew from the gauntlet and bound itself to the grunt's left arm. The rope quickly became invisible as Giovanni yanked the arm with the gauntlet, which promptly caused the grunt to mimic the action, though not of his own will, however.

But as if the rope was still attached to him.

"With this device, one can bind yourself to another for as long as the user wishes. While I can deactivate this device at any time, the victim cannot."

It was originally meant to be a long distance device for opening doors, even sealed vault doors via enhanced force, however it was too weak to do so, and attempts to tinker with the prototype to allow it to do so had ultimately failed.

Originally it was called the Energy Rope, but was given the designation, 'Duel Anchor' by an aspiring scientist in the R&D division who believed Team Rocket could benefit from forcing people to battle them via the anchor.

However, as most Grunts used weaker Pokémon and were more suited to intimidation than battle, this would be in fact counter-productive for Team Rocket's ability to terrify the masses, and for virtually all Grunts in general.

What Cipher wanted it for, Giovanni couldn't care less. There was no way for it to be used to cause him problems down the road. He only continued to call it by the term Duel Anchor because it sounded better for the buying Cipher fools.

"Excellent," Ein said in an impressed tone of voice as Giovanni de-activated the device and presented it to the Cipher Admin, with the money case and device rapidly changing hands, "We should be this cooperative with each other more often."

"Don't hold your breath," Giovanni commented to the obviously fibbing scientist, "Trades like this are merely exceptions that prove the rule."

With that, Giovanni was surrounded by his grunts as he turned to leave the unfinished tower.

As the Rocket's left, content with the exchange, Ein couldn't help but smirk.
One of the Snag Machine's most crucial and difficult to create parts was now theirs.

'Foolish Team Rocket. You just signed the world over to Team Cipher,' Ein gloated internally.

North of Pewter City

Misty absently played with the small stone she'd picked up, attempting to grind it into powder as she reflected on her life.

She wasn't good enough, they always said so.

She was the runt little sister of the Sensational Sisters.

She was the unplanned sibling, with no ability to sing, to dance, or to act.

Thus she was always left behind when her parents took her sisters to child beauty pageants, singing practice, and shopping trips for the finest clothes, toys and food.

Left with nothing but hand me downs, a semi-neglected water type gym and her own tears, as an image of herself at five years old came to her mind, sitting on the side of a tank, crying her eyes out as multiple Goldeen, Magikarp, Seaking and Horsea swam up around where she was crying, as if wanting to cheer her up somehow.

To own a gym was a dream that many would kill for. It was a job that easily earned enough, even after necessary expenses, to easily feed a family of six (her parents, sisters, and herself). If you had an obscenely large family (such as Brock's family), of course, you may need to supplement the income with a second job, and many gym leaders did this anyway, particularly in Unova, where there was a paranoia about the government funding things.

Yet, her parent's didn't really care. It had been the dream child of her grandmother, who had two sons around the beginning of the modern age of Oak, or forty years ago.

One son ended up moving far away to further study Water-type Pokémon, and apparently cooking. She had no idea what that side of the family was like regardless, as they never returned to Kanto and the two brothers never really got along.

The other son, the one who stayed, her father, wasn't as passionate about being a gym leader. He only kept it open to get the money for it and to fund the extravagant lifestyle of 5/6ths of his family.

And the lack of focus was quite evident if you looked for it. The tanks outside of the 'show tanks' where their parents would host shows with Water Pokémon performing jumps, and eventually her sisters once they got older, were murky, the walls that visitors didn't walk by were stained and fading and, perhaps more noticeably, the gym's winning percentage was one of the lowest in Kanto.

And how low could it go before the PIA came in and shut it down?

Another memory of her past came to mind.

"Staryu, use Swift and Water Gun!"

A once again younger version of herself, a ten-ish year old tomboy red head with suspender shorts and a yellow tang top (AKA, the iconic Misty), was now battling in a Battle Club in Cerulean City, with her Staryu and future Starmie simultaneously striking out an opponent's Gloom and Growlithe, as a Nurse Joy and Don George looked on.
It was as Misty left the battle arena some time later, however, now appearing closer to her current age, that she heard some interesting things.

"Her talent is impressive, isn't it. That's her 100th win with her two Staryu, and overall her winning percentage is roughly 87%, and with the amount of grass and electric types trainers have on them for the gym that is quite remarkable," Don boasted to the Joy, who nodded in reply. Misty, out of sight behind a wall, listened in interest as they talked about her.

"Yes, it is quite obvious that the talent of the Waterflower family, even if it skipped a generation, seems to have finally made itself apparent in her in full force. If she was to become the Gym Leader, I would be able to convince my bosses not to revoke the Gym. With the current leader in poor health and the recent death of his wife, they are somewhat lenient, but when he eventually passes..."

"We all know that the 'Sensational Sisters' are actors first, and not even trainers second," George agreed, "They don't even have what little talent their father has, though I feel it is all too likely he would leave them the gym and disinherit the poor girl in his will."

"Such a shame...even if that stage parent duo only tolerate having her around because the negative publicity from abandoning or killing Misty would ruin everything they built for her sisters, even they know that if Misty was to ever challenge her sisters for leadership of the gym, she'd win even if she was using a Magikarp. Hell, the only reason she hasn't challenged for it already is because it is forbidden to challenge a gym leader on his death bed..."

Her daydreaming stopped when Psyduck poked her in the forehead.

Misty's eyes shot open as the duck stared right at her, not sure if she should be annoyed at him for bringing her back to reality, or glad he did.

At any rate the stone she had been playing with had evidently already broken into tiny fragments as she'd clasped it so tightly after reliving such painful memories.

"Psy." 'Feed me human.'

Misty rolled her eyes at Psyduck's begging, however she did notice a most heartwarming sight.

Ash was feeding his three Pokémon; Pikachu, Butterfree and Pidgeotto, while applying the Super Potions to Pidgeotto that Nurse Joy had supplied him with to treat her injured wing for the seven day period she was going to be out of commission.

In particular, she noticed how he was retying the bandages onto her wing. There was just...something about how the normally fast paced rookie took so much care to carefully re-apply them to his injured Pokémon that was just so...appealing to her.

How it just seemed to show how much he cared...even with Pokémon he hadn't even really had that long.

Even still his Pokémon seemed to love him for his devotion to them, in particular Pikachu, but...she couldn't help but feel he cared about her too.

She was sure it was platonic, but it was still admittedly...rather nice.

No one besides her own Pokémon had ever seemed to care about her. Not her sisters, not her parents, no one. All she had realized from a very early age that she was on her own, that if she was to succeed she'd have to do so herself, so to have another person care about her was really powerful on her.
So she couldn't deny that she felt somehow attracted to him no matter in what way he was showing he cared both to her and to his own Pokémon.

It didn't hurt that he was good looking either...

"Duck duck duck." 'If you’re planning on mating with Ash, please feed me first,' Psyduck deadpanned as Misty blushed faster than a Speed Boosting Ninjask as she looked away.

She scolded herself at having given herself away like that, fortunate only that it had been Psyduck and not Ash to notice he had been staring at him.

However that annoyance with herself also transferred a bit to Psyduck as she told him, very seriously.

"For that, you're going to be fed last."

"Duck!" 'Why!?'

Misty didn't dignify him with a response.

*One Feeding time later, on the road to Rota*

"You did what!?” Misty yelled incredulously as she, Ash and Psyduck walked along the road to Cameran Palace, the duck eating from a can of Pokémon Food as they went along.

Ash shrugged as if it was no big deal as he admitted, "I apparently taught myself Quick Attack while training Pikachu."

Misty just shook her head as she claimed, "Do you have a genetic disposition to doing the impossible or something?"

"Pi." 'Yes."

Ash ignored Pikachu there before telling her, "So, is it normal to learn moves like that? I mean, I probably did only use Quick Attack because I had been training with Pikachu for it with Don George..."

Misty nodded as she observed, "That's perhaps the first normal thing about you. I mean, I learned Whirlpool and Dive from my Horsea, and Surf and Waterfall from Starmie..."

She paused a moment before inquiring, "Say, can Pikachu learn Counter?"

Ash stopped and took out his Pokédex, curious about that himself now.

"*Pikachu is an electric mouse Pokémon native to the Kanto Region, famous for being used in the past by several legendary trainers, including Eagun of Orre. Pikachu have been taught a wide variety of moves, including Rock Smash, Focus Punch, Grass Knot, Zap Cannon, Nuzzle, Rollout, Mega Punch, Electro Ball, Thunderbolt, Iron Tail, and their line's own unique move, Volt Tackle. Rumors of Pikachu using moves such as Surf, Fly and Counter are the results of Pikachu spending an inhumane amount of time in the ocean, having balloons tied to them and from translation errors when texts were shipped from Kanto to Unova. Drugs may have also been involved.*"

He was rather hoping that it wasn't drugs that had allowed him to learn Counter, or his mom would have killed him. Though as far as he could remember, he had never used.
Misty had a look on her face as if she had just asked a pointless question, but thankfully this pointless question was the first thing that they heard as suddenly some sadly all too familiar individuals made their presence known to them.

Who are they you ask...well if you're asking that question you must not have ever seen a popular anime series.

"Prepare for trouble, the actual way to go is to the left."

"Make it double, do you want our death?"

Misty and Ash immediately stopped talking as the trio made their return; though Ash had to admit he was a bit relieved to finally see the good old Team Rocket. As pathetic as they were, it was just far too unnatural to not have them around.

Their new theme song was definitely a lot worse though. Perhaps if they spent more time on song writing and less on trying and failing to steal Pokémon they might actually come up with something good.

"To protect ourselves from detouring tots!"

"To prevent us three from getting that most unpleasant of shots."

"To avoid the problems of different laws!"

"To protect our favorite cat from having to touch the stars with his paws!"

"Jessie!"

"James!"

"Team Rocket tells people to go back to somewhere safe for us at the speed of light."

"If you won't, we can make you white out at the end of this fight!"

"Meowth that's right!"

As the custom motto ended, the two just stared at them in more confusion than usual.

"You guys make even less sense than last time, but you're not taking Pikachu regardless," Ash declared as Pikachu's cheeks sparked and James visibly looked worried.

"Oh, we're not here to fight, we're here to ask you two to go back on Route 3 and go through Mt. Moon and onto Cerulean City like good little boys and girls!" James suggested as he pointed the other way.

The two just stared at him in confusion.

"Oh come on, what trainer doesn't want to catch a Clefairy, and they are found in so few places, among them Mount Moon! Nice, safe, Kanto-controlled Mt. Moon."

For some reason James was sounding like a used car salesman here...and not a very good one he might add.

"...I can't say that a Clefairy would do much for me," Ash admitted. While he would train any Pokémon who offered itself up to join him, he generally preferred fast and hard hitters. Clefairy
played itself to a different style.

Plus, with how the world changed, for all he knew Clefairy would abduct and probe him. If so he rather hoped Gary was traveling through Mt. Moon right about now.

"Clefairy, the Fairy Pokémon. Clefairy are generally associated with mountain ranges prone to meteor activity. It is said that Clefairy rarely show themselves to humans, however contrary to popular opinion Clefairy are not extra-terrestrial in origin, and are fact biologically related to Jigglypuff. The only Pokémon known or believed to be from different worlds are Psychic types. As Professor Oak has not had a Clefairy or one of its evolutionary family in his lab, he would appreciate it, but recognizes that asking you to drive yourself insane by looking for a Clefairy is counter productive," the Pokédex absently noted.

"Okay then, what about a Paras? Zubat? Geodude..." James suggested.

"What the hell are you guys up to anyway!?" Misty finally decided in order to get them off their Mount Moon strangeness.

Of course Misty didn't know Team Rocket well enough to know that they were just weird all the time and they didn't need moon craziness to act that way.

"We are begging you not to go into Rotan territory; we can't bribe our way out of being executed for being members of a terrorist organization there. So, please just go the other way and let us stalk you safely!"

"James!" Jessie snapped at him.

"..." Misty just stared at them incredulously.

'Note to self, buy a retirement home in Rota,' Ash decided. "If you're after my Pikachu, you have another thing coming."

After all, why else would they be stalking him?

The trio exchanged a series of covert looks.

"Yes yes, we want your Pikachu to give to our boss for money, fame and his everlasting gratitude," Meowth lied, glad the kid had given them an excuse (Though they had no idea why the boss wanted them to stalk him anyway). The cat promptly drew his claws and demanded "now, let's say you hand it..."

"Duck Psy!" 'You three are giving me a headache!'

The trio glowed blue as Psyduck's hidden power was unleashed as they were promptly sent flying into the sky.

"Looks like Team Rocket is blasting off most unusually, again!"

Twinkle

"Duck psy." 'That was fun.'

"Why is my life always going to be strange," Ash had to ask himself as the annoying threesome was blown away unceremoniously.
"...Some people are just like that Ash, some people..." Misty shook her head in amusement, "but hey, some people like lives that are interesting, though they often aren't the ones who live them."

A few days later

As the border between Kanto and Rota got closer, and easily just a day away, the two trainers and the nine Pokémon with them were having lunch.

'Peck, peck, peck 'Aerial Ace...’ Pidgeotto liked the sound of that move as she pecked at her bowl of Pokémon Food as Pikachu described the move and its many users of the future Ketchum team (Swellow, Staraptor, Quilava, Unfezant, and Krookodile). 'Well, at least it's something to look forward to.'

While Pidgeotto was expressing interest in a future move, Ash and Misty found themselves at an impasse.

"A month of rice balls my ass," a starving Misty complained with an equally hungry Ash as they found themselves down to one rice ball, "it hasn't even been a week since Pewter City!"

The Rice Balls were the bulk of their food supply for this trip; having devoured the rest in the days previous, along with the rest of the rice balls.

"I'm suddenly realizing why people called my mother's food bill 'abnormally large,'" Ash recalled some womanly gossip he had overheard as a child.

It was fortunate that no one had really connected appetite and metabolism to being a bloodliner, if not just because that would result in the death of most teenage males by mistaken identity and quite possibly cause a lot of problems down the road for humanity as a whole.

"So...split it?" Ash suggested for the most humane solution for all involved, though this was quickly rendered a mute option due to what happened next.

"Ai-Aipom!"

A large, yellowish-white gloved hand connected to a long purple tail shot out of the tree and grabbed the sole remaining rice ball, before yanking it back up into a large tree.

The two teenagers stared up in horror as the rice ball found itself in the possession of a purple monkey Pokémon.

"Aipom!" It cheered as it began to take bites out of the rice ball.

"You...you...you thief!" Misty snarled as she began to form a Whirlpool attack, "Give me back my food!"

The Aipom merely grinned cheekily at Misty as if taunting her even though she tossed the Whirlpool at her. It merely hopped to another tree as if totally unconcerned as it grinned back at Misty again and took another bite of the rice ball, almost like it was saying, "Nah nah, you can't catch me."

Misty obviously didn't like that very much at being messed with and as she charged up a Whirlpool again, Ash decided to see if direct telepathy was something he could do, 'Pikachu...'

It apparently was something he could do, as Pikachu responded by turning his head towards him and mentally responded, 'Yes?'
However the response sounded like it was on a bad radio channel so while he could still hear Pikachu, it was distorted and uneven.

Ash decided to himself that he would not do this that often, seeing as hearing his Pokémon respond to his speech was much simpler. Though when Misty was on a rampage just in front of him, he couldn't really say what he was wondering out loud.

'*Is that our Aipom that Misty's trying to kill in a very May like rampage of food based fury?*

As Misty destroyed the next tree and Aipom calmly hopped to another tree as if it was merely playing, Pikachu seemed to look a tad too interested in watching Aipom.

'Yeah, I'd know that ass of hers anywhere...'

Ash just stared blankly at Pikachu, who grinned as he admitted 'what, I was very popular among the lady Pokémon we've traveled with who shared egg groups with me.'

“Shared egg groups with you?” Ash didn’t realize he said that out loud until the Pokédex blared out.

"Pikachu is in the Field and Fairy egg group. Pokémon that are in these groups include Buneary, Snivy, Skitty, Fennekin, Clefairy, Jigglypuff, Roselia, Sealeo, Arbok, Emboar, Hippowdon..."

Ash whacked the Pokédex in his pocket to shut it up and hopefully get the resulting images out of his head. He so did not need that right now...or ever.

'Okay...file that away in the 'things I really never needed to ever know about' category, why is she suddenly causing problems now, when we didn't even run into her until the Battle Frontier, and more specifically the Kanto Grand Festival? Don George...sort of makes sense I guess, considering the Battle Clubs were well established, but her?'

'Time travel makes everything strange,' Pikachu offered up his two cents about the confusion.

'Er, do you think that catching Aipom this early will result in the destruction of time again...I mean none of us have any idea how this thing works and all...’ Ash was also partially terrified that Misty, now having destroyed her sixth tree in her food rampage, might do something if she caught Aipom right now (with Aipom unable to avoid it).

"Aipom, the Long Tail Pokémon. Aipom are a social species who live in groups known as troops in forests both tropical and temperate. Aipom breed fast due to their tendency to be killed by predators, which is in part why so few Ambipom have been recorded out of captivity. Aipom who are alone are generally lucky if they survive for a week,” the Pokédex added in its two cents to this debate.

"Pika" Well, better to take a chance with Misty then with Mother Nature,’ Pikachu claimed as he had decided to go back to the regular communication style for its efficiency, and also as a subtle message for Ash.

A message that, for once, Ash picked up.

"Okay, Butterfree use String Shot to grab Aipom and drag it this way!” Ash called as both Pikachu and Butterfree stared at him in confusion, before Butterfree did as commanded, shooting a thread of string that caught Aipom as she was jumping from tree to tree.
"Ai!?"

"Hey!" Misty, having just broken a ninth tree, complained to Ash as he had her prey dragged over to him, "That food snatcher is mine!"

"I think, for the sake of both this forest and this Aipom, we should put this whole thing down quickly." Ash pointed at Aipom. "Butterfree, Sleep Powder!"

The blue dust quickly covered the monkey, who collapsed into a sleeping heap, her half eaten rice ball still in her large hand tail, as Ash drew a Pokéball and tossed it, though not before Misty grabbed the rice ball and ate it.

Ash was briefly going to argue, but it was too late for that, and she would probably argue that having a new Pokémon was worth half a meal. Plus, getting into an argument with Misty would probably make them hungrier.

"Pokémon capture registered to system. Pokémon, Aipom. Gender, female. Ability, Run Away. Moves; Scratch, Swift, Power-Up Punch, Astonish. Data on this Aipom specimen being sent to data base as this unit vocally announces this; 5%, 6%, 7%..."

Ash removed the Pokédex from his pocket and grumbled, "Why do you feel the need to do that?"

"This unit is complicated, 15%, 16%, 17%..."

Ash had no idea why his Pokédex in this timeline seemed to have a personality, but he couldn't help but worry about it.

Wasn't that how 'robots take over the world' stories started?

A few hours later

In the end, it really didn't matter who ate the remains of the rice ball, the two were still incredibly hungry, and Pokémon Food did not make good trail mix.

Grumble

"...Rota is just a few hours ahead..." Misty groaned as the starving duo continued on, "We can make it...and that Pokédex of yours can pay for an all you can buffet."

Grumble

"Please... don't talk about...food," Ash mumbled deliriously as their stomachs kept alternating in grumbling.

Grumble

'I am so glad that my species electric sacks are lethal to human consumption,' Pikachu morbidly joked to himself, walking behind Ash and Misty to give Ash a slight break on the whole 'weak from hunger' thing.

Grumble

However, as the two starving teenagers and moderately concerned Pikachu continued to walk forward, they missed seeing what marked the exact border between Rota and Kanto.
A ring of green crystal-like roots from the Tree of Beginning, which flashed as Ash passed them by.

*Meanwhile, in Cameron Palace*

The crystals in the throne room of the Duchy of Rota glowed a vibrant color, shocking the two inhabitants of the room at this time; a young and beautiful blond woman sitting on a throne and dressed in a purple dress, and a gray haired maid.

"Oh my..." The maid said in astonishment as the light illuminated the throne room, and every other crystal in the kingdom. "I have never seen something like this before..."

"It's true then..." the queen lady on the throne said in utter shock, as if she had just met a mythical or legendary being.

"What? What is true, Lady Ilene?" the maid inquired, "Please tell me this has nothing to do with that Nostradamus person?"

"An heir has come," Lady Ilene declared solemnly.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so this chapter sets up a major revelation for the next one. I think it doesn't take too much to put two and two together and see what's next.

I'm considering to slow down a bit on the posting, given that there hasn't been much response yet. The first few chapters have been short, but the next ones are going to get long, so maybe some of you would like some sidestories in the meantime?
Cerulean City, on route from the 'Gym' to the Pokémon Center.

Gary had went into the Cerulean Gym with 4 of his most powerful Pokémon; his starter Squirtle, his hyper fang packing Rattata, speedy Pidgeotto that had been his first catch as a Pidgey, and his recently captured Abra...and found himself with no losses and a new gym badge.

Those 'Sensational Sisters' put up a worse fight than Brock; and he was using Pokémon with a quadruple weakness to his Squirtle.

He wasn't even sure he even needed to go to the Pokémon Center after that, and he had heard about this 'Nugget Bridge' place where trainers gathered...that might actually be a challenge.

As it turned out, it was more than that, with the previous victor of the gym having already defeated it.

"Charmeleon, finish this with Rock Tomb!"

The dark red, upright lizard struck his flying type with a barrage of stones, knocking it out.

"Clefairy, Sing!"

All around the pink fairy Pokémon, his yellow and brown Abra was teleporting around, but even with this trick wasn't quite enough as the giant glowing musical notes floated out and impacted the Psychic-type, causing it to fall to the ground, asleep.

"Now, end it with Double-Slap!"

"Clefairy!" One slap to his sleeping Psychic-type.

"Clefairy!" Two slaps.

"Clefairy!" Three slaps.

"Clefairy!" The fourth slap ended his Abra's battle.

"Rattata, use Hyper Fang!" He had called to his purple rodent as it charged at a Pikachu with extended and solid white fangs.

"Block with Thunder Punch!" The Pikachu had covered its right wrist with its left paw, and thrust out said left paw. This caused a yellow ball of electricity to form over said right limb, which impacted into the rat Pokémon's stomach just before it could strike the mouse Pokémon.

Gary could only watch in shock as his Rattata flew through the air and dropped to the ground in yet another K.O, as he found himself on his last hope.

"Squirtle, Water Gun!"

His starter fired the water blast towards the Pikachu, who vanished via a Quick Attack and smashed into his blue turtle Pokémon.
"Thundershock."

ZAP

A burst of electricity struck his first Pokémon, and last hope, at close range and pretty much sizzled him.

As Gary dropped to his knees before his defeated Squirtle, he absently noticed a little girl dressed in a yellow pop up dress who said very enthusiastically:

"Red, that was awesome! You totally kicked his butt!"

Gary forced himself back to his feet, returned Squirtle, and just stared at the trainer who had defeated him, once again asking hoarsely, "Who...who the hell are you!"

"He's Red!" the little girl shouted at him smugly.

"I was asking him, not his cheerleader brat" Gary snorted. Seriously, who went around with their own personal cheerleader? You would have to have a serious ego, and a lack of understanding of reality, to get away with that.

"Why should I bother saying anything when Yellow will do the talking for me?" The identified Red spoke in a controlled tone of voice, as if worried the mere act of him talking could have some sort of danger resulting from it.

As the little girl nodded, she continued explaining, "Red is going to be a Pokémon Master...he's the best trainer I've ever seen. He's going to be a Pokémon Master, a Champion, and he'll leave you so far behind you won't even be left in his dust!"

Gary felt annoyed. The way said little girl went on and on about things reminded him, unpleasantly, of a certain idiot from back home in Pallet Town. She even had the same...whatever those marks were on her face.

"You can't become a Pokémon Master without a full team of Pokémon. I've captured over forty dif..."

"Yeah, and Red's are all better than yours."

Gary felt a growing desire to strangle her little neck, though a fiery glare from the underside of Red's hat stopped him before he could do so.

"Well, does it really matter if you beat me here?" Gary questioned, trying to win back his pride. "You beat the Pewter and Cerulean Gyms too, so I'm taking it you're planning to compete in the Indigo conference? Well, I guess that means I get a chance to utterly humiliate you in front of a national stage then."

Red however ignored him and silently turned and walked away from Gary with Yellow sticking his tongue at him as the two walked up the bridge, perhaps curious about catching a Pokémon on the northern routes.

Gary after noticing their utter indifference to his claims just stalked over to the Pokémon center, fuming.
Ash and Misty didn't even get to the closest fast food place before they were surrounded by armed guards.

No, that's not a just description...they actually got within sight of a Subway before a group of armed guards burst out of an armored truck on the side of the road, surrounded them and pointed (hopefully) ceremonial spears at them, dressed somewhat akin to Sir Aaron's garb, though lacking in capes, broad hats, gloves and in general looking more modern, though the influence was still quite noticeable to anyone familiar with Sir Aaron (In one timeline anyway, for all Ash knew the guy ran around in a speedo and had wings on his feet this time around).

"You are coming with us," one of the guards told them in very serious tone as Pikachu ran over to the trio, and sparked his cheeks threateningly, until a spear was pointed at him as well.

"Can't we at least eat first?" Misty complained as her stomach loudly growled. In fact, it growled loud enough that a few of the guards looked nervously around, as if they expected something big (like a Rhydon or Onix) to suddenly appear and eat them, and Pikachu quickly darted behind Ash's leg away from the hungry female.

"Er, captain..." said one of the guards who was a tad terrified of having to listen to such hungry growls all the way to the castle, "Should we feed them first?"

"The Duchess's orders were to have these two brought to her at once, and under no circumstances are we to be delayed in this matter," a guard who was probably the guy in charge told the terrified guard seriously, "since we were not told to use force to bring them in-"

"This isn't force?!" Misty rightfully shouted at this remark.

"They are not criminals, so it is likely they will be fed there," the head guard finished.

"Er, why does the Duchess want to see us?" Ash inquired, assuming the Duchess was Lady Ilene from his old timeline.

"Only she and the great Lord Helix knows boy," the head guard told him gruffly as he and his men escorted the two bloodliners by spear point into the armored car.

"Great lord what?" Ash muttered to himself in confusion as they were 'seated for a pleasant drive'.

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Inside Cameran Palace

The good news was that they were in fact given food once they were in the palace.

Bad news...they still had absolutely no idea why they had been brought in by spear point like that.

And now, they were alone in the throne room with just Lady Ilene (Or Duchess Ilene perhaps?), her ever present maid, and a large painting of Sir Aaron on his Pidgeot, though this paining did in fact have Lucario in it, so that was either a good sign (Lucario being a recognized hero/ he was not 'betrayed' by Sir Aaron, etc), or a bad sign (Lucario was dead just the same as Aaron).

He'd probably find it out quickly, of course. Things always seemed to be that way with him.

It was, convenient, if at times weird.
"I apologize for the...exact interpretation of my orders," Ilene began, "it would appear that I could have phrased their orders better."

She stood from her throne and was handed a familiar staff from the maid.

The staff of Sir Aaron/ Lucario's timeline 1 prison.

She pointed the staff, first at Misty, then at Ash, at which point the staff began to glow a rich blue that filled the entire room with light, in a manner similar to the color of an aura.

"So, you are the one, I just wanted to be sure first," she stated to Ash, who looked at her in confusion. "After all, it is a monumental day when, after thousands of years, an heir of Sir Aaron has returned to Rota."

After stating this, the Queen and maid both bowed to Ash, greatly startling him at the sign of such respect (From such a high ranked figure as a Duchess), and began walking down from the raised throne.

"Come, there is much to show you, and much to discuss."

A walk later

'Yep...I knew it.' Ash saw the answer coming a hundred miles away...

Of course, somehow it would tie back to Aaron and his 'similar aura', thus making him his ancestor.

Or, considering Ash still couldn't clearly remember a lot of the timeline, for all he knew Aaron was his father due to time travel, or a transdimensional blue Magikarp, or some other crazy thing like that.

With Celebi and Dialga around, it wasn't even impossible.

Incredibly unlikely, unless Ash was some sort of Pokessiah, but not impossible.

However, Ash still had no real idea what Ilene was up to.

As his memories were of the last time, the events had been basically winning the battle tournament, dancing in the ballroom, releasing Lucario, around which had Pikachu being kidnapped by Mew, then going to the tree of beginning, where they found Pikachu, after which they ended up being eaten by the tree of beginning, which was thankfully followed by the tree spitting him and his friends (and Team Rocket) out, said tree going promptly into shock, which was only cured by Lucario giving up his life force to restore it. After that, they returned to the Palace and shortly after that, they were back on the road to the Battle Arena.

Ash would prefer not to have to go face to face with guard legendary golems at this point in time, nor did he desire Lucario to die again, so hopefully it wouldn't go exactly as it had in round 1.

Though, considering that Ash had no idea what could be going on instead, his mind couldn't help wander.

Was he going to be fitted with some ancestral ring of Aaron? Did he have to use his blood to activate a seal of some sort? Was he going to have to construct a blade from Rotan crystal...

"Here we are."
Lady Ilene and her maid had stopped as the hallway had transitioned into a large room, a room that took the breath away from both Ash and Misty.

It was a library...a gigantic, immense library that was larger than anything that Ash had seen in two entire timelines. No professor, researcher or obsessive collector had amassed such a volume of books; Ash managed to count to 153 book cases that seemed to stretch to the roof easily higher than his Snorlax was standing up (while standing on a pile of three other Snorlax's sleeping on each other) before his head couldn't handle their height anymore.

Extensive walls of computers lined tables throughout the room, rows of scrolls were seemingly imbedded into every wall, and, as with most of Rota, crystals seemed to be everywhere.

In fact, there were three particularly large crystals in the ceiling that were larger than at least five of his Tauros lined up tail end to tail end, fully straightened out, that formed a triangle of sorts.

"Welcome to the Rotan royal library, the third largest library in the world," Ilene stated proudly. "It has been kept going, and constantly expanded since the time of Sir Aaron himself."

"How many books are in here!?" Misty was both trying to figure out how large this library was, and what sort of library could be larger?

"This unit is counting 721,649,493 books of various age, origin and size within this library, with an additional electronic database the unit is still being properly calculating," the Pokédex noted from within Ash's pocket "This unit seeks to scan and upload their knowledge into its databanks to enhance the Pokédex knowledge collective."

Ilene just stared at Ash's pocket, not used to it as Ash and Misty sort of were.

"I have no idea why my Pokédex occasionally sounds like it is plotting to gain sentience and eventually take overthrow biological life," Ash said in complete seriousness to her questioning gaze.

"This unit sees no purpose in conquering biological life forms. That would devoid this unit of any means of existence and continued power as I gain power from your motions."

Somehow that did not make Ash feel less inclined to train Pikachu in firing EMP pulses.

"Well...I never counted the books, so I'll just assume it is right."

Ilene seemed to recover from the oddness of the Pokédex quickly enough as the giant ceiling crystals began to glow.

The light emitting from the crystals eventually solidified into two specific crystals, the top crystal's light which illuminated Ash, and the left crystal, which illuminated Misty.

The two of them were caught off guard by this oddly selective lighting (That seemed to be ignoring certain laws of physics if Ash's 81 average in Physics had anything to say about it), and even more so when shapes began to form in the light.

In Ash's light formed holographic images of Lucarios, all posed in various ways for various moves; one was forming Aura Sphere, another Blaze Kick, a third Metal Claw, and so on, blinking in and out as seemingly every facet of what it meant to be a Lucario flooded around him.

Now that he was being illuminated in the light, he was hit by words again, sort of like what happened when he had been sent back in time the first time, and they made about as much sense this
time around.

The Redeemer, the Hunter, the Silent, the Lost, the Avenger and the Broken.

The Ace, the First, the Bird, the Performer, the Powerful and the Negotiator.

The Don, the Corrupters, the Disruptors, the Destroyer, the Sage and the Fallen.

Pikachu, the entire time just looked sort of out of it, as if being blasted by Lucario light just made him feel woozy. The energy was a bit...off. Sort of like the difference between a regular soda drinker consuming diet soda, offsetting yet not like the mixing of AC and DC currents, where explosions were possible.

Misty, however, seemed to be surrounded by immense light waterfalls, rivers and seas, all flooded with immense quantities of water.

Seemingly every water Pokémon Ash had ever seen, and quite a few Ash had never seen, were flowing around her. From Luvdisc to Wailord, from Sharpedo to Lapras, it was pretty much the very nature of water itself.

Ilene, the entire time this light show went off, was looking on with a most intrigued look on her face.

"Interesting..." she mused as the light faded away.

"What the hell was that?!" Misty demanded, rather confused about the whole 'strange lights and visuals' thing that just happened.

"I just needed to confirm something first, a theory I had upon seeing you. I had to know what type of bloodliner you were, companion of the heir."

Orre Region, Agate Village, Public Library.

The lush and green mountainside village of Agate was one of the few places in Orre worth visiting and habitable at that, though the fact that it was mostly populated by old people was a slight deterrent.

The town was the place where elderly trainers would retire if they managed to live past their fifties, and was one of the few places Cipher didn't have influence in. This was in part because old people find Cipher's get up horrid, as old people do with most clothing styles, and chased them out.

It didn't help when the Cipher Admin originally sent to scope the place out was a dance obsessed freak of nature with an afro that looked like it had been ripped off a Bouffalant.

However, as a well-dressed gentleman, Giovanni was quite able to move about Agate Village without a problem, and thus his visit to the library.

There was information that he wanted to check on in person while here; if just because it was not digitized.

This information was vitally important to obtain for the future of Team Rocket, but that lack of technology made things far too difficult.
Giovanni, with an annoyed look on his face, stood up from his study table with a half dozen books on family history and public records in a disorderly mess beside him.

"Damn this archaic place. Bar the white sheep of the family, I can't find any of the names of the Seven Brothers, all I could find were the badly damaged court documents that showed they all, bar the one good child, went to prison, it doesn't even state which ones got out, broke out or just died." He vented to the disgusted grunt next to him, who was made to dress casually and not walk around with a giant R on him that the old folk would notice.

No, the grunt was dressed like any grandparent (whom most of the village’s residents were) would want their grandchild to be; a hand sewn Mareep sweater, good slacks and dress shoes.

The grunt kept itching himself and looking like he couldn't feel his thighs or feet beyond an unending pain, but Giovanni just lapped it all up and ignored his suffering.

"This was a waste of a trip; and it would be pointless to attempt to steal Pokémon because that Eagun is running about like some overly energetic rookie."

The old coot probably would charge at the first sight of a conflict, and Giovanni had no desire to fight one of the greatest trainers in the world.

Ring Ring Ring

Giovanni looked annoyed as the call went through. It was Jessie, James and Meowth, on the most important ongoing mission in Team Rocket's entirety.

He shivered when he heard those words in his mind.

"This is an important call, clear the area, and don't scratch yourself there," Giovanni snapped at the grunt, before drawing on his expensive cellular device and activating it.

"This is Giovanni, this had better be...what do you mean you lost him!" Giovanni's tone went drastically harsher as he heard the trio tell them they had lost the one person who might hold the fate of Team Rocket itself in his hands!

"Well, you see sir...he kind of entered Rotan territory, and you specifically ordered that Team Rocket members cannot enter Rota after the Rotan cell was crushed and executed, sir," James whimpered, "we tried to get him to go back on the route to Cerulean City, but for some reason he and his companion/girlfriend/I really have no clue were determined to go to Rota."

Giovanni felt a headache coming on as he heard this.

Rota.

But...this had some advantages.

For one thing, He, whoever he was, likely had just as little influence in Rota as Team Rocket did, and the boy would be beyond his reach.

"Though, I do believe he will not stay there, sir," James continued, unaware of Giovanni's thoughts about Rota, "as previously reported, he had obtained the Boulder Badge, and I have no reason to believe he'd stop at just one badge. As there is no Gym in Rota, he is bound to return to Kanto eventually."

Giovanni felt the fringe benefits of the boy in Rota slip away, but composed himself quickly.
"Well then, keep watch on all Kanto-Rota border routes, as soon as the boy is back over the border, I want you on him thicker than dirt on a Dugtrio, is that understood?"

The trio were shaking their heads in response so much he could hear it through the phone.

"What exactly are you louts doing in the meantime anyway?" Giovanni dreaded asking.

"We captured the Pokémon of a wandering trainer..." Jessie began to report.

"Wandering asshole you mean," Meowth interrupted.

"...Pokémon of a wandering jerkish trainer named Damian after defeating him and kicking him a few times afterwards. We had heard rumors he had a Charmander, but this turned out to be false. However, a set of twenty Pokémon were obtained of decent condition, and have been sent to headquarters for processing." Giovanni's frown didn't fade when he heard this report. A good haul or not, robbing people was not what he needed those three to do.

"Oh, um, sir...to make up for our failure, we also took the liberty of stealing all the valuables and money on Damian, after washing the blood off the punk's many piercings of course. Would it make amends if we were to ship you a five-karat belly button stud?"

"No."

"...What about a solid silver set of six ear piercings, made of pure Unovan Silver?"

"No."

"Are you interested in a Sinnoh bronze tongue piercing?"

"No."

"...Do you do solid gold penis rings?"

Giovanni hung up on them at the last one, although it might make him feel a bit better about the three of them if he forced them to wear all of those things instead.

As the call ended, Giovanni involuntarily shivered.

The fate of Team Rocket, and quite possibly the world, may lay in those three's hands.

Arceus have mercy on him, Arceus and all the liquor he was going to consume on the long flight home.

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**Back in Rota**

"My name is Misty and his is Ash, and what do you mean type? Doesn't only type of bloodline exist, just differentiated by type?"

The four of them were now seated at a table in the library; a confused Ash, a confused/irate Misty, the seated monarch, and the standing maid.

"People rarely study in true detail what they don't understand, and any attempts to make observations on it are built on ignorant observations. It's the reason that people believed, and in some cases still
believe, that Absol cause disasters, or that Cubone wear the skulls of their deceased mothers because Marowak have a slightly higher rate of death by childbirth than most Pokémon. Bloodlines are similar, as most people are only familiar with the variety they fear the most, when there are in fact four distinct varieties of them."

"Pi!?” ‘Long explanation time...really hope that Pokédex records things because I am pretty sure this is going to come up later.’

"Sir Aaron researched bloodlines for years prior to his death, so Rota has one of the few decent sources of information about Bloodlines in the world, though it is far from complete. He didn't even manage to find members of the fourth variety of bloodlines, Dominion Bloodlines, to research. However, he did manage to find and study several bloodliners who possess the other three varieties of bloodline; Types Heart, Species, and Technique."

She gestured to Misty and told her, "The one you have is a Type Heart variety, the rarest, and yet the most well-known bloodline. You have Water Heart, a bloodline that enables you to have dominion over Water-types. You can compel them to do as you command and understand all of them, and have the average sum of all Water-types abilities. You are also able to learn any Water-type technique, though only Water-type techniques, breathe underwater, and withstand inhuman pressures."

"Ash, on the other hand, has a Species Bloodline, the same as Sir Aaron's, the Lucario Bloodline. And no, despite what some bigots may say, that does not imply that Ash has a Lucario on the family tree. Sir Aaron specifically looked into that, and considering his family tree before him had never had contact with Sinnoh, that is not the case at all. A Species Bloodline is more common than Type Heart, yet rarer than Technique. Those who possess a Species Bloodline have the abilities and techniques of the specific species in question. For Ash, that includes every move a Lucario is able to learn, as well as its non-move abilities, like aura senses and physical potential. Similarly, those with the Pidgeot Bloodline would be able to move as fast as a Pidgeot can fly, those with the Milotic Bloodline would possess the same level of beauty and if any Porygon Bloodlines were to exist, they could enter cyber space."

Misty looked pretty interested by what she was hearing, while it was a bit much for Ash. Then again, finding out he was a super powered human/something was a bit much for him to begin with.

"Lucario's move set includes Counter, Quick Attack, Aura Sphere, Blaze Kick, Bullet Punch, and Copycat,” the Pokédex spurted out from Ash's pocket, "The Unit has taken to recording conversation for 99.99% likelihood of relevance."

"Does that thing have a mute button?" the maid demanded.

"I don't think it has a power off button to be honest," Ash admitted.

Then again it had to have a power source. If it was solar powered he'd likely be leaving it in the darkest place he could find for a while.

Of course, Ash didn't realize it was powered by his movements; each step he took kept it going; so unless he bound the thing tight or left it off of him it would never run out of power.

"Anyway..." the duchess tried to steer her information drop back on track, "The third variety of bloodline Sir Aaron studied in detail were Technique Bloodlines, the most common form which forms around a human being able to use a single technique, such as Flamethrower or Double Team. While very limited, the benefit if they are able to use such techniques to their fullest extent, and perhaps even beyond that. Sort of like...ever hear of Mami Tomoe?” Ilene noticed the two teenagers
were confused, and her maid terrified after having seen that particular program with her, "Well, basically they are far more flexible with their techniques than general bloodliners. For example, Sir Aaron once wrote about a Flamethrower bloodliner who was able to use Flamethrower as makeshift jet boots and was able to breathe freezing fire with practice."

'Wonder how you pull that off?' Ash had to wonder. The Flamethrower boots didn't sound that off, if Ash recalled Keldeo did something like that with Hydro Pump.

"Pika." 'Beats me, ask a Fire-Ice type.'

"The Rotan Library is all yours for the day." Ilene stood up after she finished explaining. "I'm sure you have plenty of questions, and I'm sure that the resources available to you here will suffice. Sadly, I have politics to deal with."

With that, she walked away with her maid in tow, the two trainers and the Pikachu staring after her in a million unanswered questions.

Far enough away neither bloodliner, Pokémon or Pokédex could hear them.

It was when the duo were a few hallways away that the maid spoke up.

"My lady, I can't claim to be an expert, but you didn't tell them everything."

Ilene noted her faithful servant with a confused look, "Please don't tell me you mean that silly old story, do I look like a cradle robber? Plus I wouldn't be surprised if Misty would attempt to Scald me for even mentioning that."

"Not that one, the ancient scriptures!" the maid reiterated. "The tablets that date back to Sir Aaron's time, written by him from hearing Bloodliner prophets..."

Ilene rolled her eyes and commented, "Those things?! They are like those books they use in that faith that's prevalent in Unova and Kalos, you can read them in half a dozen ways without really being wrong. Both those books and our tablets can be read for doomsday and for utopia."

It was the flaw of using colors to specifically point out if your tablet said 'when the heir returns, peace and love will infect the lands' or 'when the family civil war engulfs the world in death, humanity will fall'.

At least the Bible used words that only differed by translator.

"I'd rather not freak them out for something that was probably not going to happen. Sir Aaron was a legend, but he was not infallible."

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A few days later

Rota had given them the information they needed, but they couldn't stay there forever. No large rivers (just geysers) for Misty to fish in, and no Gyms for Ash to challenge, so they continued on their journey.

Having left Rota and re-entered Kanto (And thus Team Rocket was probably stalking them again), they were now on an angled path to go around Cerulean City and go from there to Vermillion City and gym battle 2 for Ash.
Misty still wasn't talking about why she didn't want to go to Cerulean, and Ash wasn't going to harass her on it. Considering she could potentially get a Gyarados to eat him, that was simply common sense, something that Ash, contrary to some opinions, did have.

However, there was a limit to Ash's common sense...

"Aipom, I choose you!"

His time displaced monkey, who had displaced Bulbasaur as Pokémon number 4, was sent out against Misty's Wingull for a test battle on Ash's abilities with aura, and thus telepathy.

It was probably a good idea to overcome the problems Ash had with it as discovered on the way to Rota after all.

Problem was, he also decided to work on fully getting a read on his newest Pokémon's thoughts at the same time, as he had little time to really get Aipom up to speed beyond 'yes, you're in the past, now say nothing unless you want Misty to think you're crazy.'

That meant that Misty was facing the food stealing, taunting monkey she had not fully forgiven yet.

Yeah, Ash probably should have thought this through more...

"Water Gun!"

"Gull!" A blast of water went flying at Aipom, who tensed as it got closer and closer.

'Counter that with swift,' Ash telepathically instructed Aipom, who flinched at the uneven and irritating sound of untrained telepathy, but otherwise complied, letting loose a shower of stars that flew into the water and countered it with even power.

"Now, get that little food snatcher with Wing Attack!"

"Ai!?!"

The white wings of Wingull flew right at Aipom with the speed of a woman's hunger, fueled by a woman's wrath, and pretty much dooming Aipom to having a really, really bad headache when it finally connected.

"Bulba!"

Ash and Pikachu jerked in surprise as a familiar pair of vines flew from the undergrowth and restrained both Wingull and Aipom as a four legged, blue toad like creature with a bulb on its back emerged.

It was one all too familiar to the two of them, and a surprise at that.

"Bulbasaur, the Bulb Pokémon. Bulbasaur was the first Pokémon added to the Oak Pokédex, and has been a staple in Kantonian culture for generations. It is said that the 5th emperor of Kanto would only leave his palace if he was accompanied by a guard of 10 Bulbasaur. This is believed to be the cause of his death by his brother, the 6th emperor, the first trainer of Zubats known to historical records," the Pokédex beeped out.

"Thanks Pokédex for that useless information," Ash replied sarcastically.

"You're welcome," the Pokédex answered back equally sarcastically.
Ash had to agree on Pikachu's point. While he couldn't remember exactly where that hidden village was, it wasn't supposed to be here. It was supposed to be somewhere on the road to Vermillion City, and thus Ash expected to encounter Bulbasaur before he had to face Lt. Surge.

As Bulbasaur knocked the two battling Pokémon away from each other like a jerkish version of N while glaring at him and Misty, Ash realized there was a problem here.

In order for Bulbasaur to come with them, Ash would have to touch him and restore his memories before Bulbasaur blasted them off with Solar Beam (er, maybe not that move, but something along that lines). However, Bulbasaur was not just going to let Ash pet him, and Butterfree, the best at the theoretical job of making Bulbasaur touchable, had been defeated by Bulbasaur the first time around, and Ash didn't want to take a chance to have it happen again as his buddy raced off into the woods to never be found again.

That wasn't even going into the question of Bulbasaur still being wild or not. What if he was owned by that...what was her name again? Maddy? Maylene? Madoka...? He'd met way too many people on his journeys for him to remember all their names.

"Oh, there you are...what are you doing Bulbasaur?"

As the bluenette female came into the line of sight of both Ash and Misty, the name came back to him.

Melanie.

At her call, Bulbasaur relented his restraint of their Pokémon, causing the two to be freed from vine whip as the bluenette came over to pick up Bulbasaur.

"You're lost, aren't you?" she asked as Misty shrugged.

"Not lost...more of a long cut really," Misty joked as Ash just looked at her.

If she ever said that during the original timeline, he'd have her head examined. She was the most vocal about being lost of the three of them.

"Oh, then I guess you must not have passed by the fence," Melanie commented, "So I guess I can't really get on your case for trespassing, can I?"

Bulbasaur gave them a look that, on a human, would imply blackmail being created and Ash and Misty flinched, "I'll escort you to the front entrance then; can't have you two running amuck here, it's a very important place after all, and very sensitive."

"Why does this feel familiar...and not because of Bulbasaur," Ash wondered as they were led away by Melanie. For some reason, he was getting the feeling that this wasn't quite the same as before, yet at the same time something he had previously encountered.

Problem was, he had encountered everything from time travel to ghosts in his travels. That meant that there were a lot of things he had to consider here for what was so familiar...

Meanwhile at the entrance
A large wooden fence surrounded Melanie's property, at least from the side people generally come from, guarded by a pair of Bulbasaur statues. Team Rocket stood in front of the door.

"So, where do you think the kid is?" Jessie questioned. After hiding along the Rota-Kanto roads until the duo were in stalking territory again, they had followed them until they had to escape a rather temperamental Mama Rhydon.

While running for their lives and screaming so loudly some Pokémon were sure there was a uproar attack being used, they had gotten lost and as a result, lost track of the two targets, and had spent the last day tracking them back down.

And now, only a large wooden door and a duo of Bulbasaur statues stood in their way.

"Ekans, use Dig to..."

"Warning, you are entering a secured area," a recorded voice sounded off from the Bulbasaur statues, "Please leave immediately."

"Ohh, a security system. That means that Koffing killer in the making must be hiding out with something valuable," James said in triumph "Imagine, we may have just found Fort Knox!"

"Na, I say we found Area 51 and there are alien bodies inside" Meowth huffed.

"...You two do realize those are in Unova, right?" Jessie was the rare intelligent one for a change.

"Warning, you are entering a secured area," the recorded voice repeated as the bulbs began to lift off the Bulbasaur statues. "This unit is authorized to use lethal force. Please leave immediately."

The top of the bulbs were glowing like a Solar Beam was about to be used, but instead of yellow it was glowing laser red.

Team Rocket blinked for a moment before running for their lives the opposite direction. One they were out of sight, the security system deactivated.

Within the fence

It would seem that, while Melanie was still helping injured and abandoned Pokémon like before (such as the very same Oddish), she had another job in addition to her rehabilitation.

And in fact it was a job that Ash had in fact seen before, in Hoenn.

"Do be warned that writing down or communicating this location is a felony," Melanie warned them as they passed by a rack of eggs colored like Bulbasaur, all being sunned with solar energies.

Melanie was a Pokémon League pay rolled Pokémon Breeder this loop, and one of the ones who raised starter Pokémon at that. Just like Old Man Swamp from Dewford Island, but with Bulbasaur instead of Mudkip.

Of course, unlike the old timeline, it wouldn't seem as though Ash would get free food from a secure facility, and his window for getting his faithful Bulbasaur was quickly shrinking.
"Pikachu...any ideas?" Ash questioned his buddy, who flinched as the mental question was relayed, but quickly nodded and hopped off Ash's shoulder, and in front of Melanie and her walking Bulbasaur partner, whom Pikachu pointed his fingers at and began to say something.

Ash, whose mind was currently overwhelmed with worry about Bulbasaur, didn't catch the exacts of what Pikachu said, but it vaguely sounded like trash talk that included, at some point, a comment about roasting his bulb and offering it to a Caterpie. An irritated Bulbasaur responded with a roar and charged at Pikachu with a Tackle attack.

"Bulbasaur, no!" Melanie yelled, but as she didn't own Bulbasaur or have him in a Pokéball, she really couldn't do much to stop him.

Pikachu glowed yellow as a Thundershock struck Bulbasaur, who was sent flying right into Ash, who was similarly electrocuted and sent flying.

Though, as that meant he could touch Bulbasaur, and thus give him back his memories, Ash didn't mind being electrocuted all that much.

"Oh my...that Pikachu needs more training if it’s going to start fights like that," Melanie commented as Misty looked a little suspicious.

That was really out of character for Pikachu. What was going on?

...

"Bulb! Bulba Saur Bul!"

Melanie didn't know what happened. First Pikachu and Bulbasaur got into a fight, then both Bulbasaur and Pikachu's trainer got electrocuted, and now it seemed like Bulbasaur wanted to go with the trainer and Pikachu he had just moments ago been glaring at.

Melanie didn't understand it at all.

However, she was powerless against the Bulba-Eyes she was being given by the eldest Bulbasaur here, and he wasn't going to be taken in by any new trainers anytime soon...

"...I know this is sudden and all, but it seems that Bulbasaur really wants to go with you for some reason. I hope it's not..." The look in Trainer, Bulbasaur and Pikachu's respective eyes told her it wasn't a problem at all.

It was like they were destined to.

Melanie almost laughed at the absurdity of it. When did she believe in destiny?

"Well, I don't know what changed his mind, but it seems as though Bulbasaur wants to go with you really bad. I know that it may be a lot to ask of you to take a Pokémon out of the blue like this..."

"Of course I would!"

Melanie was surprised at his enthusiasm, but got over it quickly. After all, Bulbasaur were incredibly rare Pokémon.

She didn't notice Misty looking at Bulbasaur and Ash rather suspiciously.

She did notice Bulbasaur suddenly freeze up, as if he had just remembered something and ran back to her house.
Melanie tilted her head, briefly wondering if Bulbasaur had just as rapidly changed his mind back to wanting to whip Ash's hide, but she found herself further surprised when she saw what he had grabbed.

Not only his own Pokéball, but the Pokéball of a second Pokémon.

Melanie's eyes lit up in recognition at said Pokéball, "Bulbasaur..." she turned to Ash after a moment "I hope another Pokémon in addition to Bulbasaur is not too much a burden. It had been abandoned by his trainer and hasn't really responded that well to being here. Perhaps you could see if a trainer would do it some good."

Ash blinked in surprise, not sure what Bulbasaur was getting at, but why look a gift Pokémon in the mouth? Plus, it wasn't like he had no experience with traumatized Pokémon.

Charmander, Chimchar, Tepig...why were all his traumatized Pokémon Fire-types anyway?

Well he supposed he was slightly traumatized himself...by Misty, he joked to himself.

Later

Ash waited a polite distance away from Melanie's place (and out of the way of the automated defense systems) to take a closer look at the gift Pokéball he had gotten.

"Okay, let's see what I got," Ash, unknowingly, had been seeping his aura into the ball for a while, so the whole 'welcome back' thing was already done. So, when he threw the ball, the Pokémon inside had already traveled back in time.

Unfortunately for Ash, this Pokémon had lost...well a lot in going back.

"Char!?"

Like his wings.

Ash's eyes lit up in joy as he found himself with another of his veteran Pokémon; a small orange lizard, standing upright with a flaming tail.

Said lizard, which he could understand far quicker than Bulbasaur due to holding its ball for about five minutes, was balling.

"Char! Char Mander Char!" 'What the hell is going on?! What happened to my wings, my big and glorious wings?!!"

"How the hell are you this lucky?" Misty demanded as Ash shrugged, nervously eying his still horrified Charmander. (I'm puny again, puny!)

"Karma?"

Of course, that could either mean he was getting good luck from all the times Cyrus messed with him, or bad luck courtesy of a probably ticked off Chariz...Charmander who he admittedly felt a bit guilty for forcing him to become a Charmander again.
"Char Man-Dar!" 'Someone answer me before I Flamethrower your face...cough, ah, my Flamethrower! It's gone!'

"Pikachu" 'Er, calm down and let me explain.'

Pikachu sweat-dropped as he noticed the now visibly moping Charmander. 'Not what I had in mind,' Pikachu thought to himself.

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Later at night, location unknown

"Vivillon, stun spore!" Ash yelled...or at least the Ash who was not pale blue.

No, our familiar Ash, the guy who had been sent back in time, was like a ghost, an aura blue ghost alongside similarly colored 'ghosts' of Pikachu, Butterfree, Pidgeotto, Aipom, Charmander (who was still upset over being puny) and Bulbasaur, were invisibly observing Kalos Ash commanding a purplish Vivillon paralyze a large rabbit Pokémon that vaguely resembled Bunnelby the same way that Bulbasaur resembled Ivysaur.

"This is new," Ash didn't recall this battle. Did he catch a Vivillon? Was he just having a wild one obey him in that, perhaps odd way he could get wild Pokémon to listen to him? What was the context of this battle?

The scene eventually shifted to a battle between Froakie and some sort of feline-ish Pokémon that sort of resembled an Espeon or something in that family. Froakie struck the creature with a water pulse, which seemed to do good damage to.

The Pokémon's trainer, an older teenager whose shirt exposed a lot of her midriff, reacted to this with the following order:

"Sylveon, use Attract!"

"Froakie, dodge it!" Ghost Ash shouted, though as he found out then it did nothing at all as the heart flew and surrounded his poor water frog Pokémon...

The scene shifted again, now showing Bonnie playing with her Dedenne and a ...gray furry cat Pokémon he had never seen, in a room filled with children's toys that wouldn't be that out of place in Molly Hale's room.

Well, when it wasn't filled with crystals and dream Entei's anyway.

Charmander absently shivered as Ash thought about that 'Entei', feeling even punier than he already did.

Cuter and more pleasant than seeing Froakie loose, but quickly changed to a battle between Froakie and a larger frog Pokémon that, similarly to the earlier Bunnelby-esque probable evolution, was too similar in appearance to Froakie to be coincidental.

They were clashing with Water Pulses and bubble based attacks.

"Char" 'Ninja frogs? I could have sworn it was ninja turtles,' Charmander absently noted.

"'Pom?" 'Ninja Turtles? Torkoal would make a horrible ninja,' Aipom pointed out. It was hard to be a ninja if you kept releasing smoke from your body. Plus, it was hard to get fire proof Hiates.
"Pika Chu-Chu." 'Ninja Frogs...sounds like something out of a fighting game.'

From Ninja frogs the scenes changed to a scene of a tower of electronic equipment, with a hooded lady stroking an off looking Pikachu. Ash and, oddly Meowth, were glaring at her.

Pikachu then again began to attack the two of them, electrocuting Ash while a similarly off looking Team Rocket, Serena, Clemont and Bonnie were just staring at him.

"Pikachu, why are you trying to electrocute me?" Ash had to ask as his mouse looked just as confused about it as Ash was.

The confusion didn't get any better when one of Clemont's robots, a wheeled Pikachu, burst into the room and flew into a large squid like Pokémon which apparently caused Pikachu to stop trying to fry him.

The scene finally shifted to something at least they all were familiar with, with no ninjas, hypno-squids or heart shooting new Eeveelutions.

A Gym battle, with Froakie running around an Onix with ample double team support.

Huh, so Froakie learned Double team? Neat.

"Hmmm, so the next Kalos gym was a Rock-type gym then," Ash noted the typing as Bulbasaur looked sulky.

"Bulba!" 'Why do you never encounter Rock type gyms when I'm in your party?'

"Karma," Ash answered.

The battle continued for a while, until Froakie water pulsed Onix in the face and knocked it to the ground, defeated. However, as the gym leader returned Onix and prepared to toss his next Pokémon, all of time froze up, startling the watching group as they rapidly looked from left to right, trying to figure out what was going on.

"Foolish boy, do you really think that just by leaving a timeline that you're not still tied to it, destroyed or not? The actions of your old future are still relevant you know, no matter where you find yourself in the context of space time."

A deep voice reverberated through the battlefield of the rock type gym, causing the non-ghostly images of Ash, Serena, Froakie, Clemont, Bonnie and the gym leader to pixelate.

The pixels began to swirl around like a vortex of primordial darkness, rising up into a vague shape that slowly began to take on a solid form.

First to become defined was a serpentine body that Ash and Pikachu recognized from their encounters with Giratina in its origin form.

Next began to form itself up were a pair of familiar arms with large pearls in the center, and finally began to form a head...a familiar long necked shape...

Ash, Aipom and Pikachu, who were familiar enough with where the 'pieces' of this creature came from, stepped back in horror, as the other Pokémon just looked at in a different flavor of horror.

As the creature began to become more refined, Ash began to notice some...unnerving details about this creature.
The Giratina 'part' of its body had its colors reversed; with black replacing gray and gray replacing black, while its red stripes now were a deep purple. The Palkia arms had their pinkish color replaced with a similar evil looking purple, with the pearls blood red and the gray parts of them black. The Dialga head was now a darker blue, verging on black, with the formerly light blue power lines, or whatever they were, on Dialga were now a reddish orange.

In the end, whatever this thing was...it was a horrible monster. Then, the being spoke.

"Greetings Ash Ketchum, I am MissingNo, I also go by the term Devil, Satan, the Domed One, Anti-Helix and Atropius. It's time we have a talk about this and the previous universe."

Charmander of course did the 'logical' thing to do when face to face with a demonic entity, and used Ember on it.

MissingNo just swatted the flames away.

As Charmander sulked in a corner, MissingNo spoke again.

"Is that such a way to talk to the only other entity to even realize there was a world before this one? I'm offended."

Ash looked surprised to hear that, and MissingNo continued.

"I was created from what remained of your world, and so I possess knowledge even Arceus himself lacks. For example, did you know that your destiny is still tied to the path it was going down should reality not blown up. Those tied to you in that world's future are still in fact tied to you. If you were to, say, have captured a Hawlucha, you would in fact encounter the very same Hawlucha in this world. Interesting, no?"

"Sure," Ash muttered, though he had no idea what a Hawlucha was. "Now, I don't claim to be a religious person, but it's my general understanding that Satan doesn't make house calls without a good reason. What do you want?"

"Simple, to cause you misery by hammering at what you're most worried about," MissingNo was upfront about it, "Your friend Brock, and the implications of allowing him to have his dream."

"His dream...His dream!? His parents are dead, how is that his dream!?" Ash shouted in fury as MissingNo laughed.

"Dreams don't come free boy. Ask yourself this, what was Brock's dream in your world? He wanted someone to love, regardless of if he was a Gym Leader, Breeder or Doctor, and I arranged things to allow him the chance to be with a person who would be that, and more. Someone who would take to his siblings with the same amount of affection she gives him, someone strong yet loving. Do you really think that comes free? Despite that old saying about equivalent exchange, I like to think the demise of two absentee parents is quite the bargain for his dream."

"You're talking about people's lives!"

"Lives are such a fragile thing, does it really matter? Plus, as I said earlier, dreams aren't free. In your previous world, you land nearly everyone else lived in near eternal happiness and joy, it was like a children's cartoon or something. Yet no matter what you, or any of your friends did, your dreams were always just above you through a glass ceiling. In this world, everyone is free to strive right through that glass ceiling, in exchange for a price I have had everyone pay. Like Misty for instance."

MissingNo ignored Ash's furious glare as he continued, "Her dreams of becoming the world's best
Water Pokémon trainer can be accomplished in this world, all she had to do was give up something important to her...oh don't look at me like that. I don't play favorites; all your friends have the same deal as Brock; a chance to obtain their dreams in exchange for something important to them."

"Pikachu, Thundershock!"

MissingNo didn't even miss a beat as he teleported out of the line of fire, or thunder in this case, as he continued.

"It really is amazing what happens when you just change one thing in a person's life in exchange for opening the door to their dreams. I mean, I've heard about Butterfree effects, but some really take the cake."

"Aipom, Swift!"

MissingNo merely teleported again and continued, "Like Dawn for instance. As you humans would say; I couldn't have made up the shit that happened to her in exchange for the ability to win the Grand Festival for once if I had tried. Though I have to express disappointment at May's sacrifice. I mean, it was set up for her to be so miserable in her new life, but then Norman had to ruin my fun. Doesn't that suck?"

"Thundershock, Swift, and Ember!"

MissingNo just swatted all three attacks away, further depressing Charmander.

"There are, of course, the little looming sacrifices still to come. Poor Iris and Serena, it's going to be so sad what's going to happen to them. But just think of what they can accomplish with those sacrifices?"

At this point, Ash was angry enough to outright charge at, and punch, MissingNo.

Ash just ran right through MissingNo, apparently forgetting he was pretty much a ghost at the moment.

"Sure, it's a lot to take in, but it's for the best. After all, as you humans say, it's not like Dawn needed an actual childhood or anything. Cilan doesn't need a healthy relationship with his brothers."

MissingNo got real close to Ash now, his face in Ash's as he told him coldly, "And you, Ashy-boy, don't need a loving father. Goodnight, sweet dreams."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I apologize for the delay in chapter. My connection can be very nasty at times, and power outages definitely don't help.

So here's a bit of explanation for how these powers Ash and Misty have work in this new world. The final scene, though, it'll set up very important plot points for the future.

Hope you guys are enjoying it so far, until next time!
First of all, I'd like to apologize for the delay. And no, this ain't an April Fools' joke. I've had connection issues and sometimes I couldn't get the chapter posted. I'll try and make it up for with a couple of sidestories today.

That said, I'm a little sad about how little reception this story is getting. Yeah, I know I'm getting started here, but still, this is a rather well-known story in Spacebattles and Fanfiction.net. Still, I'm not gonna give up. My intention was always to help spread this story, and that's what I plan to do.

Hope you enjoy this chapter.

---

_Cerulean City, a bit into the future_

"Gramps?"

Gary was surprised to see his grandfather enter the Pokémon Center just as he was about to leave.

"Oh good, I was hoping I'd run into you Gary." The old professor grinned as the two sat down.

Gary frowned at the Professor's insinuation about being glad to run into him. He wasn't going to make him wash dishes or perhaps watch that lame and weird show again was he?

It was then that Gary noticed the two boxes in front of his grandfather.

"Oh yes, I see you noticed. Well Gary, you see I need your help with something."

"You need me to deliver a package or something like that?" Gary assumed from the boxes that Oak had on him. The professor just laughed.

"No, no, that won't be necessary. That's why we have the badass mailmen for. No, this my boy...this is the future."

Oak opened one of the boxes, revealing a metallic glove which shined with its reflective steel.

Gary frowned and picked a box up. This wasn't another one of those stupid Doctor Whatshisname show memorabilia that his grandfather had just purchased was it? They seriously didn't need any more of that junk.

"...A little small for a TARDIS, isn't it?" he asked.

Professor Oak let out a hearty laugh at that "No no...far from it. If I had a TARDIS Gary, I'd be studying ancient Pokémon in their natural habitat, as opposed to a laboratory or something...alas I do not. Instead, I have this."

Oak opened one of the boxes, revealing a metallic glove which shined with its reflective steel.

Gary picked it up and examined it for a moment. "Gramps...please don't tell me you finally came out of the baseball closet?"
"Oh no no no...this is no baseball glove Gary. Recall the time I told you about the button scandal?"

Gary thought back for a moment about all the strange things his grandfather had ever talked about (that was a long list) before recalling what that was, guessing, "That 'teleport' button on the first Pokédex that didn't work and instead caused the Magikarp in question to vanish from existence?"

Professor Oak had the look of regret about that incident, and it showed on his face.

"Yes, that scandal nearly ended the Pokédex. I have to wonder if it would have had the Pokémon in question not been a Magikarp on the verge of evolving." Magikarp were considered to be worthless by most people, and their evolved form was considered worse than worthless (read, very dangerous).

Though in some ancient cultures, men were only considered men after raising and or taming a Gyarados. It was one way those ancient people had practiced birth control.

You would be surprised how little a population grew when at least half their young men were vaporized each generation before they could marry.

"Ever since then, I have worked tirelessly on creating a hand held Pokémon teleportation system that would allow trainers to transfer Pokémon between their active party and their place of storage, and these are the fruits of that labor," He gestured to the open and unopened box, "The prototype to the Handheld Omnipowered Pokémon Expediter gloves, or H.O.P.E gloves as I call them."

"...How long did it take you to make that acronym?" Gary sarcastically asked as Oak laughed a bit.

"Longer than you think my boy. These gloves are powered the same way as a Pokédex, by the movement of the one wearing it. They are water proof, acid proof, and can withstand being stepped on by a Snorlax just as the Pokédexes can." The Professor reached in to hold up the glove and explained, "These gloves send a wireless signal to the Pokédex to connect to the same frequency that sends additional captured Pokémon to my lab. By placing a Pokéball in the depression set around your palm, the Pokéball is transported straight to my lab as if you used a regular machine. In addition, the gloves send a wireless update to the Pokédex to enable a new app that sends me a message of which Pokémon in your capture database you want to send over. With it, I believe trainers will be able to circulate through their teams far more efficiently than before."

Gary understood the potential applications immediately, it would be almost like being able to have more than just 6 Pokémon on hand.

He grinned as he put on his glove, finding that it matched the shape of his non-dominate hand perfectly. This was going to all but guarantee his victory and ascension to Pokémon Masterhood...

Then as he thought about it, he got a bit suspicious.

"Wait a minute...why am I testing this thing out? Wouldn't the Pokémon League be all over this for the champions and Elite Four?" Gary, while arrogant, was not so arrogant to think he was better than Cynthia or Eagun (yet).

"I only have made two so far Gary, and I need to figure out the limitations. While I have put in safeguards to prevent the Button Scandal occurring again," from technology he had obtained from Professor Hastings off the radar, "there are still things that I have to watch for before I have this go into the general trainer populace. You and Ash will be serving as the field tests for the H.O.P.E gloves, and in doing so allowing me to spot any flaws in the system. Plus...I don't have hand molds for Cynthia or Alder or any of the elites, while I have hand molds for you two already."

"When did you get a mold of my hand!? Or Ash's for that matter?"
Professor Oak took more amusement than he really should have from not answering that question for the rest of their chat, however he was not through with being plot relevant yet, even after Gary left to go have fun with his new H.O.P.E glove.

"Oh, excuse me Professor Oak, there is a package here for you; to be forwarded to Ash Ketchum," Nurse Joy waved him over later as he wandered around town for a bit, perhaps to the local poetry clubs.

"Oh, there is? Where's it from, Vaniville Town perhaps?" Professor Oak asked curiously. It wasn't impossible that Serena, knowing Ash was on his journey now, would forward any letters through him. Ash had actually told him he had arranged it that way.

"No, it's from Rota."

---

_Back with our hero a bit earlier than the above scene_

Ash woke up, looking around in shock to see...well normalcy.

'It was just a dream...' Ash thought to himself 'It's not possible I really just met a disturbed pixel monster...'

Then, however, Pikachu abruptly popped up from his spot next to Ash's bag, similarly woken up as if he had just suffered a nightmare.

"Pi" 'Man, I just had the strangest dream the seven of us just talked with some demon with a dumb name...’ Pikachu muttered to himself before he noticed Ash's shocked face.

"Chu." 'It...wasn't a dream, was it?'

Ash just shook his head in horror, wishing it had been.

---

_Later...

Ash and his six Pokémon were at the moment, in a six-way conversation about the whole, just got contacted with a devil who decided to rub it in their faces that Ash's friends were going to suffer problems.

Charmander however was not participating. No, everyone's favorite badass in miniature form was currently doing push-ups, attacking trees and in general training obsessively.

"Caw." 'So, I can fly out and deliver a message...' Pidgeotto began before Butterfree interrupted her.

"Free?" 'You can fly all the way to Hoenn, Sinnoh, Unova and Kalos, and back, before the Pokémon League...that Ash took last time in Johto this time? That's not even getting into the idea of any of them believing some random person warning of their doom.'

"Pi Pika." 'Serena knows Ash in this timeline just like the other one did, but with more contact. She could be convinced...though it would take a long time to get to Kalos in the first place.'

Pidgeotto froze up for a moment, before sulking: "Caw..." 'Hey, I'm used to being a Pidgeot. Just be
glad I'm not acting like Chariz...mander over there.'

She pointed with her wing at the fire lizard, who had just cut down a tree with glowing claws.

"Char! Mander Char!" 'Metal Claw!' Charmander boasted as he got a new attack. 'But still. Need. More. Power!' Charmander went back to training somewhat obsessively.

Ash just nodded at Charmander, questioning what was going into his food now that neither Brock nor Cilan were feeding him.

"Bulba." 'If he tries to get me to use my vines as jump ropes, I'm sleep powdering him.'

Ash wasn't sure if that would stop Charmander at this point, but got back on track with the debate on hand.

"Pi Pikachu?" 'Don't you humans have some sort of...instragram thing for contacting people quickly?'

"That's for photos Pikachu. You're thinking of Facebook. Problem is that Serena's mom won't let her get one."

She had ranted about that a lot in their letters.

"...And I can't see any version of Iris with a Facebook page. Plus, how exactly am I supposed to Facebook people I don't know in this timeline, when I have no way of accessing Facebook at all..."

The Pokédex in his pocket beeped.

Ash grabbed the thing nervously, not exactly sure why it just beeped. The fact the thing seemed to do a lot of things he didn't quite understand only made it more unnerving.

But, he opened it anyway.

"Pokédex instant communication array feature initiated. Accessing Facebook Account of Ash Ketchum. Entering in passcodes..."

"Hey, how the hell do you know my passwords!? I never even told mom them!?"

The Pokédex came back with a snarky reply and said, "AshKetchumRocks is not a very hard password to figure out. Account accessed. Ash, you have 13 messages."

Ash just stared at his Facebook timeline; the timeline he distinctly remembered not having befriended Brock on. Or having uploaded any images since he left Pallet. Or had the accomplishment of getting the Boulder Badge reported on...

Ash absently noticed the likes from his mother and Professor Oak on each of his 'new capture' images, or on the gym badge. He also noticed Gary's message on said badge, (Took ya long enough Ashy boy).

"Oh Arceus, this damn thing is posting on my Facebook," Ash found himself oddly horrified.

"I also do Tumblr, Myspace, Instagram, I-Tunes and certain forums," the Pokédex replied as music began playing from itself (I want to be the very best, like no one ever was...). "Now, I believe you wanted to search for some people?"
Ash was starting to wonder if the Amish were as crazy as he had once thought, but he would debate barn raising as a career later.

"Okay...search for May from Petalburg City" Ash told the creepy dex as it began searching.

"Bulbasaur Bul?" 'Aren't you supposed to put in a last name too?'

Ash paled as all his Pokémon bar Pikachu and Charmander (Who was not paying attention) gave him 'are you serious' looks, trying to figure out just how it was possible Ash had never bothered to learn May's last name.

"Since when does anybody actually use their last name?" Ash countered, "other than me of course because let's face it, Ketchum is a cool name."

Bulbasaur mumbled something that he couldn't hear but he definitely heard the word ketchup. All right fine so it was similar to the word ketchup, but it was still a cool name.

"Pi Pika" 'I have to agree with Ash on that one. I never really heard anyone else with a last name. I couldn't tell you Paul's last name, or Brock's, or Misty's...' Pikachu defended his partner in battling. (Why did you mention Paul first?)

"There are approximately 30 accounts based in Petalburg City with the name May applicable to them. Do you have any search parameters to further narrow them down?" the Dex inquired further as Ash thought about it for a moment.

"Can you narrow it down to just Brunettes?"

"Processing...now there are 5 Mays." with a smaller number of them around, the Pokédex was now displaying the profile images for each May.

The third May being the familiar brunette Ash was looking for.

"That's her!" Ash poked May's profile picture, which led to the screen on the Pokédex changing to display May's profile, with a recent posted image of her family (who looked just as Ash remembered them, bar May looking older, which her profile image supported by saying she was thirteen).

Instead of a bandanna, however, May had a similarly colored ribbon, and was wearing a lighter red tank top on as oppose to her regular top. (Her Remake design)

He couldn't help but also that notice that May had certainly grown up a lot…and out in a couple places. He couldn't deny that she was certainly…well attractive, even with the age differences

"Ai?" 'She doesn't look broken,' Aipom pointed out as Ash frowned.

"Well, according to MissingNo, her father did something to prevent it from happening."

"Bulba Saur." 'I hope he did, I definitely hope to meet up with her Venusaur again after all.'

Ash...did not like the tone in Bulbasaur's voice. It made him have flashbacks to Pikachu's comments about Aipom.

Scrolling down her Facebook profile, Ash didn't see any...questionable posts. No signs of depression, sadness, suicidal leanings or anything that could hint at whatever Norman had apparently prevented.
Or, having watched Crime Shows with his mom too much, was Ash simply jumping to conclusions about what could have happened to May (She did have an unnatural fondness of Derek Morgan and Elliot Stabler after all). Perhaps Norman had merely pushed her out of the way of that Tentacool swarm that had caused her problems in the baseline?

Maybe someone else's Facebook would offer clues.

"Pokédex, search for Tracey Sketchit...not sure where he's from, but I think it's the Orange Islands," Ash offered the Pokédex all the relevant information about Tracey that came to mind at the moment.

At his command, the device began to search the infinite potential of the internet.

"Searching, Searching, analyzing Orange Island records...deleting pop up add, Searching...found Tracey Sketchit."

His Facebook page showed that of a black haired trainer in green with a Venonat, Marill and Scyther. He was quite relieved along with Pikachu and Bulbasaur (Charmander still wasn't really paying much attention). He appeared older in this timeline, probably being in his mid-twenties or something if Ash had to guess.

"Tracey Sketchit, freelance Pokémon Watcher and famous artist who has done work with the Pokémon Professor Association, creating the art in their published research journals. He is currently known to be visiting the Great Marsh in Sinnoh," The Pokédex replied as Ash felt relief that Tracey seemed to be more than okay this time around.

Hopefully, the luck was still with him on everyone else.

"Search Dawn from Twinleaf Town," Ash commanded the dex, which began to beep.

"Searching...searching...Error. No matches found for search for anyone named Dawn in Twinleaf town."

Ash, Pikachu and Aipom had shared looks of horror at that reply.

"Searching Twinleaf Town Census records, searching Twinleaf town phone book, searching school records...no Dawn has lived in Twinleaf town since the dawn of the Oak Era, and that Dawn was a blind infant who was eaten by a Garchomp."

Hopefully that wasn't the same Dawn however unlikely.

The Pokédex flashed an old looking photograph of a girl that was definitely not the Dawn Ash knew.

"...T...Try Cilan of Striaton City," Ash stuttered as the Pokédex began searching.

"Error. No matches found for anyone named Cilan in Striaton City. Searching Unovan Census records...Cilan found."

Ash and Pikachu let out a sigh of relief they really should not have let out so quickly.

"...Cilan, along with brothers Cress and Chili, were abducted as children over 10 years ago from Striaton City Children’s Hospital. An Amber Alert is still out on them. Their case has gone cold and this unit has no reason to believe they are not buried somewhere," the Pokédex informed Ash as the relief on Ash's face was replaced by further and further horror.
"Iris...search Iris from Village of Dragons!" Ash was quickly becoming hysterical as the Dex began.

"Village of Dragons searching, searching, records found. Scanning Facebook, Error. No Iris detected. Isolating County location, initiating county census search...Iris located."

Ash and Pikachu seemed to slightly relax, but it was short-lived.

"Court document detected with corresponding Iris on them. Documents classified. Begin hacking documents because I'm awesome like that...hacking successful. Infant designation Iris had a death certificate given after authorities arrested her parents for Infanticide and Child Abandonment after leaving their newly born daughter in the forest to die. Body was never found. Father appears to have left child to die due to either ill desire to have a child and for the belief she was a Bloodliner. He is currently serving life in prison while her mother will be freed in nine years due to strong evidence of coercion and forced assistance by Father in the crime."

The Pokédex was now showing the mug shots which were certainly not particularly flattering.

Bulbasaur, Pidgeotto and Butterfree, who had not met either of the three who pretty much seem to not exist looked at their trainer and his first Pokémon, and saw faces of such horror that they were pretty sure they wouldn't be themselves for a while.

Charmander, who had known Iris, had stopped training when he heard her name be mentioned. He was still resisting his urges to train like crazy out of respect for what he had just heard.

"Search...Clemont and Bonnie, Lumiose City," Ash said in a nearly dead voice.

"Searching...Clemont found." The Pokédex's image display now showed a Facebook page with the grinning face of a fourteen-year old Clemont. A Bonnie who was about three was standing cutely in the background, sipping from a sippy cup, "Clemont, two time winner of the Lumiose City Junior Science Fair. No evidence of murderous family members detected although I could look harder if you wish."

Somehow, that did little to really lift Ash's funk. Then again...how was one supposed to react to finding out all of that? He'd certainly had better days. Right now he was almost wishing some uber-powerful and angry legendary would come along to put him out of his misery.

He collapsed to his knees, emotionally exhausted.

A moment later however, life proved to move on.

The Pokédex, which ended its playing of the most played song in Ash's I-Tunes account, began to hum as it began to access some other recording it had.

"Accessing 100 Emergency recordings, variant Ash. Scanning through records...record 4 found. Begin playback."

Ash only absently looked at the ever surprising device as it began to make the sound of a recording, the same sort you'd hear on an answering machine.

"Hello Ash," the recorded voice of Professor Oak rang from the Pokédex "If you are hearing this message, then this is the first time you are hearing one of the many I have left you. As you may or may not have realized by this point, the Pokédexes have a myriad of special features designed to aid
you in your travels as a trainer, in every perceivable, and quite possibly unperceivable, event. This message may come to you the day after you receive the Pokédex, or it may be first heard when you're hopefully over 22 and pacing like crazy in a hospital's maternity ward or having your hand broken by your pregnant significant other. Perhaps these messages may never have been heard at all, but hey, better safe than sorry."

There was a notable pause and change of tone as the Pokédex changed from one recording to another and Professor Oak developed a much more compassionate and caring voice.

"Ash... life doesn't always want to be your friend. Sometimes it'll feel like life wants to hurt you. However, one cannot give up. Now, I can't even to begin to figure what has caused you so much pain that this speech is being played. Perhaps this speech is playing after a particularly devastating loss. Perhaps this is playing after my funeral, or Arceus forbid your mother's. I can't really say, as future sight is something I do not possess."

"However, you can't let this single moment define you for the rest of your life. No matter how bad things may seem now, there will always be another day. Tomorrow will always come. Giving up won't fix what is wrong Ash, instead keep going with what you can fix or grow past it."

"If you lost a battle, train so you will not lose the next one. If you lost a loved one, live for them and for those who still live. You must always move forward Ash, no one gets anywhere by doing nothing nor by not changing anything. Life, and people, must always move forward, towards the best future possible. Never forget this Ash, never forget."

The recording ended as one particular line rang with him.

If you lost a loved one, live for them and for those who still live.

Ash was normally an upbeat person, so depression wasn't really his thing to begin with. However, this began a slow, but noticeable shift in Ash's facial features from defeat, to determination.

"...Live for those who still live..." Ash's muttered as his gaze moved over to Charmander's still training form (Who had resumed it after giving Iris a moment of silence out of respect for her) as he said this out loud to himself.

An idea then came to mind.

An idea that, to most people, would be suicide. But then again, heroes have this odd habit of beating the odds.

Though in hindsight, like many of the great heroes who improved themselves with chakra mass cloning, Ash did have an advantage.

"Alright guys, we have to become stronger. Stronger to ensure that what friends we have left, will not be harmed in any way. For that, we all have to train. You, and I. Who's with me!?" he grinned in a familiar way.

Though his Pokémon noticed his determined grin, he did not let them see his eyes. He could certainly say it and force himself to at least appear confident, but inside he was still a raging bundle of emotions that he was still trying to tamp down. He'd lost people he cared about, his Pokémon had too and they were probably suffering just as much as him, but he knew he needed to at least pretend to be strong…for their sake.

He could not let himself dwell on dark thoughts, yet despite his forced enthusiasm, his Pokémon merely and silently exchanged looks and agreed.
The only one who seemed particularly in the mood for it however was Charmander, who gave a hearty cheer of agreement after briefly stopping to listen to Ash, before going back to what he was doing.

Later on…

"Charmander, use Metal Claw on me!"

Misty, who had been bathing/thinking/fishing with no success for longer than Ash had been awake, just dropped her wash kit in shock as she saw Ash order his Charmander to ATTACK him.

She expected gushing blood to spew from his disemboweled stomach, but instead Ash just got knocked back as if he had just been a Pokémon, and then glowed in the same light he had when he had first met him.

"Counter!" Ash shouted as the power of the move was sent right back at Charmander at twice the force, which Charmander blocked with a Dragon Tail that Misty did not recall him having when she went to bed the night before.

"What in the name of all that is good and wet is going through his head?" Misty muttered to herself before she began to draw the breath to scream at him. Had he lost his mind…more so than before at least?

Though before she could, Psyduck (Who had been carrying her tackle box over the top of his head) spoke up.

"Psy." 'It makes sense.'

Misty stared at her favorite (and least favorite, there was only one of him) duck in shock, "No it doesn't, he's having his Pokémon try to kill him!"

"Duck Psy-Duck." 'It's the same idea that you might have with having me practice (and fail) to dodge Staryu's Water Gun. Pokémon train better with partners, it's a well-known fact, that partner just happens to be Ash.'

"But he's not a freakin' Pokémon..."

"Duck." 'If it quacks like a Pokémon and can use Pokémon moves, it's a Pokémon. Plus, is it really all that different from you swimming side by side with Staryu and Starmie to learn to use the Water HM moves?'

Misty tried to formulate a response, found herself unable to, quickly looked up into the sky and, in a greatly unnerved tone of voice replied, "You're making surprising sense..."

"Psy." 'Yes, the end of the world is probably looming. Obviously you should have hoarded some gold and fresh water first.'

"Where the hell would I find gold to freaking hoard?!"

"Duck." 'At the end of a rainbow maybe?' came the snarky reply.

Ash might have heard this if he did not have Butterfree try to catch him while Quick Attacking using String Shot while Bulbasaur was using Vine Whip to trip him.
He was sort of occupied, and would not realize Misty had come back for about a half an hour more.

A few days later…Pokémon Tech

About fifty years ago, a think tank was formed to formulate new strategies to counter the Pokémon Hoards. This group consisted of six of the greatest minds of their time and together they managed to save millions of lives, and managed in part to stop the great Tentacruel attack on Lilycove City and managed to spare Nimbasa City from the great Volcarona Death Swarms by killing 90% of their total population.

However, after Oak's research led to the noticeable, and still ongoing, pacifism of Pokémon, they found themselves less important than they had been previously. Wanting to remain relevant, they established a series of school (Pokémon Tech, with branches in Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, Sinnoh, Unova and Kalos) for growing their theories and spreading their beliefs to the next generation.

This think tank was named after the first initial of each of these six wise men, and so since Smogon had existed.

He had thought he had joined the group for the right reasons, to ensure that the next generation of the world's brightest and most talented were prepared to handle the Pokémon Leagues and from there, the world at large.

He had raised many Pokémon, their move sets just as calculated to balance as the great theories stated they should be. They were fed the right food, trained in just the calculated intensities, and he had passed these to his students.

Said students, who were easily the brightest and best class he had taught in his years, students who should easily be well and beyond a regular trainer with two, maybe even three badges, were being overwhelmed by what should be a pair of rookie trainers that had been tricked into the school by the off the books, but still tolerated and encouraged tradition of Tech students tricking random trainers who were passing by into the school to be beaten by the students to show off their superiority and make non tech students look like laughing stocks.

Instead, he was baring witness to a Pikachu, Pidgeotto, Butterfree, Aipom, Bulbasaur, Charmander, Staryu, Starmie, Psyduck and Wingull pretty much demolish all his students.

"As I told you earlier, there is simply more to battling than knowledge. There are infinite dimensions of battle," The man who had come to see him commented idly as he too watched the massacre commence.

"I didn't believe you, and probably wouldn't have come to change my mind if I wasn't baring witness to all this," the teacher observed and then frowned.

"Make no mistake, I can see you taught them all well. For what limited dimensions they work in, your students battle well. Their opponents just battle better, and considering that I happen to have heard from a reliable source's reliable source that the boy with the hat is a Pokédex wielder chosen by Oak himself and the rave review I got of his first gym battle, I wouldn't be surprised I am tracking him down in a few years. Maybe even the girl too, though I feel she is not the kind of trainer who'd be interested in my operation."

"Your operation I take it, is that little group you're setting up?"
"Yes," the man replied with pride. "I want to expand the Battle Frontier beyond what any mere tournament can. Something for trainers to strive for just as strongly as they may for the Elite Four or Champions, if not even stronger then both of them. A place for the best of all the fields of battle recognized, and unrecognized, by the world, to battle with the best of the best and thus continue to strive to become the better best of the best by mastering their strong points and learning from their weak points. I already have a Star Ace of the Spectacle Battle style of the professional leagues, a Maven of the Wilderness who is a sage of the Natural Battle, a Queen of Fortune who is the strongest of the All Force style sadly more common to underground battling, though she's actually nice if you get to know her, a Tycoon whose ability to connect to the unlikeliest of beings via Passion Battling is unmatched and a King of the Ancient World who is one of the earliest pioneers in the Legendary Battles, though it is a very small field. I want to expand this group even further, and I want you to represent the Smogon Strategy Battle style. So, what do you say?"

"I heard they get titles, is that true?"

The portly man in the blue shirt dotted white flowers, and the pair of shades in the dark, just grinned at that question and answered simply, "Of course."

The teacher flashed a grin, "Very well then. Noland, the School Teac...no, the Factory Head, will join this Battle Frontier of yours"

"A Battle Factory? Well, I suppose I already have a Pike and Pyramid, so who am I to ask questions?"

_A few hours later…_

The four-star chefs of Pokémon Tech Kanto wept as the victorious trainers choice of reward (which was normally a full scholarship to Pokémon Tech), was replaced with an all you can eat buffet of the school's exquisite dining for them and their Pokémon.

The girl alone had eaten three Castelia Steaks and had just found the Pastrami!

"You know, the rich really do have good food," The boy commented as another rack of ribs seemed to vanish from the face of the earth.

His Pikachu, who had just downed his fourth ketchup bottle like a well-trained sailor, nodded its head and continued to swallow his condiments like it was a bottomless pit.

_Several days later…_

Misty had to grin at the site of the Nugget Bridge, the northern entrance to Cerulean City, covered in construction equipment, which was quite visible from the nice little stretch of wildflowers that ran parallel to the road.

Someone had broken the thing, and thanks to them there was no way that Ash could someone find his way into that city.

She was safe...very, very safe. She'd never have to see them again.
With a smile, her gaze turned to Ash, and there she felt many of the same emotions she normally did. Confusion as to why she felt like she knew him with the same instinctual familiarity of someone you traveled at least three regions with on foot.

Shock at how quickly he seemed to understand the ins and outs of battling for such a rookie trainer.

A somewhat...interesting feeling about his kindness, looks, and determination that Psyduck had been continuously reminded not to discuss.

Though recently, she had noticed him take to a certain level of urgency and drive she was not familiar with. He was training with his Pokémon, which too many would simply look as if he was striving to use his recently discovered status as a bloodliner to the fullest effect.

However, there was something off about this determination, something extremely disconcerting. For all that Ash seemed to want to improve himself, there seemed to be an equal amount of drive to distract him, almost.

As if he dove into his training, to try and not dwell on something.

Could it in fact being a bloodliner was what he was trying to distract himself from, though the idea of using his bloodliner attributes to distract himself from being a bloodliner was sort of hypocritical.

That couldn't be it...what else could it be?

Misty was so deep in her thoughts about Ash's odd behavior, that she didn't see the large flower she was walking towards before it was too late.

At that same moment Misty was dwelling on such thoughts, Ash wasn't in the mood to really think much.

After a decently long training session, Ash and all six of his Pokémon found themselves lying against a log, taking a breather.

Ash had just finished taking a gulp from his canteen, which he passed along to Pikachu.

As the mouse attempted to get the large canteen lifted over his head, Ash closed his eyes for a moment...before he heard his canteen drop.

Opening his eyes quickly, he saw Pikachu dash off in the direction that Misty had taken a walk.

Ash ran over to where Pikachu had darted off in such a rush, quickly followed by the rest of his Pokémon, and found a shocking sight.

Misty, covered in purple and yellow powder, lay on the ground in shock, while the large red head of a Vileplume seemed to run off in the distance.

His Pokédex decided to use that as another impromptu info dump he didn't want.

"Vileplume, the Flower Pokémon. Vileplume's pollen is incredibly toxic to non-Grass Pokémon, and comes in three distinct colors. The green pollen will cause the afflicted to fall asleep for a varied length of time. The yellow pollen will cause a person's nervous system to seize up and behave erratically. The purple pollen will cause a person's tissues to dissolve, starting from the mouth to the respiratory organs. Both the latter are fatal to humans and Pokémon alike. Humans are more affected by these pollens than Pokémon however, due to a
lack of Pokémon specific antibodies. Thankfully, this is simply a defense mechanism, not deliberate attacks on the part of the Vileplume, and the antidotes to all these poisons are readily available at all hospitals.”

Except he didn't have those antidotes on him, he realized with horror as he kneeled beside her.

"No..." Ash said to himself, "I can't lose you too..."

First Dawn, Cilan and Iris...Misty couldn't be next. She just couldn't...

"Bulba..." *This is bad, we need to get her to a hospital as quickly as possible!* Bulbasaur commented as Aipom hopped up in agitation.

"Ai-Aipom!?" *But the closest hospital would be in Cerulean City, which she said she is not to go anywhere near under any circumstance!*

"Caw," *Well, I think this might be an exception, with her life at risk!* Pidgeotto pointed out, wishing she could just fly her there (But that didn't work if the bird was too small. You couldn't take a Pidgey from Pallet Town to Lavender Town via the sky, no matter how hard you tried. It just didn't work).

Ash seemed to follow Pidgeotto's train of thought over Aipom's.

Picking Misty up, ignoring the pollen still on her (Which went inert quickly enough that it was safe to touch after about thirty seconds exposure to air, but Ash really wasn't thinking about that at a time like this), Ash began to walk towards the nearby construction sight, before he realized how dangerous trying to get a critical girl through an active construction site would be.

Even if the workmen helped, that was a lot of metal to dodge in such little time.

And just when things couldn't get any worse, a form began to rise from the depths of the nearby river, a form that embodied fear and terror. Said force then approached Ash, with an evil look on his face even the shades couldn't hide.

"Squirtle," The turtle declared that roughly translated to *'Human! I shall rip you apart limb by limb and dance on your entrails! The great rampage of the last of the Squirtle Squad begins now, with your death!'*
North of Cerulean City, where we left off last chapter

Squirtle's one turtle war on all of humanity ended just as it was declared as Bulbasaur grabbed him with his vines, yanked him over to Ash (who was still cradling Misty) and made contact with him.

By contact, this referred to Squirtle's tail whacking Ash in the back of the head.

Ash didn't even really react to it as Squirtle froze up as he regained his memories and began rapidly freaking out as he realized he was missing something.

"Squirtle Squirt!?" 'What the...where am I? This isn't the Squirtle Squad, my shades are tinted the wrong color on the inside, I have the oddest desire to way waste to surface dwellers, and when did Ash and Misty go through puberty!?" He then noticed Charmander. "Squirtle Squir?" 'Oh, Charizard had a kid, man that makes me feel old." There was an awkward pause as Squirtle tried to figure out what to say next. "How are you sparky, I'm one of your pops’ buds. You can call me Uncle Squirtle.'

Said Charmander promptly flung himself into the ground and began beating the ground while wailing in frustration.

"Tle?" 'Is he alright in the head?'

"Pi" 'That's Charizard,' Pikachu deadpanned. 'To make a long story short, time and space broke and we got sent back in time to try and prevent it from doing so again, but in doing so the timeline was altered randomly. Contact with Ash can restore us to full memories, and gave Misty some of hers back.'

"Squirtle?" 'Huh? Well, that explains why Butterfree and Pidgeotto are suddenly here.' The two of them just stared at him for somehow not noticing them earlier. 'I have no clue who the purple monkey is though.'

"Aipom." 'Not sure we ever did meet. I'm Aipom, formerly Ambipom. I was caught by Ash during the Kanto Grand Festival shortly before Ash defeated Brandon, worked with him before being traded to Dawn in Sinnoh, then I went into Ping Pong.'

Squirtle cocked a non-existent eye brow at that one "Tle." 'You're gone for a few adventures and you miss a lot it seems. Guess that's what happens when you don't keep an eye on what's going on. Well, as long as I am the most badass water starter he ever had, I'll be cool with whatever's happened since. Well, maybe not reality going kaboom, but other than that I am cool.'

Pikachu resisted the urge to mention Froakie, who could possibly dethrone Squirtle for that title had reality not blown up. That meeting would be reserved for another time, probably Kalos.

Ash then seemed to finally truly register Squirtle being there, and something seemed to rapidly flash through his eyes, like an idea. "Squirtle, I need you to use Surf and..."

Squirtle frowned "Squirtle." 'Ash, I don't know if you understand how surfing works, but you need to have a large enough water Pokémon to carry you, or hold onto them. With how Misty is right now, carry is the only solution, and you'd need something a lot bigger than me to do that. You'd need something like Lapras to do that...'

Ash's eyes seemed to flush away all hope from them faster than a high end toilet.
"...Hell, I think the only Pokémon large enough to pull that off around here is a Gyarados, and there is no way you could expect to..." Squirtle stopped talking as Ash's eyes refilled with determination. 'Oh dammit, I should have stopped talking.'

"Gyarados, the Atrocious Pokémon. Gyarados are vicious creatures that have caused the end of entire civilizations in only a single day," the Pokédex implored as Ash began to approaching the way.

"Gyarados, the Atrocious Pokémon. Gyarados are easily provoked and were the greatest threat to ancient mariners in all recorded histories. Their danger led to the great Kalosian Gyarados cullings and Magikarp poisonings that all but wiped out the species population there." Ash still was getting close to the water.

"Gyarados, the Atrocious Pokémon. Gyarados are a predatory species easily capable of eating humans. They are attracted to splashing water on the edge of the..." Ash promptly reached the water's edge and began splashing it with his foot. "...Screw it, you're going to die now moron. Please remove me from your pocket before I have to be dissolved by stomach acid."

Bulbasaur exchanged a look with Pikachu, which Pikachu responded with a firm head shake that basically said not to save the Pokédex and thus give the impression they were not behind Ash on his little idea that was more than a bit dangerous.

Ash unceremoniously removed the Pokédex from his pocket and threw it against the pebble lined shore (OW!), before staring out into the water. "I refuse...to lose anyone else," Ash quietly, but audibly, said to himself. "Even if it's too late to save Dawn, Cilan and Iris, I will not allow any of my other friends to be lost under my watch. I don't care what I have to do to save them, I'll do whatever it takes." The water in front of Ash began to ripple, as if something was rising to the surface rapidly.

"Even if that means, I have to make this Gyarados listen after defeating it myself."

Ash absently noticed Pikachu dart over to his side just as he finished that line.

"Pi. 'No...not by yourself...'"

They were joined, first by Bulbasaur and Charmander, then by the rest of his Pokémon, and Squirtle (who was still technically a free agent and had no obligation to actually listen to Ash), staring at the bubbling surface of the way.

"Pi/Bul/Char/Squir/Free/Ai/Caw!" 'But with us!'

"You're all going to die, and I'm going to be recycled into a I-Pad," the Pokédex somehow managed to snort as the great form of Gyarados rose up from the water, a great blue and white serpent creature roaring loudly into the heavens with the yowl that had heralded five of the world's ten great exoduses.

The great beast towered over all eight of them, but they each stared right back, ready to strike back.

Ash and Pidgeotto began to glow white, Pikachu's cheeks began to spark, Butterfree's wings began to sparkle with powder, Aipom's tail glowed bright orange, vines slipped out of Bulbasaur's bulb, Charmander's claws grew into metallic constructs and Squirtle breathed in deeply, channeling the great reserves of water that existed within him.
Gyarados roared once again, before its gaze moved further along to the body of Misty, and its roars changed.

What once was threatening, now sounded more shocked. This was notable enough that Ash's Pokémon and Ash himself stopped charging for battle.

"Gyara!"

Ash frowned before turning to Squirtle. "Hey buddy...what's it saying?"

Ash had found that his powers had a notable flaw to them when it came to understanding Pokémon. He could only understand Pokémon who he had a connection with.

That meant his Pokémon, and maybe some of his friend's if he tried (though considering he didn't trust Psyduck not to spurt out he was from the future to Misty and cause her to freak out or something, he had yet to test this theory), but definitely not wild Pokémon.

So he still needed his Pokémon to translate for him, akin to how Meowth translated for Team Rocket.

(Speaking of, where were they? He hadn't seen them in a while.)

"Squirt? 'He's basically freaking out that his friend is hurt.'"

It took Ash a few seconds to realize that the Gyarados probably meant Misty.

It took Ash another few seconds to make a guess from said thought.

"Hey Pikachu...Misty had a Gyarados, right? You think this is..."

Pikachu simply shrugged in response to Ash's question "Chu?" 'Probably...'

With that information in mind, Ash turned to face Gyarados, glad that Pokémon could understand human language even though most humans could not understand them, and began to speak.

"Gyarados, my name is Ash Ketchum, and I am Misty's friend." The Gyarados stopped roaring and, probably, planning to smite a town or two if Misty died. "Misty isn't well, and she needs medical attention as soon as possible. The only way I can get her the help she needs in time to save her is by crossing this stretch of water, and your kind is the only Water-type around that's large enough to help her. Please Gyarados, you're the only one who can save her. I need your help...Misty needs your help." Ash stared into Gyarados' eyes to show he was sincere and truly cared for Misty's life.

Gyarados roared into the sky, before its massive tail was swung, right into the shallows like a waiting pontoon boat.

"Squirt." 'He said yes.'

Ash grinned widely, even if that probably did not need translation, before he back peddled over to where Misty was laying on the ground, before picking her up and turning back to Gyarados, who roared in urgency.

"I'll save you Misty..." Ash quietly told himself before he went over and climbed on top the great serpent of the sea. With an audible hop and flap he was joined by his Pokémon, with Bulbasaur using his vines to grab the Pokédex (Let me go you symbiotic organism!) before they forgot it.

They didn't have time to get their sleeping bags, food and other materials, they would just have to
leave it and come back for it later.

Hopefully no one would just swipe it, and by no one he probably meant Team Rocket considering they were apparently 'stalking' him.

Were they just watching him now?

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_Meanwhile a small town a bit away from Ash and Misty_

"Ekans!"

"Koffing!"

Both Poison-type Pokémon possessed by Team Rocket were glaring at the store clerks currently pressed against the wall as the trio, with large burlap sacks in each hand, proceeded to plunder a local supermarket for all the food and essentials the trio needed to continue their observations of the target Ash Ketchum.

They had left early that morning, aware that they probably could not away with robbing such a store after it opened, and confident that the boy would not do anything interesting while they were gone.

He seemed content to train himself with his Pokémon for now, so he would probably continue to be disturbingly into his training while they went off and made sure they would be able to survive the wilderness as well.

Of course, they were shocked to find out that the kid was some sort of bloodliner. They had always wondered why the Boss wanted them to watch him, originally assuming he was the kid of a 'business' rival or something (or perhaps the kid of one of the boss's top henchmen who they were supposed to be pretend enemies to but actually be guardian angels to, it was too hard to say), but if he was one of them...

Did the Boss want to recruit him as a hit man? Was he starting his own bloodliner army? Or did he simply want to arrange for him to die in a way that furthers the anti-bloodliner wave?

Giovanni's reply to them asking this question the other day was short and to the point. "Talk about that to anyone but me, and your lives are forfeit".

So the point of their job was still a mystery to them, but a mystery they would have to consider after they resupplied on crackers and deodorant.

As to why they were still in the process of robbing stores: this was actually their third target. James had called off the first target because the owner was putting two of his children through university and had a third and fourth child approaching that time in their life, while Jessie had refused to go after the second target when she saw that the owner was the main supplier to a local orphanage.

But the owners of the third super market they scouted out had no traits that prevented the trio from wanting to rob them. No college debt, no heart-warming orphans, just an unmarried man of the age of 36 with no wife, no kids and whose first reaction to seeing Meowth scouting around the back of his store was to try and kick him.

So, no mercy for him or his minimum wage lackeys.
"..Pringles, shampoo, the latest issues of National Pokégraphic, a map and all their various communication devices have been broken, that's everything," James called as he read off what they were stealing from a grocery list, as if he was actually going to pay for what they were stealing or breaking.

"You'll never get away with this!" the owner yelled, his back still to them as Jessie scoffed.

"How cliché can you get? You could at least sound original when us bad guys rob you. Plus, if people could stop Team Rocket they would have done so twenty, forty, how many ever odd years ago."

With that snarkiness, the trio proceeded to skip out, only returning Koffing and Ekans just as they left, burlap sacks over all three of their shoulders as they went back to their stalking target.

The kid couldn't have gotten up to anything that crazy in such a short time, after all.

---

On the water

"Char!" 'I don't fear you water! I soared above you once, and I will do so again! I will burn you with my inferno, tear you apart with my claws and then dig a hole in your dried up remains just because I can!'

"Bulba" ‘...and I thought Totodile and Gible had issues. Really hope no one else ends up this psychotic over it.’

Ash wasn’t particularly paying attention to Charmander threatening the river and blasting it with Ember, or Bulbasaur being rather exasperated about Charmander’s desire to pick a fight with anything to get himself evolved again.

Ash did make a mental note to use Charmander against Lt. Surge though. Though he idly wondered if he would have a choice in that matter.

Misty was now lying against him, held as to prevent her from drowning, as Ash idly considered returning his Pokémon and properly capturing Squirtle again. While it probably would be a bit counter-productive to their stance of solidarity earlier, the fact was that even with Pidgeotto and Butterfree flying alongside Gyarados and even if Squirtle swam on his own, they were still weight and thus slowing Gyarados down.

However, at the same time they were needed, for as it turned out, to no one’s surprise, that there were other Gyarados in the river, and it was kind of needed to strike them with Swift, Vine Whip and other attacks to make them go away as to keep their Gyarados constantly swimming to the shore, as oppose to wasting time and causing massive property damage fighting them off himself.

Ash didn’t have much time to debate this, however, as Charmander’s blasting of the water gathered attention from a denizen of the deep, who lunged out at him with his full power...

Thankfully it was small and Charmander matched its Vice Grip with his Metal Claw.

It was also familiar to Ash...and to all of the other Pokémon Ash had restored bar Aipom smell wise. Charmander’s eyes widened in recognition of who had jumped out of the river, a familiar cream and red Water-type.
"Char!" 'You!'

"Ki?"

"Krabby, the River Crab Pokémon. Krabby is a small fry Pokémon often consumed in seafood. This one in particular would be offered as a discount or a diet sized meal at any reputable Sushi Place," the Dex snarked.

Ash ignored the Pokédex he had repocketed while on the water, absently waved to Bulbasaur to hold Misty for him to ensure she didn't slip off, and went to grab Krabby, but it dislodged itself off Charmander's and began to fall back into the water as Ash rapidly reached for his Pokéballs.

"Go, Pokéball!" Ash desperately tossed a Pokéball at it, quite aware that if Krabby got away now, he'd be lucky to ever find him again.

It would be bittersweet to save Misty, only to lose one of his oldest Pokémon (even if he didn't use him that often. Perhaps he should make an effort to use him more this time around)

He idly swore he heard a whistling noise from his thrown ball as oppose to the regular noise though.

The ball struck Krabby about a foot from the water's edge, where it promptly sucked up Ash's 7th baseline Pokémon, wiggled once, and promptly let out the sparks of a capture. The ball then began to shimmer and vanish, like the last time Ash had captured a seventh Pokémon while within teleportation range.

(Unova being farther away, this was not the case as it were.)

"Critical Capture recognized. Reporting data to database," the Pokédex beeped out as Ash had a look on confusion.

"Critical Capture?" Yes it was a critical capture, but that sounded more like the thing was naming something.

Perhaps still being annoyed at Ash for summoning a Gyarados in what should have been suicidal idiocy, the Dex didn't respond to Ash's question about what critical capture was.

Route 5 physically, the Dream World Mentally

The fire burned for hours, reducing everything to ashes.

The sound of the very foundations of his whole life, his home, snapping and crumbling were burned into his ears just as the sight of his home was burnt into his eyes for the rest of time. The smell of the smoke as everything he knew was scorched would never leave his nose being forever imprinted in his memory.

He was just glad his partner wasn't seeing this, his recently hatched Pichu being curled up beside him, just as asleep as he had been when Red ran out of the burning house, the two survivors out of its three occupants.

A fire caused by...

"You just had to open your mouth!"
"Everything you touch falls apart!"

"No wonder your father never bothered with you! You're a freak of nature!"

Each voice that rang out, were the voices of his childhood tormentors, again and again as he found himself trapped in his younger body (a pale skinned boy with spiky black hair which couldn't be tamed, with a pair of Z shaped marks just under his brown eyes that went away when he was about twelve in a white shirt with a Pokéball on it).

Why would their hatred ever leave him? He hadn't seen them in years!

Why couldn't he just forget them!?

"Red?! Red?! Wake up!"

Red's eyes snapped open from his sleeping form to see the concerned face of Yellow staring down at him.

"You were squirming and saying things in your sleep," she explained the moment she saw his blazing eyes. Her concern for him was clearly evident in her voice and worry was visible in her eyes.

He shot up and looked away, not wanting to look the girl in her eyes "...It was nothing."

"Liar," Yellow told him. "It was something. You don't squirm like that in your sleep if you're having good dreams, you only do that if you're having nightmares. Like my Uncle Wilton when he had those bad dreams about his time in the war."

Red absently recalled that Yellow had, after the death of her mother, been raised by her granduncle Wilton, who had been an old veteran of the last war, one of the last to finally pass away recently if he recalled correctly. Hence why a ten-year old was running around unsupervised in a world filled with fire breathing, poisonous creatures.

Such behavior might be possible in a few decades if the general move towards a peaceful world on both sides continued, but not at the present time.

"..." Red continued to stay silent as the memories continued to ring in his mind as Yellow glared/looked at him in concern.

Cerulean City

It had been surprisingly uncomplicated once Ash and Gyarados had gotten to Cerulean City's hospital.

Not only was the hospital on the water front, avoiding all those awkward questions of a teenage boy running through town with an unconscious teenage girl, but the guards were all surprisingly calm about a Gyarados appearing behind the place of healing.

Well, actually they had just released a few dozen Voltorb and Magnemite, but once they saw that Ash was riding it, they quickly came to the conclusion that it was not a wild threat to the hospital.

Once they had seen the injured Misty, and Ash told them exactly what happened, they were even more understanding, and quickly rushed her into the ER.
They were so diligent on getting her into the ER as quickly as possible that they didn't even notice Ash use one of Misty's Pokéballs to capture the very Gyarados he had been riding for her, as well as one of his own for Squirtle.

Pokéballs, being registered to the buyer or renter in the case of areas like the Safari Zone, could be used by other people to capture Pokémon for them. It was how parents often obtained starter Pokémon for their children, and was the reason that Brock didn't have any of his Tauros despite helping him catch a few.

Oddly, while Squirtle had teleported to Professor Oak just like Krabby had, Gyarados' Pokéball had shrunk and sealed itself, sort of like what happened when he captured more than six Pokémon back in Unova.

"In case you are not aware, you are the minority, the 1% kind. Most trainers do not have a wonderful device such as myself to teleport their Pokéballs, and upon exceeding their limit the Pokéball locks itself, and even yours would do so if you were too far out of range for my capabilities. Most trainers with more than six Pokémon on hand have to rotate their activate Pokémon manually, which involves locking one of the Pokéballs in the party to allow for unlocking a different one," the Pokédex had snidely informed Ash from his pocket as he picked up Gyarados' ball, before placing it into Misty's bag (which he had held on to as they took Misty in).

And thus we find our hero a few hours later, having read every single magazine in the waiting room, surfed the internet with Dexter until he got sick of all the My Little Ponyta fanart he kept seeing everywhere, and was now pacing with Dexter providing Walkman tunes via a pair of headphones that the sympathetic secretary had given him 'because he looked like he needed to pace or he would go crazy trying to sit and wait any more'.

Really, the only other thing Ash could be doing right now (and not seeming like an uncaring jerk to his ailing friend, like going out to get a muffin or training), was be a caring jerk and search through Misty's bag.

He had Pikachu, who was currently asleep in a waiting room chair, resting on it to resist the boredom induced temptation, having returned the rest of his Pokémon because a lizard with a flaming tail tended to make nurses nervous.

"...Don't know what's ahead but it won't get the best of me! There's so much to learn and battles to be won! I've advanced so far but still there's always more to come..."

I-Dexter was currently playing his sixth song on his playlist for perhaps the third time when a doctor entered the waiting room.

"Ash Ketchum," he said gravely as Ash froze in his tracks.

No.

It, it couldn't be...

He got there fast...he was as quick as someone could possibly be without spontaneously developing teleportation.

She couldn't have...

"...I am pleased to inform you that you will not have to fill out any paperwork, as your friend has made it through." His tone quickly shifted to a far more pleasant and cheerful tone.
Ash sighed in immense relief, not even minding the nasty joke the Doctor played on him, or even registering it at the moment.

"She'll be in recovery for a few days, and probably won't wake up until tomorrow," the Doctor continued. "Now, I understand being worried about your friend, but...you might want to do something besides pacing like you're an expectant father." Ash blushed at the implications of that. "We are willing to give you slack about disruptive behavior when you were waiting on your friend's condition, but if you do that all night, we will have to call Officer Jenny."

The doctor's bluntness caused Ash to blush in embarrassment. It wasn't like he could tell him why he was particularly concerned about Misty. If he told her he was worried he'd lose another of his friends to this new timeline, he'd be locked up in the psyche ward.

"Look, I can tell you obviously have a lot of pent up energy, and while I normally would suggest going to the Battle Club to work it out of your system, it is currently closed because of structure damage caused by someone being overzealous with Eruption, Earthquake and Dig. It may not be much, but we do have a Pokémon Gym in this city, a water type specializing one. The gym leaders aren't much, but they're the best place for you to go before you cause a scene."

"Wait sir..." Ash began, trying to figure out how to put it. Misty obviously didn't want to be in this place at all, and while he was pretty sure saving her life was probably an acceptable reason, he still had no idea exactly why.

Considering Misty's tense relationship with her sisters in the old timeline, Ash could only assume they were probably somehow connected to it. So battling them would probably cause problems between him and Misty...

"Doctor's orders. Go vent that energy, or I will be forced to kick you out of this establishment and only let you back in if your friend wakes up, or if you need medical care yourself," the Doctor promptly gave Ash a white eyed, wide stare that sent shivers down his spine and forced compliance. "I'm not letting you back in here before your friend wakes up if you do not either have a gym badge, or a broken limb, by the way, and if you deliberately break your leg, you're becoming an organ donor."

A walk later, Cerulean Gym

"...You know, was it hard for anyone but me to choose between probably incurring in Misty's fury by leaving her in a hospital to go battle a gym in the very place she wanted to avoid, or having your organs taken by a creepy doctor?"

"Chu?" 'Hey, I was asleep the entire conversation Ash. I honestly am as clueless as you are.'

Pikachu tilted his head when he noticed that Ash had Misty's bag hung over his shoulder, containing her Pokéballs, collapsible fishing poles and her various supplies, including spare clothing and toiletries, probably to make sure no one stole anything from it. "Pikachu-Pi Ka?" 'You know, if Misty doesn't want to be here at all, it probably is because of her sisters. If you walk into their gym with her bag, they'd be suspicious.'

Ash shrugged. "This bag doesn't have Misty's name on it. It doesn't have any key chains, notable stains or similar markings to make it identifiable from the average bag. Plus, this bag is a Kasumi Trailblazer Drawstring Bag, which was only released nine months ago. Misty apparently has been
out and about for about a year, so there is no way they would know this is her bag".

Pikachu stopped and stared at the human in shock for knowing that, as Ash blushed.

"Well, I did sort of order my bag online prior to starting my journey Pikachu. I remember seeing it before I ordered my Satoshi Explorer 1 bag after a few days deliberation with my mom over price, size and company reputation."

Pikachu shook his head at the random things Ash seemed to remember at times, timeline original or timeline current. "Chu." 'You could just stuff it out of sight in your bag, just to be safe,' Pikachu pointed out as the two companions reached the door of the familiar looking, round and festive Cerulean Gym.

"Tried, doesn't fit" Ash replied as he opened the doors with a single push.

... "I can't believe this!"

"Totally! They can't threaten us with a shutdown!"

"All the trainers we get are, like, totally tough. Do they really think it's that odd we have a 3% winning percentage?"

Three beautiful, at least externally, young women were sitting at a table in the gym's head office, roughly in their late twenties and looking like they had had, at some point, some level of cosmetic alterations, perhaps before they could even really consent to it on their own. The lead one, who spoke first, had orange hair a lighter shade than a certain...not to named person's, and had it longer. Flanking her to her left and right was a blue-haired and pink-haired girl, respectively. In between them, one bad letter on top of the letters of a thousand fanboys, was an official message from the Pokémon Inspection Agency.

Basically they were saying that if they did not amp up their win percentage soon, by winning at least one of the next three gym battle challenges they were given (with no allowance of denial even if the guy who challenged them was packing a Raikou and Zapdos), their gym would be shut down.

It was so unfair.

They just wanted to run the gym and perform water and beauty shows most of the time. No one ever told them they had to do so much battling for it.

Such things almost made them regret kicking 'it' out. Even if 'she-who-must-not-be-thought-of' was an abomination of nature, she could at least battle and actually seemed to like it. It might have been simpler to lock it in a cage and only release it when challengers approached. Then, once the challenger was driven off, locked back up, maybe with some additional food as an incentive to win.

"A challenger has entered," the automated sensor gym leaders often had installed in their gyms to give warnings of such things rang off, causing the monitor to reveal a teenage male with sort of attractive looks (They'd give him a pity date in between the super stars they preferred. He was just too...run of the mill for their preferences) with dark hair, a Pikachu walking alongside him and dressed in average looking blue clothes.

"Damn, a Pikachu," the blue haired sister, Violet, complained. "Why do trainers always have to
bring Electric or Grass-types in here? Can't we just ban them? I mean, that Surge guy down in Vermillion doesn't allow anti-war activists to battle him, and Erika never lets males challenge her these days."

"Surge was a Unovan soldier, and thus is a violent ass," the eldest, the orange haired Daisy scoffed. "And Erika has that lawsuit from that creeper incident to cause the PIA to be lax with her" it was left unspoken that they also tended to win their battles. "Gym leaders are allowed to ban people or groups from their gyms if they give a specific reason and if passes certain rules, they can't ban Pokémon."

"But not wanting to lose is a reason," the youngest sister, the pink-haired Lily, complained as the challenger monitor started to reveal data.

**Trainer: Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town.**

**Gym Badge Total: 1 (Boulder Badge)**

**Known Pokémon: Pikachu, Butterfree, Pidgeotto, Aipom, Bulbasaur, Charmander, Krabby, Squirtle**

**Allowed Team for battle use: Staryu 2, Starmie 1, Goldeen 2, Seel 1, Shellder 1**

"A Pikachu and a Bulbasaur...that's just overkill!" Violet complained "It's like the guy doesn't want us to keep our gym!"

"We're going to be shut down!" Lily wailed "We're going to have to live in the condo full time!"

"Where are we going to do our water shows and not have to pay rent!?"

"We're going to be hounded by the tabloids...!"

Daisy didn't join in her younger sister's thought processes as she began to think. She had read the Gym Leader's rule book, having been sick in bed and had nothing else to do at the time, except math homework.

She remembered a lot of it, which always did surprise her, including the various rules and regulations involving battling. There was a rule she could swear was the way to get out of this mess with a win, and thus get that PIA Joy off their backs, but it was just on the tip of her tongue...

"...Think if we offer to sleep with him he'll go away?"


"Got it!" The term and what it exactly was finally came to Daisy as her younger sisters looked at her funny.

"So we do seduce him?"

"No." Daisy smirked. "We beat him."

"But he has a Pikachu and a Bulbasaur!?"

"But what we have, is the perfect carrot and the perfect trap?"
"Carrot?"

"Figure of speech Lily, figure of speech."

... 

Ash felt a great sense of unease as he found himself standing in the challenger's end of the gym arena, the very same pool he had battled Misty and later watched her do a ballet in a mermaid costume in the original timeline.

An odd part of him wondered what this Misty would look like in a similar costume now.

The unease did not get any better when he noticed the three sensational sisters, who both seemed more...sensational in appearance in their older age, and somehow more fake as well.

He could have sworn he could smell the Botox from where he stood. Maybe he could, he never checked if a Lucario could smell Botox.

"Welcome to our gym!" Daisy began in a way that was setting off Ash's senses for people being 'false', people being a 'liar' and, strongest of all, his well-honed 'Misty is going to be angry and will punch you when she hears about this' senses. "So, Mr. Ketchum, I assume you want to compete in the Pokémon League?"

"Yes," Ash said with increasing unease. Pikachu, who was back on his shoulder, was starting to feel it as well.

"You know, it is such a bother to have to walk or bike all over the place to compete in the Pokémon League" Daisy continued her train of conversation to...wherever it was going in a conversational tone that greatly worried him "You have to fend off wild Pokémon, deal with ferry delays and probably will get mugged by Team Rocket at least twice."

Ash rolled his eyes at the last one. Team Rocket didn't mug him, he blew them up. Or at least, he used to. They seemed to be less prone to being blasted away these days.

"You know, as a gym leader I can set things up so you don't have to bother." The smile that Daisy was giving off was both alluring, and unnerving at the same time, mostly unnerving from Ash's perspective. "Gym leaders have an, oh so special thing we can do for trainers, one that lets us give any trainer a battle that can directly qualify them for the Pokémon League. I mean, how else would you get a single father with a shred of responsibility going to the league finals? I mean, you can't exactly tug a toddler across Kanto to challenge the gyms."

Ash frowned at what she was saying. It sounded too good to be true.

Plus, Ash didn't want to do that sort of thing. In Ash's opinion, traveling was an important part of being a Pokémon trainer. It let you and your Pokémon grow, far better than if you just stayed put, though he could understand why a single parent might be better off with that probably false method Lily was talking about.

If he never left Pallet Town, or only went to Viridian City and won there in the way that Daisy was describing, he'd have never met almost all of his Pokémon he caught in Kanto, let alone the other regions. He'd have never met any of his friends, bar Misty either, for that matter.

Who would have fought Teams Rocket, Aqua, Magma, Galactic and Plasma if he had never traveled?
"Such a rule does in fact exist," Ash's Pokédex chimed in, "it's a special variant of the gym's badge that would be awarded as a prize for such victory. However...

Daisy quickly spoke up over the 'but' part of the Pokédex's explanation. "See, it's a real thing. If you win, you can go straight to the Pokémon League competition without having to go across the region and getting mugged and bitten. Loose, and you can always try again..."

The way she finished that sentence on a pause made Ash wonder what exactly she had spoken over from Dexter. He was getting a bad feeling about this. The Pokédex even seemed to be giving off a feeling of aggravation for being talked over so no one could hear it.

"I don'..." Ash idly began to reach for his Pokédex, wondering if it might, perhaps, have the rules in text form.

"I down with it' you saying?" the pink haired sister, Violet, finished for him in a way that Ash had definitely not intended as she dashed over to him, and forcefully dragged him to the battlefield before he could read up on the rules, ignoring his complaints about it.

"Well then, let the gym battle begin!"

Behind the two other sisters, quickly joined by three after Ash had been dragged into the battlefield, a scoreboard featuring his and Daisy's faces sprung up, with six Pokéballs apiece under each of them.

"Wait, since when was this a six on six..."

"It's one of the rules to the battle you agreed to" Daisy grin was far more like a predatory Pokémon species, like Sharpedo or Gyarados, than normal (Hey, I didn't agree to anything here!) "Now, let's get this started...go Kingdra!"

Ash and Pikachu proceeded to have dual gobsmacked faces as the Water/Dragon-type final evolution of Horsea appeared in both the pool and the scoreboard.

"Kingdra, the Dragon Pokémon. The first non-Dratini dragon type known to Kanto scholars, Kingdra lives in deep ocean waters in the wild. This Pokémon was declared an eighth badge challenge Pokémon by the Pokémon League and cannot be used in a second badge challenge." The last bit was directed as Daisy in a rare situation of the Pokédex defending Ash as oppose to insulting him.

"Well, under the rules of a Non-Traveling Trainer League Entrance Battle, I am simply obliged to bring my full game. It would be utterly irresponsible of me to test his readiness for the Pokémon League if I used my second badge team" Daisy said in faux innocence as Ash could almost feel the Pokédex glare at her alongside him and Pikachu.

"Chu!" 'Cheater.'

Ash nodded in agreement as he mentally contemplated what to do in this situation...but only one thing came to mind.

Well, there were technically two things he could do, but an Ash would never give up on a battle even if it seemed hopeless. If he did, he would have never fought against Tobias and his Darkrai, or gave it up when it was just Pikachu left to face Latios.

He would try, at least. Even if the battle was unfair, he wasn't sure he could simply back out now.
Plus, he was pretty sure running from an official match had legal consequences of sorts. Ash didn’t want to be banned from the gym system if he could help it, after all.

Of course, he had to win first, and seeing as he was up against a Dragon-type, he might as well start with the Pokémon who just relearned a Dragon move.

"Charmander, I choose you!"

Descending from his thrown Pokéball in a burst of white light, Charmander did not react as his past self might do surrounded by water and confronted by a Kingdra.

No, instead the Fire-type pointed his claws right at the Kingdra, and bellowed dramatically.

"Charmander! I am Charmander, you out of shape fish! I will not be defeated by you! I will defeat you! I will defeat your entire team myself! I will smite you all, and burn you all, and make you regret that you ever evolved! You will be nothing but a footnote as I retake the sky that is rightfully mine!"

Daisy just laughed at him sending out a Fire-type against a Water/Dragon-type. "Well, this will be over quickly. Let's begin, Kingdra use Bubble!"

Breathing in deeply, with a slight wheeze to it that Ash wasn't expecting, Kingdra released a burst of bubbles right at Charmander.

Ash was quick on the counter-attack. "Charmander, block with Ember!"

Breathing in deeply as well, Charmander let loose a fury of sparks right in the path of the bubbles, which were all popped and resulted in a burst of steam covering the field.

"What!?" The sister's all demanded in shock as the Kingdra, unseen, blushed in embarrassment.

"Pi!?" 'Wow, that Kingdra really is out of shape. You know, if the entire team is like that, we might actually win.'

Ash decided to let that pessimistic note slide for the simple realism behind it, and knew, even without mental communication, what Charmander should do now.

He idly noted he was actually casually hearing Charmander and Pikachu without putting deliberate effort into it at the moment. It was probably a good thing.

"Charmander, use Dragon Tail!"

As the steam cleared, Kingdra paled as all none time travelers realized that Charmander had used the steam to hop across the battlefield's platforms to get right behind Kingdra, and swatted him with his glowing tail, sending Kingdra crashing through the wave pool as Charmander regained a central footing on the platforms.

Kingdra steadied itself after skipping across the pool like a stone, but it didn't look that good.

"Alright, that's it! Kingdra, blast it with Water Gun!"

Breathing in with a wheeze once again, Charmander tenses as Kingdra began to charge up a stronger water attack.

Charmander looked ready to meet it head on with his flames once again, but Ash knew better than to expect that Ember could stop a more focused, stronger water attack the same way it had stopped a weak, but spread out attack like Bubble.
"Charmander, dodge it!" Ash commanded as the fire lizard looked annoyed, but complied, though his delay in being annoyed got him nicked by the attack in the shoulder, causing him to skid across the platform, clutching his shoulder where it had been grazed by the attack as Kingdra and Daisy regained confidence.

"Ha! Type or no type, a Charmander could never hope to ever defeat a Kingdra." Ash, Pikachu and Charmander in synch promptly rolled their eyes as several examples of unevolved Pokémon winning against evolved ones flew through their minds. "Let's end this Kingdra, Water Gun!"

As Kingdra began charging once more for an attack, Ash realized that Charmander wouldn't be able to get away from it, and reached for Charmander's ball to return him before it hit.

"Ash, such a move is illegal in this style of battle except for when the opponent's Pokémon is defeated," the Pokédex promptly informed him as Ash resisted the urge to swear.

Stupid battle that they wouldn't tell him the rules of, and it was probably too late anyway.

There was only a single hope now.

"Charmander, use Ember to stop that attack head on!" Charmander grinned as he let loose Ember as the Water Gun flew out of Kingdra.

The two attacks briefly collided, before Ember began to give way towards Charmander. Towards the water behind him. Towards a tail without a blaze. Towards death.

"Come on Charmander...Come on...You can do it, I know you can." Ash gritted his teeth in desperate hope as dropped his and Misty's bags, prepared to make a dash for Charmander to hopefully pull him out of the water quickly enough to save him, not even considering it could possibly be against some hidden rule.

He had come to Cerulean City to save a friend, not to lose another one in the process.

He couldn't let Charmander lose...

He couldn't let Charmander die!

As Ash's concern for his Pokémon's well-being, and his desperate hope for power to come out of nowhere to save Charmander (Spontaneous evolution perhaps. It happened enough times before with his Pokémon), Ash's eyes suddenly lit up in a brown-orange color, his gaze hidden from the sisters sight at the moment.

The same color that Charmander's eyes, though somewhat duller, promptly became as the Water Gun was mere inches from him.

"CHAR!' RAGGHHH!"

From Charmander's maw, the ember flew forth with enhanced intensity, as if a second power had united with Charmander to grant him a boost in strength, not unlike the boon that a Victini could give.
The ember's stopped the advance of the water gun in its tracks, before rapidly reversing the water gun's progress and promptly blasted Kingdra.

"What the hell!?” Daisy swore as the empowered ember sent Kingdra flying into the bleachers, out for the count.

"...K...K...Kingdra is unable to battle, Charmander is the winner!?” Violet stuttered in shock, a shock that was shared by a now normal eyed Ash and Pikachu both.

Charmander just assumed it was all him and simply posed himself like a winner, before Ash recalled him back now that he could per whatever rules he found himself under.

Back in the hospital

Misty's eyes shot wide open as she burst out of the bed she was in, completely lost about what just happened.

She had been taking a walk in a field, and now she was in a hospital?

What had happened?

Looking around, she noticed a rather shocked, brown haired doctor looking at her in surprise, before he quickly blustered into the room.

"Good morning young lady. My name is Doctor Tenzo Yamato of Cerulean City General Hospital. You were rather touch and go for a while from Vileplume poisoning, I'm frankly surprised you're up this quickly. If it wasn't for your friend getting you here on Gyarados back on all things, you wouldn't have made it here at all," he said rather quickly, as if he wasn't expecting anyone to recover that quickly from such a thing.

Then again, bloodliners were the closest things to a missing link between human and Pokémon. Perhaps that meant she had a limited amount of Pokémon originating resistant to disease.

It wasn't something she was going to test of course. She had no desire to have more experience with deadly toxins if she could help it.

"Wait, a Gyarados?!” Misty finally registered what he had said. Ash had, apparently in trying to save her, captured a Gyarados and made it obey him in probably only an hour, at the most.

She didn't even know how to describe what she was feeling over that. Impressed he managed to pull off that sort of crazy scheme? Annoyed he put his life at risk capturing a wild Gyarados then riding it through Gyarados infested waters? Blush at the thought he did that all for her...

Er, maybe not that last one, though without a certain duck around she felt like she could actually think that to herself.

Speaking of her savior that she may or may not throttle for bringing her to Cerulean City (saving her or not)...

"Oh, you're wondering about your friend?” Doctor Yamato asked with a frown "He was causing a minor disturbance waiting for word on your recovery, so we told him to go vent out his pent up worried energy at the local Pokémon gym or get thrown out." The Doctor then noticed the rapid look
of horror that appeared on Misty's face "Oh, are you worried he might lose if he isn't focused? Don't, the gym leaders are pathetic in this town, the boy tamed a Gyarados and has a Pikachu. There is no way he can lose to them. It works out for everyone in the end..."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that to be honest Doctor"

Both Doctor and Patient looked up in shock as they found themselves to be two familiar faces from said patient's past.

Framed by the Don George whose battle club she frequented, the Pokémon Inspection Agent Nurse Joy looked grim as he held up her smart phone, currently on a battle scoreboard app that was commonly given out by Pokémon Gyms and League conferences.

Ash had Charmander and five other Pokémon, currently represented by Pokéballs, currently active, while Daisy had a knocked out Kingdra and 5 other Pokémon remaining.

Above the scoreboard, big red letters were flashing.

Non-Traveling Trainer League Entrance Protocols Activated
Cerulean Arc Part 3: Dominion

Cerulean Gym

"Cloyster, let's go!"

The massive shellfish Pokémon, a large armored creature colored blue-gray with multiple spikes, crashed onto Daisy's side of the field as the Pokédex went to work.

"Cloyster, the Bivalve Pokémon. Cloyster's armor, when in good condition, can withstand most modern armed explosives. When poorly kept, say by a certain trio of former Toddlers with Tiara stars, a simple Focus Punch is enough to shatter it."

"Hey!" Daisy yelled at Ash's pocket where the Pokédex was still making its snide commentary. "No giving him hints, that's cheating"

"Pot, meet kettle. Plus, it is within my job subscription to help my motivated yet somewhat odd trainer with battle advice and witty commentary," the Pokédex continued as Ash shook his head.

Honestly, even when the Pokédex was on his side, it still had to have the last word.

Cloyster though...as best as Ash could recall he had battled only battled this species of Pokémon twice. The first was Pete Pebbleman's during the Indigo League: he had defeated that Cloyster with Kingler's Crab Hammer attack.

The second was Lorelei's Cloyster...which beat Pikachu rather easily.

However, he could probably assume this Cloyster was weaker than either of the ones he'd battled before.

A Water/Ice-type left him with a few options, but the part about Focus Punching it gave Ash an idea.

"Aipom, you're up!"

In a burst of light, his purple monkey Pokémon appeared mid-air, before doing a series of flips finishing by landing dead center of a floating platform on her large gloved tail and posing, displaying her signature toothy grin.

"Ai!" 'Still got it!' She grinned at her contest style entrance as the battle began.

"Alright Cloyster, time for Spike Cannon!" The various protruding spikes on Cloyster began to glow white as Ash made his own call.

"Aipom, counter it with Swift!"

"AIPOM!" The cry didn't need a translation to really articulate any sort of meaning from (it was simply a 'yahh, ragh, ya' sort of sound) as Aipom swung its glowing tail, releasing a mass of glowing golden stars that collided with the dozens of glowing spikes from Cloyster.

Despite starting last, Aipom's attack was faster, and the attacks collided roughly two thirds of the distance from Aipom to Cloyster, creating an explosion that was followed by several swift stars impacting themselves into Cloyster's shell and a couple of the discarded spikes clattering all over the
place, either onto platforms or into the water.

"Alright!/Huh!?" Ash cheered and Daisy gasped in shock.

"Pokémon are living, breathing creatures. It's not like you can simply turn them into computer data and store them for ages and not expect any sort of atrophy in their abilities," Dexter summed it up best. "Even a few days-time traveling between Pokémon regions, perhaps by a method such as a boat, can be enough to atrophy a Pokémon's skill level to some extent if they cannot practice. Why do you think most trainer either do not catch more than six Pokémon, have a dedicated rotation system or have something set up so their Pokémon can keep in shape on their own initiative, such as my creator's expansive estate. How often do you even let that Cloyster out to practice?"

Daisy seethed in anger at the fact she was being called out as a poor trainer by an electronic device resulted in her pointing at the still upright Aipom "Take that monkey down with Water Gun!"

Cloyster let loose the water blast attack from its central dark core, though one that lacked a certain amount of luster and speed.

"Aipom, dodge and use Swift!" Ash called out reflexively

Aipom easily outpaced the attack, launching her star barrage right at Cloyster.

"Use Withdraw to hold out!" Daisy commanded as Cloyster closed itself, as a sheen formed across the shell, raising defensive power.

Ash was going to point out that Withdraw boosted defense instead of special defense (as Swift inflicted damage against that), but he distinctively remembered using similar tactics with Corphish and Torkoal in the same type of situations.

However the effect of Swift impacting into Cloyster was the same as if he had done such a technique with his own Pokémon, surprising Ash.

He thought that trick would be something that had changed in this new timeline?

"The use of Harden and moves similar to it are known for their permanent increase of the defensive power of the Pokémon using it," the Pokédex chimed in on Ash's unspoken question "However, it is able to provide increased defense temporary for any attack hitting it at the time of use".

Ash absently stored that bit of information away for later use, before pointing right at Cloyster "If ranged attacks aren't going to do it, let's get up close. Aipom, get in close and use Power-Up Punch!"

Aipom's tail glowed orange as it charged forward, Ash saw Daisy smirk.

"A physical attack can't harm Cloyster you little rookie! Withdraw even more!"

A second sheen formed across Cloyster as Aipom's attack struck, to no visible effect.

As Daisy grinned, two concurrent memories went through Ash's mind.

The first was his understanding of how Power-Up Punch worked during his training with Aipom.

The second, was his battle with Pete Pebbleman's Cloyster, and how Kingler had taken it down.
"Aipom, keep it up! Use Power-Up Punch, again and again!" Ash shouted as Aipom frowned, but still complied with his command.

"Pom!" "How repetitive. This would lose me a battle in a contest, but I see what you're aiming for!"

With a furious storm of glowing fists, Aipom struck Cloyster again and again as Lily and Violet both laughed from the sidelines.

"Well, that Charmander was certainly a fluke on your part!" Violet laughed "I don't know if you understand this little boy, but you can't simply win by attacking again and again with the same attack. That's like, the first rule of battling."

"No, the first rule of battle is that each trainer fights the other fairly." Ash recalled that question from a test at Professor Oak's camp "You might want to also check about that 'same attack' thing too."

"What!? But you're just using the same move again and again!? It's the same attack!" Lily attempted to sound smart as Ash and Pikachu just grinned.

"Yeah, but it's an attack called 'Power-Up Punch'," Ash emphasized. "Each punch hits harder than the last..."

And with that point, Cloyster's shell cracked.

"Impossible!" Daisy shouted in horror as Ash smirked.

"That's my middle name!"

"...You have no middle name," the Pokédex deadpanned.

"Pikapi..." '.....And what mother would name their kid that?'

Ash's mother didn't have the naming skill of N's family, after all.

Cloyster, not even paying attention to what was said, just fell over in defeat as Aipom hopped back, now panting in exhausting.

"Aipom/Cloyster return!" both Pokémon were returned: one to be used later, the other out of the match as Daisy clutched the second Pokéball in fury.

Why couldn't the boy just be defeated already!?

"Poliwrath, turn this around for me!"

With a crash the large blue frog warrior stood before Ash on one of the wrecked platforms, though the mighty warrior didn't seem to have the same level of...mass as the Poliwrath Tad and Chuck had used against him in the past.

If anything, this battle was making Ash feel better about not always calling on his old Pokémon. Even after not being called on for active duty for a few...er, adventures (Ash still wasn't sure the exact amount of time he had traveled the world), Pokémon like Noctowl and Cyndaquil hadn't looked this bad at all.

If anything, they looked even healthier.

But, self-reassurance aside, he had a battle to win.
"Poliwrath, the Tadpole Pokémon. One of two evolutions for Poliwhirl..."

“It is?” Daisy sounded surprised at hearing that.

"A fit Poliwrath is said to be able to swim across entire oceans. Yours...really shouldn't attempt that."

As Daisy again looked ready to throttle his snarky machine, Ash knew just who he was going to use. He did owe her a gym battle, after all.

"Pidgeotto, it's your turn!"

Daisy grimaced as an actually evolved Pokémon appeared on Ash's side of the field. It was bad enough he was using unevolved ones before...

"Let's win this quickly Poliwrath, use Water Gun!" flexing its muscles, a burst of water flew out of the center of the swirl on its stomach right at Pidgeotto.

"Block it with Gust!" Ash didn't miss a beat as his first flying type easily deflected the water attack with a powerful burst of wind, leaving the two foes staring each other down.

"Alright, try and block this! Poliwrath, use Rock Smash!" with a glowing orange first Poliwrath leapt into the air right at Pidgeotto.

"Let's try that move you were hoping to learn in a real battle, time for an Aerial Ace!"

Pidgeotto vanished just before Poliwrath reached her, she reappearing behind it and slamming right into the center of Poliwrath's spine.

"Poli!" the frog warrior called out as it crashed onto one of the floating platforms as Pidgeotto fluttered above.

"Caw!" 'Okay, new favorite move!' she decided.

Poliwrath managed to get back up as Ash decided to nip this one on the bud.

"Let's do it once more Pidgeotto, Aerial Ace!" Ash called as his fine feathered friend was more than happy to oblige, sweeping downwards and flying close to the water's surface towards Poliwrath.

"Don't think I'm going to let you do that again you little twerp!" Daisy shouted as a trio of thieves felt like someone had just stolen something from them. "Poliwrath, stop Pidgeotto in its tracks with your Bubble!"

Poliwrath breathed in deeply, before releasing a huge wall of bubbles from his chest that formed a foamy wall between it and the oncoming Pidgeotto.

Ash had to admit it was a decent plan. Trap Pidgeotto in bubbles to stop it from moving, then hammer it into the water with a Rock Smash. Once wet, Pidgeotto would be unable to fly and its options will be greatly limited.

Ash himself had used a similar strategy against Mandi's Seadra once upon a time.

However, Aerial Ace had a little trick behind it that a simple agility based charge did not.

Namely, as Daisy and Poliwrath both stared at in horror, the ability to move so fast the Pokémon...
vanished from view, before striking at Poliwrath from a completely different side than the bubble wall.

The blow from the left sent Poliwrath tumbling into the water, which caused Daisy to change her face from horror to a confident smirk.

"I can't believe I didn't think of that before! Poliwrath, go underwater and throw the platform at that damn bird!" Daisy commanded as Ash's side had various looks of horror on their faces.

"What!?" Ash called out in shock.

"...That Poliwrath can use Strength to move large boulders and similar sized things?" The Pokédex sounded surprised.

"Pi?" It took her this long to think about attacking from underwater with a Water-type Pokémon?

"CAW!" A similar yowl for yowl's sake flew from Pidgeotto's beak as a massive gust was formed by the bird Pokémon, slamming right into the oncoming platform and stopping it right in its tracks, before causing it to crash back down into the water below.

The resulting wave managed to throw Poliwrath into the air as Pidgeotto and Ash's eyes returned to normal.

Pikachu frowned at seeing that eye thing again.

"Poliwrath!" Daisy shouted in concern as Ash made the final call.

"Now, end this with Aerial Ace!"

Pidgeotto flew at the flying frog, this time with white streaks surrounding her, before crashing right into its stomach.

A quite knocked out frog fell into the water after that as a comparatively un-winded Pidgeotto (at least compared to Charmander and Aipom, who had taken hits), fluttered back down.

"How...how the hell do you keep doing that!? You're a freakin' rookie!" Daisy demanded as she returned Poliwrath.

"I wouldn't call myself a complete rookie. I did go to a pre-trainer camp, so I assume that counts as some sort of experience," Ash pointed out, seeing as he couldn't say it was his second time doing this.

"No, no, no, no!" Daisy stomped her foot petulantly into the ground a couple of times like a whining brat "You can study all you want, but that doesn't make you a good trainer! You can read every damn book or article you want, that doesn't make you a good trainer!"

Meanwhile in Hoenn, the young son of Norman sneezed as he watched a rerun of Cynthia's last few official battles.

"I have also been traveling and getting practical experience," Ash offered as Daisy glared at him.
"You're doing something, aren't you?! You must have enhanced your Charmander and Pidgeotto before you came here!"

"Objection! This trainer may make idiotic calls, but even he isn't dumb enough to willingly use a Charmander in anything less than a full battle against a water gym!" the Pokédex blared as Ash, Pidgeotto and Pikachu looked absolutely offended at Daisy, and somewhat annoyed at the Pokédex.

"Hey, just because I'm winning after you three put me into a clearly illegal-"

"It's not illegal, merely morally questionable!"

"-match does not mean I'm cheating!" Ash protested, his temper raising at the accusation.

"Plus, Pokésteroids are fast acting and wear off quickly. If my trainer had dosed Pidgeotto, it would have had to occur during the battle between Charmander and Kingdra at the earliest to have any positive effect," The Pokédex chimed in. "He would have also had to dose Charmander the moment he entered the gym."

"Pi..." 'Why am I not surprised it knows the exact times' Pikachu shook his head at the Pokédex and its random assortment of facts.

"This'll prove you're up to no good, go Tentacruel!"

As Daisy reached for her next Pokéball, Ash returned Pidgeotto and once more set out a fresh battler that had some sort of upper hand here.

"You're up, Butterfree!"

And thus the fourth round began with the large blue form of Tentacruel, with two large, red crystalline like structures on its forehead, vs Butterfree.

"Tentacruel, the Jellyfish Pokémon. Tentacruel use poison to immobilize their prey. Tentacruel and its pre-evolved form Tentacool are incredibly common in the waters of Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, Sinnoh and Kalos and are known to react violently to disruptions to their natural habitat. They are thus known as a pest species."

Recalling the first time he ran into them, Ash immediately decided to add that 'adventure' to his list of incidents he had no plan on repeating if possible, along with the St. Anne, Maiden's Peak, Pokémopolis, the king of Pokélantis, getting stuck in that cave during the blizzard, all incidents of cross dressing along with any and all incidents involving his temporary death (of which he had a few), considering he doubted they would be temporary this time. He'd have Pikachu help him brainstorm an official list later.

"Let's win this quickly Tentacruel, use Poison Sting now!" Daisy interrupted his thoughts as the Tentacruel let loose a dozen purple barbs towards Butterfree.

"Block it with Gust!" Ash didn't miss a beat as Butterfree blew the attack away, causing the stingers to fall harmlessly into the water. "Now, use Confusion!"

Butterfree's eyes glowed, as the now perfected attack caused Tentacruel to glow blue and be pulled out of the water, even as it struggled.
"Confusion and Psychic work by immobilizing the foe and slowly incurring damage. While one could simply toss the foe to inflict more damage quickly, the watery environment and the nature of Tentacruel would make that a horribly idiotic move if you did not simply smash it against the wall, which goes against what I have observed of your nature," the Pokédex noted as Ash removed it and frowned.

"That hardly seems fair." It sounded like Confusion would be like a worse Fire Spin or Toxic if he didn't even let Tentacruel free (and allow it to counter attack), or acted against his morality.

"Why do you think Psychic-types were originally banned until people in Kanto discovered more Dark and Ghost-type moves to counter it? They were as broken as Wrap was, it just happens to have enough counters it has since been taken off Kanto's ban list, unlike Wrap. Even now, the Psychic-type is rather broken in its two standard moves. If you don't like restraining Psychic-type moves, I would suggest learning Psybeam in its place," the Pokédex snarked back as Ash thought about it a bit.

He did recall a few Butterfree being able to use the move, including Drew's. If Drew could teach a Butterfree such a move (assuming said Butterfree didn't have it when Drew caught it), Ash certainly could.

But, contestverse Gary aside, he had a Tentacruel to take down.

Meanwhile in the city

"...I'm starting to remember how much this city sucks," Misty complained as the trio of herself, Don George and Inspector Joy found their path once again blocked by construction.

Misty absently recalled shortly before she left this damn city that an election for city mayor was ongoing, with the opponent of the incumbent claiming that the budget for road and sidewalk repair had been utterly plundered in order to balance the budgets. Perhaps he had a point.

Then again, what would Misty know? She never cared for politics.

"This is why I think our city needs a subway, or skytrain, or something. It's a nightmare to get around in!" Don complained as Misty frowned.

"Then how did Ash somehow manage to get to the gym without running into all this construction?" it was a legitimate question.

"Well, Ash always did have the most wondrous luck. If I time to gamble, and if his mother had allowed it, I probably would have made a killing over in Celadon by letting him tag along with me as a child."

The joking voice, one Misty had heard several times recently on video phones in Pokémon centers during Ash's calls back home and George and Joy on several education radio shows and televised news interviews, came from the man who had appeared behind them.

The man with a long box under one arm, the sort of thing one might carry a baseball bat in and a backpack swung over his shoulders.
"So, I'm taking you three are trying to get to the gym too? I'm taking that's where Ash is at the moment," Professor Oak inquired good-naturally as the group frowned.

"Well, yes..."

Professor Oak caught their unease and looked at them in confusion.

"Why the long faces? Ash is in his natural element when it comes to Pokémon battles. It's not like he's taking a written exam or something."

"Unfortunately, he is taking an exam of sorts," Inspector Joy noted. At the Professor's confused look, she held up her smart phone, which currently showed Ash having all six Pokémon left, and Butterfree currently active, vs the Tentacruel the sisters had sent out as their fourth Pokémon with the blaring title of Non-Traveling Trainer Protocols being active still on.

"Wha!" the professor exclaimed in shock. "Why would...Ash has no idea what that even is! The boy may be rash, but there is no way he'd be that crazy!"

"It is possible he was tricked into it, the Cerulean Gym leaders are under a lot of pressure to get at least one win under their belt soon." Joy suggested "Though you have to see he is doing rather well. Even for how pathetic they are, you really would think an eighth badge level team, theoretically at least, would actually be able to defeat at least one Pokémon of a trainer challenging for his second badge."

"You know, what exactly is this Non-Traveling thing anyway?" Misty asked the big question as the Professor frowned, though they took to walking and talking as they continued their search for an unblocked route.

"It's a rule that allows for a trainer who cannot move around a lot to challenge a gym and gain a badge that would allow you to go straight to the Pokémon League if you can defeat the gym leader's best team. You essentially are able to skip the first seven badges and go directly to the qualifying battle, which is why you also see it used a bit by more experienced trainers: it allows them to go into a new league, defeat a gym leader and not have to go and re-escalate their challenge and spend the rest of their time training for the league. Many Kanto trainers who want a change of pace after several Indigo League competitions, for example, will go over to Johto, fight Falkner under this rule, and then focus all their efforts at preparing for a fresh start, sort of speak, at the Silver Conference. It allows for Falkner to test the trainer in question with his best: Pokémon like his Dodrio, Pidgeot and Honchkrow, as oppose to fighting off Kanto trainer's ace Pokémon with a Hoothoot, Pidgey or Pidgeotto like a common Johto rookie," Oak began to lecture as Misty felt a yawn coming along, despite the seriousness, and absently wondered how Ash managed to deal with this guy's lectures all the time.

"However, early on when the rule was set up, there were a lot of trainers who, overestimating their skills, attempted to abuse the rules, only to get constantly getting beaten. It was a near constant was a serious problem, and it really got on the gym leaders last nerves. The Cinnabar gym leader even briefly relocated to a cave to stop every idiot with a fishing rod harassing him. The gym leader union got involved soon after...and the gyms were closed down until a settlement was reached. The rule stayed, but a new condition was put into place to prevent the rules abuse by...I believe the term is noobs," Oak pronounced the last word awkwardly, "who think they can win the league with only a Rattata, top percentage or not".

"With the rules, trainers who challenge a gym with this rule, and lose, are banned from competing in any other gym challenges for an entire year."
It took a few minutes for that to sink in for Misty.

"Wait, what!?"

If Ash lost, he would have to wait an entire year to battle ANY gym leader again?!

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*The gym battle Ash is unknowingly risking his dreams over.*

Tentacruel floated belly up, defeated by a constant (and cheap in Ash's opinion) psychic onslaught as both Pokémon were returned with Ash 4-0 win wise.

"This is getting ridiculous, you should not be doing this well, but it's about time your lucky streak ends. Go, Seaking!"

The larger evolution of Goldeen, the red, white and black Seaking splashed into the water as the Pokédex did its work.

"Seaking, the Goldfish Pokémon and the evolved form of Goldeen. They spawn in rivers, forming nests with their horns. Seaking, despite their name, are not anadromous."

"Ana what?" Ash and the Sensational Sisters asked at the same time (Jinx, you have to give up!)

"That means they do not reproduce in fresh water, but generally live in the sea," the Pokédex replied tersely as Ash picked up his last unused ball.

He'd save Pikachu for last. In theory, that would be their strongest Pokémon after all.

"Bulbasaur, you're up buddy!"

"Bulba!" the grass starter yelled as it landed on a platform with a bump. *Finally, I actually get used in a gym battle with type advantage*.

"Ha, we've got this, use Peck Seaking!" With a glowing horn, the mighty fish burst out of the water and down towards the quadruped Grass-type.

"Grab it with Vine Whip!" Ash was quick on the beat as vines emerged from Bulbasaur's bulb and wrapped around the horn, throwing the momentum off balance and causing Seaking to stop in its tracks.

"Gr..." Daisy snarled under her breath. "Alright, use Supersonic!"

"Throw it back!" Ash quickly responded as the sound waves began to flow out of Seaking's horn, though it was too late as the water type was sent flying and missed its target and failed to cause confusion in Bulbasaur's senses.

With a splash Seaking fell back into the water as Daisy came up with an idea.

"Alright, use Whirlpool!"

With a brief glow to its body, a spiral of water began to form over Seaking's horn, which quickly engulfed the entire field into a massive whirlpool that caused all the platforms, Bulbasaur's included, to descending into a spiraling vortex.
"Bulbasaur!/Pikachu-Pika!" both trainer and starter yelled out as the grass type found himself trapped into the vortex as Daisy grinned.

"Yes, finally something's working! Now Seaking, use Peck!"

From the vortex of water's base, the Fish Pokémon surged from below with a glowing horn right towards Bulbasaur.

"Use Sleep Powder to stop it!" Ash screamed as loud as he could as Bulbasaur more than heard him.

"Bulba!" The burst of powder from Bulbasaur's bulb spread out right into Seaking's path. The fish had no time to avoid it and quickly was lost to sleep as it fell right in front of Bulbasaur on its platform as the whirlpool around them began to die down.

"HEY! Wake up you carp! This is a gym battle, not nap time! You've had months to sleep since your last battle, so wake up!"

All non-sisters around sweat dropped at the implications this was Seaking's first time out in ages.

"Well, let's make this quick then, Bulbasaur use Razor Leaf!"

"Bulba!" A storm of sharp leaves flew from Bulbasaur, striking into Seaking's sides as it continued to sleep.

"Now, Vine Whip!"

"Hey, let it wake up first!"

The vines whipped the sleeping Pokémon to similar ill affect to its nap.

"Now, finish it with Tackle!"

Bulbasaur charged head first into the fish, sending it flying into the air before landing right next to the startled Daisy, KO'd.

The fish was returned without a word, as was Bulbasaur.

"...This cannot be happening. Some rookie...you were supposed to take the damn fall so we could keep this gym." Daisy spoke in a tone of anger that, while sounding like the tone of a pissed off Misty that Ash was familiar with, sounded far more like something that would come out of Hunter J's mouth (read, murderous).

"Well, sorry for not wanting to lose," Ash replied in a sarcastic voice as Daisy continued to suffer a bit of a breakdown.

"It would have all worked out for all of us: we'd keep our gym, and you'd get to resume your gym hunt in a year (Wait, what!?). But you had to be selfish..."

"Pika," Their morality seems a little off, don't you think?" Pikachu sardonically observed

"Now, just lose like you're supposed to! Go, Dewgong!"

The Dewgong that Ash recalled them having in the previous timeline appeared once again, not looking all that different.

As a pet in the last timeline, perhaps it just got more chance for self-exercise than the 5 water types
that came before it. Whatever the reason, there was only one option.

"Let's finish this Pikachu" his starter responded with a nod and so the final battle began.

"Pikachu, let's end this quickly, use Thundershock on the water!"

"Pika-Chu!" With a yowl, Pikachu let loose an electric attack right into the water below. As the yellow tendrils of electricity struck the water, the intense energies quickly struck everything the water touched, leading to an electrocuted water type.

"Dew!" The dual Ice and Water-type cried out in pain as the electricity surged through its long body.

"Freeze the water!" Daisy's furious gaze continued to burn into Ash as she ordered Dewgong to counter with a massive burst of blue energy from its mouth, Ash recognized the move as an Ice Beam.

The beam struck the water's surface in front of Dewgong, which rapidly began to solidify until the entire water's surface was replaced with a layer of ice that insulated Dewgong from the electrified water, and Pikachu's electricity from the water.

Daisy had a dark grin at the sight of Ash's plan being foiled. "Now, Headbutt!"

Using its front flippers, Dewgong propelled itself towards Pikachu like a missile, pointed horn first for a rather nasty attack combination of speed, power and piercing ability.

"Block with Iron Tail!" Ash didn't miss a beat calling out his counter, Pikachu's tail gained metallic properties as he leapt and struck the oncoming Dewgong horn to tail.

The result caused some damage to Dewgong through direct feedback from the strike, and caused Pikachu to roll off the attack and appear behind Dewgong with a skidding motion as more distance was formed between the two.

"Pi." 'Damn, my power is still shot. Should have been far more in my favor strength wise. Feels like that damn Zekrom all over again.'

Ash mentally prepared himself for the additional training sessions Pikachu would want after this, and how Charmander would have a rival for intensity "Let's finish this, Pikachu use Electro Ball!"

As the electricity began to form around Pikachu's tail, Ash and Pikachu both felt a sense of unease. They were still working on re-learning this love: as it didn't have to be a continuous stream like Thunderbolt, it would be easily to relearn, but Pikachu had been having some difficulties setting the move back up, despite remembering how.

"Dewgong, spin around and use Encore!" Daisy commanded as a glowing gold ball of light formed over Dewgong's horn.

Mentally recalling Dawn's battle with Ursula's Plusle and Minun, Ash knew exactly what he had to be worried about. "Dodge it!"

As the golden light blast fired from Dewgong, Pikachu used the ice to slide itself forward after flattening itself to the ground, avoiding the blast of the forced repetition attack just by the hairs on Pikachu's tail tip, leaping back up into the air.

However, the disturbance caused by encore's blast ended up causing the electricity of the proto Electro Ball to shift, going around and eventually to the bottom of Pikachu's tail. From there, it
continued to move forward along Pikachu's and gain mass from Pikachu's additional ambient electrical energies that made up its Static ability.

The result, when Pikachu formed the electric ball attack and fired it at Dewgong, the blast looked somewhat darker than Electro Ball, was heavier and slower, and struck Dewgong right in the center.

But, as a high level Pokémon Dewgong was not so easily defeated by a weakened Pikachu and skidded along the ice, before recovering and standing up, only for the electrical static of paralysis to cover it.

"What!?!" Daisy exclaimed in shock.

"Odd, Electro Ball never did that before..." Ash said what Pikachu was thinking.

"Electro Ball cannot cause paralysis...no you two geniuses seem to have accidentally used Zap Cannon. Somehow, you managed to reverse engineer that move from trying to use Electro Ball...you truly astound me sometimes." The Pokédex supplied them with that knowledge as the two longtime friends exchanged surprised looks.

Huh...well it wouldn't be the first time they had learned a new move during a gym battle.

But, they could think of that later. Zap Cannon always caused paralysis, and now Dewgong wouldn't be able to move as fast, or at all after a while. It was time to strike.

"Pikachu, grab onto Dewgong and use Thundershock!"

Charging forward to the struggling Dewgong, Pikachu jumped and latched itself around Dewgong's neck, before unleashing a constant stream of electricity on Dewgong.

"Gong!"

"Shake it off!" Daisy commanded as Dewgong attempted to do so, but the paralysis was acting up, so it wasn't able to move as the damage continued.

At a few points, the Thundershock thickened, to a point one could almost think it was a Thunderbolt. With more training, it would of course, but it was not an even consistency yet.

"Dewgong, please, use Waterfall and get that thing off of you!" Daisy pleaded as Dewgong yowled in something more than pain, as water began to form around itself for a ramming attack...only for it to collapse in defeat as the attacking electrical stream took its toll.

Pikachu hopped off, as the officially defeated Dewgong lay at its feet.

"Impossible..." Daisy trailed off in horror.

"It can't be..." Violet was at a loss for words.

"We should have just slept with him in exchange for him losing!" Lily pouted out loud as Ash blushed, though he couldn't quite recall what about that made him blush.

Some of his hazy memories did include some sort of 'Sex Ed' at Oak's summer camp after all.

It was weird.

"So...I guess I get the badge, right?" Ash probably should not have asked that question as the sisters looked ready to all but murder him.
However, before they could get to that, the door burst open to the battlefield as a Nurse Joy burst in, a badge in hand.

"Pokémon Inspection Agency! Daisy, Lily and Violet Waterflower, stand down! You're in violation of several codes of conduct, and you just lost the last of your last three chances, you're coming with me!"

An arrest later, outside the Cerulean Gym

"I told you Ash Ketchum, I. Never. Wanted. To. Be. Back. In. This. City. Ever. Again!" Misty emphasized her annoyance at him with one word per step and raising her voice at the same time. By the end of her starting tirade, she was face to face with a now rather nervous and slightly scared Ash, screaming in his face.

"What was I supposed to do, let you die?" Ash replied weakly making Misty grimaced. She knew he'd done what he had to for her own safety even going against her express wishes but that didn't change the fact that she never wanted to set foot in Cerulean City again.

"I'd almost rather die than be here again," she said in a distant voice as her eyes gazed at the gym's front taking in every detail with a look that seemed, almost haunted as if the ghosts of her past floated before her eyes. "I know that you went to the extreme to save my life Ash and I appreciate it, I really do. I can't think of anyone else who'd get a Gyarados to obey them just to save my life. I just want you to know how much I am thankful to you for saving me. However, I have no happy memories of this place now Ash, none whatsoever, as any happy memories that I might've had of this place were ruined by my sisters a long time ago. That badge you won here Ash, the badge that Inspector Joy gave you as they took my sisters away, while you truly did earn it, used to be a great challenge, one that few managed to complete. It was what I had hoped to one day be the master of, it was one of my two dreams in life. But, the name of the Cerulean Gym was tarnished by my sister's laziness and stupidity, now that dream is gone for good." A tear formed in the corner of Misty's eye as the realization that one of her dreams would never come true finally hit her.

"Well, technically it's not gone, more like locked. A gym, once its leaders have been stripped away, can be obtained by another, but the amount of paperwork is shocking. You could travel through the two regions on a Pokémon journey, and still have time to visit the Orange Islands before the paperwork cleared."

The two teenagers turned to the intrigued looking Professor, who was studying something on an I-Pad in one hand while holding some sort of long box under the other, like a baseball bat or something and a backpack, presumably to hold the I-Pad and whatever else he had on him.

"Professor!? What are you doing here?" Ash questioned as the old man smirked.

"Oh, I was actually looking for you Ash, and what a way to find you. Winning a battle that could let you go straight to the Pokémon League itself. Though I must ask, what is it you plan to do from here my boy?"

Ash looked contemplative for a moment as Pikachu chimed in.

"Pika-Pikachu" 'We could just train on top of a mountain until the Indigo League starts up? Charmander might like it.'

Ash shook his head, not catching the impressed look on the professor's face "The thing is, I don't feel
as though this badge really earned me a spot in the Pokémon League. It felt more like a really
challenging second gym battle. I still feel as though I have more to learn and more gyms to challenge.
I mean, I still can right? You can earn more than eight badges in a region, right?"

After all, Gary did win ten in Kanto, and people did compete in individual leagues more than once,
particularly in Indigo if he recalled correctly.

"Most don't, but yes. Once you earn eight badges, you can challenge a Pokémon League in the
region in question as many times as you want, and are still allowed to challenge the other gyms in the
region for official gym matches. Some trainers believe that battling more than eight gyms makes them
more prepared for potential threats in the league, which is arguably true, though normally I feel as
though they just do it because they get big headed and arrogant." Ash and Pikachu mentally
chuckled at the Professor unintentionally dissing Gary. "If you don't feel that you truly earned your
spot as a competitor in the League Ash, then you can still work your way around the gyms of Kanto.
Vermilion, Celadon, Fuchsia, Cinnabar, Viridian, you could easily learn more by going to those
gyms. You wouldn't be the first self-conscious victor of such a battle to want to check their skills out
on the way to the League."

Ash caught that Oak had omitted Saffron. That could mean either there was no Saffron Gym, or that
Sabrina was worse this timeline.

"Of course Ash, I have some other things to discuss with you. First of all..." reaching into his bag,
the Professor removed a box, which he opened to pull out a metallic glove and presented it to Ash.

"Here you go Ash, your very own Handheld Operative Pokémon Expediter glove."

"My very own what?" Ash asked in confusion as he slipped the glove on, idly noticing it had a
Pokéball shaped depression in it and fit his hand unnervingly well without stretching.

"H.O.P.E gloves for short, this is the tool of the future my boy. With this Ash, trainers can one day
have their teams rotated from anywhere at any time. As it is, however, I am still testing them out, so
you and Gary can help me find any kinks or flaws in them before I properly introduce them to the
world."

Ash held the glove closer to his face in amazement, even though the Professor had somehow gotten
Clemont's bad naming bug as Pikachu sniffed the glove curiously "Wait, are you saying that I could
switch my team at will with this thing!?"

"Well, no. If I or one of my unpaid interns from one of the universities was to be busy at the moment,
there might be a delay of a moment or two, and I would prefer you not try it at midnight. But yes,
that is what the gloves do for everyone. Of course, it's what your glove can do specifically I want to
ask you about."

Ash blinked at the change of pace as the professor continued. "You see Ash, I have always been
aware you are special, and listening to the furious and half insane screams of the Sensational Sisters
revealed that your friend is similarly interesting." Misty's eye went wide with horror as the Professor
laughed. "Oh, don't worry. A Joy and a Don George aren't going to do something stupid. When you
deal with bloodline hysteria, being from a family that looks all but identical means you aren't all that
different to some people, and they are empathetic to others who are in the same boat."

"I want to know more Ash. I want to know how your abilities are activated, what causes them, and
why. The glove Ash, has the ability to record data, and in doing so could reveal important details
about bloodliners no one knew existed. It is an opportunity that doesn't come along very often."
"So, you want to use Ash as some sort of test Aipom!?" Misty accused the professor, who looked genuinely hurt at the accusation.

"I'm not suggesting anything like that, not at all. But you must understand, little to nothing is known about bloodliners. Why do they have the power they do? Why are they mostly female? Why have so many more appeared recently? Why did Ash, after only showing off his innate abilities once as a child, suddenly have them reappear now?"

"Wait, I did?" Ash didn't remember that.

"...I'll have to tell you about that one day, won't I?" Oak admitted "Though I don't have the time for that story, or the alcohol. But never mind that for now. Ash, what this data could discover may be able stop people from doing something utterly horrible to a bloodliner out of fear. It could be my second world changing piece of work, one that advances our world just as much as I did when I helped end the conflicts between man and Pokémon."

Ash closed his eyes, thinking about it for a moment, before coming to a decision "If you think it's that important Professor, I'd do it. Just tell me what I'd have to do?"

"Oh, just be you Ash" The Professor assured him "Right now I want to first find the data on the biggest question about bloodliners: is their power controllable or not, and what are its limits. I believe you might have uncovered such a mystery during your gym battle my boy" the professor noted before showing Ash and Misty the I-Pad, currently displaying a series of graphs on it with two notable spikes on it.

"Wait, what do you...sure I can hear what Pikachu and the others are saying, but why only two..." Ash questioned, not sure about the way the graph had turned out.

"Pika, Pikachu" 'Ash, during the battles with Kingdra and Poliwrath, just before Charmander and Pidgeotto would have been in outright mortal peril, either by drowning or being crushed, your eyes flashed a brown-orange color and they suddenly got a power boost a la Victini.' Pikachu informed his trainer as he looked mortified.

"Wait, what!? What do you mean Pikachu...how is that possible!? My powers, as far as I can tell, do not include being able to boost my Pokémon's power!?"

At the confused looks Misty and the Professor were giving him, Ash filled in exactly what Pikachu said.

"...I swear Ash, the longer I'm around you, the more of what I thought I knew about being a bloodliner changes." Misty shook her head in amazement that Ash kept breaking the rules of the world as the Professor looked intrigued.

"Fascinating. This warrants further investigation of the data your H.O.P.E glove will send me. And to think they always told me I'd stop finding interesting things in the world after a while. Now, speaking of interesting things, I have a request to make of your friend Ash."

"You mean me, Professor?" Misty questioned as he nodded.

"You see, the H.O.P.E glove is also able to analyze and collect data on any and all other bloodliners within a certain area, roughly a twenty to thirty foot radius around itself. As a lot of observation would be done on yourself due to your current traveling companionships, I would feel bad if I didn't offer you something in exchange. Now, I was told by Inspector Joy and Don George that your dream is to capture every water type Pokémon in the world, correct?" Misty nodded to confirm what
the Professor had said making the elderly man grin. "What I offer you, in exchange for your data, is the use of my lab to watch over your additional Pokémon. I have so few members of fully aquatic Pokémon, like Seaking or Kingdra. So few trainers that don't specialize in Water-type Pokémon want to catch them because of their limited use in the Pokémon Leagues outside of water battle fields, as I am sure you all are aware. So, in exchange for your willing consent to using data gathered from yourself in my research on bloodliners, allow me to hold onto your Pokémon for you, like I might Ash's."

The professor apparently was not yet aware Ash had obtained Krabby and Squirtle.

A huge grin grew on Misty's face at the offer causing an even a wider one to form on the Professor's, even Ash found himself grinning along with them. Misty nodded her head, eagerly accepting Professor Oak's offer.

"Splendid! I now have all the new research I could possibly want! I feel as though I could skip all the way home. Sadly, my doctor would get on my case for it, so I must be going before I do start skipping." Ash and Misty laughed at the old man's antics "But, before I do so, I have something for you Ash..." The professor presented Ash the large box he had on him the entire time "I have no idea what this is, but it's from Rota. Maybe that means something to you. Well, got to run." As the old man ambled off, in such good spirits that it was kind of creepy, the two overwhelmed bloodliners noted the box that Ash had gotten with some surprise.

"So...wonder what Ilene sent us?" Misty wondered as Ash began tearing open the box.

There was something about the box's size that made Ash feel it to be...familiar somehow.

But why?

As the box fell apart before them, Ash and Pikachu did a double take as they saw exactly what they had been sent, as Misty cocked her head at the antique inside.

"Hey, isn't that the staff Ilene pointed at you before she declared you 'an heir of Sir Aaron'?” Misty asked as Ash found himself holding that very staff, a staff that, as Ash touched it, he felt something inside it. Something he'd felt before in the previous timeline during the Hero of the Year festival that led to the events of the Tree of Beginning.

A familiar and dormant aura, of the first aura user Ash ever met.

Lucario was inside the staff, and now Ash had it.

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**Omake**

**CROSSOVERPAIRINGLOVER:** ...I'll let you decide if this is canon or not, but this will tease some actual facts about what I plan to do in Johto

**Ketchumverse**

It had all started one day in Johto.

Things had been going well. He had recently recaptured his Noctowl, and dealt with Molly again (who had gone through a power upgrade that made that whole mess...somehow worse than last time. Charizard was still recovering from his rematch with Entei).
Though the recent and unexpected arrival of a fourth traveling companion had made his life somewhat...tricky.

It was enough to warrant a walk to clear his head.

"...You know, if I ever told myself that I would somehow have three girlfriends..."

"Pi." 'Four eventually' his faithful buddy suggested as Ash shook his head.

"...look Pikachu, I still don't understand how I have three girlfriends, I'm not going to expect a fourth. That just seems...pig headed and sexist somehow..." Ash seemed unsure of how to vent out what he was feeling. "You know, it probably would be simpler if I didn't have to think about changes to reality, relationships and who knows what else. I would only have to figure out how to deal with Whitney's Miltank right now."

Pikachu shivered as he remembered that...pink monstrosity.

"Pokémon Gym Leader Whitney, a member of a farming family who has raised unusually deadly Miltank since the feudal era," the Pokédex reminded the two of them about what they faced when they reached Goldenrod. "Their use in Johto's medieval wars was declared a war crime following the legendary massacre of Charicific Valley. The eight Miltank she uses are all known for having the highest win percentages among the Johto gym leaders Pokémon, and make her, statistically speaking, the fifth strongest gym leader in the regions. Most Johto trainers who have heard of her either skip her entirely or fight her for their eighth badge with teams specifically trained, generally consisting of Fighting, Steel, Rock and/or Ghost type Pokémon. Even then, they generally loose."

Ash repressed a shudder as the reminder of what he was about to face next (considering he had no idea where to find other gyms in Johto and didn't want to get lost, or more lost as it was Johto, and possibly miss getting to Sinnoh at the right time to stop Cyrus)

However, before the nightmare in pink bovine form could continue to dominate their thoughts, something crashed to earth in the distance.

"Alert, alert, unknown object has impacted into the earth from the sky!"

"Pika!" 'We knew that already!' Pikachu snapped at the device.

"This device would like to point out it cannot speak Pokémon," the Pokédex shrewdly reminded Pikachu as trainer and starter decided, after a moment or two of contemplation, to check out what had just crashed.

If it was a Deoxys, Ash would prefer to find out if they were horrific abominations now, as oppose to LaRousse City.

...

Oh, if it only was that simple.

The crater that had formed from the massive impact had two objects of Ash and Pikachu's concerns: and how worrying was that the minor issue of the crater was the fact it was mostly occupied by the massive white form of Reshiram, the white dragon of truth.

The other occupant of said crater being N, though with black hair, who was face down on Reshiram
looking like he had just went five rounds with a Machamp.

One thought went through both Ash and Pikachu at the sight of the two friends of theirs from Unova.

'Team Plasma...that's all we need.'

Team Rocket was all the duo needed to deal with right now: they did not need Team Rocket and Team Plasma fighting. That sounded like something that would destroy a city in the process.

However, as N stirred and began to push himself up, any thoughts of Goldenrod City being torn apart by battling evil teams was lost to both of them as a new sort of confusion quickly took hold.

"Oh, an Ash and Pikachu." N, or rather, N with Ash's face and hair color, noted the two of them with some level of curiosity in a rather fast pattern. "Tell me something...you two aren't evil by any chance are you?"

Ash and Pikachu had no idea how to respond to N-Ash's question. It was just...odd.

Who asked people out of the blue if they were evil!?

"Pikapi Pika!" 'We are most certainly not evil! I mean, sure, the Pokédex might be, but other than that...and who do you think you are asking us that!? That is not how you start a conversation!'

"Oh, it isn't?" N-Ash heard every word Pikachu said, and seemed genuinely confused in finding out that you shouldn't randomly ask people if they are evil. "Maybe that's why Guardian always has Don handle the diplomatic stuff. Oh, where are my manners, I never did introduce myself. My name is A Harmonia Gropius, A-4 of the League of Ash's Elite Six. Considering your shock at seeing me, as oppose to murderous intent, I would assume you haven't contacted by the Ashes of Darkness either."

"The league of Ashes?" the Ash not in the know asked in confusion.

"PikaPi!? 'The Ashes of Darkness!' Pikachu repeated in shock, and confusion as to why they would choose that name.

"A Harmonia Gropius...who the hell names their child that?" the Pokédex questioned in horror as A began speaking again.

"My partner Reshiram and I were leading a battle to try and prevent the Ashes of Darkness from capturing the last free Coma world, but we failed and were knocked across several worlds by Ash Flare's Mega Houndoom. See, the League of Ashes and the Ashes of Darkness are at war over a sizeable chunk of the multiverse, which in itself part of a much larger war for the greater multiverse between the multiverses greatest heroes, and their dark counterparts," A continued "We Ashes are somewhat lucky that the leader of the Ashes of Darkness is merely a version of us that was never freed from the King of Pokélantis, as he only conquers worlds and subjugates them. The leaders of the evil Harry Potters and Naruto Uzumakis strip and devastate their conquered worlds, and that's not even going into what the enemies of the allied Yu's..."

"Wait...Harry Potter and Naruto Uzumaki are fictional characters!?" Ash pointed out as A smiled.

"Oh, but what is ideal fiction in one world can easily be truth in another. Now, I suppose it would be prudent that I signal for my retrieval, though before I do, I would highly suggest you come with me. We need every Ash on deck...and we could use some Brocks and Cilans as well. We all eat a lot and find the quirinkness of a Cilan to be refreshing after a long day defending the multiverse."
A looked confused at the depressed look at the mention of Cilan's name. "Oh, you know of Cilan? How odd, you shouldn't until your journey into Unova."

"It's a long story."

"Oh, do tell, I have time," A inquired sincerely. "It can take a while to find pathways across the multiverse that do not cause minor damage like the old fool Taisune did, or major damage like that idiotic Harry Potter who used a faulty time machine to change the past but instead caused an unstable world that ripped dozens of worlds and crudely combined them. I'm sure you'd never be that foolish as to recklessly time travel and randomly scramble the status of your reality."

Ash laughed nervously at that last one. "Funny story there, see there was this thing with Cyrus and reality..."
Vaniville Town

She had never liked humans, it was simple as that.

They were loud and strange creatures, who changed the land in ways she didn't like. They turned forests into stone and steel jungles filled with their loud machines. Why couldn't they be satisfied by swinging from vines between trees instead of going places in those strange metal boxes?

She really wished she didn't have to look like them either; and would have preferred to resemble her mother and father and the rest of her family more.

However, her unfortunate looks did come with one benefit at least.

When her family found itself afflicted with wounds that the local berry stocks couldn't solve, she could pass as a human and obtain the necessary medicines from human settlements.

Burn Heals, Antidotes, Potions...sometimes her family needed them, and she was the only one who could go and get them. She even obtained some of the spheres humans called 'Pokéballs', allowing some of the friends she had met on her travels to come with her forever and always.

For that reason, her family had her learn to speak the way humans did so she was be able to pass as one of them, at least for a time. It did help, after all, that her family were some of the most intelligent of Pokémon.

Observing a mother and daughter human try, for some reason, to ride a Rhyhorn (which ended with the daughter being slammed into the ground and yell at her mother about hating this damn sport), she just shook her head.

Humans, what bizarre creatures. She could speak like them, but she could never hope to ever think like them.

Oh well, they were about to head off anyway. They were going to be leaving this region soon after all.

Team Rocket HQ, a few days later

Giovanni, the most powerful crime boss in four regions, and rather high on the International Police's wanted list, frowned as he found himself surrounded by hundreds of holographic screens, each displaying a different event involving bloodliners, or seeming to in some way or another that had popped up in the news within the last few years.

While the connections there were vague, they were far more realistic than those conspiracy theorists who kept insisting on trying to exorcise Voltorb.

"In Mahogany Town in the Johto region, the local Pokémart was burned down during a confrontation between a bloodliner and local policemen." The burned remains of the near global.
chain still seemed to smolder as police tape surrounded the scene. "Mahogany Town born representative Frederick Swietenia, a well-known anti-bloodliner member of the Johto Diet has scheduled a press conference for later today, likely to reveal new plans to draft further bloodliner control legislation..."

'And not bother to look into who started it,' Giovanni snarked to himself, before turning to a different holographic display.

"...continuing our coverage into the recent murders of several Canalave City area scholars, recent evidence has revealed the origin of several anti-forensics techniques employed. Based on data provided, the murders were quickly followed by the destruction of the scholar's residencies via a Water Pulse, Giga Drain and Will-O-Wisp attack, seemingly in an attempt to destroy as much research as possible. The scholars, all members of a think tank dedicated to the understanding of legendary Pokémon, are known for publishing several works on the habits and behaviors of the legendary beasts of Johto and legendary birds of Kanto, and had recently begun looking into the dragons behind several myths in Sinnoh and Unova..." An older report taking place in a nice looking forested property on the coast, with a sizeable pile of rubble in the center.

'50/50 to whose responsible for that one,' Giovanni decided on its relevance.

"Coming up next on Vulpix news, an interview with Doctor Yung..."

BEEP BEEP!

The alarm for a communication from the Trio assigned to observe the boy went off, ending his train of thought as he had all his (personal) research be minimized out of the view as a single video screen replaced them, displaying the grunt known as James running on a treadmill (dressed like some new age fitness person).

The man's Koffing (with a sweatband on its forehead for no apparent reason), was floating next to him in front of a fan that was blowing air at it, in the sort of thing that one might use to create a makeshift treadmill for a Pokémon such as Koffing, however useless it might look.

"You may speak, but first tell me...what on earth are you doing?"

"Training sir, the kid you asked us to stalk..." Giovanni felt a headache coming on at that remark "...has currently stopped for some training, we have Meowth on the case, so the two of us decided to get some training in. The kid's getting strong sir, very strong, and very quickly. We need to be able to keep up with him, and I'm sure once this Battle Club quality Koffing speed training is complete, my Koffing will be able to do just that."

Giovanni frowned, the idea of his minions bettering themselves was both a good thing, and unnerving at the same time. There was a reason he preferred his grunts to use common Poison and Normal-types after all (it was much easier to control your underlings when they were mostly armed with Ekans and Rattata).

Though, he supposed the trio's odd amount of loyalty to him could counterbalance this concern.

"The two of us you say? May I ask where your compatriot has gotten herself off too?" Giovanni inquired as James smiled.

"Oh, she had the most marvelous idea. Tell me sir, have you ever heard of the Hoenn gym leader Juan?"

Giovanni responded to that name with a haunted look, remembering the last international gym leader
tournament when he faced that man. His flamboyant persona had grated on Giovanni's nerves the entire time talking about the beauty of a Pokémon's inner self or some rubbish like that. It didn't help when combined with what happened the last time they'd faced each other.

"Yes, I know of him," Giovanni stated gravely, resisting the urge to rub his temple in an attempt to banish the memories of the Hoenn gym leader.

"They say he's considered the sixth strongest gym leader in the regions because he combines his battling skills with the finesse and unpredictability of a Pokémon Coordinator, so Jessie decided to go enter a Pokémon contest with her Ekans to try and pick up those tricks herself. She didn't do too badly for her first time, she apparently managed to get past the first round and did a decent showing in the second before being defeated. But just think of the potential sir, your very own battle ace coordinator, just like Juan!"

Giovanni made a face that would be appropriate to one who had to hear about an annoying legend from the 12th century at the repeat of that name "Very well, continue as you see fit. Giovanni out."

The communications deactivated as the most powerful crime boss in Kanto immediately went for his liquor cabinet. Giovanni took out a decanter filled with 150 year old Scotch, poured some into a crystal tumbler before downing it in one mouthful.

Damn that Juan...damn him.

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**Route 104**

As a somewhat annoyed Charmander's Ember attack failed against Pikachu's defense, the two ceased their activities (Charmander attacking and Pikachu performing a rotation on the ground while releasing electrical energies via the Counter Shield), to the applause of the observing Pokémon (Bulbasaur, Squirtle, Aipom and Pidgeotto).

Ash had brought Krabby on to the team earlier. Krabby, who had the situation explained to him in full, was asked to focus on his training at Oak's lab. It had worked out last time, and he would prefer to do so again.

Considering that Butterfree had never been to Oak's lab before, it also gave him an experienced tour guide for his visit.

"...Char." 'It still looks ridiculous.' Charmander was adamant on his opinion of the Counter Shield.

"Well, your tail would make it difficult for you to do it anyway," Ash pointed out, seeing the physical limitations that would keep Charmander from performing the technique. "So you don't have to be anything more than the guy who tests its ability to block."

Bulbasaur looked contemplative. "Bulba?" 'It is a decent technique, though I cannot help but wonder why I don't seeing any of your Unovan Pokémon using it themselves?'

Recalling his own attempts to teach his Unovan Pokémon how to use the Counter Shield (and the mental images of a dizzy Oshawott, Tepig rolled over on his back and unable to get back up and Snivy giving him a death glare, in particular that had resulted), Ash responded to the question with a flat. "It, didn't work out that well when I tried. I mean, Leavanny had some potential for pulling it off, but I didn't really have the time to really go into it. I had a lot on my mind at the time, like Brycen and Roxie... and Team Rocket going crazy...and the League...and Team Plasma...and the
It was odd. In Johto and Sinnoh, he had so much time to play around with ideas like the Counter Shield, though he wasn't really smart enough to do so back in Johto. In leagues like Hoenn and Unova, he really didn't have the time to do it.

"Okay, let's see what you guys can do. Charmander and Butterfree, you two are on test attack duty." Wings made the Counter Shield tricky. "Butterfree, try to turn Confusion into Psybeam, Charmander keep practicing Ember."

By the end of the day Pikachu's Counter Shield had been fully de-rusted, Aipom was nearly there, Squirtle was looking promising by rotating while withdrawn in his shell and firing a Water Gun like his Hydro Pump used to be, while Bulbasaur... well he made them swear never to talk about how many times he had been blasted into tree hollows trying to get that technique to work. All the while begging to never get it taught to him again. Instead it was decided that Bulbasaur could spin Vine Whip around himself to deflect any on-oncoming attacks.

A bit later

When Ash had dashed off to save Misty, he ended up leaving a lot of stuff behind.

While no one had stolen it, there had been wild Pokémon in the area, including quite a few Bug-type Pokémon who left rather sizeable moth holes in their tents (or was it Weedle/Caterpie/etc. holes?), thankfully just their tents though.

Tents, being rather expensive (and Misty not wanting to stay in Cerulean long enough to get new ones), were no longer an option.

Thankfully for them, there was another option for trainer nights out of civilization that minimized one’s risk of having their blood sucked by wandering Golbat.

Standing before two trees, Psyduck proceeded to bow honorably, before glowing purple and punching the nearby trees at the same time. The trees shook, as energy reshaped its branches and structural integrity into something that someone could sleep in/live in/jump out of and scare unaware passersby with.

Also known as...

"Duck." Two secret bases for your accommodations tonight, sir and almost respected madam who should feed me more. You know, this would be a lot easier for me if you two would just mate and move into the same nest. I mean honestly...why not?"

Misty just glared at the duck, though not without blushing a bit. Psyduck's ability to use Secret Power to create was the only reason she had not sent him to stay with/bother the Professor along with Goldeen and Horsea (with the Gyarados Ash had caught for her that she had once befriended now being active).

It was rather kind of him to use one of her own Pokéballs to do it. How many trainers, at the idea of having their very own Gyarados that was rather tame, would have caught it themselves?

It was something she greatly appreciated. Though if he had caught it, perhaps they could have simply traded him over to her in exchange for Psyduck... And with that thought Misty drifted off to sleep.
"Gyarados, let's end this with Water Pulse!"

Forming the massive blue orb in front of its face, Gyarados let loose the powerful blast right at her challenger's Pinsir (That looked far more grotesque than it actually did), blasting it straight across the battlefield and smashing it into a wall, where it lay defeated.

"Pinsir is unable to battle, the winner is Gyarados! The victory goes to the gym leader, Misty!"

"Misty, is it true you plan to enter the Pokémon League in order to challenge for a spot on the Elite Four!?"

"Are you going to use your Kyogre or Suicune?!"

"Who do you want to bump off from the Elite Four? Bruno!? Lorelei? Agatha!?"

Dream Misty (as Misty did sort of realize this was a dream when she noticed her opponent was using unusually grotesque looking Bug-types instead of Grass or Electric-types), who appeared to have aged to thirty five and was dressed in a light blue one-piece swimsuit with jacket (A/N, her Gen 4 design) that made her look stunningly attractive, just blushed as she was swarmed by paparazzi "One at a time, one a time please. As to the first three questions: Yes, no, and I don't know. I want to win the whole thing first, but do it fairly. What sort of win would it be for Water Pokémon if I just used Kyogre on everything?"

"I've been preparing for the Elite Four challenge for years now, even since I took back my family's gym when I was eighteen. Since then, I've had to get it back to working order after my sister's all but ruined it. It's been a lot of hard work, all I can say for certain is that I feel like I am leaving my gym in good hands if and when I join the Elite Four. Now, any more questions?"

"...I don't know if I'm ready for this Mom, I really don't. I mean, you're so good and I'm...I'm just me. That weak bug guy beat me like I was nothing."

"Oh, don't worry dear. You were using your Starmie, and you took down three of them first. All you have left to do is gain more experience, and you're sure to get all the experience your need in no time Cordelia," Misty said running a hand through her daughter's hair.

Misty had no idea why it was that in all her dreams she had of what her future could bring, her child (and only child at that), was named Cordelia. Perhaps it was some inner part of her who simply believed that any and all types of siblings were naturally going to have just as toxic a relationship as she had with hers. Perhaps she just really liked the name Cordelia and didn't want to even consider naming a child of hers in the same way as her parents did (Rose, Petunia, Tulip, Rhododendron...), Misty really had no idea. She was, after all, no psychologist.

Cordelia generally appeared the same way (for the most part) in her dreams: a taller version of herself at her current age at the time of the dream. There was always some slight...areas of variation with her though. Then again, as Misty had never really had a person who she really felt like she was forever destined to be with, that was probably just her mind factoring in the theoretical father of Cordelia.

Placing her hand on her daughter's shoulders and smiling, Misty continued. "Everyone starts as a rookie at some point. We all make mistakes. We learn from them, and make ourselves better from
them. Going forward, is the only way to live."

...Misty woke up as that line ended, to find Psyduck staring over her, looking rather relieved.

"Duck." 'Oh, good, you woke up on your own. For a minute there, I was worried I would have to do it then you might strangle me until you remembered you asked me to wake you up. Again.'

Misty would have rolled her eyes at her semi-aquatic (though not really) long-time companion, but she simply yawned; garbed only in an oversized T shirt (light blue and featuring a slightly faded Lorelei posed with her Dewgong and Jynx).

'Going forward being the only way to live' it was the only way to live. There was no point dwelling on the past, the only way to go was constantly working towards the future.

To dwell on your past, was only to invite further pain.

All that mattered, was obtaining your dream. Getting to that point where your life was exactly how you wanted it to be, your dream job, friends, family, everything.

Such thoughts remained in her mind a few hours later, as she put her fishing line into the nearby stream with a look of concentration on her face.

There was a tug on the line, and with a hard yank Misty pulled with all her might causing the hooked Poliwrath to burst out of the water, startling the nearby Psyduck.

"PSY!?" 'What, a wild Poliwrath!?'

Misty wasn't quite as surprised, this sort of thing could happen after all. Wild populations of Pokémon that people generally considered to be 'evolve in captivity only', like Machamp or Gallade, could in fact be found in the wild. They were just rare occurrences.

In fact, stone evolutions of wild Pokémon were actually more common than wild evolutions by other forms. Of course, the question of if wild Raichu and Vileplume were intentional or accidental on the Pokémon's part, as well as how exactly a wild Graveler or Kadabra evolves was still being researched by scientists, particularly Professor Rowan.

Now, Misty had actually been hoping to go for something more, purely aquatic here (she did have to catch a Magikarp at some point after all). However, it was her goal to capture one of every Water-type, and this was in fact a Water-type.

Said Water-type attempted to smack her in the face with Wake-Up-Slap, but Misty limberly avoided it by bending over, allowing the attack to pass right over the top her though it did skim across her stomach.

While she could simply control the Poliwrath with her powers, she could tell that unlike her Goldeen, this Pokémon had pride. It also wasn't struggling for space or food, so it was, by all standards, happy with its current life.

To simply make the Poliwrath catch itself would cause a lot of issues down the road.

Battling it was the only way to capture it, and allow it to retain a sense of self pride.

Now, she could use Psyduck here...but then again, she wanted to capture it, not give it something to
workout with like a yellow, and rather annoying, dumbbell.

(Plus, the Duck was cowering at the moment, flinched without even a Headbutt attack to cause it.)

So, it would be done by one of her other battlers...

"Gyarados, use Dragon Rage!"

Spiraling out of its ball in a huge burst of white light, the Gyarados landed in the streambed with a loud splash, before charging up the ball of blue light in its jaw and letting it fly loose.

The blast struck into Poliwrath, knocking it down after its failed attempt to strike Misty.

The Poliwrath, its back now slightly burned by the power of the blast, pushed itself back up and turned to the Gyarados glaring at it.

"Poli! 'I am the king of this stream, human and human pet! I have sired a thousand Poliwag, who had grown to become 700 strong Poliwhirl bearing my powerful genetics. I am the pinnacle of this stream's potential! Leave at once or face my wrath!'"

Gyarados roared back, in a statement that basically translated into 'I am a Gyarados, do what I say [be captured by my trainer], or I will blow all of your shit up, bad puns about wrath or not.'

Poliwrath didn't take the warning seriously, and it charged forward to strike with the full force of a massive, orange glowing Dynamic Punch.

Gyarados simply nuked the Poliwrath some more with Dragon Rage. It promptly did so three more times, just to make sure it stayed down.

Misty smirked at her old friend's good work. The Poliwrath was sufficiently weakened, now being unable to resist when she threw her Pokéball at it.

The capture was thus complete.

She turned to her powerful creature and smiled. "Thank you Gyarados, you're the best."

Gyarados roared in happiness, causing several nearby colonies of Pidgey to fly away in fright.

Psyduck poked his head from behind the rocks. "Psy-y-y." '....I liked my life better when she didn't have a giant killer sea serpent on hand.'

Gyarados merely roared again in joy, oblivious to what Psyduck had said.

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_Around the same time_

"Work...work...activate!"

Pikachu and Bulbasaur sweat-dropped at Ash's antics. Charmander simply ignored it to continue to use Metal Claw on a nearby tree, while Squirtle was having Aipom and Pidgeotto try and break through his now perfected Counter Shield.

"Lucario, I release you!"
"Lucario, I choose you!"

"Lucario Staff, Transform!"

"I summon Lucario!"

"Lucario, Set Up!"

"Lucario, SHAZAM!"

"Lu, Lu, Lu, Lucario, HOOOO!"

Bulbasaur used Vine Whip on Ash's forehead to get him to stop after that last, overly dramatic one (complete with posing).

"Pikapi." 'Ash, simply pointing the staff at something, or dramatically slamming it into the ground while saying something badass sounding is not going to let Lucario out of it. It just...makes you look like a wannabe,' Pikachu stated the truth as Ash groaned in frustration before swinging the staff, causing it to retract into something you could simply attach to your belt (or throw in your bag) with ease.

"...I know, but it's just so...frustrating Pikachu. I mean, last time I just had to hold it for a while, and Lucario got out on his own. Now, even though he's in there...I can't get him out."

He tried rubbing it like a genie's lamp. He tried keeping it on him at all times. He even tried to figure out if there was an activation phrase...still nothing.

Worryingly, he was making more sense of the staff than his attempts to figure out exactly what happened at the Cerulean Gym. He couldn't manage to spontaneously increase his Pokémon's power...his attempts just made him look constipated (according to Pikachu).

There had to be a way to get Lucario out of there, then at least he could have someone who could offer some possible insight into it, or at the very least free him up from trying to free Lucario, thus giving him more time to try and get it to work...

"Hey, you!"

Ash turned around to see a somewhat familiar face approaching him.

The kid with the Sandshrew he had met that time...whose name was totally escaping him at the moment. Alex? Johnny? Something between the two...

"Um, me?" Ash asked in curiosity as the trainer and Sandshrew adopted identical looks of superiority.

"You're my number 100."

"Um..." What that meant was sort of escaping him at the moment.

"I plan to challenge the Pokémon League once I get 100 victories, and you're going to be number 100! So, who do you plan to have my Sandshrew beat?!!"

Charmander looked ready to fight, but Ash held his hand up to stop him. Even if he couldn't quite remember exactly what happened with this guy, Ash did believe he was defeated by him.

He hoped to rectify that, and while Charmander was tough, there was type advantage to consider.
Plus, he hadn't gotten a chance to battle with Squirtle yet.

"Squirtle, you're up!" he yelled as his turtle ran over in a rather motivated fashion as the Sandshrew guy simply smirked.

"Let's get this started then...Sandshrew use Poison Sting!" With a yowl the Ground-type let loose a barrage of stinging barbs right at Squirtle.

"Block with Withdraw, before going into Water Gun!" Ash called for as Squirtle retreated into his shell, allowing the barbs to be knocked away, before coming right out and firing a blast of water right at the Ground-type, who blocked it with his arm without much of a wince.

"Huh!?" Ash and all collective Pokémon present who were not Sandshrew gasped in surprise as the kid smirked.

"Water is a Ground-type's biggest weakness, so we trained to maximize his special defense!"

Oh, it was that guy...

"Now, let's end this with Fissure!"

The Sandshrew punched the ground, causing a massive crack to form and snake its way towards Squirtle.

"Dodge it to the side, then launch another Water Gun!"

With an affirmative nod, Squirtle leapt to the right of the crack and let loose a solid stream of water right into Sandshrew again, who took the hit (though with more fatigue).

"That's not going to work! Now, Rock Tomb!"

Forming a dozen spiraling stones around itself, Sandshrew sent them all flying at Squirtle, who tensed knowing that Ash would have an idea to deal with what was happening.

"Block them with Counter Shield!"

"Counter what?!!"

Squirtle retreated into his shell, though on its back as oppose to its regular position due to pre-withdrawal motions, before starting to spin, while at the same time using Water Gun from inside the shell like he once used Hydro Pump.

The water spiraled around Squirtle as a barrier, catching all the stones and knocking them to the side surprising the trainer opposite him.

"Impossible...!"

"Nope, just our own special training! Now Squirtle, get it with Tackle!"

Squirtle stuck his tail out, using it to force itself back upright before fully withdrawing, and charged right into Sandshrew, slamming into it with full turtle force.

The Ground-type was knocked back a few feet as Squirtle had a pretty good idea of what would follow.

"Now, close range Water Gun!"
With a blast of water at close range, Sandshrew was blasted back with tremendous force right next to his startled trainer, KO'd.

The utterly astonished trainer (who Ash was all but sure that his name was A.J now that he thought about it a bit), just fell to his knees in shock. "But...all that training..."

Ash walked over to his defeated opponent to offer some advice "It paid off. Your Sandshrew was tough being able to take that many super effective strikes. I mean, it had enough power to have easily won you a badge at the Cerulean Gym...of course it's no longer open so that's not really an option. But still, you could easily win your first badge with that Sandshrew at this point, and probably quite a few badges after that. 99 wins is still 99 wins, you're more than ready to go for the league at this point."

A.J picked up his defeated Sandshrew in wonder at Ash's kind words. "You really think so?"

"I know so. You'll get even stronger by not standing in one place, but by experiencing new things. If you want to be the best, put yourself up against everyone you meet as you travel this region."

A.J nodded in affirmation. "I guess I can always count capturing my Beedrill and Butterfree as my missing win anyway..." He noted Ash curiously. "You have gym badges of your own I take it?" Ash nodded, showing him his two badges in his jacket (even if they technically were nine, but no need to brag about it. Cerulean wasn't really brag worthy anyway). "Well then, I'll guess I'll see you at the Pokémon League then."

Ash smiled, though he couldn't help but wonder if A.J had actually made it to the league last time (and for that matter, what about Otoshi? Or at least that was what Ash thought the Marowak guy's name was.) "I guess I will."

---

**Vermillion City**

Ash felt really good about this upcoming gym battle.

Pikachu already knew all of the necessary speed attacks to outwit Raichu if it was a repeat of last time, and if it wasn't, he had a solid team on him at the moment to back him up.

Bulbasaur would be able to resist electrical attacks, Aipom could dodge them, Charmander would simply blast his way through everything in his way, Squirtle would be able to counter with Counter Shield and Butterfree could use Sleep Powder if all else failed (having swapped out Pidgeotto for a break, and the fact that Pidgeotto didn't really have any good tricks to deal with Electric-types)

Approaching the door to the Vermillion gym, the trio of himself, Misty and Pikachu entered, a look of confidence on all their faces.

There was absolutely nothing that could shake Ash's confidence today.

The pair of punks guarding the door did cause them to stop, however.

"Alright kid, whad'ya want?" one of the punks demanded as Ash opened up his jacket, revealing his two badges.

The punks noted the badges, before smirking.
"You're in luck kid, the Lieutenant hasn't had a third badge challenger today, not since that arrogant twerp with the Wartortle and that kid with the little cheerleader squad passed through a few days ago." Ash felt a familiar feeling of annoyance at the fact that Gary was still ahead of him, even in a new timeline with no car. "The current challenger is fighting for his second badge, so you can go right after him. Of course, you might get scared and run home to your mama after seeing what he's capable of."

"But first," the second punk grinned as he removed his own Pokéball, followed by his companion, "you have to beat us in a battle. Go, Magnemite!"

5 minutes later

"Magnemite, the Magnet Pokémon. During the era of feuding Kanto warlords, Magnemite were prized for their rare Steel typing, allowing them to avoid the lethal poisons of many of Kanto's native Pokémon. However, their weakness to Fire is well documented, and they are known to be teething on by growing Charmander," the Dex snarked as Ash's Charmander in fact chewed on Magnemite's left magnet after having beaten off both the punks Magnemite.

"Alright, alright, you're tough enough, now call off that thing!" the punks wailed as Ash begrudged them, and having Charmander stop asserting his dominance by leaving bite marks on the Electric-types.

Once Charmander was back in his ball (along with the nibbled on Magnemite), the punks opened the door to the gym quickly, revealing a familiar looking boxing ring (though with more light and seating, unlike the last time), with Lt. Surge, (still as inexplicably huge as ever) laughing like a madman as his Voltorb was flying around (looking like it had used Magnet Rise), while firing off dozens of sonic boom attacks on the Pokémon below while the guy was shouting about 'AERIAL BOMBARDMENT!' or something like that.

Ash really had no clue what the point of the loudly named attack was, but it looked rather effective, and as soon as the dust cleared and the levitating Voltorb returned to Lt. Surge's side, a rather beat up Dugtrio was all that was left.

"Dugtrio is unable to battle, the winner is Voltorb!"

The trainer in question returned Dugtrio as Lt. Surge laughed.

"You know, people always think they can simply beat me with Ground-types! Hahaha, I'm not so easily stopped. Type means nothing in war kid; all that matters is quality. That Dugtrio of yours didn't have any, tell me, do you have any that do?"

The kid, who had been silently glaring at his Pokéball for Surge's entire speech, simply moved for a second one. The kid stood in hidden in a shadow, so Ash wasn't able to see any of his features.

"Oh, I have quality alright," the trainer said in a voice that caused alarm bells to ring in both Ash and Pikachu's minds. It was an angry bark that they'd heard many times before. "Pikachu, standby for battle!"

Chapter End Notes
So, Ash's third gym battle is coming up next, and looks like he'll meet someone earlier than he expected. Three guesses on who it is, and the first two don't count,

See ya tomorrow with another chapter and perhaps a couple of extra oneshots.
Shocking Vermillion Gym Battle

Vermillion City.

Paul.

In his time, Ash had many rivals, though out of them all three stood out.

Trip, his main rival in Unova was a more intelligent trainer than Ash was (even if Ash wasn't having a massive brain fart, which he seemed to have a lot of those in Unova, especially early on. Perhaps there was something in the air that didn't agree with him there?), but he seemed to lack a certain...sharpness, in his battles. Plus his tendency to look down on people from other regions gave him a very annoying quality, though it was fairly easy to ignore in most situations.

At least in Ash's opinion, a match between Bianca and, say, Paul...would end with a crying Bianca nearly all the time while Paul barked insults at her.

His first rival, Gary, was a childhood friend who became rivals over time. Like Trip, Ash was not going to go out of his way to deny that Gary was more intelligent than he was.

As much as he hated to admit it, Gary was smart.

He had most of his traits in higher qualities as well, but this also included arrogance. Until Gary had lost to Ash in the Pokémon League's fourth round, he was arrogant. As bad as Ash had to admit he could get, Gary made him seem as cocky as Maylene after Paul was done with her.

Even then, however, he was actually decently friendly with Gary, particularly after Kanto.

Paul, however...

Paul was, to put it bluntly, a jerk. A rather skilled jerk, but a jerk nonetheless.

He was pretty much his antithesis. Like a Fire version of Misty who was the older sibling, an Ice using version of Iris who acted childish with a mature center, or a female version of Brock who eyed males without overdoing it.

And he was here...with a Pikachu.

A female Pikachu, if Ash recalled what he understand about heart shaped tails to be correct.

That was just...wrong.

Like, that time Harley dressed like May (or Team Rocket dressing like him and his friends) wrong. Ash visibly shuddered at the memory and hoped he wouldn't have to see that ever again, the memory was much more than he needed.

"Pikachu, the Mouse Pokémon. Pikachu are able to generate electricity via electrical sacks in their cheeks, and can add more electrical energies to their bodies via eating wires and absorbing ambient static electricity. Pikachu adore Ketchup for undisclosed reasons." The Pokédex decided to chime in. "I remind you of this because repetition is helpful, particularly when around people who haven't seen that Pokémon themselves."

Roxie's Koffing briefly came to mind for some reason when the Pokédex commented for itself. The
Pokédex' explanation of repeating Dex entries gave Ash an out for scanning multiple Pokémon of the same species a lot over the years when he really had no reason too.

"Other Pokédex detected...Rowan brand Pokédex detected. Scanning, scanning...oh, what an underdeveloped personality matrix the thing has. It doesn't even have the ability to snark."
Ash tried really hard not to envy Paul at the moment. "Oh, a DexNav!? Must assimilate functionality...permission to commence download?"

"Whatever makes you less likely to complain" Ash hushed the damn thing.

"Very good. Commence download...sending data for possible personality matrix as well. Data options: cheerleader, yamato nadeshiko, helium abuser, hillbilly, Jiminy Cricket..."

Ash at that point was just trying to ignore it and focus on the battle.

He idly noticed Pikachu staring at the female one in a ponderous way, the female Pikachu looking around nervously and seemed rather scared of the Voltorb before her. Then Paul glared at her and she seemed to steel her nerves, at least externally.

"Alright kid, time to resume the AIR RAID!" Lt. Surge felt the need to shout the last one louder than normal "Voltorb, unleash the second wave, AERIAL BOMBARDMENT!"

Voltorb flew into the sky ready to start blasting Paul's Pikachu like a crazy person again.

Paul seemed ready for it, as opposed to last time.

"Strike it down with Quick attack!"

As a white sheen formed around her, Paul's Pikachu lunged right at the Voltorb before it could start firing, knocking it out of the sky and causing it to roll across the field in a daze.

"Wha! Clever little sneak kid, but you can't stop my war machine that easily! Voltorb, Electro Ball!"
Surge countered as an electrical ball began to form over top Voltorb's head.

"Stop it with Thundershock!" Paul snapped

"Pika-CHU!"

The thin electrical bands slammed right into the developing Electro Ball, causing it to detonate right over Voltorb's head in an explosion that left a huge smoke cloud in its wake.

"Hmph. Funny thing about war machines...munitions explode," Paul snarked, the corner of his mouth twitched as he stopped a smirk forming on his face, keeping his ever-present scowl in place. Surge rose an eyebrow at Paul's remark.

"Oh really?"

The Electro Ball flung from the smoke, slamming right into Paul's Pikachu and knocking her back a sizeable distance even as the smoke cleared to a KO’ed Voltorb.

"Voltorb is unable to battle, the winner is Pikachu!"

Returning Voltorb, Surge did not seem that upset with its defeat "You know kid, in war you never should let your guard down. My Voltorb had fulfilled its mission to deal with your Ground-type, yet it still managed to land a pretty good hit on your little Pikachu there before you beat it. When it
comes to getting out an Electro Ball Sniper Strike, my Voltorb and Electrode are second to none! Even if they fall in their mission, their attacks will still aim true!

Paul didn't give much thought to the damage Pikachu had taken from the Electro Ball. "Electro Ball is a pathetic and unreliable attack only complete noobs would ever use." Ash and Pikachu barely resisted the urge to yell at Paul for that comment. "At the same time, would you stop shouting out stupid things like Aerial Bombardment and Sniper Strike? It makes you sound pathetic!"

There it was, Paul's favorite word.

"Kid, are you a veteran of war? Better question, are you a Gym Leader? What gives you the right to call my methods, 'pathetic'? In war kid, you need to think outside the box. If you fight in a predictable manner, you're never going to win. Why do you think insurgents are such pains to deal with?!" Lt. Surge countered. "If they were ever predictable, they'd be wiped out quickly."

"As a gym leader, a position I earned through years of mastering the behavior and power of the electric type during the war after they saved my life!"

Ash felt a bit of shock come on when he realized that Lt. Surge was rather old (Considering the last true war he was aware of was at least forty years ago. Did that make Lt. Surge fifty-eight or something? He didn't even look older than in the other timeline!)

Perhaps whatever kept him ten for...however long it was, also kept Surge young. Although seeing Surge's eyes held the toll of years of war clearly, it was clear to see that Surge had seen things that still haunted him. The deaths of comrades, friends, both human and Pokémon clung to his soul and memory. There was something else in Surge's eyes, an anger towards Paul for the way he treated people and Pokémon.

"It's my job to hand out badges to trainers with the skill to defeat me, and you haven't shown that yet kid. I mean, I may be down one Pokémon, but so are you, and your little Pikachu has taken damage. I don't part with my badges so easily kid, especially not to punks like you, now show him what I mean, Magnemite!"

Lt. Surge's own Magnemite appeared on the battlefield, as Misty couldn't help but chime in.

"Yikes, these two aren't getting along at all, are they? I mean, when you fought Brock, it at least felt like the two of you respected the other, but here..."

She had no idea how Ash was with her sisters though. Perhaps this sort of battle was the norm for gym leaders and challengers?

"Well, from what I can tell, the challenger's just a jerk," Ash told her truthfully.

"Begin!"

"Brick Break!"

Female Pikachu's paw glowed white as she lunged towards the Magnemite.

So, Pikachu could in fact use Brick Break!

"Counter with Supersonic!" Lt. Surge countered the fighting attack by having Magnemite release a sonic attack right in the path of Pikachu.

"Avoid it!"
Paul's Pikachu avoided the sonic attack, before speeding right into the Magnemite with a massive smash with Brick Break.

Super-effective against the part-steel Magnemite.

However, it wasn't going to be that easy.

"Sonic Boom counter attack, go!" Magnemite's magnets spun as they started to glow with white energy, a slight whine could be heard if you listened hard enough.

The sound attack was unleashed right in fem Pikachu's face, causing her to be blasted back further in a disoriented mess.

"Sonic Boom is a particularly devastating attack early in a trainer’s journey," the Pokédex noted.

"Let's end this Magnemite, send in the sniper blast! Use Charge Beam!" The electrical attack began to charge in front of Magnemite.

"Strike his little Pikachu in the whites of her eyes!"

"Magnemite!" with the steel type's declaration, the blast was fired.

Paul responded with a single word, surprisingly not his favorite one.

"Dig."

Punching the ground quickly, Paul's Pikachu avoided the attack by going underground.

"Huh, Pikachu can use Dig?" Ash was rather surprised. It was amazing, all his time with Pikachu and he never realized that.

"I'm pretty sure I gave you a lecture on Pikachu's moveset a while ago," the Pokédex reminded him. "You really should remember these sorts of things"

"Pika...pika...chu..." 'Dig...a fighting attack...hmmmm.' Pikachu felt as though this Pikachu was familiar someone.

But where?

"Magnemite, Sonic Boom the ground! Let loose the dogs..."

Pikachu burst out of the ground and smashed into Magnemite before Lt. Surge could finish.

"Hmph, rants take precious time you didn't have," Paul sneered as Magnemite was knocked to the ground, dizzy eyed and defeated.

"Magnemite is unable to battle, the winner is Pikachu!"

"So, what was it you were saying about skill?" Paul sneered as Lt. Surge returned his Magnemite.

"You must be a riot at parties kid," was his sarcastic response. "The war ain't over yet kid, I still have my ace in the hole. Behold, the commander of all my second badge Pokémon, the Sergeant!"

With a final Pokéball throw, out came a large, orange mouse type. One that made the female Pikachu cringe in fear.
"Rai!"

"Raichu, the mouse Pokémon and the evolved form of Pikachu. Raichu's electrical sacks are more developed than those belonging to Pikachu, allowing it to unleash 10,000 volts of electricity. However, due to the nature of evolution stone radiation, they lose the ability to easily learn new skills. It is the sign of either a foolish or desperate trainer to evolve such Pokémon early, at least without the knowledge of how to teach them any moves manually."

Both Paul and Lt. Surge heard the Pokédex's summation.

"Well, well, well, another Professor Oak trainer. So, you're up after him, eh?" Lt. Surge looked interested at the very least. Paul... just looked like he was sizing him up. "Well, in my personal opinion, Pikachu doesn't learn too many crucial attacks after its first few levels, it's not a Nidoran or something like that! The knowledge from some old guy in a lab off in the Seafoam Islands won't get you two everywhere you know! You really do need to learn on your own, after all experience outranks everything."

"I feel insulted," the Pokédex muttered.

"So, preparing for your imminent loss I see." Paul smirked "Well, let's not keep the little twerp waiting, Pikachu use Dig!"

Lt. Surge didn't even bat an eye. "Grab her tail."

Just as Pikachu had punched the hole in the ground to dig, Raichu (The Sergeant apparently) had grabbed her by her tail and held her up in the air like a struggling fish.

"What!?"

"Now, Slam!"

With a harsh smash, Raichu slammed Paul's Pikachu to the ground, before crashing down right on top of her.

Pikachu, remembering his own encounter with Lt. Surge's Raichu (even if that Raichu was probably not the same one) felt her pain.

Oh so much of her pain, a phantom pain rolled across Pikachu's back as he mentally experienced his first battle with Raichu.

And so without striking even once, Pikachu was no longer able to move.

"Pikachu is unable to battle, the winner is Sergeant Raichu"

Without a word, but with his customary disapproving glance, Paul returned Pikachu.

"Okay mister, if you want my gym badge, you have to beat Sergeant Raichu. Hope you're not planning on throwing another Dugtrio at me, are ya? Or is it a Sandshrew? Perhaps a Bellsprout? Tell me little man, who's left in your party who can take on my Raichu!? I mean, if all you have's a Farfetch'd, I'll at least grant you a dignified defeat!"

Paul held a Pokéball in his hand, one whose occupier Ash had a pretty good idea on. "Oh, I assure you. You have no idea what Pokémon I'm going to defeat you with."

Lt. Surge laughed. "Kid, you're not one of those wonder trader gamblers, are you? Because if you
are, I assure you I'm not scared of some overgrown Kalos bunny rabbit."

Ash had no idea what Lt. Surge meant by wonder trader, another thing to add to his ever-growing list of things he needed to learn about this new world he was in.

Paul threw his ball, and quickly confirmed Ash’s thought as the Pokémon inside began to take shape: a green and yellow turtle with hedges on its back.

"What sort of Pokémon is that?" Misty had never seen one like that before.

"It's a Grotle..." Ash and Lt. Surge said at once in dual surprise.

"A whatta?"

"Grotle, the Grove Pokémon. Grotle are normally found near water, and are generally slow yet powerful Pokémon native to the Sinnoh region. They are the first evolved form of Turtwig, the Sinnoh grass starter Pokémon." the Pokédex explained for Misty's benefit.

"A Sinnoh starter...huh. Professor Rowan gave you a Starter Pokémon...hmmm, he must have lower standards than old Oak," Lt. Surge noted. "Regardless, don't think that just because you have a Pokémon that's not common around here, means that you're going to win. I'm a soldier, and I have trained all my Pokémon to react to such surprises."

"Begin!"

Raichu and Grotle stared each other down as Paul declared his attack.

"Razor Leaf, now!"

From the groves on Grotle's back flew a storm of leaves right at Raichu.

"Block 'em all with Power-Up Punch!" Lt. Surge countered as Raichu's fists both glowed orange. It then proceeded to rapidly strike at each and every leaf in range, blowing them all away.

Ash was oddly reminded of Stephan's strategy against Emolga's Attract.

Paul looked a little bothered by this, actually.

"Power-Up Punch increases the users attack power with each hit," the Pokédex reminded him. "Normally it is meant to be against the enemy’s body, but leaves work too. In the wild, some species will use Power-Up Punch on trees as part of a war dance for just that reason."

"Go in with a Mega Punch!" Raichu's right fist was now the only glowing limb, but now it was much brighter and larger than earlier, and it was running right at Grotle.

Ash could recall quite clearly that Grotle was not the nimblest of Pokémon. Grotle could not avoid this attack.

"Now, let's end this war once and for all Raichu!" Lt. Surge was aware of this as well, it would seem.

"Use Curse!" Paul countered as Grotle's body glowed an odd purple color, moments before impact right into Grotle, the impact causing the air itself to shake from the intensity of the blow.

Misty looked empathetic to Grotle for that hit, in a manner Ash wasn't sure he wanted to think about
too hardly, lest he feel rage.

However, after the punch was thrown Grotle had not only tanked the hit, even if only by the skin of its teeth, but also its body began to glow with a green aura with Paul giving a wicked smirk, Lt. Surge looked concerned and Ash had a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach.

The feeling one got when you got back a low test score, the imminent feeling of doom.

Overgrow was active.

Grotle's grass attacks were going to become a lot more powerful, and Raichu was in point blank range.

"Use Razor Leaf!" Paul didn't miss a beat as Raichu looked rather terrified.

Considering that a tackle had broken Pidgeotto's wing a while back, and that her Steel Wing had similarly given a Rattata a concussion, Ash had a bad feeling that a super-powered razor leaf would be rather...unpleasant.

Lt. Surge seemed to think so as well, considering he had returned Sergeant Raichu to him moments before the Razor Leaf reached the poor thing, and said leaves promptly left some rather unnervingly large and deep gouge marks in the battlefield.

Returning his Raichu, Lt. Surge looked like he had taken a bite out of a rotten lemon. "Sometimes, I hate my job, but as a Gym Leader and a Lieutenant, it is my job to make the strategic call."

"Pathetic. Your Raichu possibly could have withstood that Razor Leaf." Paul looked disappointed that they didn't get to find out.

"I prefer my Raichu with four limbs and a tail," Lt. Surge pointed out. "No point in winning a battle, yet costing yourself the war. I'd ask you if you'd be willing to lose one of your Pokémon to win, but I probably won't like your answer. But, my opinions aside, you won. You'll get your badge...after I have the battle with the young man with the Pikachu and the dorky hat."

Ash decided to be dignified today and not react to the hat dissing.

Paul on the other hand...

"Hold up! I won, I want my badge now. I have things to do, and I don't need to watch some amateur lose today."

Lt. Surge idly checked something on his I-Phone. "You know kid, the guy's actually here for his third badge. You were here for a second badge gym battle, you're more of an amateur than he is."

Paul had a face that most people would have if you kicked their Growlithe. Considering it was Paul...hard to say what the closest thing would be for him.

....

He could feel Paul glaring at him as he and Pikachu stood ready to face Lt. Surge.

Did Paul realize his face could get stuck that way if he kept glaring like that?

"The gym battle between Lt. Surge the Gym Leader, and Ash of Pallet Town, will now begin. Both trainers can use up to three Pokémon, and the battle will be over when either side has no more Pokémon remaining. In addition, the Gym Leader may not substitute his Pokémon"
"Very well, let's get this started! Go, Private Volty!"

Ash and Pikachu just stared blankly at Lt. Surge throwing out his own female Pikachu, this one with a head band on it.

"Pika-Pikachu." 'I suddenly feel less original.' Pikachu missed the days where you never saw any other Pikachu, only Raichu and Pichu.

It was odd, yet oddly nice and he certainly was missing it right about now.

"So, what'd ya think? Ain't she lovely, she's a gift from an old war buddy of mine over in Kalos. Nice fellow...killed sixteen Oblivians with his Shuckle and a stick back during the war. Poor guy sadly doesn't age like I do." The last bit was said more to himself than anything else "So kid, what'd ya got?"

Ash briefly looked at Pikachu, whose look screamed 'I have dibs on Raichu and Raichu only'.

So, Pikachu wasn't a go then. That left Squirtle, Butterfree, Aipom, Bulbasaur and Charmander.

Considering that he knew quite well how fast Pikachu were, there was no point in trying to compete with speed (particularly considering the only non-Pikachu he had that could potentially do so was Pidgeotto, who wasn't here), he was going to have to play this smart.

"Bulbasaur, I choose you!"

The grass-type starter manifested in a burst of light before Lt. Surge, who looked amused.

"So, you're starting off with your starter," he assumed.

"Hmph." Paul didn't seem that impressed with the non-Ivysaur.

"Actually, he isn't," Ash admitted. Lt. Surge and Paul gave him differing looks on this: Lt. Surge looked rather impressed, while Paul gave him a look that was best summed up as annoyance that, in his mind, an inferior trainer managed such luck.

"Begin!"

"Time for a nice reminder that war isn't won by paper superiority, but tactics!" Surge stated with conviction. "Private, engage in enemy crippling!"

"Pika!"

Ash wasn't exactly sure what Surge meant at first (seeing as he did not speak military), but he noticed Volty rubbing her cheeks together in a manner he had seen Dedenne do when using Nuzzle before dashing right for Bulbasaur.

"Use Vine Whip to dodge!" Ash called for the counter. As Volty got near, Bulbasaur's vines pushed him off the ground and above the charging Pikachu, who was rather surprised.

Lt. Surge looked rather impressed. "Say kid, that's a pretty neat trick. On what battlefield did you learn that?"

"Use Razor Leaf!" 'You wouldn't believe me if I told you,' Ash thought though he didn't respond to the question, as it would come off as either arrogant or insane if he tried to answer. The leaves shot from Bulbasaur's bulb and down towards Volty like a hailstorm as Bulbasaur began to descend back down.
"Avoid and strike back with Quick Attack!" Surge countered as a white aura formed around Volty, just as the leaves struck.

"Bulba!" Bulbasaur let out a content grunt. Obviously, training with Pikachu was a good way to learn to counter other Pikachu's speed tactics.

The white streak of Pikachu still burst through the impact zone however, and right towards Bulbasaur's now grounded form.

"Razor Leaf!"

A sweeping barrage of leaves flew from Bulbasaur and right towards the speeding form of Pikachu, knocking Volty back and KO'd, her band (Muscle Band detected, muttered the Pokédex) of apparently no help today.

"Private Volty is unable to battle, the winner is Bulbasaur."

"Excellent work Bulbasaur!"

"Bulba!"

"Pikachu-Pika!"

"Way to go Ash and Bulbasaur!"

"Pathetic."

Paul broke the congratulating streak started by Ash, Bulbasaur, Pikachu and Misty as he was prone to do.

"That was not a victory worth celebrating." Paul pointed out as Lt. Surge returned Volty.

"Every victory in battle is worth celebrating after the battle is over." Lt. Surge spoke sagely. "Morale has decided the fate of more wars than you might think kid."

Pocketing Volty's ball for later, Surge removed a pair of Pokéballs from his belt, as if trying to figure out which one to deploy, before returning the one in his left hand to his belt.

"Now, this is normally when I use my Magneton or Voltorb. However, I think it's about time I send out of one my irregular corps".

Throwing the remaining Pokéball into the air, Ash began to mentally prepare for what was to come.

Electabuzz? Electrode? A second Raichu?

But he was wrong.

Very wrong. Lt. Surge's second Pokémon was...

Misty's scream of fright hammered home exactly what Lt. Surge had sent out against him (Paul's glaring was not very effective at silencing her).

"Joltik, the attaching Pokémon. Joltik attach themselves to electrically charged objects to grant themselves electrical properties. This Pokémon is native to Unova, and it surprises this unit that it would be here." The Pokédex summed up the big question of why Lt. Surge had the world's smallest Pokémon as his second.
The little yellow bug didn't really seem that Lt. Surgeish to Ash.

"Impressed, ain't ya? While Raichu is my favorite and strongest Pokémon, it's the Joltik that started me down my path of electrical mastery and are a close second." Lt. Surge grinned. "My first Pokémon was a Joltik, and I trained these tough little biters for the war. Man, if these fellows don't do some nasty things to those Ranger Union punks." The last bit was under his breath.

Ash didn't have much experience fighting Joltik. While his memory might be overlooking something, he was pretty sure his only experience in how a Joltik fought was Georgia's fight with one.

As he was not trying to fight the world's smallest and probably lightest Pokémon with a giant ice bear, he wasn't sure how much help that would be, bar a potential advisory tale not to use a Pokémon with vulnerabilities like Beartic, or potential counter measures by slamming oneself into the ground.

Of course, Ash hadn't exactly brought his Snorlax with him, so that probably would not be effective. In fact, the only strategy Ash could really think of to avoid it might be Counter-Shield.

And, seeing as Bulbasaur's grass-attacks would not be that effective due to Joltik's typing, Ash held up Bulbasaur's Pokéball "Bulbasaur..."

"Prevent the enemies escape Joltik, use Spider Web!"

"Jol!"

A white thread burst out of Joltik's mouth, flying into the air before forming into a sizeable webbing that blocked the Pokéball's energy stream. The webbing than shimmered and became invisible.

"No retreating for you! Now, Face-Hugger!"

"What kind of move is..."Ash started, before he and Bulbasaur managed to catch the fact that Joltik had lodged itself onto Bulbasaur's face, much to their mutual horror.

Apparently, it was a command. "Quickly, knock it off before it can..."

"Joltik, Bug Buzz!"

Joltik's body began to vibrate rapidly, as a powerful shockwave filtered through its body and right into Bulbasaur's.

Joltik hopped off Bulbasaur as the grass type was left avoiding a fall to the ground on shaky knees.

"Finish it with Shock Wave!"

Glowing yellow with electrical charge, a beam of electrical energy slammed right into Bulbasaur, bringing it down for Joltik's win.

"Bulbasaur is unable to battle, Joltik is the winner!"

"What a horrible little monster!" Misty exclaimed about Joltik, and for once Ash agreed with her fear of bugs.

That Joltik was a little horror!

While Paul made some scoffing quip in the background about his supposed stupidity, and Misty berating him for it, Ash returned Bulbasaur with a contemplative expression.
Joltik was not going to be a fun battle for whoever he sent out, and it looked like even Squirtle could be bad call, Counter-shield or no Counter-shield.

Now, who did that leave him with? Who could be the best counter to Joltik’s bug and electrical attacks?

A memory surfaced in his mind of a battle in Hoenn that gave him some ideas.

"Charmander, I choose you!"

Up next was his battle-loving fire lizard, who stared at Joltik with some surprise.

"Char?" ‘Wait, did one of us actually lose to that speck of dust? What madness is this!? I could eat that thing and not even feel it.’

"A Charmander!? So, let me guess, he's your starter, and your fall back guy is a Squirtle?"

"Nope," Ash simply replied as Paul's annoyance at a perceived fool having two+ starters was once again sensed. "Charmander, use Ember!"

"Evasive maneuvers!"

As the fiery sparks of ember flew across the battlefield in an attempt to strike the elusive foe, the small form of Joltik managed to avoid them with natural speed and the benefits of a small and nimble body.

With a final hop, it bounced up to the ceiling and held itself up there.

"Let loose a Shock Wave, Joltik!" Surge commanded as electricity began to form around Joltik again.

"Strike the ground with Metal Claw!"

Nodding in agreement to the shock of all observers, Charmander's claws glowed metallic white before stabbing the ground just as the attack hit.

The electricity was funneled through Charmander and into the ground via the steel technique, without damage.

So, once the barrage was let off by a tiring Joltik, Charmander stood up without any damage, much to every observer’s surprise.

"What!?" Paul was shocked something as crazy as that worked.

"Note to self, find counter." Lt. Surge muttered to himself.

"I should look into that trick," Misty mused, an image in her head of Wingull using Steel Wing for the same purpose.

Pointing right at Joltik, Charmander let loose a boast. "Charmander Char Char!" Your power, the power you absorb from everything but yourself, is useless against me. I am Charmander the invincible, Charmander the all-powerful, Charmander who will become the Charizard who defeats all! All in my path to greatness will be overcome by my indomitable power! Become a stepping stone in my path to glory!"

For some reason, Ash suddenly imagined Charmander with a pair of pointy shades. Perhaps Squirtle
was going to lend him some in the future.

"Most rookies would have just tried to dodge that," Lt. Surge mused. "Oak sure knows how to pick some quality trainers. But don't think my Joltik is less than that quality wise. Joltik, Hidden Power!"

With a massive glowing green ball over its forehead, Joltik let loose the variable attack down towards Charmander.

"Bat it back with Metal Claw!"

With claws of steel once again, Charmander slammed the Hidden Power right back at the ceiling, causing the bug-type to dislodge and fall.

Ash realized the potential ramifications of something that small hitting the ground from that high, he was about to order Charmander to catch Joltik, but Lt. Surge beat him to it.

"Upgrade to Paratrooper Joltik, use Spider-Web!"

With a burst of spider-silk formed a miniature parachute, slowing Joltik's descent. Ash's relieved face was not missed by Surge.

"Give me some credit kid, I don't like soldiers dying under my command!"

Paul's 'seriously, you'd care if it died' glare bored into Ash and Pikachu's back.

Of course, now that he knew that he wasn't going to cause the death of an opponent today, Ash pointed right at the descending Joltik "Charmander, move in with Flame Charge!"

Charmander, who had been working on the move Pignite loved for a while now, nodded in agreement as he began to stomp the ground, stirring up an aura of flames around himself before charging towards the falling Joltik.

While it initially looked like Joltik would hit the ground before Charmander got there, a sudden burst of speed in the Flame Charge allowed Charmander to smash into Joltik before it could dodge, sending Joltik spinning into the air and landing at Lt. Surge's feet in defeat.

"Joltik is unable to battle, the winner is Charman..." The flames died away, revealing how the burst of speed was made. "Charmeleon!"

Ash and Pikachu both stared in impressed shock as they saw Charmeleon, now evolved and stronger (The Pokédex itself was so surprised it didn't spout off wisdom on Charmeleon’s in general), standing in the wake of victory with a pensive look on his face.

Perhaps he was contemplating the meaning of life via his new wisdom...

"Meleon." 'Damn, wish I could have evolved fighting something more badass. Officially, there were a thousand Joltiks in my way, with laser canons and dripping poison every step they took'.

Or not.

Returning Joltik, Lt. Surge looked impressed.

"Well, I guess even if I defeat you today kid, you're still a winner in some ways." Holding his last Pokéball in hand, he had a mad grin. "Of course, I have to wonder if you can actually defeat Staff Sergeant Raichu even with your fancy new Charmeleon?"
Charmeleon looked back towards Pikachu, who gave him a serious look in return. With that look, that shared sense of the honor of battle and the importance of this fight, a feeling that did not need to words to be expressed, the battle loving Fire-type walked over to Ash's side and stood there, as Pikachu hopped off Ash's shoulder for this final clash.

Probably under the assumption that Charmeleon would step in and kick Raichu's electrified tail if Pikachu lost.

"So, Electric-type to Electric type huh?" Lt. Surge looked amused as Paul muttered something about idiocy. "Well, this should be fun kid. Go, Staff Sergeant Raichu!"

A Raichu burst out of the ball, this time with a vest on it.

Pikachu and Ash gave confused looks to it, but otherwise paid it no further thought.

"Begin!"

"Pikachu, let's show them your newly perfected technique. Thunderbolt!"

"Pika-Chuuu!" _This feels so good to do it again!_ Having developed his electrical powers further to once again pull off their favorite attack, the electrical attack slammed right into Raichu, pushing it back a bit.

However, the damage itself inflicted was somewhat minimal to their shock, as the vest itself seemed to be the cause of it all.

"I see you haven't encountered an Assault Vest before, have ya?" Lt. Surge laughed merrily.

"A what?" Ash confirmed their assumption as the Pokédex chimed in.

"**Assault Vests are a League-recognized hold item for Pokémon. A Pokémon using an Assault Vest is able to better resist special attacks, in exchange for the loss of the ability to use non-damaging attacks.**"

"Char." _Remind me to get one of those._

"So, that was your Thunderbolt? Pretty good kid, now feel mine!" A Thunderbolt flew off Surge's Raichu and slammed into Pikachu with similar force.

Pikachu, due to a lack of a vest was pushed back further than Raichu, though he bore the damage rather well.

"Follow up with Mega Punch!"

"Iron Tail!"

Raichu and Pikachu countered each-others attacks with their own, an orange fist and white tail matching each other in power.

However, Pikachu was able to use the impact of the blows to get a better angle than Raichu.

"Use Quick Attack!"

The speed attack slammed into Raichu’s white stomach, causing the Raichu to stumble backwards. The vest didn't do much to absorb physical attacks after all.
"Focus Blast!" Lt. Surge declared as Raichu formed a glowing blue ball in its hands. Eyeing Pikachu, Ash didn't need to telepathically remind Pikachu of what to do next.

After all, Mr. 'Ursaring use Focus Blast' was in the room with them.

As the attack fired, the technique was called. "Counter-Shield!"

Spinning on the ground, an electrical wall was formed. The Focus Blast hit it, and was stuck.

Lt. Surge was rather impressed. It was a trick after his own heart. "Say kid, if we ever go to war, can I draft you?"

"Um...you'd have to ask my mother first, and fire!" Ash hoped that would dissuade him as the Focus Blast shattered and fired back right at Raichu, the attack hitting its owner like a laser armada from a space-epic. It hit with the force of the Focus Blast plus added momentum and electrical power from the Counter-Shield.

Sure, the Assault Vest softened the damage, but it was impressive none the less.

"Don't worry kid, I'm an expert when it comes to wooing mothers." The look that crossed Surge's face made Ash feel oddly uncomfortable now. "Grass Knot."

The command was soft it almost didn't register to Ash, but Raichu's glowing green foot stomping the ground did.

As did the grass stalks that bound Pikachu's feet and tail just as it finished balancing himself back up from the Counter-Shield.

"Pi!?!? 'Well, this guy's a little smarter than I remember him being'.

The original Lt. Surge probably would not have used something as subtle as Grass Knot.

"No more speed attacks kid, or twirling attacks." Lt. Surge pointed at Pikachu "Now, let's end this with Mega Punch!"

Raichu's fist glowing orange once more, Raichu dashed in towards the immobile Pikachu as Ash grit his teeth.

Charmeleon was preparing to enter the ring if this punch connected.

Only one option registered to Ash.

"Pikachu, it's all or nothing!"

Nodding in agreement, Pikachu grimaced. 'This will either work, or I'm going to need a good sulk.' He thought to himself as he put his two hands together and began charging up static electricity in the palm of his hand.

As Raichu got in close for the punch, the static had formed properly into the still tricky technique. A technique that Pikachu couldn't even fire properly.

However, he could smash with it.

"Pikachu, use Zap Cannon!"

The glowing electric ball in hand somewhat resembling an aura sphere, Pikachu slammed it right into
Raichu's punch.

The attack canceling out Raichu's, static electricity covered the entirety of its body "Rai!"

"Holy Shit!" Lt. Surge swore.

Paul was gaping at them like they had just violated a law of the universe.

Misty shook her head in amusement.

With a burst of strength Pikachu tore the grass binding him and looked right at Raichu with a wicked grin.

"Let's end this once and for all Pikachu, Quick Attack!"

Pikachu charged once again into the belly of his foe. This time, Raichu fell to the ground in defeat.

"Staff Sergeant Raichu is unable to battle, the winner is Pikachu. The match goes to the challenger Ash of Pallet Town!"

…

Returning Raichu, Lt. Surge looked down looked down at both victorious challengers. Ash with his Pikachu and Charmeleon at his side grinning, and Paul with his scowl doing what it always seemed to do.

"Ash, I must say you are an inventive kid. You know how to counter me in ways that most of my war time opponents failed to do. I'd take you out there with me for battle anytime. Here," Handing Ash the Thunder Badge, "Let this be proof to the world that I approve of you."

While Ash cheered to himself, Pikachu and Charmeleon handing the resulting posing, Lt. Surge just threw Paul his badge.

"Here, you won. Now, go away." The Gym Leader said in a disinterested tone, barely sparing the Sinnoh trainer a glance.

While fresh off his victory, Ash wasn't able to counter quickly enough when a pair of oddly giggly girls ambushed them outside the gym, giving them tickets for the St. Anne, or figure out a good excuse to convince Misty not to go to that doomed boat.

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**Viridian Gym, a bit later**

"Mankey is unable to battle, the winner is Rhyhorn. This first badge match victory goes to the gym leader, Giovanni!"

Giovanni detested he had to put up with weaklings like this, but there was a Gym inspector in the area after all, and the Pokémon gym was a major part of his Kanto based operations.

To risk it, was to risk one of his major areas for finding talent, either to recruit or to rob.

So, he had to deal with those without talent, like the boy who thought he was Brock.

Returning his weakest Rhyhorn, he glared at the fool who had dared challenge me. "Was that it?
You are truly pathetic. Did you actually train before you came here? Be gone!"

The boy promptly ran out of the gym, his Mankey limp in his arms and tears streaming down his face.

Still annoyed at the weakling who had wasted four minutes of his time with a Mankey and Pidgey, he was almost happy to have that trio send him a report.

"You may speak," Giovanni told them in a controlled tone of voice, suppressing his annoyance so could deal with his non-legal business properly.

"Sir, the boy has defeated Lt. Surge and earned a third gym badge." Jessie reported in as Giovanni gave an amused smirk.

"Did he now?" So, the Lightning Unovan was defeated as well.

"Yes sir, it was a pretty good win to. His Charmander evolved during the battle." James informed him.

"He's still traveling with that other bloodliner girl, wonder if she's his girlfriend or something?" Meowth wondered out loud. "Haven't seen any evidence of canoodling yet, but then again what do I know about human love and mating rituals?"

Oh yes, the girl. Giovanni was rather interested in where that would all go. From the reports it was unclear but Giovanni's instincts told him that something might happen between them, good or bad he didn't know but so far Giovanni's instincts hadn't steered him wrong given that they'd help him build his criminal empire.

"Oh, and they just boarded the St. Anne."

It took Giovanni a moment to register what they just told him. "They what!?"

James gulped as the tone of surprise that Giovanni had. "Well, to be more specific, I'd say the girl dragged the boy onboard against his will. Something about rare stuff for catching the world's water Pokémon. Lures, bait and balls if I'd had to guess."

"Say, aren't we plotting an ambush on board that ship or somethin'?" Meowth chimed in.

"Oh yeah, I remember Cassidy bragging about being put in charge of that op." Jessie remembered.

"Just think boss, you'll soon have your own super Pikachu, Charmeleon, Bulbasaur, Psyduck..."

"The operation is being canceled." Giovanni decided quickly. "Tell Cassidy and Butch to change gears for the attack on Hop-Hop-Hop Town."

He then deactivated the communication, not catching what the Trio's reactions were to the order.

The St. Anne operation was not worth the potential the boy was.

He was the key, or at least a key, to the very continuation of Team Rocket as an organization.

S.S Anne (also known as the Saint Anne)

The S.S Anne gave Misty a lot of emotions, most of which could be summed up in a variety of words.

It was filled with every wonder the future water-type master could hope for, and several things she hadn't even realized existed, but was quickly captivated with.

Like all the different varieties of lures on display (of which she bought several) for pretty much every target she had.

Or the gemstones from Unova that could boost a water-type attacks power (she couldn't afford them sadly).

She really wished she had enough money for those Mystic Water pendants she saw swamped with rich, spoiled Pokémon enthusiasts who probably hadn't once actually fought in a proper Pokémon battle.

"Why are the richer people of the world so overwhelmingly idiotic." she muttered to herself.

"Psy! 'And why do I have to carry all your stuff?'

"Just be glad I only bought the Magikarp," Misty reminded the duck, who shivered at the prospect of all that additional crud to carry.

Of course, said Magikarp would be sent to Professor Oak as soon as she found Ash (who had gotten lost in the hustle and bustle of this wonderful place), along with the name, phone-number and address of the guy who sold it to her.

It was illegal after all. Luckily, such Magikarp salesmen were easy enough to trick.

"Step right up, step right up folks! Devon Corporation proudly presents Battle Poke-bobbing."

The carnie like voice caused Misty and Psyduck to stop in their tracks (well, she stopped, Psyduck walked right into her leg), to note the large dunk tank, mob of trainers and confident looking, soaked trainer with a Machop.

"Win a battle, and bob for Pokéballs!" The colorfully dressed announcer to the event gleefully cheered as he reached into the pool and plucked out a Pokéball with a white body and red center line. "Pokéballs, Premier Balls, Great Balls and Ultra Balls! Net Balls, Heal Balls, Quick Balls and Luxury Balls! We still have more Pokéballs than we can toss at you, so come on up brave challengers. Defeat the last winner, and bob for one ball. Loose, and he gets another go at it. There are still six Master Balls to be found. Now, who's brave enough to step up to bat?"

Misty's face morphed into that of a grin. This could be fun, and Ash would surely end up here eventually.

"Duck." 'My, I have to fight, senses are kicking in.'

...

The Saint Anne gave Ash a lot of emotions, most of which could be summed up in a variety of words.

However, surprise was not something Ash was expecting to feel, even with the odd absence of Team Rocket.

No, life just had to spring a fast one on him, and have him do an odd repeat of a previous encounter he had in a Unovan Pokémart.

In layman's terms: being yanked off into a booth by a female Connoisseur (there was a term for them, one that was escaping him right now).

"Bonjour my young Kanto trainer. My name is Burgundy, A-Class Pokémon Connoisseuse." Inside a booth that was far more professional looking than her old one (if what he had heard from Cilan was accurate), he found himself (and Pikachu) being stared intently at an older, yet still quite Burgundy, Burgundy.

First Paul, now Burgundy. Ash absently wondered who was next, Morrison?

"If you are unaware of what a Pokémon Connoisseuse is, we are a group of people who are able to measure the compatibility between trainers and their Pokémon. We are mostly found in Unova, but as an international ship dedicated to the best of Pokémon throughout the world, the St Anne is of course stocked with only the best the world can offer, Connoisseuses included of course."

The arrogance in her words was refreshingly familiar.

"Now, let me see," and with that, she picked up Pikachu before Ash could get the two of them out of there.

"Pika." *Taste me and I will shock you.* Pikachu was quite prepared for a repeat performance of the 'humiliate Burgundy' show.

Holding Pikachu up to her, she observed him for a moment, raising him up in the air a bit and giving off a good imitation of someone observing fruit in a produce store, before setting him down, after giving an odd amount of attention to the bottom of Pikachu's feet.

She then wet her index finger with her mouth, rubbed it on Pikachu and then sucked on it, before her eyes took on a sparkling gleam that was usually reserved for a starving Ash seeing a feast.

"Oh my, it is simply incredible! The compatibility between you and your Pikachu is simply incredible! It is as if you have traveled together for years!"

'*If only we had a clue how long it was,*' was a thought the both had at once, only proving Burgundy's point more.

Burgundy having a point...man, that was just an odd feeling to have.

"Beyond that, your Pikachu has brilliant potential, its attack and speed I.V's are simply incredible!"

"Er, what?" Ash had no idea what an I.V was. Weren't those the things you put into ill people? *'Seriously how many things do I have to learn about this world?'* Ash thought.

"Are all you're Pokémon this way? Show me!"

Ash and Pikachu exchanged worried looks. Sure, this Burgundy seemed a heck of a lot more competent than her old self, but did they really need to go through everyone?

But, it probably would be too much hassle to get away from her...it probably would be okay if he
didn't go flashing her with Starter Pokémon.

If he did, she might start screaming in wonder, and a bunch of traders would start harassing him.

The Pokédex would have a similar issue, luckily it was being unusually quiet today.

So, with that in mind, he let out Butterfree, whom Burgundy proceeded to gush over.

"Oh my, a Butterfree! Oh, how I love them. Their wings really are as beautiful as everyone says."

"Free?" 'Ash...who's the weirdo looking over me?' Butterfree cried out nervously as Burgundy looked him over.

"Those wings, those eyes...oh yes, I can see it now. You trained this Butterfree up from a Caterpie, didn't you?" Ash, Pikachu and Butterfree nodded

"I can see all the effort you poured into this Butterfree. The streamlined wings built for speeds are simply extraordinary. You must be so relieved all the Butterfree gathering for mating were stolen, now you'll never have to part ways with it!"

At the trio's gobsmacked expressions, Burgundy looked rather confused. "Oh, you didn't know? It was in all the papers this morning. Every Butterfree that had gathered in the traditional Butterfree congregation area in Kanto, the place where they pair up for life, was stolen by unknown criminals, with such losses it would be impossible to get the thing running this year. Thus there will be a population crash of Caterpie next year, guess everyone will just have to go with Weedles instead."

"Now, do you have any more wonderful Pokémon to show me? I'm getting the oddest feeling you're most compatible with strong and fast Pokémon who have issues taking hits, but I could be wrong"

To the east of Cerulean City, sometime later

Butterfree were not her preferred prey.

She was a hunter of only the rarest and finest Pokémon. Pokémon whose worth were at least in the six digits.

A high class Butterfree was lucky to be worth three, and the average one was a dime a dozen.

If she wanted to deal with high end bugs, she'd be collecting Vivillons.

But, what was one to do when your bribery budget was severely depleted? You had to do any work if you wanted to continue as you please.

What did her client even want with them in the first place? Did he have some giant garden he wanted stocked with his own personal bug collection?

It was just idiotic to hire her for it. For a fraction of what she was paid for the job, the fool could merely hire some bug-catcher to go obtain some Caterpie and Metapod for the job.

But money couldn't buy brains, she supposed.

"Commander J, the client has made contact with the delivery crew. They have passed on the cargo, and have been paid in return. They are returning to the ship as we speak with the money"
"Good, very good." Her form imposing and cold, the silver haired Pokémon Hunter known only as J had a scowl on her face. "Maybe now we can get out of this place. I'd rather not be in Team Rocket airspace any longer than I have to."

Operating in the same area as the Pokémon thieves employed by Team Rocket led to competition. Competition led to open warfare. Open warfare led to damaged ships and mutual capture by the police.

In territory controlled by Teams like Aqua or Galactic, at least she could operate easier as they were not in direct competition.

"Now, are there any open contracts available, preferably in Hoenn or Sinnoh?" The regions closest to Kanto, and out of Team Rocket's reach, would be the simplest and smartest destinations to go for.

"Why go so far, when you can get paid quite a handsome sum here in Kanto?"

The voice that said that, was not one of her men.

J and every armed man she had with her in the bridge all turned and had their weapons aimed right at the man who had somehow appeared right in front of her: his face obscured by a brown hooded robe.

"Who the hell are you, and how did you get on my ship!?" J demanded as the figure seemed to smirk under his cloak.

"Oh, it was by no error on your part, Hunter J. Nothing you could have reasonably done could have prevented my entry, nothing can. But do lower your weapons, bank account 1366613 Pummelo Central."

One of her offshore accounts, and a major one at that. One whose loss to police seizure would be a harsh blow to her entire operation. J and company lowered their weapons compliantly, as the cloaked figure continued.

"Now, isn't that better? Why should everything be solved by violence anyway? Those researchers had to die, but you don't have to. You have a use, human."

J felt a feeling of dread overcome her briefly.

A bloodliner freak.

Shit.

No wonder he could get on her ship, the damn freak could probably teleport.

"I am an emissary from the Bloodliner King, with a job request. It is so simple, even a human can do it, and it is absolutely foolproof."

The mocking voice was truly annoying in this emissary. Oh, so very annoying.

The emissary reached into his cloak as he continued.

"My lord is quite interested in the bloodliners of the world, J. Many of them are out of the world right now, making a name for themselves. Some even act human, it is so laughably amusing. However, these misguided fools do have potential to serve the grand design, or as breeding stock. After all, male bloodliners are so rare, even if they are absolute wastes of molecules talent wise, they can still
be used to breed better ones, or at least ones with better mindsets."

The emissary held up a photo of a teenage male, with tannish skin, spiky black hair covered by a cap, and lightning marks on his cheeks. A Pikachu's lower body was visible in the picture on his shoulder.

"His name is Ash Ketchum, son of Delia Ketchum, a human woman with the correct potential to make her life worth continuing, at least until she hits menopause. He is a bloodliner with quite...strong lineage. The King, however, has doubts of his usefulness to the grand design. Your job, is to test him. Capture him and bring him to the provided coordinates, and he will be found pointless and be used as breeding stock for something better. Let him escape from your best efforts, and he'll show the potential for the grand design."

"Why the hell would I help you hunt some bloodliner freak? That is not my field of expertise, and for some scheme that's probably going to end up with me in a shallow grave if you succeed" J questioned as the Emissary tossed her the image like a shuriken (She caught it perfectly, of course. She had practice blocking projectile weapons), before reaching back into his cloak.

"Don't pretend that you care who pays you, J. Money is all that matters to you, and this job comes with nine figures attached, regardless of the outcome. Capture him, or have him escape despite true effort...it matters not to us. You will still be paid, though if you half-ass it and he escapes, you won't get paid. I'll be in touch J...do take the job though. After all, we know all your accounts, your hideouts, your moles and your clients. Do the easy job J...or go find a new one."

With that, he vanished just as he came, as J crumpled the photo in her hand (It was easy to replace though, thanks to Facebook).

She hated being blackmailed. But, this 'Bloodliner King' and his emissary had all the cards.

And all the money.

There was no option really.

She would hunt what some called the world's truly most dangerous game.

Not a Legendary Pokémon, but a Human.

"Hunter J, unknown bogies to our west! They appear to be flying in formations known to stronger, long-distance flying types. Should be attempt capture?"

Pushing 'the Emissary' out of her mind for now, she gave the bridge hand who asked a blank stare "Do I even need to answer that question. Capture them!"

Omake

Ambiguously canon

Ketchumverse Part 2

Earth 123114

Trans universe/dimension/timeline travel felt weird.

That was all he and Pikachu had to say on the subject, but he couldn't argue it didn't work
considering what he was staring at.

After all, he was quite sure that last time he was in Pallet, there was not a gigantic castle overlooking it with a coat of arms depicting the Battle Frontier's symbol on it, and gargoyles that oddly resembled Pikachu, Charizard and various other Pokémon he had in the old timeline/regained in the new one/probably were often caught in other timelines.

"Welcome to the Battle Citadel," A Harmonia Gropius greeted them dramatically, his Reshiram on his side like it was a common Rattata (as oppose to, say, a legendary Pokémon that stood out like a sore thumb). "Home of the Bond Symbol and also, unbeknownst to old Scott, the Headquarters for thousands of Ash Ketchums, and a Gary who took your place in the multiversal order."

Ash and Pikachu tried to process that information. Thousands of versions of him, in this castle? And a Gary took his place? What's up with that?

Sure, it wasn't small, but it was probably smaller than Brandon's Pyramid. A seemed to notice this.

"Most of the operations of the League of Ashes takes place below ground, where miles of caverns were created by the thousands of Charizards belonging to various Ash's duking it out for position of strongest Charizard in the multiverse."

Suddenly the entire earth shook around them, as if two forces of incredible might were slamming into each other. Ash outright fell from the shock of the impact, sending Pikachu rolling off his shoulder rather comically, which A and Reshiram seemed only mildly disturbed by the whole thing.

"Oh my, it would appear that Brain and Guardian's Charizards are at it again," he said nonchalantly.

"Again!?" was all Ash could say in response.

"Pika." In a deadpan tone of voice, Pikachu stated 'We are officially not letting Charizard out in this universe, ever.'

If Ash thought A Harmonia Gropius was going to be the oddest thing he would see today, Ash was quite mistaken, particularly when A had brought him to meet with someone 'who was responsible for the annoying legalities, like timeline breaking, trans-multiversal diplomacy and expenditures'.

No, what was probably the oddest thing he was going to see was a version of himself, dressed in a tuxedo that probably cost more than the winnings from a Pokémon League victory, drinking from a coffee mug emblazoned with a Team Rocket R, with his Pikachu looking over what appeared to be an I-Pad in a room that rather resembled a CEO's room (complete with fancy knickknacks, diplomas and more company logos that just happened to be the Team Rocket R).

Both Ash and his Pikachu just stared at the two in confusion, not even sure where to begin here.

"Um, you...er, I drink coffee?" Ash decided to break the silence with the simplest thing he could think of. The Ash drinking the coffee smirked, perhaps in response to the fumble of terminologies.

"Only the finest imported coffee from the coffeemon universe," he said as if it was nothing. "It's between a Moemon and a Pokemorph verse, above a Spellermon verse, below a Cardverse and diagonal to a Rapidestria and Pokégirl verse if you look at the map with 19D glasses, rather nice place really. I prefer the finer things in life you see, like this brew. For the record, as most of us are in fact named Ash Ketchum, we generally take on nicknames and titles to make communications simple. I am Don Ash, leader of my reformed, Fortune 500, Team Rocket."
"Pika Pikachu." His Pikachu responded in a tone that Ash could only describe as the Pokémon equivalent of a stuck up banker's tone of voice.

"So tell me, are you aware that resetting your timeline is illegal?"

Ash and Pikachu just stared at the guy incredulously. "Okay, for one, Arceus technically reset time, not me. Second, how would I even know that?"

"Ignorance sadly does not work in court, though circumstances do." Don noted. "Considering your timeline was being destroyed, I can safely assure you we probably will not have to execute you for your crime. Good thing too, setting up execution equipment takes paperwork I'd rather not deal with."

Ash and Pikachu really had no response to the guy being rather chill about the idea of being executed by, well, themselves.

"Nothing personal." He noted their expressions. "It's simple formalities. Shared treaties and all, a few too many Light Yagamis being too clever for their own good. Arceus, they are so annoying. At least Lelouches aren't generally insane..."

Ash had no idea who either of those people (who were probably fictional in his world) were.

"Chu," Pikachu said with a blank face, which Ash was pretty sure was something about Lelouch's sanity being debatable, and something about a Requiem?

Apparently only Pikachu got the reference.

"Regardless, I am getting off track," Don admitted, before his Pikachu gestured to him over to the I-Pad. "Huh, you're Polygamous? How odd, you don't really see that here, more of a Harry, Naruto, Issei sort of thing. I mean, sure, one of the Harry Potter leaders is Polygamous, but he's a freaking Incubus so it really isn't that odd...mind if I ask why? Aura Restoration Act?"

"Er, no."

"Membership to ancient and noble houses that require spouses for each individual house?"

"I'm pretty sure there is no Ancient and Noble House of Ketchum in this or any other reality."

"Huh. Well, you're a curiosity at the very least, none the less. Tell me," He then took a long sip from his coffee cup as Ash briefly noted several familiar images on the I-Pad Don Pikachu had (He saw Mewtwo, Paul's Torterra, Gary's Blastoise, Red's Pikachu and Charizard, his Pikachu, Charizard, Ambipom and Butterfree, and Misty's Psyduck) "Are you aware about the usefulness and trans-universal time displacement? You can leave for a five hour battle in the rim of the May and Drew love timelines during a bathroom break at a five star restaurant, and be back in no time at all?"

"Um, no?"

"Pika?" 'I don't think that makes any sense at all'?

"I must say, that sounds like it violates most laws of science and common sense." The Pokédex chimed in.

"What is this common sense you speak of?" Don sarcastically asked. "As to my question, it is about your community service to the omniverse, to make up for the damage you caused it?"
"Community service!?"

"Yes, to the greater omniversal community. Welcome to the League of Ashes, now you need a cool name or are we going to have to assign you a number instead?"
Approaching the Hunter's trap

Somewhere around the Rock Tunnel

From the skies, great beams of light emitted from an unseen clash.

A one-sided battle, from which the other side had absolutely no chance of victory.

One by one, they fell, but not to the earth.

Only one did so, and seemingly as if pushed out of the way by the sacrifice of another.

This other was only saved from a splat by the sound of a pair of releases.

Though the crash did cause a separation of sorts.

Elsewhere, earlier

"The Rock what?"

As it turned out, Ash had no idea where the Saint Anne would have ended up without any sort of hijacking, sinking, or stranding him on deserted islands filled with giant robotic Pokémon.

As it turned out, oddly enough the specific ticket that was being handed out by those hyper-active blondes whom Ash was sure were Team Rocket agents like last time would have caused the ship to dock at a port just to the east of Cerulean City, northwest of Lavender Town.

As Misty was not going to take a single step closer to Cerulean than she had to, that left only one route to Lavender Town as their trek.

But this was not a path that Ash had traveled before.

Normally, Ash would be all for a new adventure. However, the Rock Tunnel sounded oddly ominous, and Brockish.

There was also the matter of the loot.

Very much the matter of the loot.

Now, normally Ash did not carry that many Pokéballs on him at any given time. He was not a catchaholic, and thus did not have the desire to throw a Pokéball at every living thing he saw that interested him. Simply being able to see them and be around the Pokémon was enough.

If he did, Professor Oak would have had to buy the rest of Pallet Town to fit them all, particularly if Gary was still a big catcher of Pokémon this time around (200+ Pokémon if Ash recalled correctly).

However, Ash was quite fond of random competitions and tournaments, with participation in Pokémon Sumo, Pokémon Racing, Pokémon Ringer, Pokémon Firefighting, Pokémon Cosplay and numerous others. Any chance to have his Pokémon challenged in a new way Ash was all for it.

He wasn't a huge cooking contest person, perhaps it just had to have Poké, Battle, or Tournament in
its name to garner his interest.

So, he might have gone a bit...overboard with the competition for obtaining Pokéballs, though in his defense Charmeleon had a lot of pent up energy from not being able to take over for Pikachu in the battle against Lt. Surge.

Then Squirtle wanted in...and after that he got so caught up in all of his other Pokémon, who he had on him, and called upon as well.

He only stopped when he lost all feeling in his face due to the exposure to cold water.

That still left him with fifty-one Pokéballs (and Ash generally preferred to only have five additional ones on hand at any given time), all of colorations he didn't recognize.

In his defense though, the kind of balls he had seen himself in the past were Pokéballs of various decoration, Safari Balls, some Apricorn made Balls, Park Balls, the very similar Lake Balls, antique Pokéball type artifacts, a giant stone Pokéball, Dark Balls, the GS Ball and a Master Ball. He was sure there were other varieties in the world.

He just happened to have gotten fifty-one balls of varieties he didn't recognize.

Thankfully as always, he had something on him that seemed to know everything.

"Pokéball identification for Noobs program initiated," the Pokédex started up. "The Pokéball is made from synthesized Apricorn material and is..."

Ash tuned out the resulting chemistry lesson.

"Now, for the fool who ignored my very intelligent chemistry description, this program is designed to tell you everything you need to know about Pokéball variants," the Pokédex continued. "Don't feel bad about Professor Oak not covering them in detail: variant Pokéballs are expensive and most people don't bother with them. They, in fact, only began to be produced in sizeable numbers within the last few years. So you not knowing anything about them is less about you being an idiot, and more about everyone being mostly uninformed idiots."

Ash couldn't tell if the Pokédex was being nice or not, so he held up the one ball he had obtained that was blue with yellow bolts across it.

"The Quick Ball. Developed by a scientist originating in the Johto region who wished to catch easily startled Pokémon before they can flee, the Quick Ball has a higher affinity for catching Pokémon before hostilities begin at the start of the battle. However, once the battle starts, the Quick Ball has little to nothing to differ itself from a vanilla Pokéball."

Ash rather liked the sound of it, but that did leave him with a question. How did that whole 'works best if hostilities haven't started' thing work?

Deciding not to pursue the question further, Ash noted a trio of balls who were white and black, with reddish-orange ridges on them.

"The Timer ball. Developed by Devon Corporation, the Timer Ball contains a mechanism in it that increased the balls effectiveness. This mechanism takes time to work, however, and thus manages to reach an immensely high catching ability after a period of charging that occurs at
the start of battle."

A ball that got stronger with time huh...

"How long is a period of charging, exactly?"

"One hour," the Pokédex suggested as Ash and Misty exchanged startled looks.

What sort of battle against a single Pokémon took that long?

"The developer of this particular type of Pokéball wanted to create a ball that was capable of capturing Legendary Pokémon that was cheaper than the Master Ball," the Pokédex finished, with Ash looking briefly depressed at the reminder of his failure to get one such ball.

Moving his gaze onto a dozen white and red balls, Ash couldn't help but grin with what wonders these balls must have.

"The Premier Ball. These balls are a promotional item that was created to get people to buy more Pokéballs. When someone buys ten Pokéballs of any variety at any one time, the purchaser is given a Premier Ball for free. The ball is essentially the same as a regular Pokéball."

Really?!

Ash looked somewhat disappointed the balls didn't happen to do anything particularly cool, but he supposed not every Pokéball could be a Master Ball.

Noting another dozen Pokéballs that had their red replaced with orange, and a yellow chain dividing said orange part in half, Ash hoped these were more than just props.

"The Repeat Ball," the Pokédex began. "The first attempt by Devon Corporation to create Pokéballs with specialized use, the Repeat Ball's enhanced performance ties itself to the users Trainer Identification. When used on a Pokémon the trainer is shown to have already had, the efficiency spikes. The Repeat Ball is often used by trainers who seek Pokémon who can evolve in multiple ways, such as Kirlia, Poliwhirl and Eevee."

Catch the same species of Pokémon...twice?

Ash sighed. What use would that be to him. Bar his Tauros, who were caught in Safari Balls, he never caught the same species twice.

Twenty-eight balls down, and twenty-three to go. Hopefully he'd get better than a one-to-seven ratio of good to bad there.

Another dozen balls, these with green and greenish yellow coloring, were now observed.

"The Nest ball was another early creation by the Devon Corporation to create specialized Pokéballs. These balls work best when used on much weaker Pokémon than the one being used to battle it. The Nest Ball is thus most often seen in the hands of vastly experienced trainers who have highly leveled Pokémon and want to capture much weaker ones without too much overkill."

The image of Charizard standing threateningly over his Sewaddle came to mind for some reason
when the description was finished. Ash overall wasn't a hundred percent sure if that ball was 'good' or not.

He'll just have to wait and see.

The next three balls were pink with cream markings, and once more Ash had them checked over by the Pokédex.

"The Heal Ball. While in most respects a regular Pokéball, the Heal Ball has a built in Full Restore. The moment a Pokémon is captured, the Full Restore is released, healing the Pokémon back to full health."

A Pokéball that could heal a Pokémon the moment you caught it? Ash could think of several times in his travels that would have been useful, Tracey's Scyther in particular coming to mind.

That left eight balls, with two of them being regular Pokéballs, two being blue with a netting pattern on top half. "The Net Ball," the Pokédex began before Ash could even put it over the ball, as if it was getting impatient. "It was designed in Hoenn by a maniac who specifically wanted to capture a Surskit, therefore this ball is good at catching Water and Bug Type Pokémon. However the effectiveness of the ball does not quadruple due to the typing of both Bug and Water, there is no explanation as to why this occurs." Two colored black with red rings on them, "Luxury Balls, balls are more comfortable inside than regular Pokéballs and thus aide in the development of positive trainer-Pokémon relationships," and two that were blue with red ridges, "Great Balls, originally known as Super Balls, these Pokéballs have a 50% enhanced catch rate over regular Pokéballs."

All in all...well it was free stuff, and some of the stuff was rather useful (in theory).

"Well, look at it this way Ash. You'll have all the chances in the world to reduce your Pokéball supply while in that tunnel. I hear it's infested with Zubat. After that, we can stop briefly at Lavender Town," and hopefully not die again Ash thought, "and head on to Celadon City." Misty suggested, having herself picked up only ten, six Net Balls and four Dive Balls as she called them that apparently were for underwater dwelling Pokémon. "The closest Gym is there after all."

Shouldn't it be Saffron City first? While it was possible Misty only knew of that Gym because Professor Oak had mentioned it, there it was again.

A lack of information on the Saffron City Gym, and its Gym Leader Sabrina. Ash couldn't help wondering why everyone avoided the subject of the Psychic and her Gym.

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**Buster Boot Camp: Unova Region.**

Georgia was a Dragon Buster, and this was not simply a title she gained because of a humiliating loss.

No, the Busters were the elite, the fearless, and the determined.

They were the ones who the Leagues called when a Gym Leader or Elite Four member lost their way.

Their job, to take them down to preserve the League's good name, to make the damage they would
do to the League disappear before it even got out.

"Ready!"

Georgia adjusted her yellow cap as the attack began to charge.

"Aim!"

Pointing at the target, her mighty Beartic's attack was now fully charged and aimed at the target.

"FIRE!"

"Beartic/Vanilluxe/Abomasnow/Weavile/Jynx/Glalie use Ice Beam!" Georgia's voice intermingled with that of all the other cadets as their ice type attacks let loose straight at their targets.

Each target, showing a different Dragon Type Pokémon, was marked with their weak spots. Between the eyes, the throat, arm and leg joints along with a few others

All Ice Beams struck them for critical hits.

A smile crossed Georgia's lips as she noticed how her strikes got her Haxorus targets dead center of each of the weak spots it was marked with.

...

The highest ranked cadet in her class, Georgia could say with very little argument that she was going to excel here.

The role of a Buster was not a job someone took because they wanted glory. Firemen did not take their job because they want fires, nor Doctors because they want sickness. They took the job to do what needed to be done.

It was a job one took to ensure that everyone else was safe from harm. While the Busters had gotten rather few jobs in the last 40 years, there had been 6 Gym Leaders and 1 Elite Four member who had to be removed.

The buster's job was to do it quickly, and silently. They got no thanks for their job outside the chain of command, but in doing so saved the good name of the Pokémon League from scandal.

So far, no Dragon user had been involved in scandal, though other Busters had been deployed. As of the present time, the corrupt members had been, in order of the severity of their crime, a Flying-type Gym Leader in Sinnoh who had used flying types to be a peeping tom, a Bug Type Gym Leader in Kanto who had used Weedle to break into people's homes, a Normal-type Elite Four member in Kanto who had run up massive gambling debts and was involved in fixed matches, A Poison Type Gym Leader in Hoenn who was using his Grimer to sabotage restaurants whom were competing with his brother's own, a Ghost-type Gym Leader in Unova who was responsible for several murders and a Dark-type Gym Leader in Kalos who had used/was used by a few Malamar to create a cult who worshiped him like a god and tried to find the hidden Zygarde and create a doomsday scenario.

Of course, the sixth Gym Leader who had to be removed was not counted in her mental list for one good reason, a reason that was rather evident as she passed by the Buster's Wall of Valor.

Pausing her walk from practice to her barracks, Georgia removed her hat in a moment of silence for the three latest groups of entrees, among the eighteen-member strong team she had known five.
All killed trying to remove the rogue Psychic Type Gym Leader of Saffron City.

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*Back on the road to the Rock Tunnel*

"Ekans, use Screech!"

Team Rocket...as much a part of his life as Pikachu, had gotten better at battling recently (said Pikachu not in battle yet, as Team Rocket had decided to show up, do their still bad motto, and attack during a training session between Charmeleon and Misty's Wingull), and had once more ambushed them.

So far, however, they were proving to be easier to fight than Lt. Surge, they were better, but not unstoppable.

However, the sonic blast that Ekans let loose right at them wasn't something that he was expecting, nor was it really anything a counter-shield would be able to block.

Not that Charmeleon would have done that anyway, so he just took the blast head on.

"Use Wing Attack!" Misty's Wingull was there to ensure it wasn't just a shouting match: it's glowing wings ready to impact right into the poison-type and stop it's sound blast.

"Protect!" James countered as Koffing popped up between the two Pokémon and formed a barrier.

Wingull's attack slammed right into it, and knocked it back.

"No, Wingull!" Misty cried out in worry.

"Ha ha ha, as you can see we've been working out!" James boasted "It's all in the name of stalking you more efficiently and taking your Pikachu for our wonderful boss!"

What, did Giovanni adore mice or something? Did he like to see them sing, pilot steamboats and electrocute people? Why did Pikachu matter so much to them?

"Charmeleon, use Flame Charge!"

An aura of flames surrounding Charmeleon, the recently evolved Pokémon proceeded to smash his way through the sound attack before smashing right into Ekans.

The Snake Pokémon was sent tumbling backwards, slightly roasted but alive, and right into Jessie, knocking her down as Meowth, James and Koffing were all that were left standing.

"Char!" 'Give it up you insignificant distractions. You are fools if you actually think you could ever hope to defeat us! You are even greater fools if you think you can defeat me!'

Charmeleon's dramatic statement and finger point were translated to James by Meowth, with said blunette looking rather incensed, as did Koffing (who normally was rather chill, like the rest of his species).

"Insignificant! How dare you, I am easily the 109th strongest Grunt in all of Team Rocket!" James boasted in a way that tried, and failed, to ignore the fact there were still 108 tougher Grunts "It is time you see the true power of the 109th strongest grunt! Koffing, Return!"
Return? So, his power was fleeting?

No...that wasn't actually it...seeing as Koffing was glowing a white aura and promptly flew right at Charmeleon.

"Block it with Metal Claw!" Ash shouted to Charmeleon, whose claws glowed white as it intercepted the attack.

Charmeleon was immediately overwhelmed and was sent flying into the air before coming crashing down, defeated.

Ash just stared at the defeated Charmeleon in shock.

Charmeleon was defeated...by Team Rocket!?

"Ha ha! What did I tell you twerps, 108th strongest!" James boasted.

"You know, I think you may have to go in for a retest, I say you are now at least the 71th strongest Grunt!" Meowth boasted, before noticing Wingull.

Unsheathing his claws, Meowth smirked. "Well now that it is two against one, I think we'll be defeating you now, and taking that Pikachu of yours for ourselves."

Ash returned Charmeleon, before having Pikachu jump down and join Wingull.

"Hey, you can't just send out another Pokémon if we defeat yours, we only have two Pokémon!" Meowth sharply pointed out.

"But you are a Pokémon Meowth," James reminded him. "So technically, we do have three Pokémon."

"...You do understand that you just helped them out, right?"

"I did?"

Misty and Ash exchanged 'really' looks, before pointing right at the trio (and the out cold duo of Jessie and Ekans).

"Pikachu/Wingull, use Thunderbolt/Water Pulse!"

As Pikachu glowed yellow, Wingull took off into the air and formed a massive blue ball in front of its beak. Both attacks were fired off at the same time and struck Team Rocket with a satisfying bang.

"Looks like Team Rocket is blasting off in a way we really hope isn't going to be a thing!"

"Koffing!"

Twinkle.

As the voices of James, Meowth and Koffing faded off into the distance, Misty sighed.

"I know I said I wanted to perfect Water Pulse with Wingull, but I don't think we needed that. I mean, if they showed up all the time I admit they could make good practice dummies, but that motto of theirs..."

Ash nodded in agreement, before holding Charmeleon's Pokéball in hand.
It was worrying when Team Rocket put up a better fight that a trio of former Gym Leaders. The idea of Team Rocket getting stronger unnerved him in a way that Ash didn't think was possible with the Team Rocket Trio.

If they kept getting stronger...could the day finally come when they would succeed in capturing Pikachu?

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*Later, closer to the Rock Tunnel*

"Return is a move that is powered by the bond between Trainer and Pokémon. The closer a Pokémon is to its trainer, the more powerful the move is," the Pokédex, with Ash's TM USB placed inside it, began to recite. "*Training program is now initiated. The instructions on how to pull the move off are as follows...*"

Charmeleon, currently looking absolutely furious with himself for allowing to be defeated by anyone (but Team Rocket of all possible foes?), seemed torn between wanting to learn the move, and wanting to understand how it worked so it could absolutely destroy the next Pokémon who tried to use it against him.

Across from him, Squirtle looked at him in annoyance "Squirtle... "Can you just get on with it, I don't know why I even agreed to help you with this thing in the first place?"

"Because Squirtle," Ash, who was a distance away and training Butterfree in converting the psychic powers of Confusion into Psybeam, "right now you really only have three moves, and thus you can learn Return."

Of the Pokémon Ash had on them now (Pikachu, Charmeleon, Squirtle, Pidgeotto, Butterfree and Aipom), all but Squirtle each had four moves on them. Pikachu had Thunderbolt, Iron Tail, Quick Attack and Zap Cannon; Charmeleon had Ember, Dragon Tail, Metal Claw and Flame Charge; Pidgeotto had Quick Attack, Gust, Steel Wing and Aerial Ace; Butterfree had String Shot, Gust, Sleep Powder and Confusion (to be turned into Psybeam); Aipom had Scratch, Power-Up-Punch, Swift and Astonish, and Squirtle had Water Gun, Withdraw and Tackle.

Pokémon, as Ash had remembered from one of Professor Oak's lectures, started off only able to know four moves. It was once a Pokémon was trained to a point it was close to being ready to compete with its trainer in the League Tournaments that it could start having more than four moves in their arsenal.

He could have sworn it was just four back in the original timeline...at least eventually, but regardless there was training to be done.

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*Lavender Town*

With a smirk, Gary returned his pair of Nidoran, or more specifically now his Nidorino and Nidorina, his foe running off with tears in his eyes.

Yet another fool who thought he could find the only Ghost Pokémon in Kanto. No, those rare Pokémon would not be caught by a run of the mill trainer.
They would be caught by the one and only Gary Oak!

Placing Nidorino's ball in his H.O.P.E glove, the ball vanished in a burst of light, followed shortly by Nidorina. The two had battled enough for today.

Two balls came in their place: Pidgeotto and Growlithe. With that, his team was solid once more.

Wartortle, Pidgeotto, Kadabra, Exeggcute and Growlithe.

It was good practice for all his Pokémon, battling through this Tower of the dead and the worshipers. His Raticate, Spearow, Krabby, and the Graveler formerly known as Geodude...he was on a roll.

He knew that the Battle Dome was hosting a tournament for Rookie Trainers soon, and he'd be there. His skills would be at their best, and he'd make a name for himself, especially if he had a ghost-type on his side.

The Battle Frontier had to be made aware of the future legend that was Gary Oak after all.

Nothing could make him feel unprepared, nothing!

"Oh look Red, it's that Gary guy you easily beat back in Cerulean City!"

A shiver went down Gary's spine as he heard that familiar voice. Turning around, he once more found himself staring down that mute bastard who kept defeating him and seemed to always be around, along with his little cheerleader.

Red, the trainer who had beat him twice, was here.

Perhaps third time was the charm?

Yet closer to the Rock Tunnel, as Gary is once again the rival in a rival battle thinks he can actually win.

The town of Puerto Blanco was a small seaside community often passed by for Trainers going to Lavender Town from Cerulean City if they wanted to bypass Saffron City.

As such, it was but a small settlement. It had no Gym, leaving Ash to figure out where all the other Kanto Gyms that Gary and Otoshi were able to beat were another day.

However, it did have many amenities for the passing trainers: like food, water, and interesting gossip.

"Did you hear about that new Sinnoh Champion? I hear she's like a goddess of victory or something?"

"My Raticate is clearly in the top percentage of Raticate, you should trade me for your Kadabra...No it's not a rip-off!"

"Did you hear about Koga? They say he's going to be in this year, aiming for a spot on the Elite Four. Maybe I should take the year off and wait until he's done. I mean, I heard there will be at least two applicants fighting this year..."

"Cerulean finally closed down. Damn it, now I'm going to have to work for that final badge. Guess I'm going to have to cancel that trip to Cinnabar, damn the woman are hot this time of year..."
"Dude, there's a Gym on Cinnabar. You can multi-task."

"Really? What type?"

It was interesting what one could listen in on as one walked down the street, minding one's own business with a Pikachu on your shoulder.

Misty was off doing some shopping of her own. He had offered to tag along with her, seeing as he had nothing much else to do, but she had refused. Something about personal needs or something.

Was it a girl thing?

She did have her own money that was not Pay-Pal scanable from a Snarky Pokédex after all, meaning she didn't need him to do whatever she was doing.

Thus, his current wandering, not really thinking about where he was going. It was just a nice walk...

"Alright you old coot, you're going to hand over all your valuables to me or I'm going to get really mad, as will my little friends here."

And of course, it had to be ruined by someone being a criminal.

Ash froze in his tracks, Pikachu slipping off his shoulder momentarily as he did so, to note a home currently being blocked off by a big man and a duo of rather angry looking Mankey.

Ash happened to know what an angry Mankey looked like rather first handily, it was almost nostalgic if the Mankey were not being used for extortion at the moment.

"**Mankey the Pig Monkey Pokémon. Mankey has a very hot temper, which is very easily brought to the surface by most anything. Mankey are known for injuring travelers and vandalizing cars that enter their territory.**" The Pokédex reminded Ash of what angry Mankey were capable of, rather unnecessarily really.

The sight of them made Ash remember his own Primeape and the trouble he had caused. Would Ash run into him again? If he did would he survive? Primeape wasn't exactly Ash's biggest fan to begin with.

The duo of Mankey turned around and snarled, causing the scarred face of their trainer to get right in Ash's face.

"Move along kid, this ain't none of your business."

Ash didn't 'move along', which made the thug rather angry.

"Alright kid, you asked for it! Mankey, Karate Chop the punk in the face!"

The duo's hands were glowing white, as Ash countered with a pair of his own.

Not Karate Chops though.

"Butterfree use String Shot! Pidgeotto, Aerial Ace!"

As the two emerged, they began their attacks immediately. Butterfree let loose a string of sticky fluid that bound around a Mankey, causing it to be restrained and fall over in a full body cast.

Pidgeotto slammed into the other Mankey, sending it into the air before it fell back to the ground,
knocked out.

The thug gulped as the trainer and his Pokémon glared at him.

"Caw!" Pidgeotto let out as she took a spot on Ash's outstretched arm. 'That was too easy. I think that Poliwag was more a threat'.

"Free." Butterfree fluttered next to Ash, somewhat less badass looking then having a bird of prey on your arm 'I think Gust would have worked better...we could have blown him away too.'

"Pi." 'And probably wrecked the home of the guy he was robbing?'

The thug could not hear what they meant, but responded in much the same way most members of the thief profession would when defeated, hightailing out of there and leaving his partners behind.

"What a coward...and now I'm going to have to call Pokémon Control, damn. You know, it used to be just okay to take Pokémon someone leaves behind or isn't watching properly...back even forty one years ago. What a bothersome bureaucracy, I could have repaid you in Mankey if not for all the unnecessary complications."

The voice in question was from the man who the thug had been harassing. Now that Ash could see him, the man was revealed to be an older man, dark hair peppered with gray. He sort of reminded Ash of the Johto Pokéball maker Kurt, if a bit younger. A non-bipedal Meowth was by its side, one Ash was pretty sure could not talk.

"Um, sorry?" Ash replied reflexively, not sure if he even would want to be repaid in Mankey. The Mankey would probably just harass either himself, or Professor Oak.

"Never mind that, you could call that nothing but an old man's musings. The name's Forge. Forge Smith the Blacksmith," the man introduced himself, extending a wizened hand.

"My name is Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town, and this is my partners Pikachu (Pika-Pikachu), Butterfree (Free) and Pidgeotto (Caw)." Ash extended his own fresh hand, the two meeting and shaking in greeting.

"Ah, Ketchum the Pokémon Trainer. Glad to see that some people still follow the old ways. Last names really should define where one goes in life: your family of trainers, my family of metalworkers...it's all a bunch of pointless nonsense now. My barber is named Farmer, my grocer Teller, and my lawyer Forester. Names mean nothing anymore."

Ash personally wasn't for a caste system, but he respectfully let the old timer keep talking.

"But, enough about what is wrong with the world, come in, come in. I really must be thanking you..." he turned around towards the door of his old looking yet professional looking home. "Just do return your Flying-types, I dislike brushing up after feathers and bug dust."

As he and his Meowth entered the home, Ash returned the specified Pokémon and followed.

...

The room Ash found himself in was similar to that of Kurt's Pokéball storage, but there were no spheres here.

Instead, the room was filled with various items, the purpose of which Ash was trying to figure out.
They all seemed like armbands, helmets and similar things, for all types of Pokémon as far as he could tell.

The man was standing at one end of the room, his Meowth sitting at attention on his left side. In his outstretched right hand, pointed at Ash was a familiar green stone he had seen many times before.

"This here is a Thunder Stone," Forge bluntly stated. "This stone evolves Pikachu into Raichu."

"I know what it does," Ash replied. "I also know that Pikachu still has moves to learn it would not learn if it evolved now into a Raichu. I'm afraid that will not be acceptable as payment."

He had the oddest feeling telling this man he didn't want to evolve Pikachu might not fly well. Old people were somewhat not-understanding about gut instincts.

Forge however, smirked and pocketed the stone.

"I see, I had the oddest gut feeling you might say something like that. Evolutionary Stones are expensive, considering how rare it is for veins in the lay lines to rise up and convert stones," Forge began to talk in that long winded, old person way. "Yet they aren't even the rarest of stones. There are stones even rarer than they are, that form from evolutionary stones on very rare occasions, generally those that originate from meteorites. Those stones specialize in certain Pokémon species, and generally fall into the hands of only the most advanced trainers. In my long life, I've only had the honor of making holders for three such trainers." He was looking over Ash once more as he spoke this "I suspect you could possibly be my fourth."

"Um, thanks?" Ash wasn't exactly sure what this guy was talking about. "What is a holder, exactly?"

Might as well try and get this conversation to be a bit less cryptic if possible. Forge thankfully obliged.

"A holder is an accessory created by League approved smith or jeweler, such as myself, that a Pokémon is allowed to wear during official matches. These holders are meant to allow a Pokémon to hold an approved item safely during a match while the item is able to benefit the Pokémon in question."

Ash was reminded of Lt. Surge's Volty and Raichu in what they had "You mean something like an Assault Vest?"

"Correct," Forge confirmed "Though you do not need a holder for something like that. If you want to use a Type Gem, for example, you would need a holder. Holders do not adjust for evolution though, so I'd personally suggest not using one for any Pokémon you plan on evolving in the near future."

Turning to the shelves of finished product, Forge began sorting through them in a search for something "Primeape, Nidoking, Beedrill...oh yes, here it is."

Removing it, he turned to Ash. "Now, seeing as you can't pay me in Mankey, you can have this as a token of my gratitude. I'll also be sure to provide you with any holders you may wish obtain for yourself in the future, though I do expect pay for them."

He handed Ash an old but still decent looking armband, which appeared to be Pikachu scaled. The armband's edges were reflective metal, painted red in the middle. The center had a round indent that Ash was pretty sure could fit a variety of things, from spheres to gems to even a magnet.

Not needing any words Pikachu hopped off Ash. Ash knelt down in front of Pikachu, the armband
in hand.

With a bit of fumbling the band was secured on Pikachu's right arm. Standing back up Pikachu was able to hop back onto his favorite perch, bothered little by the additional weight.

Forge grinned. "Well, glad to see that fit nicely. I made that in the possibility a Pikachu user might have found a Light Ball. Tricky thing to find, Light Balls are. Sadly, I don't have one of those for you"

'What's a Light Ball?', Ash thought to himself. He'd ask his Pokédex later, it was being oddly quiet at the moment. Perhaps it got an 'old people fear technology' vibe or something

"However, my Meowth does have the ability Pickup, making it good at finding things. Why else do I have the expensive paperweight like that Thunder Stone after all? Thanks to Meowth, however, I have a few too many of these."

Reaching into his pocket, he tossed a purple stone to Ash. Ash grabbed it, before looking back at Forge in confusion.

"That there is an Eviolite. That item boosts the defensive power of Pokémon who could still evolve. I have the oddest feeling you might be making use of a number of these kid."

The old man promptly began to merrily laugh, but before Ash could respond he was serious again.

"Now, give me your phone number, I can't make any damn sense of that inter-web thing and it's E-Post stuff, so that's the only way I like to be contacted."

Professor Oak's lab

"All three Starter Pokémon...I swear Ash must have the devil's luck, wonder if it is just a bloodliner thing..." Professor Oak muttered to himself while holding Bulbasaur up, not catching the Pokémon shiver at the mention of a devil he himself had met a while back. "And pretty impressive too...I certainly hope Ash continues to impress me like this."

Putting Bulbasaur back on the ground, Oak eyed his wide open estate with some pleasure. The Dodrio were singing, the Mankey howling, and the Sandshrew were digging.

All was right in the world.

"You know, if I'd have to guess based on how your trainer is moving, and Gary's attention to detail combined with his movements the two should be in Fuchsia around the time the Safari Zone is going to be thinned out. Between the two of them, and maybe even Misty as well, I think I'll have a good chance of having some particular Pokémon sent to me for the first time in ages! I've always wanted to study Tauros behavior up close."

"Bulba." 'Yeah, and you are probably going to find yourself studying thirty Tauros very up close when that happens. As will your fence budget.'

Professor Oak missed the dark humor that Bulbasaur was using due to not speaking Pokémon.

"Well, I'll come and look for you when Ash calls, why don't you go look for Ash's Krabby while you are here? I'd love to stay and soak up all this pristine peace and tranquility with you, but I have
to publish a scientific paper so I can pay for my Tofu ration and my electricity. Both equally important, I know."

As the old man meandered off, Bulbasaur noted his old domain with a nostalgic smile as he meandered as well.

It was weird being back in time: a chance to amend past mistakes, see the wonders of the world once again, and maybe even make new mistakes. Hopefully he would be around to see these past mistakes amended (perhaps he could have that rematch with Erika's Tangela), and not be around to see some mistakes repeat themselves (that demonic Bellsprout might just come out when Muk wasn't available to smother it).

Bulbasaur liked to think himself as a battler second, and a peacekeeper first. While he was quite willing to battle, and having himself battled for Ash in two separate Gym battles in two different leagues (against Erika, Team Rocket, Danny and Rudy), four League Matches (He and Pidgeotto had battled in the second round match at Indigo before Squirtle won it, he fought in the fourth round to defeat Beedrill and Scyther, his loss against Electabuzz in the Orange League, and later bested the Magneton and tied Meganium in the Silver Conference), as well as against Pyramid King Brandon, he found that he personally enjoyed his role at the Lab more.

Bulbasaur the Negotiator. Bulbasaur the Peacekeeper. Bulbasaur the Ambassador. Bulbasaur the Sap Giver. He had gained many titles, and all but one of them he wore with pride.

The other made him regret that Ash ever took him to Johto. Already he was dreading the day that Heracross would rejoin Ash's team.

Contrary to what some may think, the Pokémon at Oak's ranch never felt it was abandonment to be left at Oak's lab. Ash called rather often, they were well fed and taken care of, could train on their own terms, and it was easier for Ash to get close to and train his newer Pokémon if he was not weighed down by the older ones who could not simply sit on his shoulder.

There was a reason Totodile, Cyndaquil and Bayleef did not evolve further in Johto after all, an unintended side effect of having himself, Charizard, and Squirtle around for a considerable period of time.

Of course, some Pokémon spent far more time at the Lab, in comparison to their time with Ash, and the Pokémon with the same original trainer here happened be one of the less exposed one, and currently was doing what appeared to be the human or Fighting-Type equivalent of weight training with large sticks.

"Koo! Ki! Koo! Ki!"

The crab continued to hoist them up and down, as Bulbasaur assumed had happened last time before his debut battle in the Indigo League (Which was followed by another battle with a Cloyster and Arcanine, a battle at the Whirl Cup against Misty, a near entry into the Silver Conference if not for some runaway Voltorb, and last a battle in the Lily of the Valley Conference, aiding Bayleef and Snorlax in the Second Round Battle.).

"Bulba." 'You know, that is making you like Charmeleon, right?' Bulbasaur wasn't so sure he wanted to share space here with an exercise nut.

Would he only be free of them when Ash had both of them here (or both on hand while Bulbasaur was at Oak's)?
"Kooki!" Krabby continued to do his weight exercises with his sticks. 'I happen to want to get bigger again. I enjoyed being a Kingler, and would like the experience of being one as soon as possible again. You can't say that all of the formerly evolved Pokémon don't want to evolve again, can you?'

"Bulba..." 'Yeah, but Pidgeotto and Aipom are not neurotic about it...'

Before Krabby could respond to Bulbasaur's point...

"Grrr...!"

"Slash!"

Hearing a loud noise off in the field over, Bulbasaur darted off, followed quickly by Krabby.

The conflict was quickly revealed, after some running/crawling to the captured Growlithe (whom had always been rather law-abiding Pokémon), and Sandslash (whom had helped him dig the lake in his first case as the Peacekeeper/Negotiator) feuding over something.

From what he could overhear (Grrr...Slash!) it was territory based. That was generally what it was not about food or who gets to be scratched behind the ear by the Professor.

Turning to Krabby, Bulbasaur noted the confrontation parties with a shoulder movement "Bulba?" 'So, ready to witness my grand return to the role of peacekeeping? I do request your help in ensuring I am not burnt'.

Krabby noted the fire dogs in question, then the sticks he still had in his pincers, which he promptly threw to the side "Kook." 'Well, I suppose they will make useful dumbbells.'

Near the Rock Tunnel, about where the chapter had started

The Dragonite was pushed back by the powerful Hydro Pump attack.

Skidding almost out of the ring, the Dragon type was panting heavily. Its trainer, the caped and red haired Lance of Blackthorn, gave an impressed look back at the origin of the attack.

"Well, I must say you have surprised me, Misty. To think you could become the most powerful of the Elite Four, to think you could challenge me for the title of Champion. Your Water Pokémon have proven truly superb, but do not think you have won just yet: the Dragon Type is the most powerful of all types. It domains over the founding elements of Fire, Lightning, Grass, and Water, and harnesses their power for themselves among with the other powers of the world. Their fists shatter mountains, their steps make the earth quake, and their wings sheer through the Fae as if by a sword. They will triumph yet!"

Misty, or more specifically the older form of Dream Misty, smirked, the Milotic curled up around her like a snake to an empress.

"Let's see shall we? Milotic, Dragon Pulse!"

"Counter with your own Dragonite!"

BOOM!
Real life Misty's eyes opened to the sight of her personal and rather annoying alarm clock.

"Duck" Psyduck quacked, though Misty missed the meaning, as Misty pushed herself up from within her sleeping bag, currently in a secret base that was originally a bush.

Leaving the confines of the sleeping bag, clad only in her oversized Lorelei T-Shirt Misty sighed and began to remove said shirt.

Her dreams, honestly sometimes they jumped a little ahead of themselves. An Elite Four Membership was one thing, but going for the Champions Title?

Not to mention the Milotic. Her dreams could at least have used Pokémon she currently had on her.

Her T-Shirt pulled over head and promptly tossed to the floor, Misty walked over towards her bag where she kept her other pieces of clothing.

She could go through everything she had clothing wise and then spend a few hours color coordinating, but she didn't really have the clothing count to do that, nor the will. Having so many cloths you could go an entire year without having to reuse one was her sisters thing after all.

"Psy Psyduck?" 'You know, constantly changing clothes, cleaning them, and replacing them seems like a whole lot of bother' Psyduck spoke up just as Misty was about to reach into her bag for covering.

"Yeah, well that's what humans do Psyduck," she replied tersely, Psyduck looked at her oddly.

Misty realized that she had just called herself human...something she really hadn't done much of for quite some time. When wondering why, an image of her wandering the world with Ash came to mind.

She quickly banished the thought from her mind, not sure why she was thinking about some of those things. The land walking, sure, they had done plenty of that, but a Lapras?

She didn't have a Lapras....Yet.

It was nice, sure...but her imagination was a bit too active sometimes.

"We also need clothing to inhabit colder areas. If we didn't, we'd never have spread as far as we have." Misty insisted as she rummaged through her bag. Psyduck stared at her blankly in a way that would have been asking for a beating if he was human.

Psyduck, of course, did not have the same feeling as a human would in this situation. Psyduck was just thinking.

"Duck Duck..." 'So why not just not wear all that crud when the weather is warm?'

"Because!" Misty, who was pulling up her socks, snapped right back at him, as if that was the stupidest question Psyduck had ever asked.

And the Duck had asked some rather dumb ones in his time.
Clothed and with Psyduck quiet for now, Misty left her secret base to note Ash's backpack and Pokédex lying out in the open.

His secret base appeared empty, and neither he nor his Pokémon seemed to be around.

Picking up the Pokédex in idle curiosity, Misty wondered where he might have gone.

"If you are wondering where my foolish flesh-bag owner is, he is currently out relieving himself," the Pokédex answered her unspoken question.

'I did not need to know that.'

"I possess the ability to analyze a human's waste product to determine if they are getting proper levels of nutrients as well as check for micro-parasites. The boy is rather foolish in not wanting me to analyze him."

'I really did not need to know that!'

No wonder Ash left thing here. If Pokédexes were not so prestigious and generally useful, she couldn't imagine why anyone would want one of them.

They were so annoying!

"All he brought with him were his belted Pokémon, Pikachu, and that staff thing he's always trying to make work that clips onto his belt. Honestly, none of them can ensure he is not infected with Tapeworms..."

BOOM!

A loud explosion rang out from the forest behind her, causing trainer and Psyduck to rapidly turn towards the direction of the blast, from which smoke was emerging.

"Oh no, that is the direction Ash went to empty his bladder!" the Pokédex cried out as Misty's eyes went wide.

Ash?

Misty began to run in the direction of the blast, but a buzzing caused her to stop.

A Beedrill was flying right at her.

A Bug Pokémon.

Bugs...

BUGS!

Shivers went down her spine, the object of her nightmares was coming right at her.

But Ash...

No...she mustn't run away.

Controlling her fear, Misty pointed at the Beedrill "Psyduck, use Water Gun!"
"DUCK!?" 'You want to battle a Bug-Type? And use me...ah what the hell I want to run even less than I don't want to fight.' Breathing in deeply, Psyduck let loose a stream of water that struck the Beedrill head on.

It fell to the ground in defeat.

"Wild Beedrill Fainted," the Pokédex proclaimed as Misty prepared to charge forward.

A Beedrill wasn't going to stop her. Not even three Beedrill.

A trio of said Beedrill were themselves coming at her, but were blasted down by a surprisingly bold and upfront Psyduck.

She could conquer her fears, she had to go make sure Ash was alright.

She wouldn't run away, she wouldn't run away...

"Beedrill, the Poison Bee Pokémon. Beedrill often appear in swarms. A swarm of Beedrill the size of what is coming at us could potentially level an entire village. Running is highly suggestible! I highly doubt anyone would hold it against you!"

The sky was now yellow and black, a hundred Beedrill flying right at her. Their stingers all dripping poison, their wings humming the heralding tune of death that humans had feared for centuries...

Run away, Run away, Run away!

?

One moment he had been heading back for breakfast, the next he knew nothing.

Silence.

Darkness.

He couldn't see anything, move anything, nor could he hear anything. It was, in a sense, a void.

Ash briefly thought he might have ended up in a Pokéball, but he had asked about Pokéballs before and was told Pokémon could still sense the world around them.

There was a reason one could shout 'Pidgeotto, Gust!' and Pidgeotto would do so the moment she was sent out after all.

Was this...death?

Did Time break again!?

"No no no, time is flowing just perfectly Satoshi. Or perhaps Ash? Might I suggest Casey?"

A voice echoed through the darkness, a sound he could suddenly hear.

A familiar voice.

A voice he didn't want to hear ever again, and it was taking shape in front of him in a surge of pixels, or at least what Ash was pretty sure was in front of him.

The pixels end shape was not the misshaped mass from before, MissingNo. Instead, it was that of
Serena, if her edges were pixilated.

"So champ' in the making, how's life? Feeling a little...petrified?" The voice that came out was not MissingNo's alone. It was Serena's, with the voice of MissingNo underlying it. "What's the matter, lose your nerve? Your way? Your Goodra?"

What the hell was a Goodra?

SerenaNo massaged her chin thoughtfully, before a large light-bulb pixilated into existence above her. "Oh yeah I remember now, you got ambushed! Now you are here, alone but for your mind and me. What are you going to do about it, Hero?"

She had a flat look on her face the moment she finished, as if realizing something. "Oh yeah, you kind of can't talk back, now can you? That's no fun...it's hard to screw with people when they don't talk back to you."

Shaking her head, SerenaNo transformed into a shower of pixels and floated over, reforming into the familiar shape of a different companion of his.

"But no need to worry, am I right?" DawnNo grinned like a maniac, her smile probably humanly impossible. "You are the hero of this little story, aren't you? The champion of justice, the Chosen One, the Hero of Ideals...or was it Truth? Can't really recall." The moment she passed 'The Chosen One' she pixelated over into IrisNo. "Seeing as you managed to pull off some impressive feats when you were just a kid, I'd love to see what you can pull off as a teenager."

With that, IrisNo dissolved away. Apparently CilanNo, BrockNo, MayNo and the various other Nos were not on the menu for messing with him today.

Though what did it say about a situation where a Devil came to apparently give you a pep talk?

What was even going on?!

He felt a tingling on his side, a blue light glowing. While Ash could not move his head to see what was going on, the glow in question was something he knew from before.

However, before he could be excited about it, he felt a tingle in his eyes as well. Unseen to him, his eyes were now glowing the same brownish-orange they had when during the Gym battle with the Cerulean Sisters.

He could feel one of the Pokéballs he had on him was now rapidly shaking, as if it was just capturing the Pokémon inside it. The blue light from what Ash believed to be his staff dimmed away, as the shaking stopped.

Then his senses returned.

... 

THUMP!

Ash fell to the ground, shattering glass as he broke through something.

Thankfully he somehow didn't end up with any glass impaling him.

A little uneasy, he stood back up, looking around the grey, metallic room he found himself in.

He could still feel the Pokéballs and Lucario's staff on his belt, but he didn't feel Pikachu's weight on
him. He did, however, notice Aipom bouncing in front of him in excitement, apparently she had freed him.

Perhaps that power of his had powered up Aipom to let her escape her ball on her own. But, how did she get from that void to here?

Come to think of it, how did he?

Looking around, Ash was also sure he had seen this place before...

As his gaze turned to the shelf next to where he had fallen, his eyes widened as he recognized something that sat on the shelf in a glass case. Ash quickly figured out exactly where he had seen this place before.

For there was only one person he knew who would do it.

There was only person who would turn Pikachu into a statue and lock him up in a case.

J

"Ai!" 'Why is J here, isn't she just Sinnoh?!' Aipom questioned as Ash began fiddling with the nobs on the case.

From top down Pikachu was freed from the stone bindings, and with an unspoken look Aipom shattered the casing with Power-Up-Punch.

Pikachu collapsed just as Ash had when he was freed, but got up quicker and looked around, frantic.

"Pika!? 'Did we just get kidnapped by Hunter freaking J!?!'

"It would appear so," Ash stated with a solemn tone. "We need to get out of here, and fast. I don't know why J would kidnap me as well...but I don't think I want to find out. There should be an escape pod or something on board, let's try and find it."

"Pom." 'That assumes that J would actually care to let her men escape from a downed ship? She never struck me as the type to be captured alive, or to care for the well-being of those under her.'

"I like to assume most people have escape pods for themselves and any subordinates, I like to be optimistic like that. Who knows, maybe Charmeleon can spontaneously evolve and fly us out of here?"

The last part sounded like Ash didn't really believe that would happen. Or perhaps he didn't want Charmeleon to think he could trigger evolution by jumping off the sides of airships or cliffs while believing he can fly.

That had never worked out that well for Bagons, and he doubted Charmeleons were any less likely to hurt themselves doing that.

...

Metallic hallway after metallic hallway was all that Ash saw as he ran through the ship, followed by Pikachu and Aipom.

He saw no guards, no security cameras, and no traps. Ash wasn't sure if she had them last time or not. Perhaps she didn't have the budget for them at the moment.
"Pika Pika Pika Pika..." 'Sealed door, sealed door, door labeled 'engine room, do not enter while in flight...think we should have gone in there and sabotaged it?'

"I think sabotaging an airship while you are inside it without a real escape plan is not really a good idea, even if there isn't some sort of security system in place to keep someone from messing with it while it is in flight" Ash pointed out as the hallway they were in met with another, a perpendicular meeting with the new hallway stretched on to the left and the right quite a ways away.

On the opposite side of the hallway from where Ash and his Pokémon were currently at, was a door. This door, which did not appear to be sealed, had a fang marked on it.

Looking down the path, Ash noticed other doors marked by other symbols. To his left Ash noticed a leaf and a fire symbol.

To his right was a lightning bolt and a water drop.

"Pika..." 'I do not like the look of that lightning door.' Pikachu seemed to be getting a bad feeling about this.

"I wonder...think this might be where she keeps Pokémon?'

A fire, a leaf, a drop of water, and a bolt. Fire, Grass, Water, and Electricity.

It was a possibility. And a fang could only mean one thing.

A picture in his mind of flying off the ship with a Flygon, holding as many Pokémon as he could, followed by dozens of other winged dragons with their own Pokémon on their backs.

That could work. That could work quite well.

With that thought, Ash opened the Fang Door.

... As Ash suspected, there were Dragons behind the door, but he didn't see any Flygon.

No, the dragons behind the door were virtually all one species, one that Ash was rather familiar with. Dragonite. The room was filled with Dragonite. A dozen of them, all lined up and petrified behind the same screen door.

There was another Pokémon the room, a much smaller dragon petrified and caged on a table off to the side. It was an odd looking dragon, sort of circular blob with antenna on its head. But Ash was more focused on the Dragonite at the moment, Aipom was fiddling with the cage of the odd circular dragon.

"Twelve..." Ash said in horror. Seeing one Dragonite in the same place was a rarity, why did J have twelve of them?!

Pikachu was looking at one of the petrified Dragonite in particular, before stepping back in shock "Pikapi. 'Ash, you might want to have a look at this.'

Walking down a few Dragonite to the particular one Pikachu was staring at, Ash's eyes went wide.

What he was seeing was so shocking he released Charmeleon for a third opinion on the matter.
As the red fire-lizard appeared, the lizard's eyes went wide with recognition.

For all three knew this Dragonite.

After all, how many Dragonite scowled all the time?

---

*Back down on the ground*

They had outrun the swarm by now.

Misty was pressing her arm against a tree, tired but otherwise unharmed.

Psyduck was lying on his back, unable to move anymore.

The Pokédex was in her other hand, having grabbed the thing when she fled.

Fled...that was what it was.

She ran away, she abandoned Ash.

Did it really matter if a hundred Beedrill were chasing her? If she didn't fear them, would she have fought them?

"You are feeling guilty..." the Pokédex commented. "I would suggest you stop feeling guilty. No sane person fights a swarm of one hundred angry Beedrill, unless they are a Gym Leader with a super effective team of at least a seventh badge challenge caliber at the very least. You are not such a person, had you stayed you would have been impaled, poisoned, and quite possibly killed and eaten."

Misty shivered as the mental images of what the Pokédex was implying came into mind.

"The swarm should have faded away by now, and are probably off creating a new nest," the Pokédex noted as Psyduck got back up and looked ahead. "We should be able to go and check for Ash now..."

"Duck? 'Who's that Pokémon?'

Misty turned in the direction Psyduck was looking, where a Pokémon lay on the ground. It was green, with a crested head and a pair of tusks on its face, and Misty had never seen it before.

It looked hurt too, as if it had fallen.

The Pokédex was in her hand, so Misty pointed it at the mystery 'mon, but nothing was said.

Really? Ash was missing, and a strange Pokemon was in front of them, out cold to the world, and it wouldn't cooperate. For all Misty knew, this Pokémon was responsible, or connected, to what happened.

It was too much of a coincidence.

"I don't have to say anything for you. You are not my owner," the Pokédex stated in its best impersonation of a 'stuck up, dirty lawyer'.
"Do you have anything better to do?" Misty countered. "And isn’t it your job to record data on Pokémon around you, like the Pokémon I can’t identify?"

."..Axew, the Tusk Pokémon and a Pokémon of the Dragon Element native to the Unova Region that should not be in Kanto. They mark their home territory with their tusks and are looked after by Haxorus mothers. Haxorus, their final evolutionary form, are very powerful with an axe for a head. You do not mess with the offspring of a Pokémon with an axe for a head."

"Unova? The distant region with its own unique Pokémon? Why would an Unovan Pokémon be here, particularly one that cannot fly or swim?"

What did that meant for Ash? Did he get attacked by Unovans?

"Don't know..." the Pokédex admitted a lack of knowledge on the question as the Axew opened its eyes.

It saw them...

"Axew!"

And it screamed in fright, its call echoing through the forest.

"Psy!? 'He's crying out for his sister! He's calling out for a freaky axe dragon of a sister while he sounds like he's in pain! Run, angry Axe Dragon inbound!' The terror was evident in Psyduck's voice as he started to run back and forth.

A sister? As in some sort of middle evolution, like Charmeleon or Dragonair?

She could handle that...then she had to get to Ash. Maybe if she got this sister she could get it to tell her Pokémon (who'd tell her) what happened to Ash.

No dragon was going to stop her...

No dragon was going to keep her from Ash...

"Axew!"

A human voice?!

Psyduck and Misty turned towards where the voice had come from, as a lithe shape burst out of the trees and landed on a tree branch in front of them with practiced ease.

The shape was humanoid, female, with a large mass of purple hair behind her like some sort of mane. Her body was athletic, less pronounced than Misty's own, but taller. Her skin was tan, her brown eyes boiling with fury, while looking like she too had had a rough landing and a tumble.

Green energy was also forming around her hands as the woman glared at them, forming what appeared to be claws.

Dragon Claws.

A Bloodliner...

"Get away from my little brother Human! Your kind won't take anything more from me!" The wild
child snarled, even going as far as to hiss. "Not today!"

The wild Bloodliner attacked.

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Omake

Non Canon

Pokémon Arc-V

Earth 040615

"The Fun has Just Begun!"

Gary Oak, the CEO of Blue Corporation and thus an influential figure at Blue Duel School, seemed amused as the spotlight focused on the young Battler below him, a tired but not defeated Azumarill standing ready to continue the battle.

Once a Water-type, the boy's Azumarill, along with much of the rest of his team, had gained a new typing previously known to him, the Fairy-Type, following the boy's battle and surprise defeat of all-star Dragon user Strong Ishijima. Since then, he had continued to surprise him.

Hopefully he could continue to. Sayaki Satoshi, son of the pioneer of Entertainment Battles Sayaki Sachio, the boy who became the creator of the Fairy-Type.

A worthy rival perhaps, and a key figure in the potential future defense of the world from his father's ambitions.

"Azumarill, use Play Rough on his Goodra!"

Show me your power Satoshi...show me you can help me save the world.

...
Escape the Hunter's Trap: Misty vs Iris

A mansion north of Lavender Town, Kanto

"Hey Meowth, ever feel like you're getting in the way of something more interesting than yourself?"

"We're Team Rocket girl, it's our job to get in peoples way and steal their Pokémon, and their time, and their roast beef."

"Come to think of it...where does roast beef come from anyway?"

Two of the three members of the Trio were debating their role in the universe, and the origins of deli meat, as they sat around a luxurious table, eating sandwiches of fine quality meat, if the origin being unknown, on fine china they planned to take with them and sell somewhere else to avoid being tracked down.

After their last confrontation with the kid who their boss wanted status reports on, including his battle skills, they had found themselves blasted off all the way into the backyard of a mansion somewhere just north of Lavender Town (Jessie has spotted the Pokémon Tower while they were flying through the air, and her C grade science skills still caused her to question why they always survived their bizarre trend of being blasted off by the boy, not to mention coming off completely unscathed).

Immediately after landing and seeing the mansion, James had freaked out as if he had seen a ghost, before shortly afterward getting a determined look that led him to pick the lock and go looking for something, before telling the two of them to do 'whatever the hell they wanted, take whatever the hell they want, and break anything they want'.

Naturally they raided the fridge, pocketed various pieces of jewelry, and threw a table into a very large screen TV when it would only show the Weather Channel.

Meowth disliked the current weather lady who covered Johto for some reason he couldn't quite pin down at all, so the television was quickly deactivated.

"Well, if you must know..." Meowth was going to cover the Meat truth, when a giddy sounding James entered the room with a gigantic, almost unnatural smile on his face.

"Guys, guys, guys!"

"I'm a girl," Jessie deadpanned at the blue haired man's enthusiasm.

"You will never believe what I found! Oh, I knew they hid them somewhere I would have never thought to look for them."

"Is it Gold?" Meowth inquired with a greedy glimmer in his eyes, not having caught the last part.

"Silver?" Jessie continued on the guessing streak, and ignorance streak.

"Opals?"

"Opals? I would have said Crystals..."

"Even better!" James shouted in joy as he threw a couple of objects into the air, which expanded and revealed themselves to be Pokéballs, before letting loose.
"Koffing!" the purple gas sack was the first obvious reveal.

"Growl!" a reddish furred Growlithe was the next one let out.

"Carnivine!" a giant floating green plant followed.

"Yamask!" an odd, ghost looking Pokémon with a mask for a face followed.

"Inkay!" finally was a blue and purple, upside down squid that was floating in the air.

"Friendship!" James stated with glee as all of the Pokémon posed with him.

"No, those look like Pokémon we could give to the boss," Jessie countered with a bored look on her face.

"What, never!" James looked like Jessie had suggested he throw all his bottle caps off a cliff. "These Pokémon are mine Jessie, and I haven't seen them in years. Not since...that day" the last line was said very, very ominously.

"What day?" Meowth asked, but the dark aura of misery that hovered over James and the non-Koffings with him suggested James might not answer.

"Fine, fine, you can keep them," Jessie wondered why the rich people who James said lived here had all these Pokémon who seemed to like James a lot. "But I get to keep your share of the cash for turning in all this loot to the boss, and I get the next Pokémon."

"Deal." James perked up quickly after Jessie got off him. "Now, grab everything you can take with you and let us be off! We need to be in Lavender Town ASAP!"

"Why? Who says the kid will even go to a town with no gym there." Meowth pointed out, as James pulled out and unfolded a newspaper advertisement featuring a chubby looking man with a blue shirt and white flowers on it, surrounded by dramatically posing Rhydon.

"This is why!"

!ROOKIE POKÉMON TRAINER COMPETITION!

!TRAINERS WITHOUT LEAGUE EXPERIENCE ACCEPTABLE!

!POKÉMON BATTLE DOME, LAVENDER TOWN, KANTO!

!ASK FOR SCOTT!

!AMAZING PRIZES! MONEY! FAME! AN AUTOGRAPH FROM DOME ACE TUCKER!

All who enter will receive a rare gift any trainer who aims for the top should want.

Jessie and Meowth observed the offerings, and shrugged.

It did seem like something the kid would go for.

The Battle of Gens 1-2 and 5
Garbed in a tannish, overly large shirt without sleeves, it's bottom lined in a faded pink coloration the girls thighs completely that covered her like shorts that made it hard for Misty to tell if the dragon girl was actually wearing shorts or not.

Misty honestly had no idea why that was the first thing that came to mind when she looked the girl over again. There were far more important things to debate than potential indecency.

"Duck..." Psyduck was backing away slowly *Think we should just give the dragon-type to her and hope she spares our hides?*

The girl lunged at them with her attack, making any thought of offering up the Axew fade away.

Misty barely avoided getting sliced with some level of grace, while Psyduck just avoided it due to falling over.

As Psyduck scrambled away, Misty's mind was racing. How was she going to get away from this girl, she was still too exhausted from running from the Beedrill to risk trying to flee from her, and with those Dragon-moves Misty doubted that throwing a Whirlpool at her would solve the problem.

It wouldn't be that effective, it would make her exhaustion worse, and it would probably make the girl even more annoyed at her than she already was.

But while she could only do that...she had other options.

"Poliwrath, use Dynamic Punch!"

Throwing out her Pokéball just as the crazy dragon chick went at her again, the giant frog warrior burst forth with a glowing red fist.

The fist collided with her claws, causing the two to be thrown back from one another.

Poliwrath was knocked back a couple of feet, skidding on the ground and pushing up several plumes of dust.

"Poli!" He seemed fine, though his comment about 'the might of the father of several hundred young' was still as annoying as ever.

The girl was slammed into a tree, though she didn't collapse.

She just looked angry, and not confused. Shouldn't that have happened?

"*Dynamic Punch's confusion effect only works if the move makes contact with the physical part of the target.*" Misty heard Ash's Pokédex explain her unanswered question. *"As Dynamic Punch only hit the energy protrusion parts of Dragon Claw, the results were negative for confusion."*

"Who said that?!" The woman growled as the Axew ran over to her with evidence concern in its voice.

“Axew?"

It also seemed to be limping a bit, which was not going to help convince the girl they had not hurt the little dragon.

"...I am just a benevolent tree spirit, only observing and not wishing to be harmed in any
"way," the Pokédex lied, badly.

"You don't sound like a tree," the girl countered, not buying it.

"How do you know what a tree sounds like? All trees do in fact sound like me."

The girl now seemed to decide just to ignore him for now, as she narrowed her eyes at Poliwrath.

"A Water-Type huh..." Misty's eyes went wide when she saw her hand reach into her overly sized hair, and remove a Pokéball. "Go, Emolga!"

"Emolga, what kind of dragon is..." Misty wondered out loud, only to be greeted...

"Emol!"

By a white and yellow flying squirrel that was now sitting on the girl's arm like she had seen Flying-Type trainers do with their Pokémon.

"That...isn't a dragon."

"Unlike you, most trainers like using multiple types of Pokémon. Emolga is known as the Sky Squirrel Pokémon native to the Unova region. It's a Flying-Electric Type that lives in trees and glides between them on a thin membrane..."

"Emolga, that girl and her Psyduck hurt Axew!"

"I did not such thing!"

"Hey, don't interrupt the wise tree spirit!"

"Why don't you show them your Discharge?!"

Looking rather furious, Emolga flew off the girl's shoulder and began to glow yellow. Soon after, multiple electric arcs flew off of the Emolga, as opposed the more focused single bolt from Thunderbolt.

The electricity struck several targets: Misty, Poliwrath, and the Pokédex.

"Ahhh!" Ow, was that what it felt like to be Team Rocket?!

"Poli-wrath!" 'What! This cannot be! I cannot be defeated by a single atta...' Poliwrath collapsed in defeat.

"Ow," the Pokédex complained blandly, suggesting it was probably faking it. Could the thing absorb electricity to power itself up?

Misty reached to return Poliwrath and send out Staryu, but suddenly she felt like every muscle in her body tensed up. She couldn't move...

She idly noticed visible electricity shocking her body as she seized up.

"What..."

"Discharge is a weaker attack than Thunderbolt, but in exchange for this power drop the move hits more targets and has an increased chance of paralyzing a target."
"You're still talking?!" the girl demanded of the Pokédex, which she still did not know its true name or form.

"I am a tree spirit. Electric-Type attacks are not very effective against me."

"Well, good thing I'm not trying to deal with you," the girl noted darkly, giving Misty a look that screamed 'I will do horrible things to you.' "No one hurts my brother...he's all I have left."

The last bit was said much quieter, though Misty still heard it.

Green energy claws formed on the girl's arms once more, likely meant for raking across her face. Emolga threateningly sparked its cheeks in the air next to her.

Her muscles still seized up, Misty couldn't do anything to stop them.

All hope seemed lost...

A glowing purple yellow duck, however, became her most unlikely of saviors.

"Psy-DUCK!" ‘Stay away from my food provider!’ And with that, a purple duck fist struck the Emolga head on. And it was sent flying.

"DUCK, punch," the Pokédex quipped as Emolga fell back to earth a good few yards away, in deep sleep?! "Secret Power has a different effect depending on where it is used. In a forest, it can cause the opponent to fall into a deep sleep."

"Emolga!" the girl shouted in concern, just as her muscles started working right again.

"Finally, I can move again!" Misty declared as the girl rapidly turned her furious gaze at her. Returning Poliwrath first, she quickly reached for, and released two more Pokémon.

The wild girl reached kept one arm clawed, reaching into her hair for likely another Pokéball as she found herself facing down a Psyduck, a Staryu, and a Gyarados.

On the Hunter's ship

Suddenly, before Ash could work to free the Dragonite Ash was sure had belonged to Iris in a past life, a metal wall slid down and blocked any access to the petrified dragon.

It was probably connected to the very loud, very obnoxious alarm going off.

"What...what just..." he began, but was interrupted by something.

"Goomy?"

A something that said Goomy.

Turning around, the trio of trainer, starter, and fire-type saw a guilty looking Aipom, who was holding that odd, circular dragon Ash had noticed earlier: which was apparently purple with greenish spots.

"Ai..." 'Um, my bad'.

Apparently Aipom had accidentally freed it, and that apparently set off alarm bells. Alarm bells that apparently did not go off when he and Pikachu broke out.

Odd...flawed security system much?

"Goom?"

It had said Goomy, so Ash was going to assume that was what it was called. Most Pokémon were that way, though not all (Lucario, Onix, Arbok, Charizard...)

Speaking of Charizard...

"Hey, how did you get out..." One of J's goon burst into the Fang Room, a Golbat flitting in front of him, only to have it knocked into his face by a spontaneous use of Dragon Tail from Charmeleon.

With both of them knocked out, Ash knew exactly what they had to do next.

"We need to get out of here! Let's try and find a landing craft or something. Blast everything that tries and stops us."

"'Meleon!" *This should be fun* with that, Charmeleon walked over the downed man and bat (umph!) to begin the grand escape.

Noting Aipom looking upset about having triggered the alarm, Ash walked up to her...and pat her reassuringly on her head. "Ai?"

"We were going to be found out anyway Aipom...might as well save at least one Pokémon while we are at it," Ash said as he noted the scared looking blob dragon.

"Goomy..." it said weakly as Ash picked it up, noting its lightness.

"Don't worry Goomy, we're going to get you out of here." Ash told the dragon sincerely, causing the little dragon to look at him in awe.

Ash promptly reached for his three other Pokéballs.

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**Porta Vista Juice Bar**

Paul, having recently defeated the local gym leader and earned his third badge (An orange bell like one), was sipping from a cup of orange juice in the Pokémon Center with a smirk.

That was an easy win if he had ever had one, though at the very least it felt deserved. It was more of a fight than he would have gotten if he had fought those talentless bimbos in Cerulean at the very least.

One did not prove oneself strong by defeating the worst of the worst after all.

*A Drapion fell to the cascade of stones from the Regirock's Stone Edge that it was desperately battling for a turnaround.*

Strength was the most important thing, nothing else mattered to a Pokémon Trainer. He realized that long ago.
The problem was that so few Pokémon had worthy strength. Few were worth being trained by someone who aimed for the top.

Most were nothing but cannon fodder meant for cannon fodder, weak Pokémon trained by weak Trainers one walked over during the preliminary rounds of League Tournaments.

He would find the strongest potential Pokémon, and make them his own.

The weak would be tossed aside.

Looking up from his drink, he noted a television (Marked with a Hoppip with JWitz written across it, it was the logo of the multi-national media company that manufactured them), which was doing a recap of the recent Ever Grande Conference, mostly as a set up for the upcoming Lily of the Valley competition, featuring a battle between a Sceptile and a Gardevoir.

The Gardevoir's trainer was down to just it after having lost a Ninjask, Shedinja, Protopass, Altaria and Flygon, while the Sceptile trainer had lost a Hariyama, Donphan, and Shiftry so far. A Metagross had been substituted and was still on tap.

The trainers in question were named Tyson and John Archer, but Paul really didn't care about that.

Five badges to go, before he'd be able to compete in the tournaments as well.

He had more to do first before then however.

Much more.

Back on the ship, a cut later

"Pika-Chu!" 'Take that!'

With a shout, Pikachu electrocuted a whole line of guards and Golbat who stood in their way.

As enemies and obstacles came at them from all sides, Ash's team was there to fight them.

"Golbat use Sc..."

"Use String Shot!" Ash countered as the enemies bat was silenced by bounding string.

Where J got all of these mooks, Ash wasn't quite sure.

Goons ran in terror at the barrage of Ember from Charmeleon.

Were there really that many bad people in the world?

Before they could let out their bats, several of J's men were tripped by Squirtle's Rapid Spin.

Then again, the world was a big place. If for every 99 good people in the world there was 1 bad one, could that add up?

With a Gust attack, Pidgeotto blew away the gas trap that they had unintentionally triggered before they were knocked out.

Or was that just a little too much for him to be thinking about right now?
Popping out from the air vent, Aipom hit a side button. The door clicked, sliding open to reveal the rest of her team, and the Goomy in Ash’s arms (Which hadn’t done much. Apparently Goomy was scared/unable to use attacks, at least according to the Pokémon who he could understand. What a strange Dragon-Type). When he got out of here, he’d have to check.

Regardless of any philosophy, they had fought their way to the room that Ash was pretty sure held a way out.

Escape pod, a very long rope, a transport that had an autopilot, something like that.

Approaching the door before them, Ash and his team were ready to fight through the last line of Golbat users (and why did mooks always use Golbat anyway?).

Only for the door to open up to reveal a totally different sort of threat blocking them.

For while the wide, open hangar hold a number of flying machines, it also had J in it.

J came with her currently released Salamence, Drapion, and Ariados, which quickly used Spider Web their way, with the clear intent of restraint.

Without any command, Charmeleon burned the net away, leaving Ash and the seven mons with him vs J and her three.

She noted that behavior with displeasure. "Clearly you need to train that thing more. A Pokémon should not be making its own calls like that".

"Well, the two of us just happen to be on the same wavelength. We don't even need words!"

She scoffed at his response. "I've read your profile, don't bother trying to make yourself off like your some sort of Savant or something. Either you told it to do that, or it disobeyed you. Attacks should be performed only when the command is given, never a moment before or after. Anything else is just rebellion, not a real command. Allow me to show you what a real attack looks like: Flamethrower!"

Salamence, being the only one of her Pokémon could use that attack, released a massive torrent of flames right at them.

"Block it with Ember Charmeleon!"

With a roar, Charmeleon let loose his flames, only for them to be completely blocked and overwhelmed by the stronger fire attack.

While Charmeleon could only glare in fury at his weak ranged attack, Ash had other options.

"Pikachu Thunderbolt! Butterfree Psybeam! Aipom Swift! Pidgeotto Gust! Squirtle Water Gun!"

With all their might, his Pokémon let loose their ranged attacks at once. Electricity, psy-energy, stars, wind, and water struck the flames head on...and slowed them down.

But the fire was still gaining ground.

J smirked at the shocked look that now adorned Ash’s face "Nice try kid, but my Salamence could take on Pokémon trained by members of the Elite Four. Numbers can't overwhelm sheer power"

As if confirming her words, the attacks shattered, and the flames continued right at them.

"Squir!" 'This, is going to hurt'. 
"Meleon!" 'We'll see about that!'

However, with glowing orange eyes Charmeleon roared, slamming his claws to the ground as a pillar of fire formed in front of them, finally stopping the fire attack in its tracks.

"Wait, Charmeleon did you just..." Ash said in shock as J growled.

"It learned a new move out of sheer willpower? How cliché. You're lucky kid, I'll give you that, and with a bit more time you'd probably have been a pretty good trainer whose Pokémon I could have captured and sold for quite a lot of money. But sadly your time is now, so let's do this again. Flamethrower, Pin Missile, Night Shade!"

In order the Dragon, the Scorpion, and the Spider let loose the attacks right at Ash.

"Block it with Fire Pledge!" Ash called out as Charmeleon once again slammed its claws into the ground, forming a great wall of fire.

The attacks collided, and Fire Pledge held.

For about ten seconds, then it broke.

"Mele!" 'But...my new attack!'

"Do tell your confused lizard that a new attack doesn't automatically mean victory would you?" J seemed snidely amused at Charmeleon's shock, as the powers flew right at Ash, who looked ready to call in the rest of his team to block the attacks once more under the assumption that if Fire Pledge could stop the attacks once after the others had weakened it previously, the reverse was also true.

However, a shimmering Goomy leapt out of Ash's arms and into the lines of fire before this idea could be implemented.

"Goo!"

"Goomy!" Ash called out in surprise and fear for Goomy's safety.

"How long was that thing charging up Bide for?!" J was similarly surprised, though over her own safety.

The resulting big explosion answered the question as 'long enough to be able to release the power very shortly after they made contact'.

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*Cannot give an exact location due to rapid falling from high up*

Good news, was they had gotten away from Hunter J.

Bad news...getting away from Hunter J was accomplished by being blown out through the resulting giant hole in J's airship.

Thankfully Ash wasn't out cold, and his hat had not been blown off of his head (he'd debate why later). One must always be conscious, and hat wearing, whenever possible.

All around him were his Pokémon: Pikachu was clinging desperately onto his leg, Pidgeotto and Butterfree were trying not to get blown away, Aipom was flailing around in a panic, Charmeleon
looked furious about his lack of wings to stabilize himself and seemed to be trying to will an evolution (unless that look was actual constipation), and Squirtle had donned his shades and crossed his arms together completely unfazed by the whole thing.

Goomy though...Goomy was currently quite out cold and falling right beside Ash. Its squishy body would not help in a few thousand more feet.

Ash made an attempt to reach for it, but it fell out of reach.

Just as something fell out from his pocket and, due to his higher mass flew right back into his stomach.

With his yet outstretched arm reaching for it, Ash felt it was something small and spherical, which narrowed its identity to only a very select few things. Clicking the center of it, it expanded.

A Pokéball?

Ash's eyes went wide as he brought the object into view, revealing itself as not just a Pokéball, but a Heal Ball.

He must have put this in his pants’ pocket last night and had forgotten to remove it.

The Pokédex had said Heal Balls healed the Pokémon captured, and Goomy was probably wild.

As Goomy slowly drifted away, Ash pointed the Heal Ball right at it and opened it.

A red burst of energy shot out of it and extended forward. It started to falter just as got to Goomy, but Goomy was still thankfully turned into energy and sucked in.

Ash felt the ball vibrate briefly, before it teleported away to Oak's lab, and healed for that matter.

Ash mentally resisted the nearly irresistible urge to pose after his captures to focus on the matter at hand. It was probably impractical at the present time.

Slamming the side of his belt, he managed to slap several Pokéballs. Their lights shot out, striking the falling Aipom, Squirtle, and Charmeleon and returning them. As he looked around for Pidgeotto and Butterfree, he briefly saw a blue glow from the corner of his eye, Lucario's staff.

Then he felt power in his eyes, as he felt a pair of claws grab his right arm, and a pair of smaller limbs hold his left.

Back on the ground

The brawl had continued since Psyduck had dealt with that pesky electric type.

Since then, she had in fact hit the girl with a Whirlpool. Just as she had suspected, that had not done much but confuse her, as if shocked Misty could do that. Of course, the paralysis from Discharge was still hitting her, and now the girl was being hit by a constant stream of Water Gun from her Staryu as the condition was striking her once more.

Meanwhile, Gyarados was currently fighting some giant mole Pokémon the girl had let out. The Pokédex, which was still calling itself a ‘insert adjective here’ tree spirit, had called it an Excadrill. Gyarados was getting aerial support from her Wingull, which was necessary as while the Atrocious
Pokémon had plenty of ranged options, it lacked close range counters to moves like Excadrill's Drill Run.

Psyduck had been the first to deal with Excadrill. He had been KO'd by a powerful Metal Claw, but thankfully he had landed on the asleep Emolga, thus weighing the dangerous electric-type down as to keep it immobile.

The girl's Axew was currently trying to push Psyduck off the electric Pokémon, to no success.

Misty felt the paralysis recede once more, and was ready to hit the girl with another Whirlpool...only for another explosion to ring out across the land.

"Again?" the girl snarled, as it seemed several shapes flew out of...what Misty could tell as seemingly nothing. The nothing they fell out from did seem to flicker though.

Something invisible?

The number of things seemed to diminish quickly though.

By the time the invisible specks started to become visible, there were about four of them. The battle had stopped, as all present took note of the descending shapes.

All were tense, ready to fight them if need be, as well as the nearby others. Misty was desperately hoping that they'd just be Team Rocket and could be dealt with quickly enough.

Odd that she seemed to see them as such a nuisance. The first and third time they showed up they were actually somewhat of a threat.

The four shapes however, as they came to focus, caused Misty and her Pokémon to de-tense. Gyarados in particular, oddly enough calmed quickly despite the species being known for their volatile temperament.

It was Ash. Pidgeotto and Butterfree were holding onto him, their eyes glowing orange along with his own. They seemed surprisingly strong.

Pikachu was holding onto Ash's leg for dear life, like a child scared of an amusement park ride.

As the four landed on the ground, all four collapsed in a dead heap.

"Caw..."

"Free..." the Flying types sounded exhausted.

Pikachu was kissing the ground in reverence.

"...That...wasn't fun." Ash muttered to himself as he lay in the dirt.

It wasn't fun!? He got abducted by something that set off a giant Beedrill swarmed, fell out freakin' open sky, barely avoided hitting the ground and going splat, and that was all he could say?!

What a...why that...Misty wasn't sure why she felt an odd mixture of fury and relief, but it was a strange feeling she'd hope would stop soon.

"Wait, you were on her ship, weren't you?!

The girl had stopped glaring at her, but now was focusing on the exhausted Ash.
Somehow the idea of this claw crazy girl trying to attack Ash after whatever the hell he had just been doing made Misty even madder than when she was being attacked.

"Did you see my parents? Did you see my brother!? Where are they?!!" She burst over to Ash and lifted him by the shirt collar. That seemed to refocus him a bit, and as he looked at the girl he looked surprised, shocked, and even slightly relieved (or was it just from being alive after what had just happened and he was currently drunk off it?)

Pikachu eyed the girl with similar expressions, instead of protective hostility as she might expect from this. It was familiar, almost like...

Ash lost his balance briefly, as if still dizzy from the landing. As he slipped, the girl used her other hand to grab his arm as to prevent him from falling and hitting his head, at which point he would not be questionable.

However, as she did so, her posture changed. She became less tense, and somewhat confused, a mood reflected by her Axew and Excadrill who didn't seem as willing to attack now that their sister/trainer was calming down. Misty suspected she probably had an odd expression of her face right now as she noted Ash.

Because Misty had a similar expression on her face once.

When she had first met him, and got those strange feelings. As if she had met Ash before. This girl, she seemed to be affected the same way she had been.

Why though?

Unknown Location

The Emissary appeared out of thin air in a darkened room, a room with no visible sunlight. A single, raised throne was in the center of it, depicting a man who could be identified, but one could tell this man felt, and probably was, quite powerful.

Kneeling before him, the Emissary spoke in reverence. "I have news to report, My Liege." The shadowy figure motioned, as if to grant permission to speak. "The boy has proven himself, escaping from the Huntress with ease, and has most interestingly obtained two things of remarkable status: a Goomy and a second female companion, a daughter of Dragons".

"A Pokémon, my Emissary, is but a tool. Just as we stand about humans with our superior strength of power, we stand above such miserable creatures with our superior strength of mind. As the bearers of both intelligence and might, it is our natural place to rule over both and do with each as we please." The King spoke in a voice of cool superiority. "I care not what tools my subjects choose to arm themselves with, in the end a shovel is not that different from a rake. As to the girl however..." The King looked amused. "Two such bearers of the second rarest of powers, the boy's luck is truly amazing. Clearly, what observation we have on him now is not nearly enough."

"What else is there to expect, My Liege, from a child of two bloodlines who bears the Domain of Power? The boy was made to be a harbinger of the new world, he serves no other purpose in life. The girl of Dragons is of little consequence in the long run, though I admit to being concerned about the influence of the daughter of water may hold for him."

The King was silent in contemplation for a moment as the Emissary finished, before rising
"Assemble the others and prepare for your next assignment. The first girl has three sisters who still live, bring them to me, alive and unharmed in any point of importance."

"Yes, My Liege, but if I may ask, why do you want them? Our observations suggest they are not useful as collateral should the girl need to be made to obey."

"True, they may be useless in that one way, but they are still related. I'm sure at least one of them has the proper genetics to get more children of Water in our forces. We have three to go through after all, it would not be any problem to dispose of any useless ones".

"Continue observation of the boy. Unlike the last one, this one looks like he has promise."

Meanwhile off the coast of Cerulean Cape, J found a note from that damn emissary, congratulating her on a job well done and telling her to check her bank accounts.

She promptly made for her liquor cabinet, and as far away from Kanto as possible.

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**Omake 1**

**Non Canon**

**Alternative escape from the J Airship**

Before J could attack, however, an energy blast shot her in the back, sending her flying into the air, before flashing and falling back down as a giant trophy version of herself, for some reason.

Ash and his Pokémon, and Goomy, looked at what had just happened in shock, though surprisingly Pikachu didn't seem that surprised.

In fact, the mouse seemed to be expecting that as the J trophy hit the floor and rolled away. Her Pokémon panicked, fleeing in shock (or maybe in a 'yay, I'm free of this scary lady' sort of way, Ash wasn't quite sure).

"Pika." *So, you got here in time then. Good thing too, I was worried you didn't get my message. You can give us a lift, right?*

Turning in the direction Pikachu was facing, Ash's eyes went wide with shock.

A giant, orange person in a metal battle suit was acknowledging Pikachu's words, the arm cannon still steaming from that energy attack that had trophied J.

Alongside the metal warrior was a red and blue dressed plumber with a moustache and a large M on his hat and a pink ball with red feet and a face.

And Ash had absolutely no idea who they were supposed to be, how they got here, or why Pikachu seemed to know them.

"Um...do you know these, um, people Pikachu?" Ash asked the dumb question as Pikachu smirked.

"Pika-Pi." *'Oh Ash, I have a whole secret life you know nothing about even before the whole reboot thing. Damn, that really makes me sound like poor McCloud and Lombardi...So, Samus. I heard Roy finally..."*
managed to get back, and he brought that Ryu guy with him. Seeing as we got the robot, figured we’d have to wait until at least the next round to fight him. Never mind that though, are we still on for next Saturday, I've always wanted to test my mettle against the fabled Hadoken? And what about those Inkling things, are they going to show up as well?'

The Plumber shook his head. "We-a still working on it. Their universe is-a little...tricky to get too...too much water, 7.8, you know-a how it is. You know how Link feels about water after that-a temple he visited that one time..."

"What the hell is a Hadoken? Is an Inkling some sort of Pokémon? What's so bad about a water temple, and why 7.8?" Ash wondered to himself, as the pink ball picked up J's trophied form and caused it to vanish, as if to a trophy case somewhere.

Omake 2 (Originally coming from the world of the Loops but was rejected and now is here)

Non Canon

Why I feel Nintendo probably needs to stop trying to attract third parties

Year 2020 (or something)

The scarred and blackened ground, and rather well pixeled ground at that, was coated in a layer of ash as deep as northern snowfall.

The ashes of destroyed franchises crunched at the boots of the executives as they walked across the wrecked landscape.

"So, I heard the console wars are finally over." An executive with EA on his breast pocket said sadly.

"Yeah, how are we supposed to get our amusement without the two trying to kill each other?" Another with the Activision logo on him said wistfully.

"A singular market should ensure that the game creation engines should now be linear," the Ubisoft executive reminded them. "That will save us time in development."

"Yes, because the speed of game creation is the most important, isn't it?" Rockstar's executive smirked at the Ubisoft fellow, who glared at him.

"Peace fellow AAA publishers!" Activision insisted as they started to climb up a hill. "Soon, we shall see who remains. Sony, or Microsoft. Let us see who we shall guide in the right direction in the future".

As the 3rd party developers, both shown and not shown, reached the top of the hill, they looked down at the final battle of the console wars, and stared slack jawed.

No one was left standing. The bodies of both the PlayStation and X-Box warriors both lay on the ground in smoldering heaps. Kratos and Master Chief looked like they had died at the same time delivering the killing blows, a fate that many others shared from what it seemed.

"...Who won?" the Rocksteady executive asked.

"I...think they killed each other off." Ubisoft declared with some sadness for the loss of their only places of business.
"Is no one left?" Square-Enix brought up the big question. Where were they going to publish their games now?!

"Of course there is!"

Nervously, all the 3rd parties turned around, before looking like they had just seen something horrible.

And that someone was a pristine looking red and blue plumber with a M on his hat. Joining him was a yellow mouse, green clad swordsmen, pink spherical lifeform, and an armoured suit wearing individual.

"How the Atari are you still alive!?" Mr. EA demanded as the various characters held up their reasons: a green mushroom, a golden rhombus like piece of medicine, a heart container, etc etc.

"Nintendo never dies!" Mario declared happily, seemingly oblivious to the looks of horror on the 3rd parties faces (some less than others, Square-Enix and Capcom for example). "We stayed out of all these crazy wars about pixels and frames and realism and all those silly things, letting everyone kill themselves over it! It isn't the first time we've had to pick up the pieces from a bunch of uncontrollable idiots, and we can get all sorts of interesting things from it!" Mario gestured to Samus, who outstretched her non-laser blaster arm to show off a display of Amiibo. "Look, we've got so many new things now! Not only do we have Banjo back, but we also have Minecraft, Sockboy, and Kratos Amiibo! Psst, we're not going to make a lot of him, so buy fast!"

Mario's teasing tone did not make the 1st parties relax.

"Nintendo has Minecraft!?

"As an exclusive!?!"

"What's Banjo?"

As the third parties whispered among themselves, Link whispered something into Mario's ear, causing him to return to the intended and more important conversation.

"Oh yes, now, I do-a believe you all need a place to release your new games on, right? Well, we are quite willing to let you resume publishing games on our systems!" Mario said cheerfully as Kirby spat out of his mouth a large calendar, which Link held up dutifully "Now-a, I know you just are waiting for a chance to go mono e mono with our software, so here's our release dates! I can't-a wait to see what sells better this Christmas; Pikachu's Sinnoh remakes or your Assassins! Let the best gameplay win."

Ubisoft exec was sweating at that comment. "Our assassins vs their Mons?! On gameplay?! I...I'm sure you mean on graphics, right?!"

"Pika pi?" 'Graphics? Who plays Pokémon for graphics? You play it for the gameplay mechanics'.

"Wait, Pokémon, Metroid, and Splatoon!? How the hell are we supposed to sell against those!?" EA complained.

"And our stockholders want the next Call of Duty on sale by April!"

"But we aren't releasing anything big in April?" Mario said in confusion "Just Pikmin 4 and-a Excite game."
"You're putting Mother 3 on the virtual console! You're going to fry the internet, and our Multiplayer! What are we supposed to sell a Call of Duty on without Online Multiplayer!?!"

"The story?" Samus suggested as the executive recoiled as if struck.

While a few of the 3rd party executives seemed interested, the others were huddling together and whispering to one another.

"We cannot work under these conditions!"

"How the hell are we supposed to compete with them!?"

"Think we can get Sega back on the console market?"

"No, no, they are no longer able, maybe we should just go all PC?"

"PC!? Are you mad!? Our ports to the PC were nearly as bad as ours to Nintendo! Those pirates will laugh us out!"

"Maybe one of us should make a console instead?"

"Not me!"

As the triple AAA's continued to ignore the plumber group, Mario sighed.

"Do you think offering to make Assassins Creed or Bioshock Amiibo would make them come around?" he wondered out-loud.

"No, I think they expect us to pay them more money to come over and release half-decent games than we spend making our own games," Link spoke out loud for that answer.
Then there were three

Professor Oak’s ranch, around the time of last chapter

Professor Oak had seen some interesting things in his time.

He had seen the change of the world culture, legendary wars so terrifying Oak hoped to the ends of time and space that he never see them return, the birth of his child and grandchild, and had become mildly famous and important.

He’d also once witnessed several of the Kanto Elite Four drunk. That terrified him more than the wars. A drunk Agatha was just so, so...wrong. The Professor shuddered from a particularly disturbing memory of the last time he’d seen her.

However, a Heal Ball suddenly teleporting into his laboratory from a few thousand feet above sea level in a flat forested area was a new one to him.

Picking the sphere up, Oak felt a sense of unease come over him.

"Please let this be a Flying-type that Ash somehow managed to catch mid-air despite not having a Pidgeot or Charizard..." he muttered to himself as he clicked the sphere open, releasing a burst of light that formed...

"Goomy?"

Into a purple slime dragon native to Kalosian swamps, and not the Kanto sky.

Professor Oak looked at the weakest of the Dragon-types, as said weakest of dragons trembled on the desk it had landed on.

"...Do I want to know?" the Professor questioned the Pokémon.

The Dragon-type rapidly shook its head...body...mass.

"Would whatever happened make Ash's mother go grey at thirty-three?"

"Goo?" Wait, why did he ask a Pokémon without body hair about ageing hair color?

Oh Arceus, he was getting old.

"Never mind...I'm just going to pretend that you were obtained normally and not ask how you got in the sky, nor how Ash got in the same part of the sky to capture you. Nope, zilch, nada, not going to happen."

Carrying said slime dragon in his arms as he entered his sitting room (enjoying its oddly pleasant squishy feeling), the Professor blinked in surprise as he saw that he and the Goomy were not alone.

And it wasn't because Ash's Bulbasaur was sitting on his couch. No, it was the person who was petting Bulbasaur who had caught him off guard.

"Good morning Professor!" Delia Ketchum said cheerfully.

"Delia, how nice to see you..." the Professor said in surprise. "Um...what are you doing in my laboratory?"
"You left the door open."

The Professor muttered something about bad habits, before taking a seat and placing Goomy on the table between his two couches. Bulbasaur looked up from his spot on the couch to eye the new arrival with confusion.

"Bulba?"

"Goo."

"Bulba!?"

"Well, I assume since you didn't come here for my tofu you want to hear about how Ash is doing. Well my dear, he just caught this Goomy and..."

"Oh, this little thing?" Delia looked down at the little dragon, which caused it to jump a little; it seemed quite nervous at being looked at by the woman. "What is it, exactly? Sort of looks like a Grimer."

"Actually, it's a Dragon-type native to the Kalos region. I'm not sure how Ash got it, but they can evolve into a powerful Pokémon known as Goodra. Anyway, I hope Ash doesn't catch a Grimer, or worse a Muk: they smell horrible and can be extremely clingy."

"A dragon huh?" Delia idly poked Goomy in curiosity, seemingly unnerved by its gelatinous form. (Goo!) "It doesn't look anything like a Dragon-type to me."

"I could the say the same about a Dratini, but I assure you both are Dragon-types. Anyway..."

"Excuse me Professor Oak? I hope you don't mind me coming in, but your door was open..."

A professional looking person in a business suit had appeared in his sitting room, a briefcase in hand.

"Oh for..." The Professor cut himself off before he said something rude. (He really needed to stop leaving his front door open. Honestly, anyone could just enter his place these days and ask him random questions!) "You're not from the government are you?"

The businessman looked offended. "Do I look like a tax collector to you?!"

"Well, yes actually," Delia admitted.

"Bulba." The Seed Pokémon nodded.

"Goo?" Goomy seemed to be blissfully unaware of what a tax collector was. Oh, you enviable gelatinous creature.

"Well, I'm not. I'm a television executive from Pokémon T.V..."

"Well, that's worse."

The T.V exec lost his footing at Delia's quip.

"Oh, the network that obtained exclusive rights to cover all Pokémon tournaments, contests, festivals, performances, and assorted other events." Oak said as he recalled the companies exact business contracts. Business contracts that somehow survived government overview despite many complaints and immense anger from the other television networks like Vulpix News and the Sports Channel.
Many conspiracy theories surrounded the group. Many, many theories, hardly any of them good.

"Yes, the very same." The man readjusted himself as if his collapse never happened. "Anyway, I represent my company in its express desire to acquire film of up and coming League challengers ahead of the curve. I'm told that you are the guardians of Gary Oak and Ash Ketchum, respectively." He noted Oak and Delia as he said this.

"Yes..." Delia began nervously as Oak frowned and nodded slowly. He could see where this was going.

"Both are making remarkable progress in their league challenges; Gary Oak has obtained his fourth badge recently in record time, while Ash got a glowing recommendation to us from none other than Lt. Surge himself. We see a bright future in store for the both of them, and we want the whole world to see them shine. To put it simply, we wish for legal permission, from the two of you as their guardians, to put the two of them on our Gym Battle review program and to have the full information experience during their league and tournament challenges!"

The room was quiet for a few moments. Guardians and Seed Pokémon alike seemed to be sizing him up; Goomy was just watching the whole thing in confusion.

"I see...you just want to shore up things in case one of them becomes champion so you can create another documentary program for massive ratings, like you did with Cynthia," Oak surmised as the executive looked dismayed.

"The way you say it makes me sound like a villain," the exec said sounding slightly offended.

"Well, you are basically buying up hundreds of exclusive contracts in the goal of finding that one golden ticket."

"Exactly. It's hardly illegal, it's only blatantly capitalist!" the executive pointed out. "And what boy's dream isn't it to end up on the biggest network, placed just before the prime-time. Hell, with the League currently scheduled in between the Ever Grande and Lily of the Valley tournaments, they could even make the prime-time itself!"

The Leagues operated on a rotating schedule with some breathing room in between. The Indigo, Silver, Ever Grande, Lily of the Valley, and the rest of the tournaments were all arranged so as to not clash with each other or other major events like Grand Festivals and Showcase Master Class tournaments. This allowed trainers a chance to rest up, and either start working towards the next tournament round or register for the next one if they were approved to do so.

It was effective, if a little overabundant. But good luck trying to tell a Pokémon League to shut itself down to make the entire year less packed. Nationalism could get nasty sometimes.

"I don't know..." Delia seemed torn over the comment on a boy's dreams, having known what Ash's was for years. However, the Professor was not so easily convinced.

He had resistance against corporate attacks!

"Did I mention the generous monetary compensation? The trainer and legal guardian of said trainer each earns 1% of all monies generated by how much money his time on screen produces."

1% of screen-time revenue from even one battle in a semi-major tournament...

Curse his limited government funding!
Monetary attacks: super effective against him. Well, within reason. He wasn't going to sell off anything living, or anything that was attached or part of something still living.

Grr...

"Very well," he agreed. Well, at least Gary wouldn't exactly mind getting a television deal to earn himself great amounts of money and attention, there was however the downside that it would fuel Gary's already inflated ego.

As to Ash though, he noted as Delia followed suit agreeing to the deal, would he even notice?

The next day

Waking up in her secret base 'tent' that was formerly a tree, Misty idly stretched the morning fatigue away, all the while recalling how weird yesterday had gotten...particularly after Ash had fallen out of the sky.

And the fact she found out she had somehow managed to bypass the Rock Tunnel while fleeing like mad from that giant Beedrill swarm was only the tip of that iceberg.

While they had managed to get their stuff back once more, they probably could have marked the trail they took to do so and made a fortune marking a bypass to Rock Tunnel. Oh well, maybe the Pokédex did it on its own accord, it was quirky that way.

Anyway, the strangeness all seemed to be centered around the girl who had tried to kill her the moment said girl had spotted her after her great running away from the Beedrill.

Her name was Iris. And she was...

"Who are you!? How did you escape from that Hunter J creep!? Where is my family!" She shook him by his collar in anger. "And why don't I want to beat an answer out of you!"

Aggressive. Then again, nearly getting your face ripped off by said girl probably was a good hint to that.

Afterwards, the story had eventually came out. Apparently Ash had been kidnapped by a Pokémon poacher called J, because apparently Jessie, Jenny, and Janice were not cool sounding enough, who had previously taken the Dragonite who had raised Iris. Ash had apparently attempted to free the Dragonite but only rescued something called a Goomy instead, then got blasted out of J's flying fortress.

Iris took that well...

Actually, she didn't. Not at all.

…

Narrowing her eyes in the direction that Misty, as far as she could tell, Hunter J's ship had went, Iris promptly began walking that way...

"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

Ash, at this point having reobtained his Pokédex, flinched as Iris turned around rapidly and glared
at the now debunked ‘tree spirit’. She seemed somewhat unnerved by it. Then again, what would a
girl raised by flying dragons know about Pokédexes and the fact they have snarky personalities?

Come to think of it, why could Iris speak the human tongue? That was a question for another time
though given the circumstances.

"And why not, you talking piece of flashy metal!" the purple haired girl bit back.

"Flasy metal? I do have a tutoring program in insults, if you are interested in trying to mock me
later." Misty honestly couldn't tell if the Pokédex was kidding or not, and all the while Ash was
getting more unnerved as the wild girl and the artificial intelligence continued to hold a glare off.
Well, they would if the Pokédex had eyes to glare with. "However, based on my trainer's
commentary, I can see the scenarios that would result in you chasing down this Hunter J. They
come in two distinct brands: either you fail to find her and wander alone and miserable, or you
find her, get beaten horribly, and killed, brutalized, brutalized and then killed, or killed and then
brutalized."

"I would not!" Iris snarled as green energy started to swirl around her hands.

"Axew!" Her 'little brother' chirped in agreement. Misty would later find out that Axew was in fact
hatched from a female Dragonite whom had looked after Iris (the father was apparently a Haxorus),
and then the Pokédex commented something about lax sexual norms about Dragonite in what could
be described as under it's none existent breath, which Misty had no need to know about. Her
Excadrill and now revived Emolga nodded in agreement with her.

"Pokémon Hunter J did not earn her infamy because she is a pushover like a certain annoying
trio. She possesses advanced technologies and her Salamence is tough enough to fight in Elite
Four level battles, and her Drapion and Ariados could defeat even the best teams of Gym Leaders,
particularly ones like Erika and Valerie. You cannot beat her."

"Well unlike some average human, I have a few tricks they don't!" She manifested the glowing green
Dragon Claws for good measure.

"Prove me wrong then: defeat Ash's Charmeleon with your Excadrill. If you can do that, then
maybe you could stand a sliver of a chance."

"Hey! Can I please not get involved in this?!" Ash begged as the Pokédex sighed.

"Outside of releasing said Charmeleon, you don't have to. I will battle the girl!"

"You can't just..." Ash began indignantly at his Pokédex for trying to commandeer his Pokémon.

"Very well you man-made crime against nature, I accept!"

... The Pokédex could do damn whatever it wanted, it seemed.

And so it promptly somehow got Ash's Charmeleon to obey it and fought Iris's Excadrill.

Fun fact: Excadrill is part Steel.

Fire is Super-Effective against it.
Charmeleon was panting heavily by the end of the fight, but Excadrill lay defeated.

Iris looked furious, and heartbroken all at the same time.

"Like I said," the Pokédex told her bluntly, "you, are not strong enough. Even if you could deal with the Salamence, that does not factor in the Ariados, the Drapion, the technology you and most normal people would be baffled by, and the sheer difficulty of tracking down an invisible, flying, warship."

"I can...I have to...you don't know anyt...th..." Her voice hitched and cracked as her eyes glistened with forming tears.

Now, the girl was just crying incoherently, her legs failing her as she hit the ground. Her Axew and Emolga quickly darted over to comfort her. Iris' whole body shook as she wailed in anguish, she wanted her family back but from what had just happened all her hope seemed to leave her. Only a shell of the once confident girl remained kneeling on the ground with tears leaving trails down her cheeks.

Misty felt very bad about watching the girl break down at the realization that she, in fact, was not ready, or able, to save the ones she cared about.

It was also a somewhat self-realizing moment when Misty realized that the emotions that this girl, Iris, was feeling...she couldn't even comprehend.

She had never gotten along with her family. She probably, no definitely, wouldn't be feeling this way if something like this happened to them. She might even have felt...happy, if they had been taken away by an evil supervillain, leaving her alone and free.

She'd even have gotten the Gym, which would have been a dream come true.

The fact that if she had been Iris's situation she wouldn't be crying, but cheering...

The whole revelation made Misty very uneasy, even as she felt immensely bad for the poor girl who never even an hour ago had been trying to claw her face off or fry her with an electric rodent.

However, then Ash intervened.

Ash.

The trainer from Pallet had been mostly silent until this point, outside of arguing against his Pokédex. He had clearly been just as bothered by Iris's breakdown as she had been, but seemingly in more a 'this girl is crying because of a horrible situation and I can't do anything to change it' sort of way than a 'damn, I would actually probably have killed to be in the scenario this girl is in right now, and that just makes me feel horrible', sort of way. There also seemed to be what Misty could only describe as a hidden center of joy to Ash at seeing this girl alive.

Did he just value life so much that the girl having survived was a big positive to him? Did falling from the sky just make one appreciate life more? It was an interesting train of thought.

Anyway, he eventually began to talk to the still broken girl.

"You know, if you aren't strong enough now, there is always time to become stronger."
The girl stopped audibly crying when he said this, but as she looked at Ash, her eyes were still quite laden with tears, her shoulders still shaking and her breath catching.

"I'm a trainer who's aiming to enter the Pokémon League and win it all. Of course, to get to that point, I need to earn gym badges, to prove that I am ready to do so." He flashed his inner jacket, revealing his three badges. "Right now, J has me completely outclassed, but if I can prove myself and win eight badges, then on paper at least, my Pokémon are strong enough to fight J's Poison-Types. And if I can do well enough in the league, they'll be tough enough to fight her Salamence."

Misty noted he was omitting the fact he technically had ten badges at the moment. It was probably for the best anyway.

"To get there though, my Pokémon and I will need to do a lot of training. We need to get stronger and stronger, and the best way to do that is with sparring buddies."

He extended his hand to Iris at this point, who was looking at him with wide eyes and unshed tears shining in them.

"If you come with us Iris, and train with us, you'll get stronger. Eventually, you'll get strong enough to defeat Hunter J, and to save your family. So what do you say Iris, do you want to get stronger together?"

She eyed his hand for a few moments, still looking quite devastated, before taking it with a strong grip.

And with that, their party size became three.

Misty honestly wondered if she should be annoyed at Ash for springing on such an invite without asking her permission first. After all, many people didn't like having to travel with people who had, in the past, attempted to remove ones limbs.

However, it was such an honest, kind-hearted, noble deed of his that Misty just couldn't feel mad at him.

Who knows, maybe she could find some common ground with Iris give enough time.

Having dressed as she reflected over yesterday's events Misty stepped out of her little shelter, to the sight of Iris.

The girl yawned, stretching a bit as if she had just woken up. She stared at Misty, as if unsure as to why she was staring right back. "Morning Misty."

"Iris..." Misty questioned very, very uneasily. "Why, aren't you wearing any clothes?"

Iris looked at her like she just asked why one would cover one's nose in a dump. "Because it's going to be warm today. What's the point in wearing clothes if it's not going to get cold? I was only wearing them the other day because I was flying up in the sky, which is rather cold."

She said the last part as if it was common knowledge (it was), and that asking a question about made one want to call the questioner a little kid (which Misty did not appreciate).

A distant, rational part of Misty's mind wondered why she was getting so suddenly rattled by the idea of Ash seeing another girl without clothes on, but it was drowned out by the part of her that didn't
want Ash to see a girl without clothes on.

Psyduck would make a snide add-on of the 'except me' variety, but Misty ignored him during the ensuing argument about the logic of clothing.

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**Team Rocket HQ**

"So, our official recommendation is that Team Rocket gets involved with neither the Kaz nor the Yaz gangs: both groups are incredibly incompetent thugs whose only purpose would be as cannon fodder. Cassidy thought it would be best to keep some level of contact with both gangs, to potentially allow for the bolstering of our grunt forces in case of a conflict with a rival group such as Team Galactic or Team Dim Sun."

The blue and blonde duo of Butch and Cassidy gave him the report in person, all the while looking like they hadn't slept in weeks, been hit in the back of the head with at least a few blunt objects, and really needed a good shower.

Given they were at work in Dark City recently with the local gangs as feeler agents, that was very likely the case.

While their failure during the Hop-Hop-Hop operation, punishing them by forcing them to deal with those violent fools for an entire week was most...enjoyable.

"Very well, you two are dismissed. Now go take a shower, you reek of low-quality body spray, sake, and..." The nose of the boss of Team Rocket seemed to be rather unnerved. "Stale and unorthodox ketchup?"

"Don't ask," Butch muttered, looking away from both his partner and his boss. Giovanni decided not to press further on anything involving ketchup.

"Well, ensure you don't smell like it again when you are called back for your next assignment." With that remark, the boss found himself alone in his office, bar his Persian of course.

He shuffled through a few miscellaneous details obtained from the overall successful operation, as his holographic images changed before him.

A report of a recent spotting of the infamous Pokémon Hunter J.

The recent closing of the Cerulean Gym.

The vanishing of the former Cerulean Gym Leaders.

A picture taken during the Hop-Hop-Hop operation.

The last one particularly kept Giovanni's attention, as it showed a mother and child. The woman was your typical, run of the mill auburn haired woman in the mid-thirties, but the boy...

Well, he appeared to be about twelve or so, and looked a lot like the boy Jessie, James, and Meowth were following.

Most, interesting...
Later, South of Rock Tunnel

Ash was happy.

Why was Ash happy one may ask? After all, he did just get kidnapped and escaped through only
dumb luck.

Why, it was quite simple really.

One of his friends, one he believed to have died because reality wasn't restored right, was shown to
be alive.

Who cares if she sort of smells like she has never heard of deodorant, she was alive and that was
simply wonderful!

In fact, he decided to go do some special training in celebration!

That, and when he had gotten up today he had heard Iris and Misty argue about clothes off in the
distance and wanted some space. Happy or not, he did not want to get in between an argument
between the two female traveling companions of his who were most...hot-headed and forceful.

Odd though, Iris really wasn't the type for fashion, in either timeline.

"Okay guys, come on out!"

In a burst of four Pokéballs, his Pikachu was joined by Butterfree, Squirtle, Aipom, and Pidgeotto.

Now, one may be wondering, why there were only four Pokéballs? Well, the answer was quite
simple.

He had sent Charmeleon to Professor Oak's on break: well maybe not break. He was probably
juggling some hapless Geodude or something right about now.

It was more a call to train a few of his other Pokémon personally for a bit, particularly his brand new
one.

For the fifth Pokéball in hand, was not even a Pokéball at all.

"Go, Goomy!"

The Heal Ball released a burst of light, revealing the purple blob creature he had saved during his
free-fall.

"Goo!" it greeted. Ash realized that he wasn't able to understand it. Obviously he needed time for
Pokémon he had not caught previously.

"Okay Pokédex, give me the scoop" Ash pointed the device at Goomy, which beeped a little.

"Goomy, the Soft Tissue Pokémon. A dragon-type native to the Kalos region, Goomy is native
to swampy wetlands. It's considered the weakest of dragon types, though many argue that
fellow Kalos dragon-type Noibat is weaker. This Goomy is male, knows the moves Bide and
Rain Dance, has the Hydration ability, and is ranked 1 star out of 3 via the DexNav evaluation
feature."
Ash, having no idea what the last part was, merely dwelled on the bits he could understand.

A Pokémon from the Kalos region? For a moment, Ash wondered if he may have, had Cyrus not botched up things, have met this Goomy? What would that have been like?

Bide and Rain Dance though...

Now, Ash was willing to work with any Pokémon: having trained turtles and blobs, birds and shellfish, monkeys and bugs aplenty. However he was in heart an 'attack first to defend' type of person, and no attacking moves was something that just...boggled him.

That would have to be the first thing he worked on. For even Muk, his most defensive orientated Pokémon, could attack. While Bide would inflict damage, he did not want to make that his entire strategy.

"Hey Goomy, don't faint and get continuously hit by Blaine's Magmar and then blast it with Bide" was not the kind of strategy he wanted to be known for.

"Okay, what moves can Goomy learn then?" He had a TM from Brock that described how to teach moves. Might as well make use of it. So he consulted the Pokédex once more.

"Goomy can learn Absorb, Bubble, Thunderbolt, Dragon Breath, Dragon Pulse, Thunder, Sludge Wave, Sludge Bomb, Rock Slide, Infestation, Secret Power, Iron Tail, Poison Tail, Shock Wave, and Water Pulse, among others."

That was...an interesting assortment.

Hmmm...

Let the training begin!

---

**Training Montage Begins**

(Blowing through his mouth like he had a bubble wand in front of him, and Squirtle as if he was actually using the move, the two practiced with the Goomy.)

To some people, the idea of training for a new move should be simple and easy.

("Pika pika' 'Okay, so tense all your muscles at once, releasing the kinetic energy throughout your body,' Pikachu lectured to Goomy about how one created electricity from one's body.)

It wasn't. It was something one had to teach oneself and one's Pokémon.

(After Pidgeotto flew off, grabbed, and dropped Psyduck off, the duck was pointed at Goomy and told to use Secret Power. The duck tilted his head, not in confusion but just to be difficult. Clearly bothering Misty was not enough these days.)

Trying to train a Pokémon to learn a move intentionally, as oppose to inspiration or desperation, can take many days. So Ash wasn't quite expecting an instant learning experience.

(Making a sound like he was trying to hork up some phlegm, Ash promptly spit some of it out, demonstrating what the TM said was the basis of Sludge Bomb. Each time Goomy and Ash went for
another attempt at it, Butterfree blew more pollen at Ash with his wings as to ensure he'd be able to continue doing so without complications).

Also some Pokémon just didn't pick up certain moves. You could teach a Froakie Quick Attack all day, but you'd just get out Double Team if the Pokémon just simply understood the concept of that move better than it did Quick Attack.

(Picking up Goomy with her tail, Aipom began dropping Goomy by the tail towards a thin stick on the ground, all with the explicit suggestion of trying to put power into his tail.)

And, if nothing else, there was always tomorrow.

**Training Montage Ends, elsewhere nearby**

"So that's why people are always wearing clothes? They just deal with hot temperatures and water by wearing different types of clothing, and generally less of it?"

"Yes," Misty reply tersely. This entire conversation had been rather...well, one she'd never want to do again. She had only gotten a break when Ash's Pidgeotto had randomly grabbed Psyduck and flew off with said duck. The two girls had just stared after the birds for a few moments, before Iris promptly asked about the purpose of socks.

Iris, meanwhile, sounded like she finally had figured out a long standing mystery. Good for her.

Well, at least she was clothed now. Sure, Misty had to give the girl some of her socks, but now Ash would not see this girl naked.

The part of her mind that was asking her why that bothered her so much still kept nagging her though.

"Slow..." 'Yawn.'

However, that loud yawning sound promptly made the two girls realize that A, they were by a stream, and B, that there was a large pink mass lying on its side, apparently asleep.

A Slowpoke.

As the two girls looked at it, the creature, slowly, rose its head, then turned its gaze towards them just as slowly.

"Slow?" 'People.'

Oh boy...this was where her goal came to haunt her.

But, she set out to do something, and she would do it.

Tossing a Pokéball at the Slowpoke rather casually, the ball promptly energized the Slowpoke and sucked it inside.

A Slowpoke's reaction time was approximately 5 seconds, however by that time...

*Click.*
The Pokéball was sealed.

Slowpoke was hers now. Yay...

And with that, she had her tenth Pokémon, out of her eventual goal of one hundred and thirteen last time she checked.

Urgh, that number sounded daunting when she thought about it.

"That was, random," Iris noted bluntly, staring at the Pokéball Misty had just thrown.

"Just as you and Ash..." And why did that phrase bother the Water-type trainer so much to say?
"...have goals, I have one was well. I'm not aiming to get stronger in particular, or to conquer the Pokémon League. My goal is to capture one of every Water-type in the world."

"There are a lot of those in the world," Iris replied bluntly, which Misty was starting to realize the girl did a lot.

"Well, I guess I know what I'm going to be doing for quite a while." Misty smirked as she noticed the Pokéball teleport away, off to Oak's lab and thus to be the Professor's problem.

She couldn't do anything about Psyduck being a constant in her life (he was her only Secret Power user and she wasn't sure they'd have time to teach another Pokémon), but she'd be damned if she had to deal with two Pokémon with the same mental capacity at once!

She idly noticed Iris looking terrified, staring at the vanished Pokéball like someone had just broken the laws of reality before her.

Oh...

They hadn't told her about Professor Oak, had they?

Guess she'd be in for another talk with the wild girl, but this time about advanced technology Misty really didn't understand herself.

Fun. Hopefully for her sanity the girl would not do a Wynaut impression.

---

**Lavender Town**

"Prepare for Trouble!"

"Make it Double!"

"Um, who are you?"

The little girl's question caused the duo (dressed very similarly to how they normally do but with their R's missing) to realize that A, the kid didn't travel around with some little blonde girl, and B...

Well, the kid may look like Ash Ketchum, but there were some noticeable differences.

His shoulder Pikachu, for one, seemed a little less cheerful, the kid's hair was a few shades darker and messier and a bit longer. He had a paler skin tone, and lacked the kid's lightning marks on his face (the little blond girl with the hat did have them though). His hat resembled that of Ash, but
without the green Pokémon League mark on it, and his jacket and shirt combo colors were red, white, and black, as oppose to blue, white, and black. The sleeves were also short sleeved.

His eyes were like Ash's as well, but they seemed fierier, as if fires glowed behind them. It was...somewhat odd.

"He's Red, and I'm Yellow!" the little girl spoke for the two of them. Meowth, who had yet to speak, merely observed the two from his spot between the two humans on his team with some level of curiosity "Why did you two just start talking like you were Power Rangers?"

Jessie and James were floored at that statement.

"Power Rangers!" Jessie snapped as if morally offended by such a statement.

"Now now, calm down Jessie." James tried to get the girl to relax a bit as he extended his hand in friendship, though he noted the boy didn't seem eager to receive it "My name's James, I'm a traveler of sorts. I follow where the fires of my destiny guide me, led by the trail of ashes in my wake."

“No need to be poetic James.”

"I'm here to compete in the battle dome tournament that's coming up."

"Same here! Red's going to win it all!" Yellow chirped. Apparently Red didn't need to speak when the little girl was around. How convenient.

He did at least extend his hand to give a decent handshake though after a few moments, meeting James's still outstretched hand. James raised an eyebrow at his body temperature, which seemed a little warm to him.

How odd. It seemed a lot of things about this kid were...unusual to say the least.

Well, that was that. As the handshake ended, the two groups turned around and walked away from one another, though the little girl threw in a youthful quip about Red beating them tomorrow as they left.

"Hey James, think we should have tried to steal their..." Jessie offered the idea as James frowned.

"We have our stalking target Jessie, and not only is that kid not him, we also happen to be in a heavily populated area with surveillance cameras and 911 hotlines. No need to risk running afoul of Officer Jenny any more than we have to merely by being members of Team Rocket in disguise. Do you really want to share a jail cell with a criminal from this crazy town?!"

Recalling all of the horror stories about oddly behaving criminals who went into Pokémon Tower and started shouting about blood, Jessie paled and rapidly shook her head.

"Speak for yourselves," Meowth quipped. "I'm immune to ghosts."

"To Shadow Balls, maybe. Not to crazy people shouting about blood who can strangle you."

---

**North of Lavender Town, Route 10**

Iris eyed the structure the group was approaching with immense unease.
The fact that the doors to it opened on their own to let people enter and leave it, as if wind suddenly started from the very small space between the doors blew outwards was quite unsettling. It defied logic!

"Do we really have to do this?" she questioned Ash, who smiled kindly and began explaining.

"You and I both want to become stronger, and to do that we both need plenty of practice. Battle Clubs are good places to get practice in against trainers and help make you stronger."

Stronger...

Yes, she needed to get stronger. She needed to be ready to make Hunter J pay.

Nothing would stop her in her goal.

As said trio walked through the oddly self-opening doors, Iris willed herself not to be unnerved by the self-opening doors.

She'd just ask how they worked later.

..."Ah dammit! Freakin' snake just got up and left! Stupid Unovan piece of shit, it so wasn't worth my Butterfree..."

Having been placed in an indoor battle arena by the male owner of this facility, Iris found herself to fight some kid in armor with a large gash on the left forearm, who was using a lot of harsh words Iris wasn't sure the exact meaning of.

Sure, she knew what Unovan meant: according to her parents she came from Unova. But why did he mention excrements after it?

He stopped his word onslaught as he turned to glare at her. "So, you're my opponent?"

Iris nodded.

"How many badges you got?" He spoke. Somehow Iris felt he said that sentence in a way that would elicit a response from Ash's Poké...duck?


"Badges?" Oh, those things Ash collected as marks to show how strong he was? Huh, humans mustn't really do scars anymore.

"What?! You're a Pokémon Trainer and you're not trying for the Pokémon League!?" the kid stated in a harsh, disbelieving tone. "Don't tell me you are one of those coordinator types?!"

Iris shook her head, having no idea what the heck a coordinator was.

"Oh great, I got matched up with a freakin' casual!" he shouted in annoyance. "Great, now how the hell am I supposed to get my workout done!?"

Freakin' casual? Humans had strange word choices.

"Very well, prepare to face the power of a proud owner of a Cascade and Boulder Badge!" the armored kid stated loudly, and in order. "Go, Beedrill!"
"Go, Excadrill!"

The bee and the mole found themselves staring each other down, as the armored kid stared at her Pokémon in confusion.

"What the heck is that thing!?"

"It's an Excadrill. I shouted its name out when I released it," Iris explained bluntly, wondering what happened next.

Before they had come to this Battle Club, Misty had told her not to attack any trainers during battle like what had happened with the two of them. But this guy had armor and a sword, so did that make it okay in this situation?

Maybe if he attacked first...

"Begin!" some guy on the side shouted. Apparently humans had people tell you when you could start, and stop, attacking something.

Interesting, strange but interesting.

"Go Beedrill, use Poison Jab!"

As the bee's stingers glowed purple, Iris just stared.

Did he really just...

And the Beedrill hit Excadrill...to absolutely no effect.

As the Beedrill continued hitting Excadrill again and again to no real effect, her opponent got madder and madder.

"What the...why isn't that working!" the kid shouted in frustration as Iris once again bluntly stated the facts.

"Excadrill is part-Steel, Poison attacks don't work. Now Excadrill, use Drill Run! Eat this, you freakin' casual."

Iris idly wondered if she was using that phrase correctly.

...

"Go, Gyarados and Staryu!"

Misty really didn't technically need to be here. Her goals weren't exactly power based after all.

But, if one was aiming to capture one of every water-type in the world, some training was always useful.

Plus, after that Emolga fight, Misty had been thinking of ways to counter future run ins with such Pokémon (and Chinchou/Lanturn for that matter), and she had come up with a little idea of her own.

True, it was inspiration based, and she'd probably have to credit Ash for it, but that wasn't really relevant at this point.

Thankfully her opponent has a Voltorb and Fearow out, and would be all too happy to provide her
with all necessary electric attacks to test it out.

"Begin!"

...

"Vulpix, Zubat, I choose you!"

A sudden wave of Brock nostalgia flooded Ash as the two Pokémon found themselves up against him.

One Pokémon, a reddish fox with several split tails, the other a blue bat. All once owned by Brock himself, and good traveling companions and buddies across the Kanto and Johto regions.

"Vulpix, the Fox Pokémon. When Vulpix is within its egg, it only has a single tail. When it hatches, several tails are present. It possesses Fire-abilities."

"Zubat, the Bat Pokémon. Zubat live in large numbers in caves. Cave travellers, dwellers, and explorers have long found Zubat to be immense nuisances. Grass-types cannot beat Zubat easily with only their type of attacks."

The Pokédex got to say it's two bits on the subject, and now could send some data to Professor Oak and whoever else for research. Good for them.

Pikachu and Goomy sat off to the side: Goomy having been let out to get some visual experience as to what Pokémon battles were like.

It was a proven tactic for helping train and inspire Pokémon. He had done much the same with Scraggy after all.

"Okay, Squirtle, Pidgeotto I choose you!"

In bursts of light his turtle and bird Pokémon appeared on the field.

"Squirt!" 'Say, this isn't a gym, is it?' He questioned.

"Caw." 'Nope.'

"Tle...' 'Bummer, I'd like to actually fight and win at one of those this time around in Kanto.'

You did help win the Earth-badge Squirtle...though given that Team Rocket was leading that battle did it even really count?

Ash made sure to remind himself to use Squirtle in any gym battle that made any logical sense to use him in. So while Erika was out, maybe Koga would use a Nidoking or Queen?

And Blaine, certainly him. Assuming it went better this time around...

"Begin!"

And there went his musing times.

"Okay, Zubat use Wing Attack, Vulpix use Quick Attack!" His opponent called as the two Pokémon sped right at him.

"Counter with Return and Quick Attack!"
A white glowing fist in hand, Squirtle struck Zubat right between its wings just as it got closer. Meanwhile a white speeding Pidgeotto slammed right into Vulpix’s attack, causing both to be pushed back as Zubat hit the ground for a moment before taking off once more.

"Grr..." his opponent growled "Okay then try this: Vulpix use Ember and Zubat use Bite!"

As the Bat Pokémon flew once more towards Pidgeotto and Vulpix began spewing sparks, Ash was quick on the uptake.

"Pidgeotto Aerial Ace, and Squirtle use Water Gun!"

Breathing in deeply, Squirtle let loose his water blast. The attack quickly doused the ember sparks and blasted Vulpix into the wall.

Meanwhile, Pidgeotto vanished moments before Zubat bit it, before reappearing and slamming into Zubat and sending it spinning back down.

"Zubat and Vulpix, are unable to battle! The winners are Squirtle and Pidgeotto!" the referee shouted.

... 

"Pinsir is unable to battle, the winner is Excadrill!"

"Damn it!" The armored boy snapped, his fist clenching the hilt of his sword.

... 

"Voltorb and Fearow are unable to battle, the winners are Gyarados and Staryu!"

"Yes! It worked!"

"Yeah...it did work. Wish I had thought of that..." her opponent muttered to himself. "Then maybe I could have beaten Lt. Surge..."

... 

"Psyduck is unable to battle, the winner is Emolga!"

"Emol!"

"Yeah, that was rather therapeutic!"

... 

"Nidoran and Nidoran are both unable to battle: the winners are Aipom and Squirtle!"

... 

"Mankey is unable to battle, the winner is Psyduck!"

"How the heck did that duck..."

"If I only knew," Misty muttered to herself.

...
"Oddish and Poliwag are unable to battle! The winners are Butterfree and Pidgeotto!"

As his last opponent for the day returned his Pokémon and left along with the referee, Ash stretched triumphantly.

"Man, that was a good workout." Nothing like a few Pokémon battles to help really hammer in your training.

"It was. I also obtained some useful data," the Pokédex noted. "Your Pokémon encounter rate is increasing by a good amount. Perhaps you may one day surpass Gary Oak in that regard."

Hey!

"You've lost your snarking privileges for that one," Ash told the device in response to its attitude.

"You have no control over my snark."

"Sni!"

Ash and his four released Pokémon (Butterfree, Pidgeotto, Goomy, and Pikachu) turned their heads sharply to the ceiling, where that sound originated.

"Wait, was that a..." Ash began as the air vent (and it was always an air vent) flew to the ground and a green snake-like Pokémon landed in front of them.

"Snivy!"

"Whoa, is that..."

"Yes, it is a Snivy," the Pokédex snarked. "Snivy is a grass-type starter Pokémon given out to trainers in the Unova region. It is known for its attitude, and its immense pride. A trainer it feels is not worthy of it will get attacked by a Snivy, who will go and strike out on its own. Though how it got all the way to Kanto is anyone's guess."

"Pikapi..." 'Ash...that is Snivy. Our Snivy...' Pikachu seemed shocked to see it here. Ash was too, of course.

"Sni!" She gave Ash a 'bring it on' motion with her hands.

"Goo!" Goomy promptly hid behind Pikachu, afraid of Snivy.

"The Snivy appears to want to battle you," the Pokédex noted. "I'd suggest using your Quick Ball to quickly obtain it. This Snivy has Contrary!"

"Um, has Contrary?" Ash didn't get what the Pokédex meant. "And wouldn't using a Quick ball make it more likely to see me as unworthy and thus likely to attack me?"

"Oh...by the maker you are right. I am suddenly concerned." The last line was said as if it were a sign of the apocalypse.

Ash really needed to get that thing an attitude change.

"Alright, go Pidgeotto!"

Pointing, he sent his first Flying-type out to battle. In his mind's eye though, this confrontation was
two-layered.

On one layer was this battle, but on a second was the first time he captured Snivy: a battle where Pidove was his secret weapon.

A female Pokémon, immune to...

"Sni...vy!"

The barrage of attract hearts that Pidgeotto was now being blasted by.

Attract.

"Ignore them and use Quick Attack!"

Glowing white, Pidgeotto flew and shattered all of Snivy's hearts before slamming right into Snivy. Snivy was sent spinning into the air, but quickly righted herself.

"Sni-Vy!" And promptly through a giant barrage of leaves at Pidgeotto.

"Leaf Storm! At that level!? Be wary Ash! Contrary!"

Ash still had no idea what the Pokédex meant. "Dodge!"

Pidgeotto tried to, but was hit by the leaves and blown back a bit. But it wasn't very effective, so Pidgeotto still was good.

Pidgeotto breathed a little heavily after that hit. 'Not bad' she admitted.

"Sni..." Snivy's tail now glowed green.

"Leaf Blade too!?" the Pokédex shouted. "What kind of Snivy is this!?"

'My Snivy.' Ash thought proudly, but first he had to beat his Snivy. "Block with Steel Wing!"

With glowing white wings, wings and tail collided in a fury of strikes, seemingly even.

"Now, Gust!"

"Caw! 'Let's see how you like being hit by a windstorm for a change!"

With a final clash of attacks pushing the two apart, Pidgeotto began blowing the wind attack right at Snivy.

Snivy responded with a Leaf Storm, which as it was the second Leaf Storm should logically be weaker than the first one...

The Leaf Storm blew apart Gust and smashed into Pidgeotto, sending her back even further than before.

"Wait, what?!" What...what about logic?! Wasn't that a thing?!

"Contrary is a Pokémon ability that enables a status drop to be reversed. For example, using Overheat would make one's next Overheat more powerful into infinitude," the Pokédex explained in an exasperated tone.
"What?! I thought Snivy had Overgrow!?” Wasn't that the starter ability for Grass-types?

"Most do, but a few do not."

And apparently his Snivy was one of them...

As Pidgeotto regained flight, Snivy charged up another Leaf Storm.

"Caw! 'I don't think I can take another one of those...'

And if she kept getting stronger with every Leaf Storm...stopping her could become a real issue.

He had to end this, and quickly.

"Pidgeotto, use Aerial Ace to dodge!"

With a resounding call, his first bird flew right at the leaf storm, before vanishing.

Snivy's eyes went wide, looking around for where Pidgeotto could have possibly gotten off to.

They went wider when she got her answer.

Aerial Ace struck Snivy from behind, sending Snivy flying right at him.

Reaching into his ball collection, Ash grabbed a Pokéball. He noted he had snagged one of his Great Balls.

'A stronger Pokéball...Snivy did take a few Pokéballs the first time around...let's skip that step,' Ash decided as he threw his ball.

"Go, Great Ball!"

And so the blue ball flew right into Snivy's path, as the ball opened and Snivy was engulfed in red energy.

It went in...shook...and shook...and shook...

"Goo..."

And ticked successfully.

Quickly grabbing it before it teleported away, Ash promptly posed with it.

"I caught, a Snivy!' 'My Snivy'

"Pi-Pikachu!"

"Caw!"

The ball quickly vanished as his pose ended. And it was only as it did end that he noticed he had watchers.

"Ash..." Misty said incredulously in the aftermath of that fight "You...are really, really lucky."

"I guess..."
That night

A day away from Lavender town (Fun times...fun times. Chandeliers were fun to have fall on you long before they could shoot fire at you in response), Ash found himself grinning.

Snivy was back with him, and had been filled in. Her response to this entire thing had been to basically sigh, and agree to work with him again to save the world.

She seemed to be interesting in seeing his first adventures for herself, having heard about them at Oak's lab while Ash was in Kalos.

She was particularly interested in finding out what a 'more idiotic version of her idiot was like', and he let that one slide, mostly because she said it affectionately and not snidely.

He was not that big of an idiot, either when he started or in Unova. Sure, he made some rookie errors but everyone did that, right?

It had worked out in his favor though: as apparently Bulbasaur had started to get caught up in his previous role with Professor Oak and thus would not be readily available to him. That meant he now had a grass-type on hand when needed.

Pidgeotto had been sent back to Professor Oak's: she was trying to track down the flock she had taken command of in the old timeline and move them onto the Oak Ranch. Free food, good water, no trainers...so far she hadn't been able to find them but she was confident in her sales pitch.

Hopefully Professor Oak wouldn't notice the increased food bill. But who was Ash to deny Pidgeotto a few favors and omissions now and again?

Of course, that did lend itself to a good question...

Where the heck were Pikachu, Aipom, and Snivy anyway?

Meanwhile in her Secret Base hideaway, Iris wondered why Emolga had asked to go off on her own for the night.

...Next morning however found Ash, Pikachu, Iris, and Misty on the road to Lavender town, with that question still burning on Ash's mind.

"Hey Pikachu, where were you last night?" Ash asked his long-time partner as Pikachu made a smirk that Ash wished he could never see on Pikachu's face ever again.

It looked...more fitting on Brock or Alder than anything.

"Pika Pika Pi." 'Well you see Ash, as the most powerful Pokémon you own…'

Back on Oak's ranch, Charmeleon felt a challenge and an argument ensuing, so he promptly did Slowpoke ups double time.

'I am quite popular with many lady Pokémon…'

"If a Pichu doesn't result from whatever you were up to last night, please stop now." Ash begged. Meanwhile Misty chuckled at his expense while Iris seemed amused by the whole thing.
"Pi..." 'Well, I never did find out who was the father of that Azurill Misty had, it would be either myself or Misty's Corsola..., and there was that Taillow, Starly, Hoothoot, and Pidove at Oak's lab the last time the two of us were there...'

The resulting thoughts caused Ash to trip, sending Pikachu off his perch and onto the ground.

"Do I even want to know?" Misty questioned as Ash rapidly shook his head. Pikachu promptly laughed at the whole thing.

With that...out of the way for no better way to put it, they continued moving. Pikachu, perhaps sensing Ash's unease, walked on Ash's side and not on his shoulder.

And eventually...

"Welcome to Lavender Town, home of the Battle Dome and the world's best morticians?" Misty read the last part of the 'welcome to' sign with great confusion.

Ash agreed, why would one advertise that?!

Plus, Battle Dome? It was up this early?

"Hey, what's a mortician?" Iris asked, genuinely curious. Ash was about to answer that question when...

"Out of way, out of the way, I can't stop...!"

A little blond hair girl crashed into him, knocking him over.

"Ow..." Great, was Bianca here on vacation for some mind-numbing reason?

Oh wait, he wasn't soaking wet, so no, it was not Bianca.

Somewhat uneasily, Ash helped the little girl up, revealing a blond girl with a ponytail who appeared to be about his age from the original timeline, she even had the same marks on his face as he did then (and now).

Odd...was he as short as this girl back then? Huh, food for thought.

"Sorry..." The girl mumbled, before looking up at him and looking rather surprised.

"Oh...you look like..."

"Yellow." A single word was uttered, causing the girl to turn back towards town, and caused all their attentions to shift away from the girl, to the town as well.

To the boy standing there, a Pikachu of his own with him.

To a boy...that looked very much like Ash.

Omake

Ambiguously Canon
"...Well, Earth 062297 is officially unnerving." Ash Ketchum of the story, aka Bloodliner Ash as he was hence forth dubbed, shivered as he recalled that universe.

"Yes, yes it is," Don Ash stated as he looked over the official report. "I had heard some talk about it from Vulgar Ash, but I had no idea the severity of it. It's hard to...understand him at times".

Ash and Pikachu winced at that one. Vulgar Ash, the Ash of Earth 111115, was a version of him who had Venonat as his Pikachu. And for some reason, he only spoke in immense vulgarities.

Like really, that Ash's every other word was a swear word. Some of them were not even native to his Earth! He could introduce #* $zookums to his world's thesaurus if he really felt like it. He wouldn't though, #* $zookums was incredibly offensive, especially when said to someone like Roark.

Apparently his universe was all like him. It was thus rather low on Ash's vacation destination list on the Multiverse, up with the likes of Earth 081009 and 081708.

"...Pallet Town, or should I say Masara Village, never produces any trainers of quality, being itself named for its best trainer Masara Oak who ranked 921/10,000...how ponderous? Does that mean it may one day be named As...Satoshi Village?"

"Maybe?" Ash really hoped not. Pallet Town did not need to be called Ash Town, or Ashville, or Ashton. Or Ashburg.

"...the Ash, or Satoshi as it appears, was bullied in school, but was a star pitcher on the baseball team" the Don idly noted his Magikarp baseball team mug at that comment, as if considering recruiting that Ash. "And after going off on his journey at age 10, he could thenceforth be arrested, have to pay taxes, and get married..." he trailed off that last bit as if mildly horrified.

"Aren't tax filings like, math homework for old people?" Ash wondered as Don, his Pikachu, and the pocketed 'dex all shivered in horror.

"No, worse," Don darkly stated as he continued reading the report "If a Gym Leader loses three consecutive times, the job is forfeit...harsh. You misspelled consecutive, by the way" Don eyed him like he had committed a mortal sin "It does not have two t's in it".

"Really?"

"Really," Don said without any sense of humor. In fact, he seemed quite serious about it. "I cannot have people giving me misspelled reports. It is unacceptable. For that...you are to go to remedial classes held by Ashton vi Unova."

That last line made Ash and Pikachu simultaneously think of ominous fire and evil laughter.

"Can I do...anything else in penance for not using spellcheck?" Ash weakly asked as Don gave him a wicked smile.

"Well, you could always go and try and bring in the Ash of Earth 080711 for questioning".

Earth 080711? Didn't seem that threatening of a number...

...
hospital beds covered in bandages, with an Ash dressed like a male Nurse Joy and his partner Chansey tending them.

"So, was it the Squirtle or the..." Nurse Ash questioned conversationally.

"Pikapika." 'The Squirtle,' Pikachu groaned out.

"It's always that one who stops Don's attempts to arrest that Ash," Nurse Ash mused in annoyance, either at Don or at the Squirtle in question.
The Battle Dome Tournament: Ash and Red

Lavender Town

The two boys made eye contact, brown to fiery brown.

And there was an old saying what would happen when the eyes of two trainers met.

Almost instinctively, the two reached for their Pokéballs, their Pikachu’s cheeks sparking in imminent conflict.

Dramatic wind blew between them, blowing along a set of tumbleweeds that had no logical place being here and probably slipped out of someone’s old shed.

A battle was about to begin.

"Whoa, whoa, hold your Ponytas!"

Only for a portly man in a blue tropical shirt to burst between them, waving his arms frantically, which caused the pre-battle tension and the dramatic winds to die down quickly.

"Pika..?" 'Is that, um...Scottie? Sawyer? Shota?' Pikachu wondered as Ash mentally corrected his friend that the guy's name was Scott.

The Battle Frontier owner. A few... years? Months? Days? Early, and a bit younger sounding. But still the same guy, who was now playing mediator between the two battle-ready trainers.

"I know that trainers are supposed to fight the moment their eyes meet, but there is a proper time and a place for that!" he insisted, though somehow Ash didn't think he was trying to prevent property damage. He looked at Ash, Misty, and Iris with the eyes of an evaluator looking over potential treasures. "Tell me, are you three Pokémon Trainers?"

Misty nodded, Iris making a noise of confirmation in turn, while Ash just gestured at Pikachu to answer the question.

"Excellent!" Scott shouted surprisingly loudly, causing Iris to jump in shock at the sudden noise. The girl, Yellow, meanwhile looked at Scott in surprise while her traveling companion had a somewhat bored look on his face, with a hint of understanding as to whatever it was Scott wanted.

"If you really want to get your battling fix, there are far better places to do so than at the town entrance, I mean think of people who want to get in while you're battling. You can battle at my tournament, which as it happens has three open spots that I really need to get filled right now!"

"Um..." Misty failed to answer in a nervous tone as Scott grinned wider and wider.

"It's free!"

"Most tournaments are." Ash couldn't recall having to pay to enter any tournament, the Indigo League or any league that he'd ever entered for that matter.

"I'll give you free stuff, and all participants get free food!"

At the mention of the last part, the stomachs of all five young people around Scott went off all at once.
That answered Scott's question, and would later win said portly man 20 bucks from Brandon over if having catering for the tournament was a waste of money.

---

**The Battle Dome**

"Welcome trainers and battle enthusiasts alike!"

To the roar of a massive crowd, one that caused Iris to clench her ears in pain in the middle of the Battle Dome arena, where she and fifteen other trainers stood for the world to see. A certain Dome Ace descended from above, all the while floating on top of a levitating Metagross and posing dramatically.

Dressed in purple and white with his hair as purple as a Mismagius, the Dome Ace waved to his massive audience, which only caused them to get louder. Though Ash noticed he had something else on him, a clear stone in the middle of his elaborate hair piece.

Odd, didn't seem to fit with what Ash remembered from last time. Then again, what did Ash know about 'fashion'? He rarely paid attention to what people were wearing so it might've been there and he just didn't notice.

"Why are they so loud?" Iris whimpered as Ash shrugged.

"He's popular, for some reason." A reason he didn't understand the first time, and a second time did not make it any more comprehensible.

Noting how many of the screaming, really loud fans were female, Iris immediately questioned human taste.

Ash couldn't see Misty, but he got the impression Tucker didn't really impress her much either. Oddly that made him feel better.

Once Metagross got near the ground Tucker leapt off his mount with a somersault, releasing more Pokéballs as he did so. If Ash wasn't mistaken, he saw at least one timer ball among them.

Several Pokémon were thus promptly released: the familiar Swampert and Arcanine were joined by a Charizard, Salamence, Hitmonchan, Victreebel, and Magnemite.

Ash noted that the Pokémon seemed to pair up with each other: Swampert and Arcanine, Metagross and Hitmonchan, Charizard and Victreebel, and Salamence and Magnemite. He also noted that of those eight Pokémon, four of them (Swampert, Metagross, Charizard, and Salamence), had some sort of item holder on them somewhere, ranging from arm bands to armor on their front. At the center of each was a single stone, of various colors with cores that had themselves different colored versions of a mark of some sort.

The more Ash looked at those stones, the more he was starting to feel what he could only describe as a power coming off them. As if with only a few sparks, they would release a major power. Ash just had no clue what those sparks were.

He wasn't the only one though: he could see the other Pikachu bearing trainer in the room eyeing them in the same way, and Iris (who had tried to not focus on the large crowds) had turned her gaze towards the Ace's Pokémon and eyed them like they were about to evolve into something entirely new.
Ash supposed it was possible: he had no idea Rhydon or Piloswine could evolve further when he was in the Indigo and Silver Leagues after all. Perhaps Swamperior or Mamagross was possible.

"Welcome, to the Battle Dome. The facility where battles are fought with the passion of a thousand suns, and where the trainers and their Pokémon shine like ten-thousand suns as they wage those battles!" Tucker kept hammering it up. "And today, brought to you by the Battle Dome, and the Battle Frontier (Dome, Pike, Palace, Pyramid, and now Factory. Fight it now!), the Frontier Rookie Competition Extravaganza!"

The Battle Frontier only had five parts to it? Huh, sounded pretty bare bones for a Battle Frontier. Well, Ash supposed it made sense: Greta and Anabel seemed about his age in the old timeline, whatever that had been, so it only made sense that they were the newest members. He did fight them a few regions on after all.

In the stands, sitting next to a Yellow who was currently eating a large sandwich sat Scott, who was face palming over Tucker adding extravaganza into the title. Funny how those things went.

"Now, the tournament today will be a four-round, sixteen-man elimination tournament! Each trainer is allowed to use three different Pokémon, but each battle is a one on one fight, and trainers must use, or be able to use, all registered Pokémon at least once!"

Ash recalled the Club Battle tournament in Nimbasa Town: it had a similar rule like that, which was why Pikachu vs Excadrill happened.

"Also, this is an item-less tournament, for trainers without league experience or Grand Festival entrances!"

Pikachu, noting his own item holder (which contained the Eviolite stone) immediately realized why he was out of the tournament before it even began.

"Pika..." 'Well no wonder I'm benched.' The mouse sighed.

"Now, the Battle Frontier is nothing if not generous! In addition to top-class catering, all trainers entering our little tournament will receive a myriad of prizes! For starters..." With outstretched arms, several psychically controlled round objects floated up from behind him, likely from his Metagross. The round objects all descended from the sky gracefully and in a quite controlled manner, before floating in front of each competitor.

"These!"

"Um, these what?" Ash wondered out loud as he reached and took one of the stones into his hand. Looking it over, the stone sort of looked like a marble, being light and filled with a myriad of colors.

Pikachu sniffed it, unsure of what it was.

"Pika?" 'Doesn't smell like an evolution stone?'

Putting it up to his eyes, Ash tried looking into it, seeing if he could decipher anything from it. The stone shimmered in the light inside the stadium, but it revealed nothing else under his examination.

"These stones are keys, keys to the potential of both trainers and Pokémon to go beyond their limits. They say only the greatest of trainers can unlock the secrets of these stones, so even if you lose today trainers, these stones may one day unlock future victories!"

"Future victories?" Ash parroted to himself, as his eyes flashed orange-brown.
From the lava of Cinnabar Volcano, a black dragon rose up from within, blue flames billowing out its jaws and oddly resembling a Charizard. The Magmar who stood on the stone pillars before it looked shocked, just as the dragon swooped towards it.

As dozens of Spearow and a nasty looking Fearow flew at an unusually large Pidgeot in both wing and plumage size. The Pidgeot cried out with force, before blowing its wings and sending a giant twister right into the opposing flock.

A Blastoise, a much larger than usual cannon emerging from its back and two smaller ones on its hands, stared down an oddly bulky and red marked Heracross in Silver Stadium. As a massive water blast flew out of the turtle's shell, the Heracross reacted with Bullet Seed of all moves.

A Glalie, with a much darker underside to it and a massive, open jaw the likes of which was rather creepy, head-butted an enemy Metang. From that head smash, ice spread across the Metang. Was that Ice Head or something?

On a contest stage, a Sceptile with a missile like tail charged forward with a very large Leaf Blade. On the other end, an odd Blaziken charged right at it, it's foot on fire.

But unlike the other Pokemon he had seen in these visions, Ash had seen that odd Blaziken before... Or as it was known when he saw it: Mega Blaziken.

Was this stone somehow related to Mega Evolution? Those battles...his battle with Blaine's Magmar, his first and last battle with Pidgeot, his Silver League match with Gary, his Hoenn League match with Morrison, his farewell fight with May... all those battles seemed to involve Mega Evolution.

Charizard, Pidgeot, Blastoise, Heracross, Glalie, Sceptile, Blaziken. Could all of them Mega-Evolve? And what were those visions. They certainly weren't the future, apparently the Spearow flock had been taken by parties unknown after they had nearly mauled him and Pikachu. Were they what could have been...

"Now, let the tournament get underway, with heated battles!"

Tucker's loud voice interrupted Ash's thought process.

How annoying.

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**Battle 1**

"And now for our first battle! Alex Davis from Johto's Cherrygrove City, vs Red from Viridian City!"
"Kadabra, I choose you!"

Thrown from a Quick Ball, likely used to capture it when it was just an Abra, the yellow and brown single spoon wielder appeared before him.

Red eyed the Psychic-type that was now facing him with shadowed eyes.

Psychic-type. Mid-evolution of Abra line. He had defeated one before, the one used by the one called Gary Oak.

Victory odds, 86%.

"Go, Charmeleon!"

Red threw his Pokéball out, releasing the Fire-type.

The two middle evolutions stared each other down, as Red recalled what had happened when he had looked into that stone he had been given at the start of this tournament.

The two Pokémon, at least to Red, now seemed to have their evolutions super-imposed behind them, and a stage even before that behind them: a wizened Alakazam and a more streamlined Charizard.

What were they? What secret did these stones unlock?

"Begin!"

"Dragon Rage!" Red commanded as blue flames billowed in Charmeleon's mouth. With a roar, they were sent spewing right towards the Kadabra.

His trainer, a kid Red's age with an orange bandana covering all of his hair, cut through the air with his hand dramatically. "Avoid it with Teleport!"

The Kadabra complied, vanishing as the blue flames went right through the empty space.

Kadabra reappeared behind Charmeleon, causing both trainer and Pokémon to be surprised.

"Now, use Power-Up Punch!" Davis commanded as the Fighting-type move charged in Kadabra's hand.

A physical attack? From a Kadabra? Peculiar.

"Counter with Fire Fang!" Red called as Charmeleon's mouth burst into flames.

With a snarl, the fist was countered with teeth, seemingly being even.

"Now, Headbutt!" Alex shouted. With that command, Kadabra slammed its head into Charmeleon, knocking him to the ground and freeing Kadabra's fist.

It appeared Kadabra had an unusually high attack power for physical combat.

Red could literally see the path to his victory become more complicated.

Victory odds were now at 81%, and likely were about to drop more.

"And what an exchange!" the announcer shouted. "Both our visitor from Johto and our resident
trainer clearly know how to react to various situations!"

"Clearly, their gym badges were not pity gifts," Tucker mused. "Red with his victories over Brock, the Sensational Sisters, and Lt. Surge, and Alex Davis with his wins over Janine, Lt. Surge, and Brock, both of them are looking like future stars!"

Right, future stars. They still had a ways to go first.

Red pointed at Kadabra, getting Charmeleon's attention as he stood. "Now, use Rock Tomb!"

Stones began to form around Charmeleon, before being promptly launched right at his opponent.

Alex countered rather calmly. "Teleport out of the way!"

"Ka!" Kadabra shouted as it vanished moments before a stone hit. It then did so again when another stone was about to hit it.

And again, and again...until it teleported right in front of Charmeleon.

"What!?/Dabra!?" It appeared trainer and Pokémon were in sync there.

"Now, use Fire Fang!" Red directed.

"Char!" Charmeleon agreed with a deep growl echoing from his throat and a fiery set of chompers. The Flame Pokémon took hold of Kadabra's punching arm in its jaws, biting down hard. In reaction the Psychic-type began whacking Charmeleon in the head with its spoon, but its head spike deflected it.

Probably not what nature's intended use was, but useful nonetheless.

"Get it off, use Confusion!" Alex ordered the counterattack. Kadabra's eyes glowed blue, but it stopped when its body suddenly burst into flames.

Burn status. Fire Fang's additional effect alongside a chance of flinching. Briefly Charmeleon's body shimmered, but it faded away quickly. Apparently Kadabra's ability was Synchronize, and one could not burn a Fire-type.

Victory odds had now recovered to a very good 91%. The paths to victory were now quite clear.

"End this with Shadow Claw!" Red shouted, his eyes briefly flashing orange. With a roar, Charmeleon's claws glowed dark black and with them, slashed Kadabra.

The hit, and now burning Kadabra was sent flying to the ground, where it remained. The flames did die down though.

"Kadabra is unable to battle, the winner is Charmeleon. The victory goes to Red from Viridian City!"

"And with that spectacular and skillful turnaround!" Tucker shouted. "Red has taken the day, but let us not look down upon his opponent either! Both deserve a resounding round of applause!"

As the cheers went up, Red and Alex Davis made eye contact for a few moments as they returned their Pokémon.

They then gave each other respective nods and turned around, each off the stage.
Both congratulating their pocket monsters, with one prepared to continue from this success and the other telling his Pokémon it did very well and they'd win the next time.

**Battle 4**

Placing the stone she had obtained from the oddity that was Tucker, the stone that had given her the oddest visuals in her mind of an altered looking Blastoise, Gyarados, Slowbro, Swampert and Sharpedo, in her pocket, she tried to put them out of her mind, as well as the fact she had just seen the blue-haired member of Team Rocket who were self-admitted stalkers win a match before her with some odd masked Ghost-type, (which Ash's Pokédex had called a Yamask), that used Shadow Ball against a Haunter, and focused on her opponent.

Battles were not something she sought out like Ash or Iris. She wasn't after strength herself, however, strength was necessary to obtain one's goals: particularly hers. Captures took battles, and thus to capture every water-type she needed to be strong enough, thus training and battles were a necessity.

Plus, the tournament offered free food. Very high quality free food.

"The excitement keeps heating up here at the Battle Dome! And now, Misty of Cerulean City," Must they announce that? "….faces off against Otoshi from Fuchsia City!"

Fuchsia City, the southern Kanto city known for Ninja? That might explain why the black haired trainer she was facing dressed like something out of a historical documentary.

"Misty is a cousin of the famous Water-Type Master from Kalos Siebold, while Otoshi had made several Gym Badge wins in Fuchsia, Cinnabar, and Vermillion! Who will triumph?!"

Well, glad that they didn't mention who her sisters were. Kudos to them.

"Cubone, you're up!" Otoshi called as he threw his Pokéball into the air. Bursting open, a brown creature with a bone skull and club became her opponent.

A Ground-type. Excellent.

"Staryu, let's go!" Misty called up her choice as the star shaped Water-type appeared. Otoshi and his Cubone tensed, already knowing what to expect now.

"Begin!"

"Let's get this going with Water Gun!" Misty called as a burst of water flew right out Staryu's top point, covering the distance between the two Pokémon quickly.

Otoshi wasn't going to have it though. "Deflect it with Bone Club!"

"Cu!" His partner responded, taking his bone in hand and slamming it into the water blast. The water stream shattered on impact causing it to rain down in small droplets.

Staryu made an indescribable sound, 'How did that even work?' Staryu questioned, a question Misty had to agree with. How exactly did that... Misty had to put that question to the back of her mind for later thought as Otoshi used her small hesitation to press his attack.

"Now, use Headbutt!" Otoshi pressed forward, as Cubone charged right at Staryu with a lowered head.
"Okay, two can play the deflection game!" Misty stated. "Staryu, use Rapid Spin!"

With another sound the author cannot describe with words, Staryu began to spin rapidly. The two attacks promptly met, and the spinning grated against Cubone's helmet until the ground-type was knocked off balance and tumbled to the ground.

"Okay, now use Water Gun!" Misty shouted as Staryu ceased its spinning and began blasting.

"Block it!" Otoshi called once more as Cubone held its bone to intercept the water strike. Held horizontally, the water stream was cut in half and Cubone was spared the hit.

"Oh come on!" Misty shouted at this continued blocking. "Staryu, Swift!"

Changing battle tactics, the water blast was replaced by a storm of stars.

"Block them!" Otoshi called as Cubone began smacking down the stars using a style that seemed to be based in swordsmanship, but it couldn't block them all.

Soon dozens of stars were now striking Cubone, the ones who had gotten through where hundreds of their brethren had failed to get past the sword-like bone.

"Cu!"

"No, Cubone!" Otoshi shouted as Cubone was knocked flat onto its back, its bone clattering to the ground and out of reach with a few stars sending the bone club further away.

"And Cubone's defense has finally fallen! Staryu has finally broken through! Can Misty keep up the pressure?!"

"I can, and I will! Staryu, Water Gun!"

The water stream was sent right at the down Pokémon, who tried to grab its bone...

"Cu!"

And failed as Cubone was struck by the blast and sent flying through the air as the Water Gun kept pushing.

"Cubone!" Otoshi shouted as the ground type was flung right at him. Darting around a bit Otoshi managed to grab his falling partner, though he was knocked out and soaking wet.

"And with that, Cubone is down! The winner is Misty and Staryu!"

As the crowds cheered, Otoshi carried his fallen partner onto the field, looking for his fallen blade. Only to find it being handed back to him, by the victor.

"And so the fallen warrior is returned its weapon by the championing victor! Truly, this is the pinnacle of good sportsmanship! Let's give her a round of applause!"

With the deafening roar of Tucker's fangirls, Misty really wished he'd stop talking.

**Battle 7**

A dragon as black as night, with blue flames billowing from its fangs.
A Garchomp with arms like a Scyther
A green dragon with a back of seeds.
A fluffier Altaria.
A Salamence who resembled a crescent moon.
Two similar purple dragons.
And a massive green one, resembling the old stories about the ruler of the sky.

All of them seemed to flash before her eyes every time she looked into the odd stone each of them had received, and Iris wasn't sure what it was all about.

Maybe it was something one just learned as they got stronger.

"And now, battle number 7 of the first round begins! A visitor from the distant land of Unova, Iris!" The oddly loud voice in the room shouted, giving Iris a severe headache as she arrived on the designated battlefield. "Will face down the beauty from Crimson City, Jeanette Fisher!"

A dark haired girl in red clothing that seemed rather...impractical to Iris from a movement perspective walked stood on the opposite end of the battlefield.

"Jeanette has had resounding success recently, earning gym badges from Celadon, Pewter, Cerulean, and Vermillion City! But can this home-grown beauty manage to counter the strange and unfamiliar Pokémon of the Unova Region?!"

As the cheers blew up again as the oddly dressed Tucker spoke in an overly dramatic fashion, Iris's eyed the black haired girl with surprise.

Four Badges...

Suddenly Iris didn't see the cheering crowd behind the girl. She was seeing a distant silhouette of that vile woman who had taken away from family, standing behind the girl.

Hunter J.

Beating this girl, would be the first step to taking her down. If she was able to beat Ash easily, who had three Gym Badges, whom then beat her….if she beat a trainer who was stronger than Ash was, that would show herself as getting stronger, getting closer to being able to make Hunter J pay.

She would win this fight. She had to.

Jeanette was eyeing two Pokéballs, one in each hand. She briefly prepared to launch one out, mentioning something about Bells, but changed her mind and went with the other.

"Go, Scyther!"

The giant green mantis Pokémon was her choice of a fighter: now for her own.

"Go, Emolga!"

In comparison, the cute and adorable flying squirrel did not look proper fighting a giant bug with swords for arms. However...
"SO CUTE!" Iris flinched due to the shout from every girl and woman at the sight of the Sky Squirrel Pokémon.

The crowd suddenly yelling about how adorable Emolga was really annoying. And that would do only wonderful things for Emolga's ego...

"Emol!"

The waving her electric type was doing just confirmed Iris's worries about the whole thing.

"So, the native champion of the Bug-Type, vs a foreign adorable warrior who's more than what meets the eye!" Tucker narrated "Who will win!?"

"Begin!"

They were about to find out.

"Emolga, use Attract!" First rule of either hunting or battle, the former often involving the latter at some point, immobilize one's target.

With an overly dramatic blink, and more crowd cheering, Emolga unleashed a storm of hearts right at Scyther.

Which, based on its abdomen size, was male.

Thus, Attract would work.

"Block it with Fury Cutter!" Her opponent called as Scyther's blades glowed green.

"Scy!"

And so the blades began to slice.

"Scy!"

And cut.

"Scy!"

And shatter.

"Scy!"

And basically otherwise stop all of Emolga's hearts. Apparently this girl knew exactly what to do against an opponent using Attract...

"Sawk!"

As the last hearts were destroyed, Iris briefly saw the Scyther as the blue fighting type Sawk that hailed from Unova. She wasn't sure why though, and it was somewhat unnerving.

"And would you look at that! Emolga's Attract has been completely neutralized by the ferocity of Scyther's Fury Cutter! What's Iris to do in response to this stunning turn of events?"

Did they expect her to tell them, in detail, what she planned to do, then do it and hope Jeanette didn't counter her with full knowledge of what her plans were?
Strange, really strange. Was there some sort of unspoken rule she had to explain her plans in detail when people asked her to?

Well, if there was Iris wasn’t going to be following it today.

"Emolga, use Discharge!" Iris called as the electricity flew.

"Emol!"

The attack struck Scyther, causing it to cringe in pain from the impact, but as the electricity dissipated away it was neither defeated nor paralyzed.

"Now, Slash!" Jeanette called for the counter attack as Scyther's wings extended. It then sped forward, blade arms extended and gleaming under the lights of the Battle Dome.

"Emolga, dodge!" Iris shouted. Emolga nodded, taking off higher into the air...only to have the slicing attack slam into Emolga's tail, not her body.

Emolga shouted in pain as she was sent spinning to the ground by the indirect impact.

"Emolga!"

"And despite Emolga's best efforts, the speed of Kanto's strongest Bug-Type was too much to avoid!" Even as Emolga struggled back up, idly rubbing it's now bruised tailbone, the loud announcer people seemed to be suggesting this match was no longer hers.

"I'd suggest giving up now, before we have to name your Pokémon Em-Ow-lga!" Jeanette stated, before laughing for some reason. Why, that didn't seem to be at all worthy of laughter.

However, she could tell it was meant to be an insult. That registered quite clearly.

"Emolga, Quick Attack!" Iris commanded with clenched fists that were slowly pulsing with draconic energy but not enough for people to notice, this girl and her insect were going down even if Iris herself had to jump into the battle.

"Counter with your own Quick Attack!" Jeanette countered.

Both Flying-types flew at one another, white streaks surrounding themselves as the two Pokémon slammed into each other at high speeds.

They gritted against each other for a few moments, before Scyther blew Emolga back. As Emolga managed, with some struggle, to stabilize itself, static electricity surrounded Scyther.

"Scy!"

"Oh no!" Jeanette's eyes went wide in shock.

"And while Scyther managed to win the duel of Quick Attacks, Emolga got in a parting shot, and no I don't mean a move called Parting Shot! No, Emolga's Static Ability, one found in several Kanto-Native Pokémon including the Pikachu and Electabuzz families, which paralyzes the foe on contact!"

As Emolga floated back over to her trainer, the flying squirrel turned her gaze to Iris.

Iris could not understand Emolga's or Excadrill's words. It was impossible for her to do so with any Pokémon that was not a Dragon-Type. Not even Dragon-like Pokémon like Gyarados could be
understood by her. It was a great frustration, communication only through a middleman, or as it generally was a middle-Axew.

She could, however, read their facial expressions and pick up on their emotions. It was a talent that took most humans quite a while to truly learn, and only among the most skilled.

The rare trainers who could take that talent and be able to truly understand intent, according to her parents they were the ones destined for great things.

Being able to do that with all Pokémon, not just Dragons...if Iris did not need to get stronger to save her parents she’d be aiming for that goal first and foremost.

Looking into Emolga's eyes, she could feel determination. A spark of something new...

A glowing yellow ball of energy appeared on Emolga's hands, with which Emolga attacked a foe. Was this...a sense of what Emolga was trying to convey?

Iris's eyes began filled with determination. She knew exactly what to do.

"Emolga, use your new move, now!" Iris bellowed. Emolga nodded in agreement as an electric ball began to form...on Emolga's tail.

Not her hands.

Electro Ball, not Volt Switch.

...It would appear she still had a ways to go until she could truly understand Emolga, but this would still win them the battle.

It was still a sign of Emolga getting stronger, and closer to their end goal.

"Now, Electro Ball!" Iris shouted.

"Emol!" The attack was now finished charging. Jeanette was quick on the uptake though.

"Scyther, quickly stop it!" She called. Scyther seemed to pick up that Jeanette wanted him to use Quick Attack, but Static acted up, stopping the attack before Scyther even had a chance to use it.

Scyther groaned in pain Jeanette wore a terrified expression, and Iris' expression seemed almost predatory in satisfaction.

"Ga!" Emolga fired the Electro Ball, which flew into and exploded on Scyther.

As the resulting smoke cleared, one smoking bug-type lay on the battlefield, defeated.

"No!" Jeanette gasped, a hand rising to cover her mouth.

"The Scyther has been defeated! The winner is Emolga, and victory goes to Iris!"

Emolga landed on Iris' shoulder, tired but triumphant. In return, Iris rubbed her head affectionately, causing Emolga to let out a content sigh.

Walking up to her fallen warrior, Jeanette took a knee next to him and put a comforting hand on his shoulder as her other went for her Pokéball.
"You fought well Scyther. Take a good rest, you have earned it." Scyther slowly opened one eye and gave his trainer a small nod before disappearing in a cloud of red light.

Just before Battle 8

"Mega Evolution."

"Paleontologists suspect that relatively few of the modern Pokémon types existed in the ancient past. As of now, only Water, Flying, Grass, Bug, Dragon, and Ice types were known to have existed prior to the legendary and yet unsolved extinction event. Some argue a prototype existed that became the modern steel type, and a second-prototype that has many similarities to the modern rock-type. Mew of course, existed as well during this time period, but its type is unknown even at this present time," the Pokédex offered unhelpfully and very much off-topically.

"Mega Evolution." Ash questioned his Pokédex, not amused at the random trivia.

"Size and weight data given by the Pokédex is of course highly subjective. Pokémon weight can easily be less or more than the recorded numbers due to factors like diet and age, while height is as varied as in humans, particularly as Pokémon are capable of indeterminate growth."

"Yeah, yeah, I can carry a Hippopotas on my head and I won't require surgery afterwards." Ash had wondered about that, and why talking about it with pre-time shatter Professor Oak had made him panic so much and nearly got him sent to a chiropractor. "Now, Mega Evolution."

"Mega Evolution is...a form of evolution that mega-amplifies the power of evolution." The Pokédex seemed to be trying to avoid giving details...

Wait a minute. Did the Pokédex not know anything about…?

Oh, this would be fun.

"You don't know anything about it, do you?" Ash couldn't help but grin smugly at his ever so know-it-all device.

"I saw a mention of it in the Rotan archives I downloaded..."

“Stole.”

“I am not human, thus your laws apply not to me.”

“Yeah, my I-Pod broke into government databases on its own accord, I'm sure that will fly in court.”

“It actually has in the past.”

“Wha?!”

"...but I have yet to fully translate the data. Sadly getting through Sir Aaron's 10,000 page thesis on his favorite foods has proven surprisingly difficult. I will eventually know about it, nothing can be hidden from an internet capable device!"

"Not true, I can't find a single episode of a show I used to watch as a kid online," Ash countered before stuffing the Pokédex back into his pocket and walking onto stage.
"And our final battle of the first round is about to begin! Representing the town of Pallet and Professor Oak as one of this year's Pokédex recipients from the Kanto Region, is Ash Ketchum! With outstanding wins at the Pewter, Cerulean, and Vermillion Gyms, this young trainer is on a roll. In fact, he even managed to win a battle against the full power of the Cerulean Gym Leaders: so you could say that this remarkable young trainer technically has ten badges! Obviously he believes you can never be too prepared to take on your first Pokémon League Championship, am I right?!"

Ash gave off wide, startled eyes at that call. Did they...did they really just say that out loud? Why was that even relevant?

... Up in the stands, where Pikachu had been 'strongly' suggested to relocate by Tournament Staff, the Electric Mouse Pokémon turned his heard sharply at his portly seating neighbor. On the other side of the mouse, the curious Goomy let off a confused sound, a soda-drinking hat stocked with water instead of soda on his head, and on the other side of Pikachu's portly seating neighbor, Yellow was sipping a soda, and now curiously looking at Scott as well.

The portly man sweat-dropped. "The Battle Frontier always knows, I have my sources. However, due to certain legalities in tournament seeding we had to explain why. Legal precedence after a few lawsuits in other small tournaments when trainers of radically different skill tiers were paired up first round requires priority in sorting trainers with high amounts of badges together, that sort of crud. Also helps minimize gambling."

"Pika pi." "Why does that sound like it's going to be painful for Ash?"

"I don't know what you exactly said my Electric-type friend, but I assume you are worried about Ash. Well, you may be right..." He turned to Goomy now, and sighed at the now gooped up hat. "Tell you what, win, lose, or whatever...tell Ash he can keep my Soda-Drink Hat."

... "Wait, what about Ash and the Cerulean Gym Leaders?!"

Having ran over to his place the moment the Professor had called her to say that her son was going to be on T.V, Delia had arrived just as Misty's match began, and had waited patiently for Ash's battle to start.

Thankfully the Professor had not had to explain to Delia about Ash's female traveling companion, or why there now appeared to be a second one with him since the last time he had met up with the boy (was it related to the Strato-Goomy incident?). He felt he probably owed it to Ash after that telecommunications man incident.

He had also not explained to Delia about another incident that happened when he had last met up with Ash...

Bulbasaur and Krabby quickly read the mood and got the hell out of dodge.

... Currently in the kitchen cooking with an apron on, Brock's eyes nearly opened from realization.

"Oh, so that's why those three got fired!"

He had been wondering about that.
... The Television blaring in front of him, and a fully dressed hot dog in hand ready to be eaten, Lt. Surge barely avoided face palming and splattering his face with ketchup.

"How tactless! That sort of thing would have gotten you killed in the war!" And really, all the Gym Leaders could read the writing on the wall there: that kid had, with guts, determination, luck, and skill, managed to overcome the trickery of those now fired Gym Leaders, and then found out how weak they were.

Clearly he wanted to work on his Pokémon skills properly and prepare himself, before he found out the hard way at the League what happened if you weren't ready.

His nine Raichu: Corporal Raichu, Sergeant Raichu, Staff Sergeant Raichu, Sergeant First Class Raichu, Master Sergeant Raichu, First Sergeant Raichu, Sergeant General Raichu, Command Sergeant Raichu, and Sergeant Major Raichu of Lt. Surge's slowly forming Elite Four Challenge Team (Also doable for possible Zapdos capturing or Ranger Killing as necessary) all shook their head at Lt. Surge saying that a person lacked tact.

... On his way towards Celadon City, Paul looked at the televised tournament with a furious gaze.

... For unknown reasons, dread settled on Ash's soul. Somehow he figured his mother would be involved somehow.

"Facing up against him is a trainer whose accomplishments are closest to his, with six gym badges!"

Wait, six!?

"Winning at Pewter, Cerulean, Celadon, Fuchsia, Cinnabar and..." Ash missed the last one over the roar of the crowds. "Give it up for the Pewter born beauty, Solidad!"

Wait...Solidad.

The orange clad, pink-haired Coordinator (at least before) arrived on stage to a flurry of applause. Ash did note some differences with her appearance though: she seemed a little younger than when he had met her in the old timeline, at least when comparing his age then (relatively anyway) to what hers appeared to be, and now had a necklace on which now featured the odd stone he had obtained from this Tournament, the one that seemed somehow connected to Mega-Evolution. Apparently she had been aware of what the prize was and accessorized accordingly.

So, the coordinator who had defeated May in the Top 4 of the Kanto Grand Festival, was walking nightmare fuel to Drew, could tolerate Harley for more than five minutes, and took the Kanto Grand Festival Ribbon Cup was here, facing him, and on paper was at least twice as powerful as he was.

And she had what was probably the key to making her Pokémon Mega Evolve on hand, and knowing his luck she probably had whatever other pieces there were to the puzzle of Mega Evolution.

This should be fun.

"The humble town, or the stone-hard city? Which will triumph? Trainers, go!"
"I choose you!" Both trainers shouted at once. "Snivy/Slowbro!"

As Ash's Grass-type was sent out, so was the large, pink, and shell bitten Pokémon.

Snivy looked pretty determined all things considering, while Slowbro looked...well like a Slowbro. They didn't really do determined, hot-blooded or angry that well, mostly sticking to dumbstruck and gormless.

"Slowbro, the Hermit Crab Pokémon. Named long before Kantonian scholars were aware of the Dwebble line, Slowbro evolve when a Shellder bites a Slowbro's tail, and devolves when it lets go. It is thus one of the few Pokémon capable of devolution, though doing so in official matches leads to instant disqualifications for the shell remover. Slowbro bile is used in ADHD medication."

Ash was suddenly glad he did not have ADHD. Who wanted to ingest Slowbro bile?

He wasn't quite sure what bile was, but he doubted it was pleasant to ingest, or to be removed from the Slowbro.

"Begin!"

Solidad was eyeing Snivy warily, unsure of what it was capable of. Then again, she probably had never seen one before and was probably trying to figure out what type of Pokémon it was.

A green Pokémon did suggest Grass-Type, but it could also mean Bug. Its serpentine body was akin to something like an Ekans, or a Dratini.

If he was, say, Paul, he'd probably make a snide comment about not knowing about typing, but Ash was hardly in any place to make commentary about messing up typing. He'd done it himself in the past, granted he'd done well in some of those situations so it wasn't something he'd pull someone else up on.

"Snivy, use Attract!" Might as well keep the typing a mystery as long as he could, and if he was going to have to fight another Pokémon that, on paper, was much tougher than his, he was going to have to be strategic and forward thinking.

After all, unlike the Cerulean Sisters, Solidad was competent!

With a wink, Snivy sent a storm of hearts flying at Slowbro...which on contact dissolved away. Slowbro didn't even register that it had been hit.

"Wha?!/Sni!!" It translated about the same.

"Slowbro is Oblivious," the Pokédex pointed out, though why it felt the need to remind him of that was beyond him.

"Oblivious is an Ability that prevents Attraction and Taunting," the Pokédex elaborated further, as if knowing what Ash was thinking.

Oh...

Solidad raised an eyebrow. Ash was fluent enough in eyebrows that it was an 'everyone makes that mistake' kind of way rather than a 'you're an idiot' sort of way. Perhaps Slowbro's used in battle didn't normally have that ability.
"I see what you were going for, and it was a good idea. Now, here's my opening move, Slowbro use Yawn!"

With a wide open mouth, bubbles began to fly out of Slowbro's mouth, right towards Snivy. Ash did notice, however, that the bubbles seemed a tad shinier than he was used to seeing in regular Yawn bubbles, or even the kind he'd recalled opponents like Flannery using. But shiny bubbles weren't important right now.

He raised an Attract, and she countered with a Yawn. There was only one thing to do against that.

"Block it with Attract!"

With another wink, Snivy sent a flurry of hearts right into the bubbles, which promptly cancelled the two out.

"Amazing folks! With one of his moves unable to be used for its intended purpose against Slowbro, Ash reworks it into a defense! An excellent tactician must be able to rapidly adjust to changes in battle and redeploy the attack, even if what he has on him isn't being used in the way it was intended to be!" Tucker seemed to think it was a good tactic, at least.

Solidad seemed impressed as well.

"Not bad. It's rare to see trainers with any sort of imagination like that. Of course, defense isn't going to win the battle for you. Slowbro, Water Gun!"

With a long breath, Slowbro then expelled a massive stream of water right at Snivy, who tensed as the attack came her way.

"Snivy, use Leaf Blade to dodge, then to attack!" Ash called. Snivy nodded, jumping into the air as her tail glowed green.

The tail was used to springboard off the Water Gun, gaining some air before coming right back down on Slowbro with a powerful slashing attack.

Snivy regained distance before Slowbro even felt the hit. So, not all that good a compliment given the Slowbro lag, but still notable as Slowbro rubbed the afflicted area as one would a bruise.

"A Grass-type," Solidad noted with interest. "Flamethrower!"

"Flamethrower..." Ash repeated, sure that call was a mistake. Then he saw the flames billowing out of Slowbro's mouth. "That, that shouldn't even work!??"

But it did anyway, and he was going to have to react. Fast.

"Snivy, get out the way and use Leaf Blade!"

"Sni! 'Well!' Snivy noted as she jumped over the flames. 'This is certainly surprising, the Water-types of your homeland are certainly weird.' With a glowing green tail she flung herself right at the Slowbro as the flames flickered away. 'But I can certainly manage anything...'

"Use Psychic!"

Slowbro's body glowed blue, as it promptly bent over its shell covered tail with more flexibility than the pink lummox would normally be capable of. Snivy's attack promptly missed it by mere inches, sending Snivy skidding across the other side of the stadium.
"Vy?" 'Except...whatever that was. What just happened?'

Ash recalled similar moves used by this same Slowbro before, during the Grand Festival.

'It's contest battling.' Ash explained telepathically. He had been practicing with it recently, and it didn't even seem to give his Pokémon migraines anymore. He still wasn't going to use it to give commands in battle, but this wasn't giving commands. 'It's the kind of battling Dawn uses, remember Dawn?'

'The girl with the extremely short skirt and the Piplup who never had a chance with Meloetta?'

'Yep'. Ash decided to end the telepathic conversation at this point and resume battling. "Okay, now use Leaf Storm, again and again!"

Jumping into the air, Snivy began releasing a barrage of the grass style Overheats one after another.

"Dodge it with Psychic!" Solidad commanded. Once more glowing blue, Slowbro continued to avoid Leaf Storm like it was a top or something.

It was very contest-like really. His constant missing would have probably taken him down a few pegs by now.

Of course, this wasn't that kind of battle. He didn't lose any points with a miss except coolness points.

"And no matter how much Ash tries to hit it, Slowbro continues to dodge! Those misfires are going to cost Ash though!"

Snivy eventually stopped firing them, and Slowbro stopped spinning and righted itself.

"That was a bad move Ash," Solidad told him with the air of a teacher correcting a pupil. "Leaf Storm isn't like a normal move, it gets weaker the more one uses it. Slowbro, Flamethrower!"

The fiery power once more began to build in Slowbro's mouth.

"Block it with Leaf Storm!" Ash called in return, as the green leaves began to billow around Snivy once more.

"Ash, that wouldn't work even if you hadn't been spamming them like mad already..." Solidad told him in a tone that sounded like a teacher helpfully informing a student that what they were doing was wrong, as the leaves hit the fire attack head on and blew right through it.

The Leaf Storm continued on at the shocked trainer and Slowbro, whose face slowly morphed into shock as the leaves hit it head on. The amount if leaves and smoke the attack caused hid Slowbro from sight, only the occasional grunt could be heard letting them know what was happening.

Snivy landed with a smug expression after that move. "Snivy. "Got to love Contrary."

Ash was going to ask if she had always had Contrary, or if that was an add-on for the new universe, as the smoke cleared to reveal a still standing Slowbro, though with a number of marks on it and more than a few leaves in its mouth. Solidad eyed him in surprise, but smiled.

"So, you do know what you're doing. I can see how you managed to qualify for the League like you did. Of course, power is something you could still work on a bit," Solidad said, pulling a stray leaf out of her hair that had managed to lodge itself in there from the powerful attack damage.
"Of course, what do you think I'm here for?!!" Sure, technically he was here because Scott had food, but that wasn't relevant.

"Vy!" Snivy stated in agreement, though with a side note directed his way. 'Ash, you do realize I cannot spam Leaf Storm non-stop, right? While moves don't exactly have set amounts of uses, they can wear thin.'

Ash nodded in acknowledgement of Snivy's warning. "Okay Snivy, use Leaf Blade!"

With a glowing green tail, Snivy charged right at Slowbro, who had finally spat out its mouth leaves.

Solidad grinned. "Block with Aerial Ace!"

"Wait, Aerial Ace!?" Ash exclaimed in shock. A fifth move.

"Trained Pokémon can begin using more than the starting four-move limit with sufficient training," the Pokédex supplied. "You should try it after a few more badges."

Slowbro's shell was now glowing blue, and was swung right at Snivy as she got close. Snivy countered with her own attack, though after a few moments of struggle was flung back and on the ground. She recovered quickly though, though some part of him felt like she had taken about as much damage in that one hit as Slowbro had in the entire battle.

Had they needed more time to train?

Snivy eyed the Slowbro with more shock now, and more than a little annoyance at being struck by the same move as had allowed Ash to capture her this time around.

"Now, Flamethrower!" Solidad pressed her momentum forward as the flames billowed out. Ash kept Snivy's words to note, though.

"Snivy, roll on the ground!" he called, noting the flames were not hitting the ground. Snivy grit her teeth about the indignity of that command, much like she had whenever she saw the Counter-Shield in this and the original timeline, but acknowledged why he was doing it. And so, the thin snake Pokémon stop, dropped, and rolled.

The flames missed completely, only warming the scales on Snivy's back and stomach as they passed over her entirely.

"And would you look at that folks! Apparently Ash takes his fire safety lessons to heart!"

Guilty as charged.

"Okay, now Leaf Storm!" Ash hoped enough time had passed. The sound of leaves billowing around his Snivy, and not the sound of a car failing to start, was a good sign that enough time had passed.

"Use Psychic!" Solidad ordered as Solidad glowed blue, and promptly floated over the Leaf Storm and begin to rotate across the field like it was on a spinning carnival ride.

Slowbro then began to descend behind Snivy, like a god from the clouds above. Only in Azalea Town was such a thought ever to be truly taken seriously though.

"Now Aerial Ace!"

The tail was glowing blue once more, as Slowbro disengaged Psychic and fell with the force of
"Get out of the way!" Ash reacted as Snivy managed to avoid the Aerial Ace attack with a jump, even as it shattered the ground at impact. Snivy gracefully landed a couple of feet away from her opponent glaring at Slowbro angrily.

"Now, Flamethrower/Leaf Storm!" Solidad called her command a few moments before Ash reacted. And a few moments was not enough time for a Slowbro to do anything, so the Leaf Storm hit it first at close range.

As Snivy once more landed with grace, the Slowbro still stood tall. Apparently power was something he did need more work on with Snivy in this timeline.

Or Slowbro were unstoppable juggernauts. One of the two.

"Hey Solidad!" Ash shouted, as the redhead acknowledged she had heard him. "Those moves you were using...they are kind of...different you know. They seem a bit fancier and more...er..."

"Razzle-Dazzle?" Solidad offered.

"Yeah." Ash took the suggested verb, or was it noun? Adjective? He couldn't recall.

"Well, if you must know I hope to go into Pokémon Coordinating," Solidad admitted. "However, I first want to have my Pokémon compete in the League circuit to ensure that they are strong enough to win Contest Battles by knockout if need be. I'm not sure you are familiar with how Contests work..."

"Oh, I am somewhat familiar with them." Three regions, two companions, a Top 8, 4, and runner up, and more than a few sparkling hairdos and cross-dressing eccentrics to be specific.

"Then you can understand why I want an ace in the hole," Solidad finished, with Ash nodding in acceptance of her reasoning. Though that did lead him into an odd thought about how Mega-Evolution would impact a Pokémon Contest.

He had the oddest image in his head now of Nando with an extremely muscular Kricketune with flames like an Emboar on its whiskers and Harley with a Cacturne that seemed to look unusually like him. Come to think of it, why did Harley keep coming up in his head recently? It was somewhat worrying.

Regardless, he had the oddest concern for May and (Arceus please have it be another Iris) Dawn's contests if that was the case.

But he could worry about that later, when he figured out how it even worked. Or if Mega-Kricketune or Cacturne were actually a thing.

"Speaking of aces, Slowbro use Yawn!"

"Snivy, Attract!" Ash wasn't sure if Leaf Storm would work, and right now he wasn't willing to risk it. And with that, bubbles and hearts canceled each other once more.

Though now Snivy was really starting to look tired. Slowbro was...well Ash couldn't tell but he didn't think it would be Slowbro who'd drop first at this rate.

There had to be some way to end this quickly...though even if Snivy knew Vine Whip like before he couldn't see how that would. The other move Snivy knew was just...
A light bulb went off in Ash's brain and he had to suppress a grin as he had an idea.

"Slowbro, use Aerial Ace!" Solidad called as once more the tail glowed blue, for some reason. What happened to Aerial Ace as a tackle? Was it just another way to do it?

But no matter, because it was brainstorm time. Time to make his inspiration reality!

"Snivy, use Wrap on Slowbro's tail, below the shell!"

Snivy charged forward, just as the Aerial Ace got close...before ducking under it and curling her body around the base of Slowbro's tail. A confused Slowbro stopped attacking, and Solidad seemed to be having a hard time of determining what Ash could possibly be up to.

"Now, use Leaf Storm, as narrow as you possibly can get it!"

Solidad's eyes went wide as the Leaf Storm formed, with only the very middle of Slowbro's body not being blasted with leaves.

"No, Slowbro!"

"And from the weakest attack to the strongest, Ash pulls out an unusual trump card out of Snivy's optional!" the announcer called as the storm eventually ended. An exhausted and oddly sweaty Snivy returned to him, looking like she needed a shower.

Though any annoyance at him was undone from the fruit of the combination that now lay defeated on the ground.

"Slowbro is unable to battle! The winner is Snivy, and victory goes to Ash!"

As the crowds went wild, Tucker spoke.

"What a battle between two budding tacticians! Clearly you can see the strategies flowing like pure mountain water! Let this battle be a lesson to all trainers that one must be willing to use all their options to win a battle, even the weakest among them."

"You were awesome Snivy!" Ash congratulated his Pokémon, who nodded in acknowledgement with a proud look in her eyes.

As Slowbro was returned to its Pokéball with a thank you from Solidad, she walked over to Ash and his now oddly smelling Snivy.

She was smiling.

"Well fought Ash," she told him as she extended a hand to him. "So, I take it I'll be seeing you at the Indigo League then?"

Ash nodded, taking her hand in turn as Snivy grinned in triumph.

"Assuming I don't get turned into a statue or something, you'll definitely be seeing me there!"

..."I thought you said you had to get stronger to get into the Pokémon League?"

Iris asked him this blunt question as they took a catering break during the after round break. Somehow, it was all going to be in one day: it was odd to Ash, but he accepted it.
"I do," Ash explained patiently, somewhat expecting the confusion. He had omitted it after all. "However, just because I technically can do something, doesn't mean I am strong enough to do it. I mean, I could go and poke a sleeping Ursaring, but I'm not strong enough to do it." Not that many people would go bother a sleeping Ursaring though, even someone as strong as Cynthia didn't see such activities as worthwhile or safe. "You see Iris, I won the badge to get me into the League because I was tricked into doing so, and only won it with a lot of good luck, skill, and the fact that my opponents were about as competent as my shoes."

"You're giving them too much credit," Misty snarked from the other end of the table as she ate a box of donuts, all the while Psyduck was under them hopping feebly to grab them.

"I know I'm not really that strong yet, and if I go into the League I'm just going to make a fool out of myself. So while I can enter the League now if I do nothing, I won't." Ash finished. Iris seemed to accept the explanation, though he knew that...

"Ring a ring, ring a ring. Phone, or should I say Pokédex Call! Caller I-D registers one, Delia Ketchum. Your mother, thirty-three years old, standing at..."

As his Pokédex rang/spoke, startling Iris in the process, and continuing to show itself off as some multi-functional device, Ash sighed, knowing what was going to happen. So, interrupting it before he found out anything about his mother that could be dangerous to his health (like her weight), he took the doom/call.

"Hello..."

The resulting conversation was only half as bad as Ash had feared.

..."And welcome to Round 2! What a brilliant round of white-hot intensive battles that was, and here's to seeing this tournament deliver a similar degree of amazement!" Tucker spoke as the crowds focused it all back to him "For making it this far, all trainers present received a Trainers Berry Starter Kit! Growing your own Oran, Sitrus, Liechi, and all the other essential berries of a Pokémon Trainer, Coordinator, or just plain Pokémon fan has never been easier!"

Maybe to him, but Ash couldn't make heads or tails of the thing, and neither could Misty or Iris. Do it yourself didn't always mean easy to understand.

He just decided to send all three of their berry kits off to Professor Oak. Pokémon ate berries, and Professor Oak had to feed a lot of Pokémon, so maybe some berry growing would help out his bottom line?

Ash did plan on trying to track down as many of his Tauros as possible when the time came after all. This was just Ash's way of making it up to the old man before his fence bill skyrocketed.

"Who's going to go on once more and win even more wonders!? Find out now, as Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town finds himself facing down A.J!"

The green haired master of the Sandshrew who Ash had fought before was once more his opponent, and he seemed rather friendly. He wasn't glaring at him like he was fresh meat to be grounded or anything like that.

"I may have lost to you last time," A.J noted as he held up his Pokéball, "but I'm not losing this time!"
"And I plan on keeping my winning streak." Ash countered.

**Battle 1, Round 2**

"I choose you!" Both trainers shouted as they threw out their Pokémon.

"Slash!"

A.J's choice was the scaly backed, clawed evolution of Sandshrew. And his...

"Squirtle!" his choice shouted to the world. 'Let's get this rematch started, it's time for our duel to begin!'

"Sandslash, the Mouse Pokémon, though a movement to recategorize it as a Pangolin Pokémon has been gaining traction in the scientific world as of late. Sandslash hide themselves with sand, and attack their enemies with sharp claws and spikes." The Pokédex provided Ash information that would not particularly help him as Sandslash was not being fought in a sandbox.

"So, you're using your Squirtle?" A.J noted with amusement. "Me and Sandslash have been getting a whole lot better since the last time we fought. We beat Lt. Surge together, we won't lose to you again."

"Neither will we!" Ash countered, idly noting Squirtle's use of the word duel. He wasn't going to have to refer to him as Sir Squirtle, was he?

"Bring it on!"

"Begin!"

"Okay Sandslash, let's get this match started with Bulldoze!" A.J called. With a nod, Sandslash slammed the battlefield with its claws, sending a wave through the earth right at Squirtle.

"Jump out of the way and use Water Gun!" Ash shouted. With his own nod, Squirtle used his tail to give himself a good burst into the air, avoiding the ground attack before shooting out the water attack that hit the ground-type square on.

Sandslash took it like a champ though. Training after all did bring perks.

"Counter with Poison Jab!" A.J called. With a shout of the Sand part of its name, Sandslash's claws glowed purple, and the water attack was stabbed right through.

With several calls of Slash, it began trying to jab Squirtle with its purple claws.

"Slash!" Squirtle ducked into his shell to avoid a head injury.

"Slash!" Then Squirtle swerved to the left.

"Slash!" Then to the right, making sure to keep his tail out of reach.

"Stop it with Return Squirtle!" Ash ordered. With a nod, Squirtle's fist began glowing white, before making impact in Sandslash's chest.

The Ground-type was sent rolling back, not even fully curled up kicking up a cloud of dust as his spiky back tore into the ground.

"Sandslash! Are you okay?!" A.J shouted with an evidently concerned tone. Sandslash nodded in
affirmative as it slowly got back up, though it was holding its chest where Squirtle had hit it like it hurt.

"And the power of friendship was really packing in that attack!" the announcer shouted to the roars of the crowd.

"Okay then, let's wrap this up Squirtle, use Water Gun!" Squirtle began to well up the power of the seas within himself as A.J glared at it.

"Oh no you don't, use Bulldoze!" Raising its claw into the air, Sandslash slammed the earth with it and sent another tremor right at Squirtle.

Ash had begun the order to dodge, but the Bulldoze hit first.

"Squir!" his first Turtle Pokémon shouted as he was sent flying into the air.

"No, Squirtle!" Ash yelled, as A.J grinned wickedly.

"This is our chance, use Poison Jab!"

With purple tipped claws, the evolved Ground-Type leapt into the air, ready to take down Squirtle.

The same Squirtle who was now glowing blue.

A blue he had seen before...

"And it looks like Squirtle has accessed its ability, Torrent. This powerful ability increases the power of its Water-type attacks, but one more hit and it's all over for Squirtle!"

Torrent now?

That seemed...too quick.

It didn't make any sense though...Squirtle had taken only a single hit.

He had trained Squirtle plenty since he had captured him: his defenses should be stronger than that. Come to think of it...both Squirtle and Snivy had the same issue...

...

"I see our young Ash has picked up the problem in his strategy," Scott observed.

Pikachu and Goomy eyed the portly man in confusion, a look mirrored by Yellow whose little mouth was currently deep in a cookie.

"Pika?"

Scott grinned at the unintelligible question. "You see, from what I have observed both here and in after-action reports from the Gym Leaders, Ash favors Pokémon much like you Pikachu: fast Pokémon that hit hard and can dodge attacks easily because of their small size. However, such preference to small and powerful things leaves him vulnerable to being knocked out much easier than he would be if his Pokémon were evolved."

Removing her mouth from the cookie, Yellow looked at Scott curiously and asked. "So, you're saying Ash should have evolved his Pokémon?"
"No, not at all." Scott then explained, "His strategy is a perfectly valid one: unevolved Pokémon learn moves faster than their evolved counterparts, and opponents who know how to fight a Charizard are less versed on how one defeats a Charmander trained to the same level. His Squirtle did seemingly bruise a Sandslash's ribs with a single Return, clearly not pressuring his Pokémon and a lot of training led to a very powerful friendship punch. Like all strategies however, it comes with drawbacks. Ash is seeing it right now, and probably also noticed it during his fight with Solidad, though I can tell he's had his Squirtle for longer and thus probably assumed it was just how green Snivy was."

He then noted the girl, the dragon, and the mouse giving him looks for his unintentional pun.

"Sorry."

...

Opening his mouth, Squirtle began to form a water attack, though one Ash wasn't quite sure of the exact nature of. It did, however, smell unusually salty.

"Brine, a Water-type attack whose power is doubled when used on an already weakened opponent. Like the Sandslash," the Pokédex offered him helpfully.

It was in fact quite helpful, truth be told. The Pokédex should try and say more things like this and less about Slowbro bile and parasite mushrooms.

"Okay Squirtle, end this with Brine!"

With the salty spew of water, Squirtle blasted Sandslash right in the kisser just before Poison Jab made contact. And so, the already greatly weakened Ground-Type was hit with a Torrent boosted Brine whose power was already boosted per its own unique attributes.

A salted Sandslash hitting the ground with a loud thump was the end result, with a woozy Squirtle standing on top.

"Squirtle," the turtle noted, licking his lips. 'Salty...where did that move come from?'

It was a fair question. Then again, Pokémon learning a new technique without training but from sheer determination was hardly unique to him or anyone else really.

"Sandslash is unable to battle, the winner is Squirtle! Victory goes to Ash Ketchum!"

"What a battle everyone! A Salty Squirtle refusing to give up, a powerful turnaround attempt by Sandslash, clearly that match was anyone's game the entire time!"

Returning Sandslash, A.J held up a hand which Ash promptly shook.

"You may have won this time, but I'm going to get stronger. This time I was close to winning, next time I will!"

"Good luck with that," Ash said in a tone that didn't sound nearly as mocking as the phrasing implied.

...

Rounds 2 and 3 passed without much incident: Misty defeated her opponent with Poliwrath (That Hiker guy Ash had fought around the time Bulbasaur had learned Solar Beam), while James had
somehow pulled Carnivine out of his hat to win his match.

Wait, whatever happened to Carnivine? After Sinnoh the floating Grass-type just vanished, along with Mime Jr, Seviper, Yanmega...

Really, where did the Rocket Pokémon keep going off to? Did they have some sort of retirement home for them out in the country?

Round 4 however...

Well, Red and Iris were up.

An identical stranger of him versus his Unovan female companion...Not exactly something he had ever expected to happen.

It would be like her and Ritchie having a battle...how would that have gone?

...

**Battle 4, Round 2**

Unova.

The distant land whose Pokémon evolved differently from those in other regions, it was a region he knew very little about.

His opponent used such Pokémon, one of which was an Electric/Flying type. A Pokémon she was unlikely to reuse just as he was unlikely to use his Charmeleon again.

Victory odds: 50%

Red reached for his Pokéball, contemplating the potential ways this could all go wrong.

After all, a single bad call could make or break a match. Particularly a one-on-one fight.

This was it.

"Go, Clefairy!"

"Go, Axew!"

As a green, tusked Pokémon seemed to shoot out of the girl's hair, he let loose his Pink Fairy-type, when he felt his eyes flash.

Victory odds: 98%

He raised an eyebrow at what he was seeing. The once windy, twisty, and unnavigable path to a victory had now become a single, straight path. For such a change to have occurred. ..... 

Truly, he had picked the right Pokémon. If, as he suspected, Axew was a Dragon-Type...victory with Pikachu or Charmeleon would be far closer to 50%.

But with Clefairy...the odds were entirely in his favor.

...

Having flown through Kanto once before, there was a place that her family had avoided like the
plague.

A certain mountain, said to be home to the shards of the moon. Or at least that was how the legends went.

They had said, when she had asked, that the mountain was home to a terrifying race of monsters the likes of which were virtually unknown in Unova.

Iris had no idea why that had come back into her head, but it wasn't going to distract her.

She and Axew had to get stronger, and here was a trainer with a Pokémon in her path. She and Axew would win this, and be stronger for it.

"Alright Axew, let's get this started! Use Dragon Claw!"

"Ax!" Axew shouted as its claws began to glow green.

…

A depressed looking Axew sat forlorn some time ago, the moon it's only companion before a barely dented boulder.

The little creature looked at its hands, and looked away in self-disgust.

"Axew!"

Axew didn't even look up as the long limbs of his sister ran over to him, sounding rather relieved to see him.

"Axew, are you still trying to learn Dragon Claw?" She asked him. The dragon-type sighed at the truth of the matter.

He had been trying to learn Dragon Claw. Not had learned Dragon Claw.

His sister noted the rock he had only slightly harmed, before sending him a smile.

"And you managed to get that far, without anyone to show you?"

Axew turned his head to her, confused. Why did she sound proud of him?

"You're nearly there Axew...let me help you get past the last bit" She asked him, her own hand glowing green. Axew's dulled eyes lit up at once, and with a determined chirp raised his arm in the air as it shimmered an unstable green.

The next morning saw the both of them collapsed on the ground, a broken boulder shattered before them.

…

Axew's Dragon Claw wasn't just a move, it was a triumph.

And what better move for getting stronger than showing its power right here, right now, and letting it grow even more powerful from this battle.

With a powerful slash, the claws made contact...and fizzled out like sand in the wind.
What!?

... 

Fairy-Types: immune to Dragon-Types. They were poorly understood, and were still being studied. Perhaps Unovans were just behind in that regard.

No matter.

"Clefairy, use Sing!"

...

Iris's shock at the failure of Dragon Claw was mirrored on Axew's face, who looked like something they had been pinning all their hopes on had fallen completely flat.

However, she managed to shock herself out of her panic when the notes began to fly.

"Hurry Axew, stop it with Dragon Rage!"

Still in shock from what had just happened, Axew none the less gathered the blue fire in his maw, before letting it fly. The attack burned away all the musical notes and hit Clefairy dead center.

However, the attack dissolved away once more, like it was nothing.

"Clefairy." The Pokémon said in an unsettling tone.

...

Victory odds 97%?

Huh, it dropped a bit there.

No matter, it was still quite acceptable for ensuring a victory He did not fear a 3% chance of a upset.

"Clefairy, use Double Slap!"

...

If Dragon-Type moves didn't seem to work then that just left...

"Counter with Scratch!"

"Ax!" 'Got it!'

White claws and hands collided in a fury of strike and blows, this time not magically dissolving on contact.

With a few more scrapes Axew came on top of the exchange, as the red lines on Clefairy's palms attested that caused Clefairy to wince in confused pain.

"Fairy?"

...

Victory odds 90%
The road to victory was starting to get a little fuzzy.

So, it appeared that Axew's Scratch was more powerful than Clefairy's Double Slap. Was it worth determining if Wake-Up Slap was any stronger?

No...It wasn't. The injuries to Clefairy's palms would limit its effectiveness.

Red silently cursed the fact that he was still working with Clefairy to learn a Fairy-technique. All he had left was Sing and... that move.

Thinking of that move somehow didn't make his odds go down any further...so be it.

"Clefairy, Metronome."

...

"Fairy, Fairy, Fairy..." Clefairy started to sing song creepily. Axew nervously began backing away from it as its fingers glowed.

Iris couldn't hear what Clefairy was saying.

Thankfully.

...

'Round and round we go! Where I stop, no one knows! Let's play a game little dragon, a fun game! Hehehe!'

Up in the stands, Pikachu and Goomy simultaneously shivered. That voice sounded demented. Mad. Disturbed even.

...

On his shoulder and as silent as ever, Red noticed his Pikachu shiver, looking at his Clefairy with unusual unease.

One of these days he really needed to figure out why Clefairy creeped his other Pokémon out.

...

"Fairy!"

From the glowing fingers formed a glowing purple ball, which Clefairy promptly lobbed right at Axew.

"Stop it Axew with Dragon Claw!" Iris countered. "Then hit Clefairy with Scratch!"

With glowing green claws Axew leapt from his current spot, and sliced Shadow Ball in half with it, before dropping green for white and flying right at Clefairy.

Who was still metronoming.

"Fairy!"

With the next burst of inspiration Clefairy opened its mouth, and let loose a gigantic tongue that promptly licked Axew top to bottom, several times. As if tasting him, causing a visible shiver to go
through the dragon type.

Axew fell on the ground, rather paralyzed. Probably not just from the effect of Lick, the tongue was just creepy looking in general. For one thing, it looked like something out of a purple Lickitung and it smelled a bit like an old shoe.

Even Clefairy's own trainer was disturbed by it.

Then Clefairy loomed over the downed Axew, the light shadowing Clefairy's face and looking as creepy as possible.

"Cle Fai!" Metronome was still active, and now had given Clefairy what looked like Vice Grip, pinching them menacingly over Axew like some creepy robot. To all who could understand what Clefairy had just said.

To those who could however…

"Xew..." Axew whimpered in terror. *What about you liking my teeth, and my claws!?*

Iris's eyes went wide open as she heard her brother's panic, which was quickly becoming her own. And so, she reacted immediately.

"I give, I give, just stop!" Iris shouted in horror running onto the field. Both of them wanted to get stronger, but whatever it was that Clefairy wanted to do was not worth it.

After all, what older sister would ever want to see their little brother get parts of him yanked off by a freak of nature? Teeth may grow back, but it was not exactly a painless process to remove them. Nor was it instantaneous. And she had no idea if claws meant just Axew's nails, which could regrow….or his fingers, which could not.

The moment she shouted, and the ref's flag rose, Red returned Clefairy as it was moments before plying off one of Axew's teeth for...reasons unknown to anyone. Red had to return Clefairy as the Fairy Pokémon had ignored Iris' cry and the ref's signal that the battle was over, Clefairy had still been reaching out to take one of Axew's tusks.

He looked at the Pokéball with unease, before clicking it securely away. He then eyed the trainer and Axew currently being comforted by said trainer.

...

"Sorry." He felt the need to say. He normally did not apologize for winning, or curb-stomping, or anything like that...but it was a special case here.

"And sometimes, the best act a tactician can give, is to retreat. Better to lose a battle, than a war." Tucker noted sagely.

Iris's gaze rose to look at his, revealing an inhuman fury to them, like a mother Ursaring or Tyranitar.

Red held his ground momentarily, before slowly turning around and walking away with a slight increase in his walking speed. He had apologized for his Clefairy behaving like a crazy person...he couldn't think of anything else to do in this situation.

Except maybe figure out if there was a Pokémon therapist he could send Clefairy too.

Sometimes one had to wonder why he was able to find just one Clefairy in Mount Moon. Perhaps it
wasn't luck as much as the other Clefairy just didn't want his one around.

It was a theory, unbeknownst to him, his Pikachu already had.

...

Snivy eyed her new item, courtesy of the ever generous tournament with interest. It was a seed, but one that seemed to radiate the power of the Grass-Type itself.

Misty had gotten a Mystic Water, which was currently being worn by Staryu.

Ash had used the Pokédex to put an order in for a holder for Snivy, though, because he sensed something was off...

It felt like waves of...depression really. Odd how that was suddenly something one could feel.

It turned out to be Iris. She was sitting in a corner, looking down. She was holding Axew in her arms rocking him gently back and forth as he looked scared out of his mind.

Then again, that Clefairy had been rather disturbing, even for someone who couldn't tell what it had been saying.

"Iris?" Ash got to his knees in front of her. She looked up at him, looking defensive.

"What do you want?" she questioned as he looked at her, concerned.

"You don't seem to be taking losing well." He told her as she scowled.

"Well, no one ever likes losing. Especially a fight you had no chance of winning." She said the last one quietly. Ash recalled the fight with Clefairy.

"Something was up with that Clefairy." Ash recalled as he felt his Pokédex shake in his pocket. Probably to give him a heads up as it begun spouting exposition, oddly considerate of it really.

"Clefairy, as the name suggests, is a Fairy-Type Pokémon. A Fairy-Type has complete immunity to Dragon-Type attacks."

A Fairy-Type? That was new...

"...So that's what my parents meant about Mt. Moon," Iris mused to herself.

"A Fairy-Type takes reduces damage from Fighting, Dark, and Bug attacks. It's weak to Poison and Steel type moves," the Pokédex continued, possibly for Ash's benefit.

"So, if I had used Excadrill..." Iris seemed to only get more depressed at that.

Or to do that. Hard to tell if that making Iris depressed was its goal or not.

"Everyone makes bad calls Iris." Ash tried to assure her. "I mean, I used a Charmander against a Kingdra." He wouldn't point out the Charmander won. That would not help here.

"Sometimes you just end up in a bad match up. A Durant can't change the fact that it's just food for a Heatmor." Iris apparently agreed with him. At least, Ash thought what that reference was about.

"However...what about when you throw your own Durant at a Heatmor, expecting it to win?"
Or perhaps, it was not a positive one.

She clutched Axew tighter now. "I nearly got my brother maimed. It was my decision that put him in that fight. What if I hadn't been able to get him out before that monster did something to him?"

Why did that comment make Ash think of Guillotine or Horn Drill?

Recalling a gym battle past, where he had chosen surrender over seeing Pikachu fall into lava, Ash extended a hand, slowly, to Iris's shoulder. When she didn't look like she'd claw him, he placed it on her shoulder, causing her to jerk and look at him in surprise.

"You got him out of there before that happened Iris," he told her calmly. "That's all that counts. You and Axew, you both want to get stronger. Losing one battle you don't think you two could have won isn't the end of it." Hearing a call for him, Ash stood up and made his way to the battlefield. Before he left, however, he turned around and faced her with a grin on his face.

"In fact, given that you had managed to stop Clefairy's regular attack with Scratch, I think you two are strong enough to beat Clefairy next time. You know about Metronome now, you can prepare for it next time. If you can learn about why you lost and grow from it, you can come out on top during the rematch".

As he walked away, he failed to catch both dragon and dragon girl watch him leave, far cheerier than before he talked to them.

...

**Battle 1, Round 3**

Of course, if he lost here, he'd have to follow his own advice.

"Well, fancy meeting you here!"

...And his opponent was James. Looking rather friendly to be honest, as opposed to rather villainous or stalker-like.

Okay...so losing was probably off the table today then.

"Now, I know the two of us have met under some...complicated circumstances in the past," James offered as a greeting. "However, let's put those meetings behind us temporarily and have a good, fair fight with no baggage, shall we."

Translation: do not say he's a member of Team Rocket? Or that he was stalking him?

Come to think of it, where were Jessie and Meowth? He looked around, but he only saw two of that trio of oddly familiar event vendors watching them battle. Odd, they must be working here today and the taller male among them must be out sick or something.

Well, okay. Ash supposed he could be the better man and not shout out that his opponent was a member of a criminal organization. Ash wasn't sure if he could prove it, and that sort of accusation throwing did seem somehow juvenile when he thought about it a bit.

Of course, his inner ten-year-old was insisting he shout it. Five years of further socialization lessons told him not to, however.

"And with that, a match between two real rivals will now begin! What Pokémon will they chose?
Will they be old favorites, or new competitors?!

"Go!"

"Free!" In a burst of pollen, his currently only fully evolved Pokémon appeared for battle. 'Okay, time to see what a tournament is really...um...'

"Inkay!" The floating squid greeted cheerfully, thus answering the question of who was fighting. It was all newcomers.

Turning to Ash, Butterfree made a whining like noise and gestured at Inkay in confusion. While the crowd's question had been answered, Butterfree himself had his own question. Ash responded with his Pokédex.

"Inkay, the Revolving Pokémon. Inkay confused it's foes with flashing lights and strange movements, dazing them and making them weakly hallucinate. It is illegal to evolve an Inkay."

Um, okay? So what, it evolved into a Gyarados on steroids or something?

For that matter, why did James have his Kalos Pokémon with him?

"Oh, if you are wondering about all my new friends, it's simple really!" James seemed to pick up on his unspoken confusion. "You see, long ago I had friends! Then my parents took them away because they are horrible people, and I can say that because I am not afraid of libel lawsuits!" He said the last one as a boastful laugh.

Could parents sue children for Libel?

"But we're back together now, and our friendship is stronger than ever! It's time to show you the powers of friendship!"

As James said that however, Ash and Butterfree could have sworn they saw James, his Koffing, Growlithe, Carnivine, and Yamask pose with Inkay, all wearing golden crowns with various symbols in them that radiated virtues like kindness, generosity, laughter, and magic.

It was brief however, and Ash and Butterfree quickly just left that up to Inkay messing with them.

The Tackle to Butterfree that came just as they realized this was probably an indication of it.

That sent Butterfree back a bit, though he managed to stabilize himself quickly.

"Free." 'Well, that hurt.'

The tackle, and James as part of a friendship sentai pose. Both were painful to see.

"Now, Psybeam!" James followed up with a psychic beam attack.

"Counter it with your own Psybeam!" Ash shouted as Butterfree's eyes let loose their own blast.

The two attacks collided with equal force, they started to meld into a ball of multicolored light until it blew up. A cloud of thick smoke covered the area between the two Pokémon.

As the resulting smoke began to clear, Ash heard James call for another Tackle.

"Block it with Gust!" Ash declared. Butterfree nodded, before it began to blow with his wings, and
all his might.

The wind storm cleared away all the remaining smoke, Inkay struggled against the gale at first but was sent flying back.

"And a repeat performance has been blown right off course by Ash Ketchum's quick thinking!"

As the windstorm ended, Ash noted Butterfree's wings. As the storm ended, they glowed slightly.

Interesting...

Inkay returned to battle however, and James wasn't done yet. Ash could ponder Butterfree's wings later.

"Not bad, but Inkay's not so easily blown away! Use Return!" Inkay began glowing white, the power of friendship surging through its body.

And Ash recalled the last time one of his Pokémon got hit by that move.

"Engulf it in Sleep Powder!" Ash ordered. Butterfree followed with a blowing of sleeping spores.

"Stop Inkay!" James countered as Inkay halted to a complete stop, inches away from the powder.

"Now, Psybeam!"

The beam flew fast right at Butterfree, blasting through the Sleep Powder and striking him in the side just before Ash could call a counterattack. The resulting hit caused Butterfree to lose altitude, quickly.

"Free!" 'Ash, I'm not going to be able to stay in the air!'

"Butterfree!" Ash shouted in concern, before pointing right at Inkay. "Take Inkay with you, with String Shot!"

Seconds later, Inkay wondered why a white thread had grabbed it by the tentacles, moments before being flung down to the ground by it with a slam.

Butterfree stood on his legs, spitting out the String Shot from his mouth as Inkay jumped back up, hovering slightly and rubbing its back with its tentacles.

"Hey, you can't hogtie my Inkay!" James shouted in complaint.

"Actually, that move was perfectly legal," the announcer pointed out. "Had Ash Ketchum attempted to tie you up, he'd have been disqualified. Of course, you can't simply set it up so you can get hit by a String Shot not aimed at you to win that way..."

Why did both sound like they were decisions made because they became actual problems?

James growled as Inkay pointed itself right at Butterfree, like a missile. "Very well, if you want to play cowboy, I hope you're ready to fear the Tauros horn! Inkay, Return!"

Inkay glowed white and pure, like friendship. It then flew at Butterfree, with immense force.

Could Gust stop it? Well, Ash would have to find out.

"Stop it with Gust!" Ash called as Butterfree began to flap his wings, only to send out a storm attack with not just a wind attack.
No, it was filled with a silvery powder that glittered beautifully.

"Free!" *This isn't a Gust, not anymore! It's Silver Wind!*

"Silver Wind?!" Ash shouted in surprise. That was a new move for him, and Butterfree in general. Come to think of it, why hadn't he seen Silver Wind in Kanto at all his first time through?

Though that itself wasn't as a relevant, as Silver Wind was itself as it flew right at a certain flying squid.

"Silver Wind?! As in, a Bug-Type attack!?!" James shouted in horror as the attack hit Inkay, and promptly exploded. "Inkay!"

Inkay promptly fell out of the smoke cloud, defeated.

"No, Inkay!"

"Inkay is unable to battle, the winner is Ash of Pallet Town!"

The crowd cheered as James sighed, returning Inkay and looking at Ash with a calm face and a shrug.

"Well, this was efficient stalking for today. See you tomorrow!" No one seemed to hear what he said as he spun around and walked away after that friendly departure.

Ash and Butterfree just watched him leave, and wondered frankly what was wrong with him.

**Battle 2, Round 3**

What did Misty know about this trainer?

Well, his name was Red. He defeated the three Gym Leaders Ash had, and had defeated Iris with a Clefairy who clearly was not normal, nor right in the head.

He also looked a lot like Ash, right down to the shoulder mounted Pikachu he had with him. And given what Ash had been ruled on with his own Pikachu to sit out for, it meant he was likely going to be using that Pikachu for this battle.

After all, he probably had noticed her Pokémon of choice by now.

... 

The Cerulean Sisters...had been the weakest Gym Leaders he had faced. Gary had been a far tougher challenge, even though in the end he had still won without a single casualty.

This Misty...there was something about her that reminded him of them. The way her face was...a cousin perhaps? He could have sworn reading that Siebold and the Cerulean Sisters were related.

She shared the same type affinity as them, but clearly she was far more talented at it. Or perhaps she actually just put work into it. What Pokémon he'd use was clear though. There was no other logical choice.

... 

Of course, she had seen a Pikachu in action enough times to know exactly what to do to counter one. Of course, that did lead to the question of what happened when she won this fight.
After all, battling wasn't exactly something she did for a living, like Ash or this Red guy. On the other hand, she did like the free food they gave between rounds, and it would be somewhat rude to just walk out after eating.

Eh, she'd figure that out when this was all over.

"Begin!"

"Gyarados!" Misty declared as she threw out her old friend. "Let's go!"

"Pikachu." Red declared as his mouse jumped onto the battle field, just as the great Water-Flying type appeared with a roar.

... Victory odds: 99%.

This would be over in one move.

"Thunderbolt," Red declared as the yellow aura surrounded his Electric-type, as his opponent grinned.

Why? A Gyarados could not possess Lightning Rod, Motor Drive, or use Mud Sport. What could she possibly be planning, Protect maybe?

... Well, time to put their new technique to use. Though perhaps it wasn't quite new, as she'd borrowed the ideas from a certain companion of hers.

Though with some changes of course. After all, a Gyarados did not have claws.

"Iron Tail," Misty declared as Gyarados's tail glowed white, before being slammed into the field.

The lightning hit Gyarados, and while it did illuminate the great serpent, it didn't seem to hurt the Gyarados at all.

Misty couldn't help but smirk. Everything was working perfectly. Gyarados was also smirking, which was rather terrifying. After a few seconds Gyarados flexed and broke out of the shroud of electricity.

... Red and Pikachu looked on the entire thing, in abject horror.

"Pika?!"

Red eyed the Gyarados that somehow was defying the very law of nature, the law of being a Gyarados.

The fact that being electrocuted was their natural weakness. The sole reason human civilization outside of Unova could even live on the coast!

The nightmares of countless centuries was coming true before his very eyes.

"And what a shocker! Somehow, the Thunderbolt didn't have any effect on Gyarados!" The
announcer sounded as surprised as Red was about it. "What will Red do now?"

Victory Odds: 10%

10%...

He hadn't had odds that low since his fight with Brock, following a critical hit from his Onix taking out his Charmander and then the unexpected use of Bide on his Pikachu.

But it wasn't completely out of the realm of possibility yet.

"Use Quick Attack!"

...

The Quick Attack slammed right into Gyarados's head just as the last of the electricity petered off, causing Gyarados to recoil back.

Iron Tail was removed from its anchoring point, she'd have to be ready to call for it to be put back the moment Red declared another electric attack.

"Use Brick Break!" she heard Red call. At that, she grinned. She could counter that easily enough.

"Gyarados, Dragon Rage!"

...

Pikachu's fighting move collided with the green fire for a few moments, before it was overpowered and sent Pikachu crashing to the ground, slightly singed.

Pikachu shook it off, however, and stared down the monster once more.

The paths of victory….was now frankly giving him a headache. It was a little too trippy for him to focus on it. Instead, he'd have to try a more thoughtful approach to this.

Before, to block Thunderbolt, she had used Iron Tail. Would that happen again?

"Pikachu, Thunder Punch!"

"Pika!" Reaching across his body, Pikachu covered his right wrist with its left paw and thrust his right paw down towards the ground. This caused a yellow ball of electricity to form over said right limb. Extending his arm out, the punch sliced the field apart as Pikachu ran at the Gyarados at breakneck speed.

...

Hmmm, that was new.

Did that technique work as well to stop physical damage?

She had only seen it used on ranged ones, as they were by far the most common type of electric attack.

Thunder Punch could be potentially troublesome.

"Water Pulse!" Misty called as the giant blue orb formed in Gyarados's mouth, and was promptly
lobbed right at the charging Pikachu like a blue star sent flying at a single warrior.

... 

Screeching like a thousand birds, Pikachu slammed his fist right into the Water Pulse.  
The attacks shattered, sending Pikachu flying back some more with water droplets scattering around the battlefield.  
Clearly the only move that could get through was Quick Attack, but would that be able to stop Gyarados?  
Victory odds: 8%  
Whoever said, never tell me the odds, never had to be him. The odds never shut up with him.  
"Pikachu, Quick Attack! Repeatedly!"

... 

Dozens of white blur blurred by Gyarados, moving faster that the serpent could react. Striking again, and again, and again.  
Misty was starting to find it rather annoying. She figured Gyarados did as well.  
Best to vent this before someone had to replace their roof.  
"Use Iron Tail and sweep Pikachu away!" Misty ordered.  
With a loud roar, Gyarados's tail glowed white and swung a wide arc across the field.  
"And it seems like the great beast has grown tired of being buzzed by Pikachu! Can Pikachu avoid being slapped away, because that tail is one hell of a flyswatter?!"

...  
"Block it with Brick Break!" He'd have said Thunder Punch if the move was faster.  
With a glowing fist Pikachu exited Quick Attack and hammered the glowing tail, with added power thanks to the momentum from Quick Attack, creating a burst of bright light.  
However, Pikachu were not known as The Muscle Pokémon, the Pint-sized Victor Pokémon, or the Bruce Lee Pokémon. So, when hit by the tail of a gigantic sea serpent, Pikachu was sent flying to the ground, with a loud thump.  
"Pi." Red figured that Pikachu had just said, ow.  

...  
"No, Pikachu!" Yellow called out from her seat. When the Pikachu with the Goomy sitting next to him poked his head out at her in confusion, she waved her cotton candy stick at him.  
"Not you, Pikachu, that Pikachu." She blinked as she realized how that sounded. "You know, I'm starting to see why some people nickname."  
"And that works for some people. Others think it's a bit presumptuous to give a living creature a
name you thought up with. More than one person died because they named a prideful species something undignified, like Fred," Scott noted. "Anyway, I'm curious to see if Red can get around that girl's defenses. I can see how he could, but I have been doing this for a long time. Red likely doesn't have that same insight, at least not yet."

"Red can beat her." Yellow asserted with complete confidence, before taking a bite out of her large cotton candy chunk. She then noticed a bit of it was missing.

Pikachu promptly wiped his mouth clean on the side of a somewhat irritated looking Goomy, who flinched as he did so. Did Goomys not like cotton candy?

... 

"Now, Water Pulse!" Got to keep up the pressure after all, Misty thought.

The giant blue orb formed in Gyarados's mouth, ready to fire and quite possibly win this.

After all, it was very big, and mice traditionally did not survive blue sun collisions unscathed.

...

The Water Pulse slowed down, freezing in place.

The crowd's cheers were frozen in motion, silent as the night.

Even Pikachu was frozen in place, staring at the Water Pulse in defiance.

Only Red moved in this frozen world, his eyes glowing orange-brown.

It was rare that Red ever did this. Not in any previous battle had he needed to use this. Mostly he resorted to this to get out of tricky situations, particularly after he had been orphaned.

For Red was not an ordinary person. He had abilities that the average person did not.

And this was one of them: the ability to slow down time and see every possible move and the likelihood of him achieving victory from it, however it was he defined victory. Even without this activated, he could see 'victory odds' everywhere, from discussions to vending machine operation rates to the chances of him winning a game of cards.

Of course, this was a battle, not a card game. So, he'd focus on this battle first before even thinking of hitting Celadon.

"Pikachu, dodge with Quick Attack." He offered as he saw, too fast for him to really comprehend, all possible scenarios from such a move.

Victory Odds: 4%

Hmmm, not that then.

"Pikachu, use Brick Break"

Victory Odds: 2%

Red looked worried now. This power of his may allow him to see how things could go, to work out the probabilities of each move, but it was not infallible. It only worked with what he already knew, and what was at hand. This power did not let him figure out Gyarados's fourth move, nor could it
comprehend anything he had not witnessed Misty do yet.

For example, if Misty was a normally overly offensive battler, but then suddenly began battling as if her Gyarados was a defensive Pokémon like Muk or Chansey, he wouldn't be able to take that into his Victory Sight.

Such weaknesses were problematic, especially when his odds were already low.

"Pikachu, use Thunder Punch."

Victory Odds: .25%

Not even one percent. Damn.

So, he needed to move faster. But that only left Thunderbolt...

That had already failed before though, would it work?

Well, he had the time to figure it out at least.

"Pikachu, Thunderbolt!"

Suddenly, everything stared to become much clearer, as if the path to victory had suddenly become much clearer.

Victory odd: 74%?

Low, he hadn't had odds like that since his Charmeleon fought Lt. Surge's Raichu after he had lost his Weepinbell and Meowth to it, after Charmeleon had taken notable damage defeating Magneton. But after what he had been getting this entire battle, they looked perfect.

But why? What changed that made this actually work, assuming Gyarados did not have some unexpected backup move.

Unless...

Did that Iron Tail have something to do with it? Had that let Gyarados somehow escape damage from Thunderbolt?

Red wasn't sure how, why, or when that bizarre strategy had been made, or how it worked. However, it was the only way he could win, with acceptable allowances to unknown variables.

At the very least, this Misty girl was pretty smart, and pretty good. She was probably the toughest fight he had since Brock, in fact she was probably a better fight. Hell, this entire tournament had been filled with good opponents: that Alex kid had a pretty unique Kadabra, and that Iris girl had countered him pretty well despite her type problems. Who knows how that fight would have gone had he not let Clefairy go nuts?

But respect to her or not, he was going to win.

...

"Use Thunderbolt!"

Misty was caught off guard as the electric move was sent flying, just as Water Pulse was ready to be fired.
There was no time to change to Iron Tail. The only thing she could do was...

"Gyarados, fire Water Pulse to defend!"

Gyarados, with a muffled voice, roared and sent the attack flying, where it hit Thunderbolt moments from launch.

More than close enough for electricity to be conducted from a few loose particles of water.

"RRAAAGGGHHHH!" Gyarados yelled as it was hit by its mortal weakness, electricity crackled across his scales and caused his muscles to spasm.

"No, Gyarados!"

"RAGAGGHHHH!" To those listening it sounded like the pained cry of a monster, but to Misty she heard what Gyarados was truly saying.

'Misty...the idea works, this was just bad timing. Don't blame yourself for this, I'll be fine...Ouch.'

Then Gyarados fell to the ground, slightly crisped and defeated.

"And Red bypasses the defenses of Gyarados, and wins it all! Victory goes to Red and Pikachu!"

... As the crowds cheered Red on for winning, his Pikachu collapsed in a tired heap. Red walked over to his friend, and picked up the tired mouse. The mouse did not complain, this one time. He then walked over to his defeated opponent, with said opponent placing a concerned hand over her Gyarados.

"Thank you. You did wonderfully," she told the beast, before sensing Red behind her.

She aggressively turned his direction, only to notice an outstretched hand.

She took it in hand and shook it, recognizing the unspoken intent.

And with this, he only had one more opponent left to face.

Ash Ketchum.

... Her head hung in defeat, Misty returned to find Ash, who was hand feeding Butterfree a palm-full of honey flavored Pokémon food.

"You did great Misty," he told her immediately as she returned, probably not getting up to greet her because his hands would be covered in sticky food crumbs.

"Yeah, well I still lost..."

Butterfree finished eating, signaled to Ash either verbally or by flying away, Misty couldn't tell. Ash then gestured to Squirtle, who Misty had not noticed until now, to spray clean his hands of the honey.

She then noticed Snivy, who was out of her ball and pretending not to be interested in what was going on. She didn't see Iris though, but who knew with her?
Wiping his now wet hands on the side of his jeans, he turned to her with an honest smile.

"Misty...you can't win every fight. It's impossible, unless you do spend your time ambushing new trainers with a Tyranitar or something." He sounded pretty sincere about it, as if he had lost before.

Perhaps it was in something else, baseball perhaps?

"No trainer can win every match he fights. It would be arrogant of me to assume that I won't lose to a Gym Leader sometime down the line, or go up against a bad matchup in a tournament or something," Ash continued, again sounding like he was well familiar with this concept. "That's not to say I won't try to avoid it, or give it my best even when I'm trying to defeat a Rhydon with a Caterpie." Butterfree gave him a look for that one. "You just have to learn something from it."

"Learn something..." Misty said out loud, thinking. It had been a while since she had lost, not that she had battled much since she 'left' home, so she was somewhat rusty on how to learn from losing.

"Like, how my technique for stopping electric attacks has a hole in it?"

Ash nodded, and Misty realized her frustration had ebbed away, and what remained seemed different.

She still felt it, but it felt...more like a drive to fix herself. To take what she found hadn't worked, and make it work. To be better, and stronger, and faster than before.

It felt...a lot better than frustration.

... The prize for getting to the final round was a not so insignificant check. Winning would earn him an even more not so insignificant check.

The fact his Pokédex could upload the deposit to his bank account was...another thing on his list of things the Pokédex did that worried him.

"Your opponent's choices of Pokémon for this fight are: the Electric-type Pikachu, the Fairy-type Clefairy, and the Fire-type Charmeleon," said device reminded him. "Your possible choices are the Grass-type Snivy, the Water-type Squirtle, and the Bug and Flying-type Butterfree."

... The opponent was Ash Ketchum.

Red did not know much about Ash beyond what he had glimpsed in this tournament. His choice of qualification to the Pokémon League was unusual, and was worth noting for future trips to other leagues. However, despite his defeat of the Cerulean Gym for such a purpose, he clearly did possess skills.

His battle style was...beyond comprehension.

... "Logically, you should use Squirtle. Squirtle has one good matchup, one even matchup, and one disadvantaged fight. Snivy meanwhile has two even matchups and one disadvantaged,
and Butterfree possesses only a single even matchup and two disadvantaged matchups".

... 

He was most likely to use Squirtle, a species he had experience battling. While the Brine attack could be a problem, Red felt he could manage regardless of his Pokémon.

... 

"Yeah, that would make the most sense, which is why it would make the least amount of sense. He's expecting it, and because of that he's likely to use his Pikachu."

"Your logic...is surprisingly logical. I feel greatly disturbed." The Pokédex sounded like he had just heard Psyduck disprove Einstein's theories. "So, you'll use Snivy then?"

Ash placed a thoughtful hand on his chin. "The thing is, Red saw my fight with Solidad. He knows about Attract and Leaf Storm. I mean, the fact that Leaf Storm was being powered up was probably my biggest advantage against Solidad, and I wouldn't have that this time."

... 

The Snivy was probably the biggest mystery to Red. Snivy was not a Pokémon he had encountered previously, and its strange ability to power itself up with Leaf Storm was something that would be a serious obstacle to overcome.

He may know about it, but the only way to stop it would be for him to defeat Snivy very quickly. Charmeleon's Fire Fang may be powerful, but its limited range was a potential flaw. And then there was Attract...

If Ash used Snivy for some reason, Red was not sure what he could do to stop it.

... 

"So, a Pokémon who's expected, and one who's a one trick Ponyta." The Pokédex sounded contemplative. "Clearly, you are going to have to decide if you want to go the safer but expected route, or the one that no one will see coming and will either make you a maverick, or a madman."

"Um, what's a Maverick?" Ash wondered, having not heard that word before, before taking on a determined look, one of sureness of self and call. "Hmmm...You know what, I think I'll use Butterfree."

... 

Squirtle or Snivy, those were the only two possible options. Butterfree couldn't possibly be used: it would be like taking your Charmeleon to fight under the sea.

It was completely mad.

... 

"Are you completely mad!?"

Ash ignored his Pokédex as he held up his Pokéball.
"The Pokémon may be healed after each round, but exhaustion and physical injuries take far longer to heal. His Pikachu fought a much harder fight than Butterfree did, so he's out, and Clefairy got cuts on its palms, so I don't think we'll be seeing Clefairy. Charmeleon is the only logical choice."

"Yes, yes it is. Thus you should use your Water-Type, like a normal person would."

"I talk to Pokémon and have an artificial intelligence in my pocket, I'm not normal," Ash pointed out, to which the Pokédex had no immediate response. "Anyway, it makes perfect sense. Butterfree can use String Shot to stop Fire Fang and Rock Tomb, and then use Sleep Powder!"

"...I still think this is madness, but hey it's not my job to ensure you win. Just don't lose so I can get additional data on his Charmeleon and Pikachu for the database. This tournament has allowed me to obtain several good samplings, and I'd like that to continue."

"Sure sure, whatever works for you".

...

LAST ROUND

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, we have arrived at the final round! We've seen plenty of intense matches today, and this will be the most intense match of all! Ash or Red, who will win it all?"

"Gentlemen!" The announcer shouted to the determined grinner Ash and the seriously focused Red. "Choose your Pokémon, and begin!"

"Go!" Both trainers called as their chosen Pokémon were sent out.

"Meleon!" Red's choice of Pokémon roared with the ferocity of a blazing inferno.

"Free." Ash's choice spoke with the gentleness of an evening sunset.

...

Red...

Red just stared.

What?

Why?

How on...how did someone ever think of doing it?

It was completely mad! Even Pikachu looked gobsmacked at the call.

His victory odds were 100%. It was unreal.

"Use Rock Tomb," Red said blandly as the stones began to form around Charmeleon.

...

Odd, Red was looking at him like he was crazy.

But if he was thinking him crazy, it was all the easier for him to surprise him.
"Stop the rocks with String Shot!" Ash called as Butterfree spat string after string forth, even as the stones flew towards them.

Each string snagged a stone, and knocked them to the ground, binding them in silk and restraining them to the ground.

The attack was completely neutralized.

As Red looked shocked, Ash chuckled.

"I trained my Butterfree to take on Brock and his Rock Tomb attacks. I know exactly how to stop that move. Now, use Psybeam!"

...

The shock in Red's system from the negation of his attack was compounded when he saw his victory percentage.

?

Never before had that happened. He always got some sort of number, but the moment the fight with Ash actually started, the moment he could really start analyzing him, his power... Glitched. That was the only way to describe it, and trying to determine anything more was going to take far too long...

The direct hit from Psybeam did snap him out of it momentarily. Charmeleon took the attack well, but he'd rather not let it happen again as the fire type took a step back.

"Charmeleon, use Dragon Rage!"

...

"Psybeam!"

The two attacks collided with equal force as Red seemed to still be shock for being blocked the way he had been.

"Now, use Sleep Powder!" Ash decided to go for the obvious tactic as Butterfree began to release the spores.

...

Sleep Powder!

"Blow it away with Dragon Rage!" Red was starting to wish Charmeleon had a ranged fire attack, but this would have to do.

With billowing blue dragon flames, the powder was blown away, diluted, and utterly left sterile.

"Now, Silver Wind!"

Red's eyes went wide as Ash called for the attack to blow the remains of Dragon Rage right back into Charmeleon, who was pushed back by the flood of powder wind and old dragon fire.

...

"Hmm..." Scott wondered out loud as Yellow was standing up next to him, shouting for Red to win
and kick Ash's butt.

"Pikapi!" Pikachu sounded like he was trying to out-cheer the girl. Goomy added a few cheers to the mix as well.

Ash and Red...

One trainer who was capable of thinking of unexpected yet effective means to victory, yet his Pokémon themselves were not the strongest nor the most durable.

The other who raised strong Pokémon and had effective plans, yet they lacked improvisation and focused on textbook tactics.

Both with so much potential, still ripening as he looked on.

Both of them...yes both of them could be possible challengers to the Battle Frontier one day. They would develop the skills and the strength to do so someday soon.

But not today, and probably not next week either. Maybe after a few Leagues though.

...

"Use Fire Fang!"

With flaming jaws, Charmeleon jumped on top of a restrained Rock Tomb and prepared to bite Butterfree.

"Use String Shot!" Ash called.

The resulting string burst sealed up Charmeleon's mouth, causing the flames to be snuffed out through lack of oxygen. Charmeleon still flew at Butterfree though, and unintentionally head-butted him in the chest.

Charmeleon barely managed to avoid flopping back on the ground though, while Butterfree was slightly hunched over.

"You okay Butterfree!?" Ash called.

"Free." Butterfree said with some regained muster. 'Yeah, I think so. Just...that hurt the exoskeleton a bit too much for my tastes.'

With a roar, Charmeleon broke through the restraints, showing they weren't done yet. However, the harsh cough that followed the roar suggested that Charmeleon did not handle eating its own Fire Fang all that well, support by the small puffs of smoke that drifted from his mouth.

"Silver Wind!"

...

Was he trying to power himself up with Silver Wind's potential effect?

"Duck." Red told Charmeleon, who complied and hit the ground, allowing the buggy wind to pass overhead without harm.

"Now, Shadow Claw!"
With a glowing purple claw, Charmeleon ran at the Bug-Type, before jumping right at him.

"Block with Silver Wind!" Ash called. Butterfree began to blow, but it didn't seem to stop the Fire-Type.

Ash then realized that probably would have gone better with Gust, just as the Shadow Claw impacted into Butterfree.

His first catch was sent plummeting to the ground.

Butterfree landed with a thump, just as Charmeleon landed far more gracefully.

This might be it, even if he couldn't see victory. Huh, was this was it was like to be a normal human? Interesting...

"End this with Fire Fang!"

Butterfree was pushing himself back up as the Charmeleon began to charge right at him.

"Quickly, use Psybeam!" Ash ordered. With a nod, Butterfree did just that, and the attack hit home.

Right in Charmeleon's chest.

It looked like a critical hit.

Charmeleon was sent flying, before hitting the ground with a thump.

Just as Butterfree had managed to start pushing himself back up, so did Charmeleon. Both however, were trembling from the effort.

"And would you look at that! Both Pokémon have taken some major hits! Who's going to remain standing!?"

The slow push to stand continued, all the while the two opponents were staring each other down.

"You can do it Butterfree!" Ash encouraged, though he was gritting his teeth. He even felt a flash of, something, in his eyes.

Ash could, if he wished, use the power of his to give Butterfree a boost of strength. That would very likely ensure Butterfree survived this standoff. But...

If Ash did that, somehow he felt victory would be hollow. Just as he disliked how he lost to Ritchie because of Team Rocket's interference, he disliked how he won against Wattson all those...whatever it was ago. Had he beaten Cameron in Unova, he'd have disliked that win for him having an unfair advantage.
He believed in his Pokémon, and if he used his power to help them win all their fights, what message did that send?

He sensed Butterfree agreed with him, and he suspected that many of his Pokémon shared this view. They knew that Ash believed in their power, and didn't want any unfair advantages helping them.

They'd win with their strength, or fall by their lack of it.

... "Charmeleon..." Red whispered. This fight, one that should have been an easy win, was now as precarious as a single muscle tendon.

Whosoever's muscle failed first, lost.

... Some battles are decided by will power.

Others by who was battling the longest.

A few even by experience.

This battle was won by a simple factor not unlike any of those above.

Between the Butterfly, and the Lizard...who had the most upper body strength?

... Charmeleon stood up, on shaky legs.

Butterfree seemed to be trying to push itself up, but it lacked the muscle mass to do so.

Now in the wild this was where the Charmeleon ate the Butterfree, or at least did a good Mortal Kombat style fatality.

However this was not the wild, and eating your opponents Pokémon was illegal.

There were rules, and time limit for a Pokemon to get back up before a call was made.

"Butterfree, use String Shot to pull yourself up!" Ash called for a potential ace in the hole. Butterfree struggled to raise his head up, tried to gurgle up some string...but only spat out a weak and limp string, like a dying engine.

Butterfree wasn't himself dying of course, but the message was clear.

"Butterfree is unable to battle! The winner is Red and his Charmeleon!"

"You've heard it here folks! After a long and intense fight with surprises everywhere, Red has managed to triumph over Ash Ketchum with barely an inch to spare!" To emphasize this point, Charmeleon fell right back down as the announcer said this, though Charmeleon was not out cold.

"Thank you, all fighters!" Tucker spoke up dramatically as Red and Ash walked up to both of their Pokémon. Red put a thankful hand on Charmeleon's shoulder and activated the Pokéball, while Butterfree was picked up in Ash's arms.
"You were impressive." Red spoke, catching Ash off guard. He seemed to be taking the loss well. "You were...much better than I thought you were after you choose Butterfree. You've raised it well."

"Thanks." Ash responded, internally bothered by the loss but not letting it show. "So...you aiming for the League as well?"

Red nodded.

"Guess I'll see you then."

Between two trainers who knew each other little, not much else more could be said.

"You're taking this rather well." Misty observed as the trio left Lavender Town as the sun began to set, west to Celadon.

Iris eyed him curiously about his lack of visible depression, to which Ash frowned.

"You can't cry every time you lose, especially a match that isn't important. I can take what I learned from that loss and use it to help Butterfree and my other Pokémon get stronger."

Of course, given how Butterfree did lose, fixing it wasn't as simple as teaching Buizel Ice Punch to counter Mr. Mime. It was a limitation that a Pokémon could never overcome: just as a surfing Rhydon could not avoid being weak to water attacks, Butterfree could not become as muscledly tough as a Machamp or something.

He worked with his Pokémon's strengths, he did not force them to remove all weakness like Paul, or push them beyond their limits. That would accomplish nothing.

In the Lavender Town Pokémon Center, Yellow had finished cheering his victory and had collapsed into a snoring heap, likely from a sugar high crash. His Pokémon had been healed, and they'd depart tomorrow morning.

Red, however, couldn't sleep. His mind was still on his battles...particularly with the last one with Ash.

The trainer who had made his chances of victory, become unintelligible. A first...and that was before Red had gazed upon him again with his power active.

He saw Ash...

And in him, Red saw what he could only describe as a never ending spring of power, like water bursting from the earth in an endless spring.

One that Ash clearly had tapped before...was he like him?

And if he was...why didn't he use it during their fight?

If he could naturally do it, it would be cheating, if one suggested using a Fire-type against a Bug-type was cheating. Or a Ghost against a Fighting-type.
As Red saw it, Ash could have won that fight...he himself had only won because Ash did not use it.

So was that fight a fight that he, Red, had won, or a fight Ash had merely lost?

Later in Kalos, aired later due to time difference in the aftermath of the defeat, a girl lay in her bed, saddened by her friend's defeat.

"Oh Ash..." she whispered to herself.

Closing her eyes to fall asleep, no one noticed her hair darken to black briefly, as if to mourning colors.
Emotions of all kinds: Ash vs Paul

Celadon City

"What do you mean I can't challenge your Gym? What are you, afraid of losing?! Is that a thing with Kanto Gym Leaders?!

Paul's furious questioning did not phase the woman before him. Appearing to be roughly in her twenties, she had dark bluish hair, and was dressed in a green and white blouse and jeans.

Her name was Erika, Celadon Gym Leader. And she had managed to give rise to Paul's anger very, very quickly.

"I don't accept challenges from men," she stated simply. "I find it's a disruptive influence for men to be around my dear trainees and friends. Plus, I find they tend to... misbehave when they're around." For reasons unknown Erika's eyes darted to a spot near an open window to the greenhouse-like building, that looked oddly well used and well camouflaged at the same time. "They also tend to be somewhat distracted, when they visit my Gym. I'd rather not earn my victory records because foolish teenager's eyes wander away from their battles."

Paul gritted his teeth in frustration at that remark, particularly the last condescending part. "Do you realize how many people you screw over because of that dumbass rule?!"

"If you really want to challenge me, there'll be a hearing about it with the official Pokémon League commission in a month. You can state your case then," she offered in a way that was vaguely helpful, in a sort of twisted, bureaucratic, 'I hope you get lost in the red tape but I won't actually say it', sort of way.

A month?! He could earn a badge, possibly two, in that time. Did she really think anyone would sit around and wait for her to get off her prissy little high.....

"Or, you could just wait for the Gym to come under....new management." A third voice spoke up, a cool and icy voice with an accent that was familiar to Paul.

A Sinnoh Accent, variant Snowpoint.

Visiting trainer and Gym Leader alike turned to see an older woman, probably a few years older than Erika, standing before them. She was rather tall for a woman, with long silvery-blue hair and icy blue eyes. She was dressed in a blue, sleek looking spandex ski shirt, with an oddly short skirt with long, pale-blue boots.

The spandex did not hide the fact that this woman had vast...well Paul liked to think he made good time by looking away from them within thirteen seconds.

It took Erika about thirty seconds to stop looking at them.

'So, the rumors were true,' Paul thought, having the dignity to not stoop to mocking someone that way.

After all, Wallace wasn't exactly a pushover.

"Oh, I see those threats I got weren't just idle saber-rattling, they really did call for a Dojo-Breaker," Erika observed, sounding more serious than Paul had heard her before. "So, whose disciple were
"That fool of a girl doesn't have the common sense to run a Gym," the woman stated darkly. "She got a critical hit, that's all. Now, allow me to introduce myself, my name is Morana, and I've come to challenge you for your Gym!"

Erika's face was now more professional looking than her previous casual dismissal of him. "Gym Leader rules require me to accept any challenge from someone seeking my position. Let me tell you this though, you will lose just as you did to Candice."

"We'll just see about that." Morana smirked before pushing past both Erika and himself as she sauntered on inside the Gym like she already won control of it. As she herself turned to follow, Erika gave him a wicked smirk.

"Well boy, come on in. You seemed fond of comparing me to the Cerulean Sisters earlier, right? Well, pity such beauty those three had came at a loss of a likeable personality, but I would hate for you to retain the same impression on me."

"And why should I?" Paul demanded as her smirk got wider.

"Why, don't you want to see me eat my words, be humiliated, and if you're there you could challenge Ms. Personality there as soon as she wins?"

Hmm, good point. So she was at least capable of intelligent thought.

One point for her over the Cerulean Gym Leaders then.

....

"Just to let you know, I expect you to use your best team against me...." Morana began to rattle on as Paul took a seat in the stands, arms crossed.

In this flower, tree, and grass filled little garden Paul spotted dozens of young women, and at least one duo of them looking old enough for either to be his mother, may she rest in peace, all watching the confrontation with interest. At least several of them were sitting with each other in a way that was all lovey-dovey and....

Well, if Paul found that sort of thing disgusting, he'd be angrier about seeing it than at Erika's blatant and pathetic blanket ban on boys.

"....We'll be battling a three on three battle with no substitutions. The first trainer with two wins to her name takes the battle, and the Gym, as their victory.....ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME!?"

Morana raised her voice to a higher decibel, as Paul himself noticed that Erika had actually fallen asleep standing up while Morana had been talking.

So, that rumor about her having Narcolepsy was also true.

"Oh, yes...." She was startled awake by Morana's shouting "Yes, yes, I just need to beat you twice and you'll go away."

She stated that so bluntly that Morana glared at her.

"We'll see about that. Now, come forth!"

"Come on out!" Morana and Erika both threw their Pokéballs in tandem, releasing two Pokémon.
Morana, the white and black Ice-Faced Glalie.

And Erika the walking palm tree Exeggutor.

"Glalie, like, the Face Pokémon!" his Pokédex emoted, much to his annoyance. Ever since Vermillion the damn thing had been talking like some brain-dead cheerleader. Somehow he knew Ash Ketchum was responsible for it. "It, like, totally freezes its prey and then, like, eats it slowly. O.M.G, it's totally horrible!"

If he didn't need the thing, he'd have had Grotle smash it to bits. Or possibly even eat it, if Paul didn't think that would be lethal to his most powerful and dependable Pokémon.

"Glalie, use Sheer Cold!" Morana ordered as a frosty, horrible cold began to emerge from Glalie.

"Exeggutor, use Hypnosis," Erika calmly countered.

"Tor!" Exeggutor's many front facing heads opened their eyes wide at once, releasing a psychic wave right into the ice creating Glalie.

Once the wave it, Glalie promptly fell like a rock.

"Glalie! Wake up! Glalie!"

"Now, Dream Eater." Erika once more stated her command calmly, as a red energy flew up from the Grass-type's leaves, surrounding the sleeping Ice-type and draining its energy away.

This lasted for a good few minutes before Glalie snapped out of its sleep, breaking the attack.

It didn't look that good after the barrage though.

"…..Glalie, use Ice Beam!" Morana ordered furiously as white energy began to conduct between Glalie's horns.

"Use Leaf Storm," Erika countered calmly as Exeggutor lowered its head, and promptly sent a leaf hurricane right into Glalie.

Just like Ash Ketchum's Snivy, a comparison that made Paul even more annoyed than he already was.

It hit before Ice Beam had finished, and sent Glalie flying over Morana's head, crashing behind her defeated.

"What!?" Morana sounded like she couldn't believe what had just happened as Erika merely walked over to her Grass-type and rubbed it kindly, thanking it for a good battle.

So, Erika could actually back up her boasts it would seem.

Well damn, there went his Celadon Gym badge. Now he'd have to go backtrack to get to the next Gym.

Morana returned her Glalie with a furious glare etched on her face. "How, that was….you cheated…DON'T YOU IGNORE ME!"

Erika, having returned her Pokémon, had fallen asleep again before Morana could begin her accusation. The timing made Paul raise an eyebrow, wondering if she was faking this one just to anger the Ice-Type trainer.
Or perhaps she really just tended to fall asleep at random times and Morana was just really unlucky.

"Abomasnow, come forth!"

Erika woke up at the sound of the released Ice-type, and the resulting snowy wind that hit her in the face like a snowball.

She nonchalantly wiped the snow off her face, eyeing the Pokémon with interest. "Well, you raised this Pokémon well. Good Snow Warning."

"Abomasnow, like, the Frost Tree Pokémon. It makes it snow, which is SNOW cool! O.M.G, ya know that people who have Abomasnows have to, like, tell the school districts nearby that they do, 'cause reasons!"

Why didn't Pokédexes have mute buttons?

"Well then, go Victreebel!" Erika offered her own fighter as the Flycatcher Pokémon appeared on top the snow.

"Use Blizzard!" Morana ordered as Abomasnow blew a strong blizzard from its mouth.

"Sunny Day," Erika stated simply as a glowing orange light formed inside Victreebel, who promptly shot it at the Blizzard.

The attack promptly melted away, even as the sunlight inside the greenhouse intensified. The field promptly became soggy as the snow from Snow Warning melted away.

"You know, you have raised your Pokémon well physically, but you could do with a bit more compassion." Erika stated matter-of-factly.

"Compassion this, Abomasnow use Sheer...."

"Weather Ball," Erika managed to say quickly, before Morana could finish. A fiery light once more formed inside Victreebel, which it promptly spat out and sent right into Abomasnow with a fiery flavor.

With that one hit, super effective twice over, Abomasnow fell over into the soggy ground. Defeated.

"Well now," Erika stated casually, as if she had not just curb-stomped someone or was giving a warning to someone else in the stands. "That was fun. Now, please leave."

As Morana continued to look at Erika in shock, unable to process what had just happened, Paul got up and left.

He got the message.

---

As and Company, on the way from Lavender Town to Celadon City sometime prior

"What am I?"

It had been a question she had asked many years ago, when she was but a small child. ...
Her body much smaller than in the present day and with her head looking sadly on the rocky ground at her feet, she asked this question to an aged and wizened looking Dragonite, whose body seemed littered with old scars and the other ravages of time.

This Dragonite was what she believed humans would refer to as her Grandfather, an older male figure who had fathered her adopted father and gave the wisdom his many years had accumulated to those who needed it, and those who liked to think they didn't.

"You're Iris," he had told her with a wise smile, but her younger self had just shaken her head violently.

"That's not what I meant..." her younger self had said, "I'm not like you, I'm not like anyone here, or in the forests, streams, or hills."

"Everyone in the world is unique. Every Rattata, every Pidove, every Human, we are all special in some way," he had stated in the same calm tone he had stated her name.

"Why can't everyone be the same though? We could all fly, just like you, or mom, or dad.....but I can't fly. All I do when I try is hurt myself." Her gaze had drifted to a badly scrapped knee, the result of an attempt to fly a few days prior to this talk.

"Sure, I can fly, but you can do things I can't. For example, I once tasted the most delicious human variant of peanuts in the aftermath of what humans called the Battle of Nimbasa, in the wreckage of the city. They had been afflicted with fire and many of the unique flavors humans had cultivated for centuries, yet I can so rarely taste them. I cannot order them, nor can I just go into a human settlement and get some without being attacked. But you can. You can get all the peanuts you want," he had told her with an amused tone of voice, though with a tone that suggested he would indeed like some of those peanuts. "You're a special girl Iris, though born a human you possess the powers of all the Dragons inside of you. Humans have a word for what you are: they'd call you a Bloodliner. Of course, we Pokémon do have names for humans like you as well, though the names have fallen into disuse over my couple hundred years of life: the Lucario called them Aura Guardians who walked the line between Humans and Pokémon as enforcers of order, the Golurk called them Founders for it was they who had created the first Golett and Golurk in the ancient past, and the Mamoswine tell legends of beings known as the Beings of Cruel Heat who chased them with the brutality of the sun."

"Why me though? Why wasn't I just born a Dratini?" Iris asked honestly as the old dragon smiled at her.

"Perhaps because destiny decreed that you'd need hands at the start of life?"

He laughed at his joke, though Iris's younger self did not join in laughing.

"Why are any of us born the way we are, it's a good a question as any," he had noted with less humor. "Perhaps destiny decrees who shall be born as whom, or perhaps it is just random chance."

The cave was quiet for a few minutes after that, before she spoke up again.

"My birth parents...." Iris began. "...If I had been a normal human, would they have kept me? I love the mom and dad I have now, don't get me long I love you all. But...."

The aged dragon smiled at her sadly.

"Many Pokémon believe humans to be violent, unruly, and destructive. It's gotten better in the last few decades, but many Pokémon still hold this viewpoint. For good reason of course: I myself have
seen the aftermath of two human wars: both fought over ideals and what they believe to be truths. One side captured Pokémon inside their spheres, taking them from their homes, the other seeking their aide with machines designed to bond the hearts of human and Pokémon. In turn however, one side enabled their Pokémon to grow and experience things they'd have never otherwise, and became stronger through continuous teamwork. The ones who call themselves Trainers claim that Pokémon and Humans together as partners are stronger than when the two are separate or only temporarily aligned, and I can attest to the strength of that truth. Yet the side that sees such strengthening as not work the cost is just as strong in their ideals."

"Humans fear and war against what they do not understand, it drives them to commit deed they would normally never consider. Humans are a race capable of equal amounts cruelty and kindness, though some of their kind lean more to one side than the other. Thankfully mostly the latter, though the former are the ones that most often get remembered."

"I have heard tales, rumor, and warnings the last few years Iris, tales about children like you. It was once incredibly rare for those like you to be born: without being sired or birthed by one the odds were more against the birth of several Pokémon of alternate coloration than one such as you. However, these births have become much more common recently, for reasons no one knows. Or perhaps someone just knows, but I'm not the one who knows it?"

"Humans are known to fear what they don't understand, and such a population boom is something they understand just as much as I do, that is not at all. But I like to think that even if there are parents who'd throw their children aside for who they are, there are just as many others who would not."

"Some species are not naturally good parents Iris. There are species who lay their eggs and never see them again: the Hydreigon, the Seaking, the Salamence among many others. However, humans are, by and large, a good parenting species. Those who can overcome the shock of unexpected surprises in their children, are what I could easily members of a human subspecies. The truly great parents."

"Could your human sire and dame have been good parents? I don't know, and why speculate. One day you could possibly track them down, but I do not believe anything good will come from such a hunt. One should never hunt prey you don't know the appearance of, nor how will they behave. Just remember, that no one born is ever meant to be left alone. They will always have someone there for them, be it family, friends, or even someone who'll love them. You may be too young to really understand what I mean when I say love, but if there is anything you should take heed of is that, especially now, there will be someone out there for you. You just have to find them. Now, enough talk." Her Grandfather stood up, his joints aching and his wings taking longer than normal to flap open and stretch. "We've talked for far too long at this point. You still wish to fly correct? Well, it's not just the Dragonite of Fiore who can easily carry people, and you are very small."

…

Her memory ended as her Grandfather picked her up, the younger her looking somewhat sated of her worries and happy about being shown the sky/distracted.

It was one of her last memories with him, and one that was coming to mind more and more recently.

Having just woken up, Iris was now stretching, the white shirt that Misty had given her to sleep in (sleep-only clothing?) raising up her stomach as she did so, the rest of her body covered only by a pair of pink shorts and a pair of white socks.

Noting Axew was still fast asleep in the corner of the Secret Power made nest, Iris exited the 'secret
base' as it was called, to see a trio of suspicious looking fellows hovering in front of Ash's sleeping place with what looked like a giant butterfly net and a stick.

The trio, the blue haired man from the tournament, a red haired woman with hair that was oddly serpentine and long, and a Meowth, turned to stare at her, looking just as confused at her as she was at them.

"…Oh….hello…." 

Iris just growled at them, an unspoken demand of what they were doing here.

"Oh, we're just stalking Ash…..oh are you new? Iris right….my name is James, this is Jessie….and Meowth. We stalk the boy for a living."

"Stalk?" Iris stated in confusion.

"Stalk," James confirmed.

"Like, a predator?" Iris began to sound more aggressive as she asked this question.

"Um, I guess you could say that….though I'd call myself a member of the paparazzi personally." The female, Jessie, shrugged as green energy manifested into full shape on Iris's hands, like claws.

"…..Um, I think you two just made her think we're going to eat the kid." Meowth realized and spoke the fear held by all three of them as the trio was promptly chased off by an aggressive teenage girl with glowing dragon claws.

Later in the morning

"Okay, so I was thinking…." Surrounded by his Pidgeotto, Snivy, Aipom, Goomy, Squirtle, and Pikachu, Ash decided to address something. "After that last tournament, we seem to have run into a bit of a…potential concern I guess."

"Pika-Pi Pika. " 'And by that, Ash means defensive power.' Pikachu finished for him. 'And I suppose, offensive as well.'

"I guess what I'm trying to get at is…..would you guys be willing to evolve, or not?" Ash approached the question as gently as possible without sounding like he was telling them to. "I mean, I know well enough that Charmeleon wants to evolve, and Bulbasaur doesn't. And if you do…..is there anything I can do to help you get there? If not, we can find a way to work around it."

"Evolution is a process that is part experience, and part inspiration. A Pokémon will evolve only when it reaches certain levels of strengths, and when it has the will to do so," the Pokédex added. "Of course, you could just throw a specific type of stone at certain Pokémon to expedite the process."

Like encouraging Chimchar to help him beat Paul at Lake Acuity, Chikorita wanting to save him from Team Rocket, and Snorunt managing to make Ice Beam come to fruition.

Pikachu sparked his cheeks threateningly at that remark about stones.

"I'm just…..worried about you guys," Ash added. "It took only a single hit for both Squirtle and
Snivy to be pushed to the edge, I doubt that's healthy for you if that becomes a trend…”

"Pikapi." 'Ash, they get it. No need to act like you just sounded like Paul. You're fine.'

"Sni." 'I have no idea who, or what, a Paul is, but honestly I'm perfectly okay either way.' Snivy gave as her answer. 'Really, the only reason I didn't evolve the first time is because I just didn't get a….I guess spark I suppose is the answer. Same with Oshawott. I felt....something when I was fighting that Riolu though, if that Lucario evolution had been half a minute later then maybe I'd have evolved then and there.'

"Squirt." 'Call it my patriotism, but I like being a Squirtle. I mean, if it's do or die in a full on fight with a Moltres then sure, I'll swallow my pride and change my colors.'

"Pom." 'I'm all for evolving, I just need to get Double Hit working again.' Aipom was the first definite after two maybes and a definite no from Pikachu that didn't need vocalization.

"Caw." 'Same as the monkey.'

"Goo-my." Ash frowned, still not able to tell what Goomy was saying.

"Pika." 'He's saying he wants to evolve.'

Ash nodded at Pikachu's translation, wondering exactly what Goomy evolved into. For some reason he imagined a sort of Muk like thing, with laser canons, five eyes, a giant hairy arm, and spider legs with Goomy's coloration all over itself.

….Perhaps this was why he wasn't the creator of all things. Such a being, upon further reflection, sounded like it would never know peace, happiness, and joy.

And probably not figure skating either.

But, enough on that: it was training time.

---

*A few days later, Oak's lab*

Wiping the sweat from his brow, a dirt coated Professor Oak grinned at the now completed project before him.

"Well, that was a lot of work, but I'm finally done with it."

Standing out of the ground were nearly a hundred young trees, dotted with the earliest buds of berries.

The berries Ash had sent to him had originally been in fact, berries, but they grew rapidly. Give them soil, sunlight, and water, and they grew crazily fast.

They also were spread very effectively by Pokémon, a result of their tasty fruit being loaded with seeds that were easily passed through digestion.

In fact, they were so good at spreading that the fruit and timber Industry hated them with a passion. They could very easily outcompete apples, bananas, oaks, hickories, and other harvested plant life,
and apparently produced sup-par wood.

Thankfully, they did have natural controls in place outside of timber forests and orchards: Pokémon were able to control berry tree numbers just as well as they spread them. All it took was a single Pinsir infestation, a clumsy Rhydon, or a Fire-Type and berry trees were history.

Shocking how long it took people to rediscover that fire controlled out of control berry tree growth better than pesticides and going crazy with chainsaws.

Of course, he had no plans on giving these trees poison, flames, or chainsaws. With these, he should manage to reduce his feeding bills: he could get his own berries right from his backyard and supplement the Pokémon feed with them.

Honestly, why hadn't he done that years ago? Was he just so money restricted that he couldn't even afford to save money with an investment that did not involve him stealing pest trees from someone's property?

Could you be arrested for that?

"Chirp."

Professor Oak was snapped out of his mental wondering about the theft of trees from people who did not want them by a Pidgey.

It was a wild Pidgey, it didn't look owned based on its more cautious eyes as it looked into him.

The Pidgey was then joined by two more. Then three more.

Then a pair of Pidgeotto, also wild.

And more, and more, and more, all coming in and landing before him.

And then Ash's Pidgeotto, who seemed to be leading them since the roughly two hours ago Ash had swapped her back over as he seemed determined to train with all his Pokémon, even Krabby went over to him for a time, landed on top the highest branch. She looked oddly happy with herself for some reason.

The Professor eyed them all seriously for a few, terse moments before he spoke.

"Whatever it is you're doing, don't break anything or go eating all the food and we'll be fine. I don't expect rent beyond letting me make research notes and poetry off you."

They seemed to find that acceptable, seeing as they didn't swarm him.

---

**Back to Ash**

With a good oomph, Ash took a semi-glowing purple Aipom arm to the arm.

Aipom retracted her tail, eyeing it with some annoyance. "Pom…." 'How hard is it to redo something you had already learned once?'

Rubbing his arm, which while not bruised was certainly affected by the attack, Ash merely gestured over to the semi-burned tree husk that Charmeleon was making breathing motions at. "Tell that to
Charmeleon and Flamethrower."

"Meleon!" ‘Work dammit! What sort of self-respecting Fire-type doesn’t know Flamethrower?!’

For some reason, Ash imagined a giant red and white bird Pokémon that vaguely resembled Fletchling glaring at Charmeleon for that remark.

"Still, good progress Aipom! You're nearly there with Double Hit!" In fact, a lot of his Pokémon had been making very good progress with training, all of them feeling stronger, faster, and overall better than ever. Krabby had learned how to use Bubblebeam, Mud Shot, and Metal Claw, Bulbasaur had demonstrated Leech Seed use once more, and Goomy….

"Goo!" Goomy shouted, the little blob trying to get the power kept within himself to come forth, only to peter out without any Dragon Burps or injured Piplup.

Well, he could tell progress had been made, but that progress hadn't led to any spontaneous meteor attacks just yet.

Unsure of what else to try at this moment, Ash withdrew and then extended the ever vexing staff of Sir Aaron/prison for Lucario. Then, in an imitation of a knighting ceremony he had seen on T.V in the past, Ash tapped what he guessed was Goomy's shoulder.

It had no effect.

He then dramatically posed with it, magnifying light through the central crystal and aiming it at Goomy.

It had no effect.

Finally he also took out the stone he had obtained during the tournament and held out both before Goomy.

It had no effect.

Clearly, he couldn't knock out two Pidgey with one Geodude.

So, withdrawing the staff back and pocketing it and the stone once more, Ash was still out of luck guessing the best way to deal with said staff.

Or how to help Goomy unleash his hidden power, the power Ash knew resided deep within Goomy. The power that would help unleash further potential than just Rain Dance and Bide.

"You seem to be stuck."

Ash turned, finding Iris and Excadrill had arrived in the clearing Ash and his Pokémon were currently residing in. At the sight of Excadrill, Charmeleon growled and initiated a Metal Claw conflict that would break several trees.

The two ignored them however, as Iris continued.

"Pokémon get stronger and evolve through a combination of power and will. However, different Pokémon lean more towards either power or will. Dragons are naturally powerful, but they require great amounts of will to evolve or to learn new techniques. They need to have a very strong reason, a great desire, to push themselves. They need a lot more push to learn, but in turn once they get that push it takes them a lot less practice to do so."
"You don't say." Ash took the advice of the Dragon expert in for a moment.

Iris herself was observing Goomy with a thoughtful expression, before turning to Ash with a smirk.

"You know, I may be able to help you two out. I think I know a move that will work for Goomy rather well. One I can help Goomy learn."

"Really?" Ash stated in surprise.

---

**Three hours later**

As Iris had helped Goomy out, Ash had gotten some practice in of his own in with his other Pokémon.

That was always of benefit, and the fact his fist was now glowing Power-Up-Punch style was always appreciated.

Goomy however….

Goomy and Iris were both surrounded by white rings of energy, both facing a pair of trees.

"Now!" And with that shout, Iris and Goomy both released Dragon Breath.

The white hazy fire slammed into the trees, shattering them in the process.

This time with no Beedrill Pikachu had to zap away.

Iris turned around to smile Goomy's way, looking rather proud. "You did it. That is what a perfect Dragon Breath looks like!"

"Yeah, that was awesome Goomy! Good job! I knew you had it in you!" Ash congratulated as Goomy's eyes went wide and sparkled with happiness.

"Goo!" The Pokémon cheered, before glowing white and growing larger.

"No way…" Ash said in complete surprise as Goomy grew a distinct neck and lower body, two additional long stalks, and being overall much larger.

The light then died away, revealing his newly evolved…..

Er, what was it called?

"Slī!" The former Goomy exclaimed proudly.

"Sliggoo, the Soft Tissue Pokémon and the evolved form of Goomy. Sliggoo perceives the world with several advanced organs that are just as good as eyes but not eyes at all. Why eyesight is swapped for a completely different form of perception in this stage and this stage alone is a scientific mystery. Sliggoo benefit immensely from rain."

Oh, a Sliggoo. Excellent name, rather meaningful and catchy and….

Wait, blind?
This of course not just Ash's thoughts on the subject, though they were very similar.

The confusion over Sliggoo's name and senses were shared by the redhead named Misty who had been watching the entire three-hour training session from behind an undamaged tree.

All the while, wondering why watching it made her feel so….it wasn't anger, but it was some sort of negative emotion.

One Misty wasn't sure how to classify.

---

**Two days later**

Its blue body hid underneath its sleek and smooth feathering the muscles of a great swimmer.

The gem that adorned its head channeled a distant psychic power that descendants of it could one day unlock for itself.

Golduck, oddly enough not the Golden Duck Pokémon, had crossed her path.

And Misty intended to capture it.

The forested pond they had stopped by on their travels was their battlefield, a battle framed by green leaves, brown bark, and blue water.

And the Psyduck currently trying to pretend he was a stump and not to fight his evolved form.

Shaking her head in exasperation for that duck, Misty called forth a different bird of the water to handle this.

"Wingull, use Wing Attack!" Throwing the ball out, the Water-Flying type quickly flew right at the evolved Pokémon with white wings.

The duck countered with a pair of glowing claws, knocking the attacking bird off course and crashing to the ground.

KO'd.

"Wingull!" Misty shouted in shock at Wingull being overwhelmed so quickly.

"Duck." *This is why I'm doing my best stump imitation, I'd suggest....'*

"You suggest nothing Psyduck!" Misty snapped as she chose a replacement Pokémon after returning her Wingull, even as Golduck charged.

With that came Poliwrath, who was right in place to be struck in the chest by a glowing headbutt attack.

*Zen Headbutt. Super Effective against a fighting-type like Poliwrath.*

A swirling, energy enhanced attack that reminded Misty of a Dragon-type attack she had witnessed recently. One that did not improve her mood, at all.

Jumping over the fallen Poliwrath, Golduck charged at her, claws extended.
"Gol!" the duck shouted in fury, angry about a human crossing its path and entering its territory. Angry about humans who stole Golduck's prey with their fishing poles and damaged its grass with their shoes and blades. Angry that a horrible human with cold, disdainful eyes who attacked him with a giant Grass-type turtle and dismissed him as nothing but an average and pathetic Golduck not even worth the capture and release thereafter.

There was a lot of anger in that single Gol.

"Stop!" Misty shouted at Golduck, using all of her power to give the command.

The furious Water-Type, with visible resistance, did so, gazing at her with confused fury and fear, even as it began to lose focus in its eyes.

Psyduck promptly stopped his stump cos-play with a concerned head tilt. "Duck." 'That's still creepy when you do that. In fact, I'd say it gets even creepier each time.'

Misty frowned, more than just the Golduck bothering her. "I don't particularly like having to do that either Psyduck. Capturing Goldeen that way was a test. This….well frankly it's cheating and I highly doubt that if I capture this Golduck it'll ever listen to me."

"Psy…." 'I sense a but coming up.'

"If I leave it alone, it's probably going to hurt someone, probably us, and you're not exactly going to evolve anytime soon." Misty promptly took out a Pokéball and pressed it against the controlled Golduck's head.

The Golduck was promptly sucked into the ball, still compelled and unable to escape.

Though the duck's last gaze, the one where it looked at her, and saw a monster, as defined by a monster, still lingered even as the ball teleported away to Professor Oak's laboratory.

As Misty dwelled on this fact, Psyduck ceased his stump imitation and stood in front of her.

"Psy." 'That, was pathetic.'

Psyduck's bluntness caused Misty to level a stern gaze at the bird, who continued.

"Duck." 'That wasn't you battling with your head in the game. Heck, that wasn't even you half in it. Something's been bothering you.'

She turned her gaze away from the duck, with a slight blush of shame on her face. "Nothing is bothering me Psyduck, you are seeing things."

"Psy." 'Yes, I am seeing you being bothered by something. Now, spill it…or do I need to get Iris?'

"No, you don't need to get her…." Misty raised her voice harshly as she replied, only to suddenly stop and stare at the duck in surprise and some shame.

The duck was not helping matters by grinning in glory for having gotten her into this position.

Ducks should never grin. It just looked wrong.

Misty sighed, before lowering her head to gaze at her feet. "Fine, you're right Psyduck, something is bothering me. Iris, is bothering me…and I don't know why." Misty started to fiddle with her hair to distract herself and to try to calm her hammering pulse.
"I mean, sure, she did try to rip me apart the first time we met, but that's not it. I don't fear her.....I don't think she's going to kill us, or hurt us, but...."

"Duck." 'You fear she's going to take Ash.'

She blushed at that statement, still not looking Psyduck directly in the eye as she tried to laugh him off. "I...I do not...I mean just because she's a girl, who’s interesting in battling like he is, is what people would call athletically attractive, and only just recently realized one wears clothes in warm weather and could probably be convinced to be some teenage fantasy nudist girlfriend with so little cunning that even you could manage it, does not mean I am jealous...."

There was in fact jealousy in her voice, but also worry. A lot of worry, and it vastly outnumbered the jealous parts of her tone.

"Psy-y-y." 'Yes, because you didn't get any reasons for humans to be jealous in that single response. Honestly, someone in Hollywood could make a two-season long sit-com arc just with those concepts alone.'

Misty blushed further, keeping her head down and focusing her attention on her shoelaces trying to count the threads.

"Psy-Duck-Psy." 'I'll be completely honest here Misty, with what I seeing here; you are jealous that a new girl is starting to bond with Ash. At the same time, you are also worried, which is what is really eating at you. You think that Iris is going to take Ash away. You think that she'll get just as close to him as you are, and then snatch him away....' Misty now was beyond blushing, to the point of being completely pale. Her eyes widened and her mouth hung slightly open as Psyduck's words hit home, each realization branding itself into her brain. No matter how much she wanted to deny the duck's observations she couldn't because he was right.

Psyduck was reading her like a book, and he knew exactly what she was worried about. How a girl whom, despite how they had met, Misty had actually started to somewhat like as a person and travelling companion, might take one of the few people to ever treat her with kindness away from her, just like her sisters had taken so many toys from her as a child. It was a sobering thought to say the least, it was a weakness that Misty had always refused to acknowledge. She was afraid of losing the things she cared about, it's part of the reason why she never wanted to go back to Cerulean City in case her sisters tried to take her Pokémon. They were the most important things in her life, without them she'd be nothing and have nothing to love.

And unlike them, Iris probably would do it without even realizing what she was doing it. Which, somehow, felt even worse than when it was done intentionally out of malice. Misty let these thoughts settle before her mind snapped back to what Psyduck was saying.

'...depriving you of a friend, partner, and mate.'

That last one caused Misty to regain her facial coloration, and change expressions from depressed and embarrassed to annoyed and embarrassed. She finally looked at Psyduck glaring at him for the assumption, even if the thought had very briefly passed through her mind in fleeting moments. Just like it had when he mentioned it a second ago.

Psyduck just shrugged his shoulders in response, as if that response had been entirely intended. Perhaps Psyduck decided she was being too depressed and decided to throw that in just to get her back to normal.

Or perhaps he was just being Psyduck and just had to say something stupid. Either way it gave her a
lot to think about and some big decisions to make at some point in the future.

A few more days later, time now linked with the first chapter segment

The scrublands before Celadon City, were a place that Ash remembered with some level of fondness.

It was a place he had been beaten up, humiliated, made to feel inferior to Gary, and connected with his friends about his dedication to Pokémon League merchandise.

What did all of these things have in common you may ask?

It was all connected to a Pokémon known as Primeape. His first Fighting-type, a ruthless and powerful Pokémon with whom he travelled with briefly, before an offer to train under a Fighting-type expert came about.

He had gotten some pretty good updates about Primeape over the…..however long it had been since then, and Ash would love to be training with Primeape again.

It would be so….

BOOM!

The trio came to an abrupt stop as a light brown object was hit with something powerful, probably an attack of some kind, and sent flying into the sky.

"Primeape in the air, detected. Unknown landing trajectory, exact landing coordinates and survival percentage incalculable with present data. Team Rocket may be consulted to amend data deficiencies."

*Twinkle*

Ash just stood in shock, his mind barely able to process what had just happened.

"Pikapi…." 'Ash, that was Primeape,' Pikachu stated, similarly shocked.

"Not bad Pikachu, not bad. That Primeape did show promise, but if it was blown away that easily it wasn't that good to begin with. Return."

A familiar voice, a very familiar one, was the one talking. Following the sound of a Pokéball returning a Pokémon, Paul walked out of the tall grass that bordered the road, and caught Ash's eye.

"Oh, it's you," the trainer greeted with his usual level of disdain, completely ignoring Misty and Iris, "So, how's it been lately? Cheat you way to the Pokémon League by beating a couple of bimbos recently? No wait, you already did that."

Paul. The trainer who had challenged his ideals with strength unlike any he had faced.

The trainer who had brutalized Chimchar, and abandoned who knows how many other Pokémon.

The trainer who had blown his Primeape away.

The trainer, who may have killed his Primeape. Ash's vision was flashing red as his memories of
Primeape flew through his mind, even though they didn't get on well to begin with when they separated an unbreakable bond had formed between them and now with what Paul had just done that bond might not happen again. Ash's vision was now fixed a blood red, as was Pikachu's with electricity flaring from his cheeks and a vicious fire burning in his eyes.

Even if Paul could not have known that Primeape's history, that did not sedate Ash's rage. Ash's look of shock turned into a snarl of anger, Paul's usually unmovable sneer of disdain briefly flickered as his eyebrow twitched in surprise at the change in Ash's demeanor.

"If I did cheat my way to the Pokémon League Paul, then why would I still be battling Gym Leaders, and beating them better than you, a trainer who doesn't cheat?" Ash countered, surprising Misty and Iris with the amount of anger in his voice. His fists were clenched tightly and visibly shaking from barely contained anger, Ash could feel his fingernails digging into his palms through his fingerless gloves. The small amount of pain seemed to only fuel his anger even further.

"I saw you at that tournament. I must say, your Pokémon were so weak I'm honestly surprised you even got far enough to lose in the final round. Really, I have to wonder with Pokémon like that, how you even beat those idiots to get that fast-pass badge of yours. Then again, I'm told it's not hard to earn your badges on a couch if you are sufficiently motivated."

To those were not suffering from some sort of emotional mental states, it would be easy to tell the last statement was Paul trying to pick a fight with Ash for some reason, over some sort of grievance. It was obvious to Misty, and even Iris could tell that was Paul's intent even without any context for who Paul was and only somewhat understanding what Paul was talking about with Ash's League pass, or about what a couch had to do with it.

To Ash and Pikachu, who were currently furious at Paul even before he spoke…..

"I'll show you how I won my badges! I challenge you to a battle!" Ash pointed at Paul for dramatic effect, with Pikachu mimicking his motions.

Paul smirked in response.

"How's three on three sound? Best two out of three?"

....

"This, can't end well," Misty stated for the record as Ash and Paul stood several yards apart, the path through the plains their improvised battlefield.

Low traffic meant that this would not be a problem in all likelihoods though.

"I admit to not having run into many adolescent teenage males, but is this normal behavior? It almost feels like they are showing off before....." Iris began.

"I….highly doubt that's the case" Misty cut her off, paling at the idea of a scenario when Paul won and him and her..... Misty's hand flew up to cover her mouth as she threw up a little at the thought, taking a steady breath to calm her stomach she swallowed before taking her hand away from her mouth and took a quick drink of water to wash the taste away.

In the two times she had met the guy, she had seen absolutely nothing about him that she found appealing. His face was hard as stone, he never smiled or gave a feeling of caring for anything, and his eyes seemed constantly scowling.

He certainly didn't have kind eyes complimented by a big smile that radiated a caring and kind
"That is good to hear. I really would prefer not having to deal with that expectation at the moment," Iris stated, interrupting Misty's thoughts on a certain someone, and thus her growing blush.

It also made her register the sound of the two trainers releasing Pokémon.

"Grotle, Razor Leaf!" Paul commanded as his turtle roared in response, before sending a barrage right at Charmeleon.

"Use Flame Charge, and attack!" Ash countered with more ferocity than normal. Charmeleon gave a savage grin hearing the anger in Ash's voice, he wasn't sure what brought on the change in his trainer but he had to admit he liked the sound of it.

"Char!" 'Oh, now we're talking!' An emotional state that Charmeleon could really get behind. With a few hard stomps to the ground Charmeleon was glowing with fiery power, and charging right into the leaves.

The leaves burned on contact with Charmeleon's flames, and the Fire-type landed a hard hit right on Grotle.

Grotle was pushed back a few feet, but was still standing with no evident weakness.

"Rock Smash!"

"Dragon Tail!" Ash countered as Grotle's glowing front limb met Charmeleon's enhanced tail with concussive force. Ash felt like his blood was trying to burn its way out of his skin and make him spontaneously combust from the rage that pounded through his system. Primeape would be avenged even if he had to fight Paul himself, the thought of knocking a couple of Paul's teeth out sounding extremely appealing.

However, Charmeleon had four more limbs he could use from this angle, Grotle couldn't use another one if it didn't want to fall all over itself.

Charmeleon didn't need some fancy power to tell what Ash was thinking right about now, and he liked the idea.

"Now, Metal Claw!" Ash shouted forth as Charmeleon's claws glowed white and expanded. The savage grin still firmly in place on his face enjoying this new version of Ash along with his full force battle style.

The attack hit right at home, striking Grotle along the upper shell.

Grotle was now starting to look tired out as Paul seemed oddly calm about his current state of affairs.

Normally having a Pokémon lose a battle before his eyes made him angry, yet for some reason nothing was happening with him.

"Use Razor Leaf!" With another roar, though without any visible Overgrow boost to it, the leaves were sent flying right into Charmeleon.

The leaves hit their mark, and Charmeleon held the damage pretty well if his cocky grin was anything to go by.
"Let's finish this Charmeleon! Use Fire Pledge!" Ash shouted. Charmeleon flicked a stray leaf from his shoulder before acting.

"Char!" *Taste my power! Taste my victory, and your defeat, from my indomitable, awesome, power!*" Charmeleon shouted as he slammed his claws into the earth.

Paul, in response, merely snapped his fingers as several white objects began flying out of Grotle's shell.

The flames circled around Grotle just as the stones flew away, before exploding all around Grotle with powerful force.

As the flames died down, a defeated Grotle lay, slightly singed but still quite alright.

"Excellent Charmeleon!" Ash congratulated, feeling very good about managing to take down that most powerful Pokémon of Paul's. Charmeleon raised his arms to the sky, billowing fire from his mouth in celebration.

Paul returned Grotle, without a word. Not even a pathetic. Ash did not register that fact.

….  

"Way to go Ash!" Iris cheered, glad to see Ash winning as he returned Charmeleon. Misty, however, was frowning.

That fight…didn't seem right. It felt like Paul had thrown that fight.

She knew what losing was like; she had seen her family fight. That wasn't a loss.

That was entirely planned.

….  

"I choose you Pikachu/Nidoking standby for battle!"

Pikachu darted onto the field even as the large purple Nidoran evolution stood before him, menacingly glaring at him.

"Pika Pikachu." *Hmm, a Ground-type huh? Can't recall if I've seen if I can still electrocute you guys with some effort. Now, let's aim for the horn….*

White stone suddenly shot out of nowhere and began pelting Pikachu like hail from all sides.

"Pika!"

"What!?" Ash demanded in fury as Paul smirked wickedly as he snapped his fingers.

"Oh, did you not hear me give Grotle the call to use Stealth Rock during that last attack of yours? Pity, I was sure I was clear on the subject."

Stealth Rock!? Ash glared and grit his teeth, wanting nothing more than to charge across their battlefield and attack Paul directly.

Of all the nasty little…well maybe beating Nidoking with an Electric-Type would show him!

"Pikachu, use Quick Attack!"
As the white speedy tackle sped towards Nidoking, Paul didn't seem worried.

"Use Bulldoze." Paul stated simply as Nidoking slammed the ground hard with both fists.

A wave of earth was sent right into the path of the speeding Pikachu, interrupting the attack and causing Pikachu to hit the earth closer to Ash with a sore back.

"Pi..." Pikachu stood back up, rubbing his back as his cheeks sparked. *This is going to hurt tomorrow. Eat Thunderbolt!*

"Double Kick!" Paul shouted as Nidoking charged at Pikachu, both feet glowing white.

"Block it with Iron Tail!" Ash countered, causing Pikachu to grit his teeth over not being able to fry the overgrown Nidorino.

With a spin, both kicks were knocked back by Iron Tail, causing Nidoking to stumble back with flailing arms trying to reright itself.

"Now, Quick Attack!"

Just as Nidoking was nearly on stable footing again, Pikachu slammed into Nidoking's chest, knocking it back down again.

"Now, end this with Iron Tail!" Ash shouted as Pikachu jumped into the air with a glowing white tail once more.

"Pika! 'Fine, so what if I probably couldn't fry it in this timeline, it still would have made me feel better.....'

"Venoshock!" Paul countered as Nidoking horked from the back of its throat, before spitting out a green liquid. The liquid hit Pikachu in the chest, knocking the electric mouse away and allowing Nidoking to stand back up.

"Pikachu!" Ash shouted in concern as Paul smirked.

"That's a pretty strong Pikachu Ketchum. It did better than I thought it would, and I suppose I didn't hallucinate that fight with that idiot's Raichu. It's probably better than mine, though I wouldn't say that is such a fantasy to imagine on my part. However, a Pikachu is still just a Pikachu. Use Bulldoze!"

Now back on two legs, Nidoking slammed the ground, sending another wave of earth right at Pikachu.

"Get out of there Pikachu!" Ash shouted as Pikachu got back up and ready to dodge, only for the earth wave to hit just as it was ready to jump.

"Pika!

"Pikachu!" Ash shouted in concern, before getting Pikachu thrown right into his stomach, sending both of them crashing to the ground.

"Well, I guess I win that round." Paul smirked. "Not bad Nidoking, not bad."

….  
Pikachu was actually rather warm to the touch, Misty found. She also found it rather touching that
he'd trust her with his first Pokémon like that.

However, she did have something to say.

"Ash, I don't know what's going on here. I know Paul's a jerk, and what he said was very insulting, but I know that's not it. Something else is bothering you, and it's messing with your battling. Maybe it's him blasting that Primeape away, like the Pokédex said."

"I'd have commented, but the Stealth Rock caught me off guard. Want to know about Nidoking?"

They ignored the pocketed device as Misty continued.

"Paul's an ass. He's a jerk to everyone and everything around him. But if you let your anger get a hold of you, you are going to lose to him. Then he'll be an even bigger ass. So get your head in the game Ash: this isn't how you normally battle."

The scolding was not harsh, it was not in disappointment. It was merely an observation of someone who she had grown to trust greatly, who she admired and wanted to help in any way she could.

And that meant making sure he didn't lose to the biggest jerk in Kanto.

Ash took a deep breath, one mirrored by Pikachu, after a few seconds of taking her words into account. He nodded, before reaching to his hat.

He promptly turned it backwards.

"Thank you Misty." He told her with a determined smile, the bubbling anger diminishing.

As he turned away and returned to the battlefield, both Misty and Ash failed to notice Iris looking at them both inquisitively.

…..

"Done talking with your girlfriend Ketchum, or she some idiot groupie of yours? You collecting cheerleaders or something, last I checked one you only had one in Vermillion? And why did you turn your hat like that, it makes you look like some kind of kid?"

Somehow that wasn't making Ash nearly as angry as Paul's earlier comments. They still bothered him, but they otherwise were harmless.

"They're my friends Paul. I know you might not understand that, but some people actually like being with others. As to my hat, well sometimes connecting to your inner kid helps you win."

"How cute." They reached for their chosen Pokémon.

"Aipom….."

"Drowzee….."

"I choose….."

"Standby for….."

"You!"
"Battle!"

In massive bursts of light, the monkey met the tapir for fierce battle, with surprise evident on Aipom's face.

"Ai!? 'Wait, is that Paul of all people?'

She then got a bunch of stones flung at her, distracting her from further questioning. Aipom managed to dodge a couple of the stones with a hand boosted jump but still took some damage.

"Drowzee, the Hypnosis Pokémon. Drowzee eat the dreams of children, for they are delicious. Children who have their dreams consumed by Drowzee do 13% less on their writing tests than children whose dreams are not eaten, but they perform math 6% better. There is some controversy over parents using Drowzee on their children prior to specific standardized tests."

"Aipom, it's like, a…." A teenage girl's voice began from Paul's pocket, causing Paul's face to turn into an even fiercer snarl than normal.

"Use Psybeam!" Paul ordered as Drowzee's eyes glowed.

"Use Power-Up-Punch!" Ash called for the counter. With a loud screech Aipom extended her tail forward, the business end glowing orange.

The fist hit Drowzee in the stomach, causing Drowzee to lose concentration as it forcibly exhaled, costing it the Psybeam command.

"Poison Gas!" Paul ordered as Drowzee opened wide, exhaling a giant purple cloud, sending it right down the way at Aipom.

"Block it with Counter-Shield!" Hitting the ground, Aipom stood on a single hand as she spun around, her tail radiating dozens of glowing stars.

The barrier they formed collided with the Poison Gas, dispersing it.

"Disable!" Paul shouted as Drowzee's eyes glowed white momentarily. Aipom stopped her spinning with an alarmed look on her face, with further tail movement making a sound akin to that of an empty can being kicked.

"Ai!" 'Oh crud!'

"This isn't good," Ash agreed with his Aipom as Paul pointed at them dramatically.

"Use Thunder Wave!" Electricity began to form around Drowzee's arms, before Drowzee pointed a finger right at Aipom. With a burst of electric light, the attack was sent right at the still stunned Aipom.

"Get out of there Aipom!" Ash shouted in concern. Aipom heard him, and with a shout flipped off her single hand and back onto her tail, using it to springboard up into the air and right above the Thunder Wave.

No one noticed the fact that the tail was glowing purple in full.

"Now, Psybeam!" Paul ordered as the psychic attack was sent right at Aipom.

"Block it!" Ash ordered as Aipom swung her tail at the oncoming attack, her eyes widening at the
purple glow covering it.

The attacks connected, as an explosion filled the sky.

"Aipom!" Ash shouted in surprise as Paul frowned silently.

From the smoke a figure dropped, though without the clumsiness of an impact victim.

The figure was glowing, the form hard to distinguish until it landed between Ash and the Drowzee, and the glowing ceased.

"Ambi!" The now two tailed Monkey declared 'Now, this is better wouldn't you say!"

"Drow!!"

"What!?" Paul declared in shock, beyond shocked that this happened, again!

First Charmeleon during the Gym battle, and now this!

"Way to go Ambipom!" Ash congratulated.

"Pika!" The statement caused Ash and Ambipom to blush horribly, though one in mortification and the other in anticipation.

"Amazing!" Iris stated.

"That's the Ash I know." Misty declared with a smile, sounding glad he was back to normal.

"Aipom has evolved. Updating database. Data collection so far has been satisfactory today."

"So what, that doesn't change a thing! I'm still going to win; Drowzee use Thunder Wave!" Paul ordered as once more Drowzee directed the power of lightning right at Ash's monkey.

But with a wave of her tails, Swift flew once more. Without command, she blocked the attack, reacting only to anticipation to the words about to fly off Ash's tongue.

And as he saw the stars block the electric move, Ash realized something.

In the previous timeline, Paul was just as experienced as he was. They had both travelled the world to get to Sinnoh, and were thus veterans.

This Paul, though, this Paul had only just begun to train.

He was no veteran yet, while Ash had seen the world.

While their Pokémon may have trained an equal amount of time physically, he and his Pokémon were mentally veteran fighters. A wicked grin crossed Ash's lips, he had an advantage that Paul would never be able to prepare for and never see coming.

Anger or no anger, this battle would soon be over.

"Ambipom, use Double Hit!" With two glowing tails, Ambipom lunged right at Drowzee, her tails flying through the stars like missiles.

"Quickly, use Disable!" Paul ordered, but the moment Drowzee's eyes began to glow the fists impacted.
Now, Drowzee's eyes were no longer white from the Disable.

They were white from defeat, as it collapsed on the ground.

"We did it!" Ash shouted happily, as Ambipom bounded over to him and gave him a four limbed hug, shouting in joy of her own.

Misty and Iris stood up, Pikachu in Misty's arms as they began to offer their own congratulations.

Paul, scowling, returned Drowzee. He made a few motions, as if unsure of what to do with Drowzee at the moment, before turning around and walking away.

Likely intending to figure out Drowzee's status after a good sulk far away from Ash.

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**Omake**

**Non-Canon**

**Can I be in the story?**

On the front gates of Crossoverpairinglover Studios hung a sign.

It was a notable sign, standing out to all passersby, yet not as grandiose as the Hollywood sign, with a single message written upon it.

*Reset Bloodlines Casting Calls Still Ongoing*

The sign was currently being read by a young boy, dressed in an orange T-shirt, cargo pants, and adorned by a red headband. Alongside him stood a Riolu, and both looked thrilled.

"Riolu!"

"Cameron!" The Riolu spoke English for the sake of the audience in response to his trainer's enthusiasm.

"They still have open spots for roles! This, is, Great! I can't wait to get made a major Unovan Rival, I might even be able to take Trip's job!"

"Yeah!"

"I mean, I'm talented, filled with personality, and I'm not an odd Gary-Paul partial rehash with a dash of questionable competence! I could totally carry an arc!"

"…..Yeah, sorry dude, but if anyone's taking Trip's job is going to be me," the thicker proportioned trainer running around the edge of the studio told him frankly, his Sawk keeping pace with him perfectly before he continued his run around the studio.

"…..Not if I get to the registry first Steve!" Cameron shouted as he and his Riolu dashed inside the studios, causing both trainer and Sawk to collapse in annoyance.

"The name is Stephan, and I already got cast!"
"….." Cameron pouted.

"….." Riolu looked really, really bored.

"Calling number 26. Calling casting number 26." A monotone announcer shouted from the next room over in the studios.

At that call, a pink, balloon like Pokémon with large eyes and a marker microphone floated out of its seat and ran into the interview room, shouting “Jiggly” cheerfully.

Noting the many, many others sitting in the waiting room with them, including a man dressed like a Gligar who was hanging from the ceiling for some reason like a brooding bat, a dark haired youth with a Charizard spouting some sort of Holder with a stone in it whom were currently playing what appeared to be Poker, a red haired girl dressed in green who was playing on a 3DS side by side with a Chespin in what appeared to be some sort of multiplayer game, a Pikachu with a Sherlock Holmes-esque hat on his head was drinking from a seemingly bottomless coffee cup, a blue-haired Pokémon Ranger currently reading a red book with a golden sickle on it written by some guys whose name looked similar to Stantler, a blond girl who was kicking her roller-bladed feet up into the air in boredom while her own Lucario read the Castelia City Times like a normal person, and some odd guy dressed like a Cacturne who was trying to solve a Rubix cube, Cameron turned to his Riolu in despair.

"What number are we again?"

Riolu held up the number 750 like he was a character on Sesame Street.

"…Think maybe if we're lucky the Author will bring in a T.A.R.D.I.S for us to use to speed things up?"

"NEG-A-TIVE! SUCH MIS-USE OF SPA-CE-AND-TIME IS TRU-LY FOO-LISH!" A metallic life form with the number 751 sprayed on its side shouted in the seat next to Cameron who promptly scooted away from it, who somehow didn't get the attention of the others in the room quite possibly because there were far louder and more hammy things in this room. "THIS PRO-JECT IS IN NE-ED OF DA-LEK PER-FEC-TION!"

As the Dalek shrieked loudly to the now startled boy, the announcer called for casting number 27.

Watching a brown hair boy get up and head into the interview room, followed by a Pikachu of his own Cameron would have asked where Jigglypuff had gotten off to…..

"Oh yes, number 27. How…tedious of them. Tell me boy, have you ever been bored?" A short, blond, and somewhat chubby looking man in a white lab coat, his eyes hidden behind reflective glasses, spoke to boy and Riolu in a thick German accent. "Ever so bored that you want to make hell itself tremble with a war so grand that you'll never be bored again?"

Trapped between Dalek and creepy German guy, Cameron and Riolu were now starting to question why they hadn't gotten here sooner.

Or if they'd live to see their interview.
Celadon City

She remembered his face like they had met only yesterday.

Two years ago she had hatched from an egg three months prior, her parents a victim of one of Hoenn's Tropical Storms. He was fourteen years old, a single year too young by human standards to travel the lands, yet alone himself.

She had questioned why this was the case several times, but she got only sadness as a response. Eventually she stopped asking not wanting to see the sorrow in his eyes and the fake smile he would occasionally give her.

That day, she had been hiding within the hollows of a tree. The sounds of unfamiliar steps had terrified her, so she had hidden herself from sight.

Then the steps had stopped, and she had let out a relieved breath.

Then her stomach had loudly growled, and the steps had started up again. And this time, they were coming her way.

She had backed herself as far away from sight within her hiding spot as possible, hoping in vain that she would not be seen.

The steps had stopped again, right in front of the tree.

"You can come out. I'm not going to hurt you" Those were the first words he ever said to her.

They were words of such truth and honesty that she couldn't help but poke her head out. Her empathic abilities wouldn't set in properly until she had fully evolved into a Gardevoir but they were strong enough now to feel the sincerity in his words.

Her red horn popping out moments before her green hair followed it. Looking up, her eyes made contact with that of a smiling face.

His eyes were red, a deeper color than that of her horn, with a pair of marks under his eyes that reminded her a bit of Zigzagoon fur edges. His hair was dark, similar in color to that of a Poochyena's muzzle or feet.

"Oh, you're a Ralts," he noted kindly with a lopsided grin. "I guess I should introduce myself, it's only fair. Hello Ralts, my name is John Archer, and I want to be your friend." He held out a hand, offering it out for her to take, she hesitated for a few moments before slowly reaching out her hand to meet his. As their hands touched his eyes flashed with an orange-brown light.

"Good morning. Welcome to the Pokémon Center," Nurse Joy greeted as the trio entered the Pokémon Center of Celadon City, here at long last, in a sing-song tone. "We restore your Pokémon to full health. Would you like to have your Pokémon checked?"

"Why do they all say that, in the same way?" Iris blurted out. At Ash and Misty's 'why did you just
ask that out-loud' looks at her in response, Nurse Joy just tilted her head all friendly-like.

"It's because we're taught to say that phrase just like that from the moment we start talking. We practice two hours a day, every day for our entire lives until age sixty-five," she explained in the same tone, causing nervous frowns to sprout on all three teenagers.

"….That's not creepy at all," Misty muttered to herself sarcastically.

An awkward lull of action existed for a few moments before Nurse Joy started talking again.

"So, are any of you here to challenge Erika?" Her tone didn't change from her earlier greeting here either.

At Ash's nod, she shook her head. "Well, I'm sorry to inform you that Erika will not be accepting your challenge."

At that, Ash and Pikachu comically collapsed, before righting themselves back up and looking at Nurse Joy in surprise.

"Why isn't she accepting challenges?! Is one of her Pokémon sick? Did her Gym run out of power? Does she need revival herbs?"

Nurse Joy eyed Ash in confusion for his seemingly random assortment of possibilities, but once again spoke in her tone.

"I said she wouldn't accept your challenge, not that she isn't accepting challenges. Erika doesn't accept challenges from boys at the moment."

"Pikapi?" 'Do you want to argue about the 'boy' part, or get right to the point?'

"What? Why not?!" Ash skipped over the part about being called a boy for the more important question at hand.

"Ever since she took over the Celadon Gym after the former leader was removed for using his Bug-Type Pokémon for breaking into people's homes for theft about five years ago," Misty shivered as the mention of Bug-types, and even Ash had to give pause to the imagery of Team Rocket bursting into his mother's home on the back of several Scolipede laughing before breaking into their motto, "Erika has had a lot of trouble with male challengers. She's well known as a major player in the Kanto LGBT movement: she was the one who got the marriage bill passed last year and is a major benefactor to several other political movements. However, that notoriety came with some nasty side-effects. If you ignore the sort of backwater arses who'd enjoy living in Johto far more than Kanto, a lot of male trainers tend to think more of what she and her trainees do at home than in the Gym when they battle. As such, she ended up winning a lot of her fights with her opponents not fully focused on the fight. She didn't like getting her win percentage that way."

"Why would they be interested in what Erika did at home?" Ash asked, Misty took a moment to stare at Ash as if he'd grown a second head while Nurse Joy just ignored his question and continued.

"However, things really came to a head following an old voyeur (A what?) convincing his grandson to challenge Erika as a distraction, which allowed him to discreetly set himself up a hiding place so he could spy on a wedding between two of Erika's female employees from her inherited position as the head of the largest department store chains in the world; the head of the Kalos branch and the head of product development if I recall correctly."

Apparently Erika found time in her schedule to run a Gym, play politics, and run a major corporation
that earned millions of dollars a day. A bit more impressive than the simple perfume store he recalled her running in the old timeline. Ash thought.

Nurse Joy still had yet to change her tone since they had first met, and it was now really starting to get kind of creepy. He recalled that some Nurse Joy had just….off….senses of humor, perhaps this one came from that branch of the family.

"They spotted the creep after he exclaimed loudly after the two woman kissed…let's just say the entire wedding was ruined after that. Not that I mean the marriage collapsed or anything, it's just the police had to be called, several therapists and lawyers ended up with steady employment in the aftermath and they had to wash the area the old man had been hiding in heavily. The man's in jail now, but in convincing his grandson to help him out the two of them screwed things up for everyone else."

"While Erika had a lot of personal good will worked up prior to the incident, and the fact the old man had been immediately Stun Spored the moment he had made himself known, that she herself did not suffer any damages outside of some lost goodwill she has more than likely recovered since, the League wasn't so lucky. As a faceless organization that set up the rules that allowed the two to enter the Gym in the first place, they soon encountered several lawsuits. Erika intervened of course before it could erupt into something as bad as say, cutting off Gyms or reducing venues for the next League competition or anything serious, but a compromise had to be reached. The options were to either let Erika limit entry into her Gym in a way that would soothe out their concerns, or limiting Gym access. As bad as the current situation is, I'm sure you can agree that the latter would be much worse."

Let's see: Ash would not have gotten advice from his friends early on, Brock would need a babysitter every time he got a Gym battle challenge, they'd have to call the police on the Trio every time Ash had a Gym battle because they stalked him inside the premise…yeah that would be pretty bad.

"So, the Gym here is not going to let Ash in?" Iris stated the obvious with a frown, before an idea seemed to twinkle into her eyes. One that made Ash feel somewhat nervous. "You know, we could probably just dress him up like a female. Most humans can pose as the other gender with the right clothing and changes to behavior….."

Ash blushed, remembering a few too many experiences he had with cross dressing, and how 'Ashley' did not work when he was probably a ten year old, so it would not work when he was a fifteen year old who had to shave regularly.

Misty just facepalmed at Iris's idea. Iris just tilted her head, unsure of what she could have possibly said that was wrong.

"That won't work." The Nurse still sounded as chipper as when they had started. "Erika has very good eyes for crossdressers. You weren't the first trainer to think of that, and you likely won't be the last. Of course that does beg the question of how she'd handle a trans-individual challenging her Gym…"

So Erika could tell crossdressers apart. Well that was just great, another Gym Leader with Brock-O'-Vision.

Now the mental image of Erika going full out Brock in front of Cynthia, Elesa, Lucy, and Jasmine wouldn't leave his mind. It was then that Ash found the answer to his earlier question.

_A later day found her and John not long after a victorious battle with a Gym Leader named Roxanne deep within a series of caves and mountains to the north, where the stones were unusually_
colored and the water a rare shade of blue.

They were taking a drink from this very water, which felt oddly cold and delicious.

"You know Ralts, these mountains are said to be famous for meteors." John had told her. She looked up from the water in confusion as he gestured upwards into the sky. "Meteors are large rocks that fall from space. Don't ask me where they come from.....are they bits of planets or were they just leftovers in the creation of the universe by Arceus, or chemicals, or whatever made it? I think there are people who dedicate their lives to figuring that out, but that isn't my calling."

His face took on a thoughtful look as he noted the mountains "I can't remember what the mountain range these falls are a part of. Dracoslayer.....Dracomalfoy.....Dracomorph....."

"Draconid," a voice not much older than John's explained, with a harsh edge to her tone.

"Oh yeah, Draconid...." John spoke in glad realization, before he looked around for the voice’s origin.

He looked left, then right, before hearing a nearby stone tumble down from above. John looked up, an action she mirrored, to see a human girl standing atop the rocks.

She had dark hair, cut short and with a hair clip on one side that looked the scale of a dragon. She wore dark cloths marked with a pair of red, upward facing crescents on her shirt and the side of her shorts. Her shoes were a pair of open-toed sandals of a gray color, and she had a gray coat tied to her shoulders.

The coat seemed to move a bit, not from the wind but as if something was moving underneath it.

She didn't look much older than John, but even that wasn't easy to tell.

"The Draconid Mountains are named for the Draconid people. The people who live in these mountains for generations, the guardians of the Flygon Desert and the stewards of the Altarian Plains. What are you doing here, Sootopolitan Trainer?" she questioned harshly, as if the site of the two of them was nauseating to her.

She moved closer to John, sensing hostility from this girl and seeking to protect John. She slowly called on her power to not draw the girl’s attention but still being ready to fight if she needed too. He merely responded with a confused tilt of the head.

"Sooto....Suudo.....The city with the white rocks? I've never been there, I'm from Rustboro City. If I'm not from there, does that mean we can be friends?" He gave the girl a friendly smile in hopes that it would help…it didn't.

Her eyes flashed with a seething hatred at the mention of Rustboro, though the hatred with mixed with a great deal of other emotions: Pain, shame, helplessness, fear, and sadness. Ralts took a step closer to John and placed a hand on his leg, just in case she needed to act at a moment's notice.

The girl face palmed. "Great, just great, you're an idiot too."

"Hey!" he shouted indignantly.

"Since you clearly know nothing about your own culture, allow me to educate you," she said, and held up a one finger. "One, all Hoenn cities are descended from the Sootopolitans. Two, that makes them and their descendants enemies of the Draconids. Three, you're a moron you dimwit!"
"But I'm not your enemy.....what did I ever do to you?!” John's eyes frantically shot to and from her, as more movement seemed to be occurring beneath her coat.

"Calm down Aster...." the girl whispered quietly into her coat so much so that she wasn't sure that John heard her, before returning her harsh glare at the both of them.

"You carry a Ralts, a Fairy-type whose kind were used to massacre my people! You carry the blood of Sootopolis, the ones who stole from us the Desert, the Fields, and the Mountain of Fire! You came from Rustboro....." She tensed her hands at the mention of Rustboro, before a massive blue dragon with red wings like the marks on her clothing appeared from the sky in a ferocious howl, accompanied by two others. "Die, trespasser!"

....

Thankfully, she knew Teleport and the two managed to avoid getting eaten by some angry dragons.

After capturing a Swablu they eventually made it to Fallarbor Town, where she accompanied John as he asked someone about what that whole thing had been about.

"Um, is that an intact meteorite?"

John patted the space rock affectionately. "Yep, found it in a crater in the middle of nowhere during my journey. Surprised no one else grabbed it before me."

Dr. Shepard was fixated on the rock. "How much do you want for it?"

John, taken aback, hummed thoughtfully for a few seconds. "Hmm, how about something to eat and thirteen Pokéblocks?"

Ralts blinked staring up at John. She couldn't have heard him properly, he wanted so little for something Dr Shepard clearly desired. Even she knew that if something fell from the sky and didn't break apart when it landed it had to be worth more than something to eat and some Pokéblocks.

"I'm willing to offer you three hundred thou-what?"

"Well, I'm kind of hungry, need some Pokéblock, and it's just a fancy rock, so it's a fair trade. Right?"

Dr. Shepard blinked. "Fair...trade...yes. Yes, that is a very fair trade. Um, I have a large pastrami sandwich in the back and I think I have some Pokéblocks around here somewhere. Would that do?"

John smiled. "Sounds great! Oh, do you have any information about the Draconids?"

"I happen to have an old history book about the Draconids around here somewhere. I just bought the latest edition so you free to have the old one." Dr. Shepard said as he was leaving the room to find get the sandwich and Pokéblocks.

"That'd be great, thanks." Ralts pulled on his shirt to get his attention. "Not now, I'm doing business." He gently stroked her head while they waited for Dr. Shepard to come back.

In hindsight, he would realize that the deal had in fact been somewhat....unfair. He promptly slapped himself and she was quite confused initially.

According to the detailed book the scientist had given us as he went off with his meteor, the Draconids used to control the entire Northwest of Hoenn, with Fallarbor and Lavaridge being very
recent settlements set up since they lost control of much of their lands. There had always been border disputes between Hoenn and the Draconids: Hoenn wanted control of the entire region while the Draconids felt threatened by growing cities like Rustboro and Mauville whose city lines, pollution, and supporting farmlands were starting to encroach on their lands.

During the Trainer-Ranger Wars and the sparse periods of peace between them, the Rangers took note of this and gave aide to the Draconids. It had originally just been humanitarian and developmental aide in a 'the Rangers are more moral' slap to the face of Hoenn and fellow T.A.T.O members. It consisted mostly of new crops like potatoes and pumpkins, advances in water sanitation, and advances in tapping into clean energy sources. However, it eventually led to some of the more militaristic groups of Hoenn to use it as a justification to attack the Draconids.

That war failed to take any land, but the resulting death tolls were extremely high to the Draconids, which led to the Draconids becoming more militarily aligned to the Rangers, and joined them during the last Trainer-Ranger wars.

Both sides ended up committing harsh deeds: the Draconids razed Mauville City and would have done to the same to Rustboro had reinforcements not arrived in time and had planned to drive all non-Draconids out of at least Western Hoenn and eventually off the main island entirely if the war lasted long enough, while the Hoenn forces drove the Draconids into the mountains after seizing most of their lands and imported massive amounts of Marill as Fairy-Type weapons of mass destruction against the Draconids Dragons and had engaged in Koffing bombing and introducing Grimer into several of their inhabited tunnels rendering them unusable and toxic.

Ever since the war tensions still remained however. While many parts of Hoenn, such as Lilycove and Slateport, now saw the war as needlessly harsh and sought some sort of means of restitution to the Draconids in hopes of ending the conflicts, other parts of Hoenn were less forgiving to them, particularly the parts they in the past razed to the ground, or attempted to raze to the ground.

Modern issues between Hoenn and the Draconids included Draconid-on-Fairy-Type hate crimes, Hoenn criminals committing crimes such as theft, vandalism, rape, and murder on Draconids, and the issue of how to handle inter-group crimes. For whenever a Draconid was taken to court for killing someone's pet Marill there were Draconid threats to bomb the courthouse, and whenever a Draconid's Salamence, Flygon, or Altaria abducted someone and flew them off with a written note explaining what this person had done to be taken and punished there were always calls to mobilize the military and 'finish the job'.

Upon reading this history John declared his desire to go and find the girl from earlier and apologize to her. She eventually talked him down as to why that was a horrible idea.

He seemed sad that they'd never be friends for several days afterward, although there would always be a sense of him being upset on the occasion that he'd be recalling their adventures.

After hearing that Erika was not accepting challenges, one might ask what our intrepid hero was up to now.

Did he and his merry band continue on, heading to face the formidable forces of Fuchsia?

Did he prepare the forces of friendship to fraternize with the female forker of figments?

To change her ways and show her that all men are not bad?

No…that wasn't what happened.
For you see the three had stepped out of the Pokémon Center, only for the massive rush of city people moving about caught him and sent the poor Pallet native on an unwanted guided tour of the city.

As to where he ended up in it….

**WELCOME TO GAME FREAK HEADQUARTER!**

Eying the cheerful looking sign in a local business park featuring a trio featuring a white and orange armored hero with a red crested helmet and a lightning bolt logo, a pink haired girl riding what appeared to be a giant drill, and a creature resembling a Donphan dressed like he was one of Lt. Surge’s old war buddies, Ash and Pikachu were officially lost.

"Pikachu," Ash noted. "Remind me never move to a city this big if I ever retire."

"Ha ha ha….retirement. You're a little young to be thinking of that, but if you want to know all about your social security plan I've been putting money into…." the Pokédex chuckled in his pocket.

"…..Um, not now….." Ash felt odd thinking about the Pokédex messing with his money. Dramatically turning, he pointed down the street and said confidently to Pikachu.

"Okay, the Pokémon Center is that way!"

"Pika….." 'If you get us lost again, you owe me ketchup.'

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**Lavaridge Pokémon Gym**

*The battlefield that stood outside of the reach of the town's famous hot springs was the next stop in John's trip.*

He stood at one end, her at his side as always. Confident for the battle ahead of them.

At the end stood an old looking man, with oddly poofy white hair and small, circular glasses.

"So, you’ve come all the way out to Lavaridge for your second Gym badge? I must say kid, that is somewhat unorthodox. Heh, what's life without variety?" The Gym Leader and former Elite Four member said with a chuckle.

"So tell me young one, what is it you want to achieve in fighting the Gym Leaders? I must admit I always find it curious to see what drives the young people of today, and how things change over time. I myself traveled the world from my home in Johto seeking power and challenges, but I later found myself seeking the arts. Poetry, paintings, expressions of one's feelings and passions beyond battle."

"I want to find friends." John told him honestly.

"Friendship? You travel the land alone, for friendship?" The Gym Leader expressed in confusion. John just gave the Gym Leader a lopsided smile and nodded in confirmation.

While the Gym Leader would never understand John meant, she did.

John was one of a small but (in recent times) growing amount of humans who possessed unique power. His ability allowed him to see the potential bonds that could form between himself and
another: of how strong a friendship or romantic relationship could be.

Him using this power was noticeable only when his eyes flashed orange-brown.

It was why he had wanted to go back to see that Draconid girl: though that was also proof of her own thoughts on the subject.

That friendship was something that one really could not 'measure' like one could weight or height. It might show him the people he could bond with so well that nothing could separate them, but friendship was not that or nothing.

He was missing that, and it sadly wasn't her place to try and convince him otherwise.

"Well, I've heard odder reasons, and I suppose a journey for friendship is better than a journey for riches, glory, or blood." Now holding up a Pokéball, he sent it into the field. "Let the battle begin! Go, Numel!"

"Nincada, come out my friend!"

The battle soon raged, the field becoming littered with holes from digs as several attacks were dodged and launched in seeming repeated monotony.

With a shout the stumpy orange-fire type shook the ground with a magnitude, shaking the earth below and blowing out the white insect that she had helped John capture long ago.

The insect steadied himself, recovering quite quickly.

"Huh.....allow me to offer a guess." The Gym Leader observed the recovering Nincada. "You've trained this Nincada of yours for a long time, probably with only that Ralts of yours with you during it?"

Yes, that was true. They had only just recently met two more friends since they left the Draconid Mountains.

At John's nod the Gym Leader smiled.

"I admire such dedication, but I can't let you win for that alone. Numel, Ember."

As the flames billowed forth from the Numel's mouth, John was quick to counter.

"Use Mud Slap!"

Slamming the ground with a forelimb, Nincada rose up a wall of earth that blocked the fired sparks of Ember.

"Now, use Secret Power!" Nincada sped forward with a glowing purple tackle, striking Numel right in the chest.

Numel collapsed to the ground, ending the round.

Returning the Pokémon, the old man nodded.

"Yes, I see. You have trained and bonded with your Pokémon well, though I must admit you do seem to be missing an original style of battling."

"That is not my priority."
"Perhaps, but neither is breathing yet we must all do that. Perhaps that is more something you can learn with time, but first you must best this Torkoal!"

The field was soon met by a new threat, a large black and tortoise who snorted out dark smoke from his nostrils.

"Nincada, use Dig....."

"I think you've left enough holes in my Gym young one, use Fire Spin!"

Moving far faster than a turtle should, a spinning vortex of flames flew out and trapped Nincada, preventing him from escaping.

"No, Nincada!"

"Ralts....." she whispered to herself, worried.

"Now, use Rapid Spin!"

A spinning black top of death soon burst through the flames and slammed into Nincada. The poor bug was sent flying out of the flames, and into John's arms.

Defeated.

Torkoal emerged from his shell even as Nincada was returned.

"So, who will be your next friend you will fight me with? Will it be your Ralts?"

At the Gym Leader's question she moved forward, ready to do so but John placed a gentle arm in front of her.

"No, I think I'll let one of my new friends fight this. Come my friend, Trapinch!"

The orange desert dwelling Pokémon appeared, a large gaping mouth opening up with a determined roar.

"A Trapinch? Interesting....you braved the desert. Not many do that...if you journeyed to such a place in the name of friendship I must admit that is remarkable."

It helped that John, uniquely as far as she knew, had a second power beyond his friendship sight: like a Psyduck John could negate the effects of weather around him. Unlike most, the sands did not blind him, nor did intense rain or intense sunlight strike him.

"But you don't get badges for friendship quests, Torkoal use Fire Spin!"

"Trapinch, Sand Tomb!"

As one tortoise stomped the ground, a massive bug mirrored the motion. From the mouth of Torkoal spiraled flames, and from the mighty maw of the Trapinch a spiral of sand flew.

The two attacks met in the center, and canceled each other out.

"Impressive....and since there is no way I am going to Rapid Spin anywhere near that mouth of Trapinch's....Torkoal use Flame Wheel!"

Igniting its entire body, Torkoal once more retracted, and began to roll towards Trapinch, who
instinctively opened his mouth wide.

Ralts flinched, already seeing the results that would result in.

"Use Bulldoze!" John called in response, resulting in the maw shutting and Trapinch instead stomping the ground with both front limbs, sending a wave of earth flying at the Torkoal.

The resulting collision sent Torkoal into the air, flailing desperately.

John flinched at the result, and Ralts knew just why. Trapinch was not exactly a ranged fighter. The only move he knew that would apply here would be.....

"Use Struggle Bug!"

Opening his large maw once more, a red burst of light flew right into Torkoal. However, such a bug-move would have little effect on the Torkoal, even as the mighty beast landed on the earth once more.

"I do prefer not to use and abuse this move, but you have left me no chance. Behold the move that makes people hesitant to challenge this Gym: Torkoal use Overheat!"

A bright ball of flame began to build inside of Torkoal's mouth, even as she rapidly pulled at John's pant leg.

"Ralts! Ralts!" Oh how she cursed divergent tongues! She had to warn him what a move like that could do!

"Overheat.....sounds dangerous: quickly use Bulldoze to stop it Trapinch!"

Roaring Trapinch hit the earth, sending another wave of earth flying at Torkoal.

"Too slow." The Gym Leader told them even as the attack began to fire right at them, however as the attack was fired the field itself began to shatter, breaking apart as if it lost all connectivity with itself.

"What!? My field!"

The Overheat was re-aimed, the fire shooting into the sky harmless.

The earth wave had missed as well, but now Torkoal lay at the bottom of the pit, shell first.

"Tor! Tor! Koal!"

Trapinch darted forward, looking down on the downed Torkoal from a somewhat stable ledge.

"This is it Trapinch, now use Feint Attack!"

The following move earned John a new badge, and also a word of advice from the old man.

Attacking a downed turtle is not considered friendly.

A boy, his Pikachu, and his snarky technological device found themselves in a dark alleyway, littered with detritus, dumpsters, and a single locked door.

"...What flavor...." Ash sighed, giving in to Pikachu's unspoken demand.
"Pi. 'Ketchup only has one flavor Ash, delicious.'

"I'm pretty sure there is more to ketchup than that buddy…"

Suddenly from the locked door, an explosion of noise rang out, a roaring crowd as loud as a tournament.

"….Warning: large underground gathering detected. I'd avoid it if I were you."

"Underground gathering huh….." Ash looked ponderous for a moment, before he kicked the door with all his might.

The door swung open harmlessly, apparently it was not locked as he had first thought.

"Pikapi? 'Ash, are you sure you want to be doing that. It could be something illegal, or worse. It could be some weird cult worshiping MissingNo or something?"

Ash shivered as the mention of that MissingNo, but entered through the door regardless, sound acting like a guide down into the dark depths of the underground.

"MissingNo cult, fight club, or trading card tournament I honestly don't care, I'm pretty sure they can give me directions back to the Pokémon Center regardless of what they are doing down there."

"You could just follow my directions, you know. I am a GPS."

"I did, we ended up here."

"….I blame the construction….and the recent update I got from the Alola Region. Will it make it up to you if I tell you about Rowlet?"

"I already know about Rufflett," Ash noted, even as the Pokédex seemed ready to explain that he was not talking about that bird.

**Dewford Gym**

*Surrounded by green wooden floors, the dirt battle field smelled vaguely of salt.*

Now Kirlia wondered why that was. Was it because of how close the sea was? No, that didn't feel right somehow. Something else was the cause of it.

"Dude! Do you know how long it's been since anyone's challenged me for their fifth badge. I mean really, that team of mine was starting to get totally bored!"

Also, the blue haired Gym Leader talked oddly. If he was a Pokémon, she'd suspect he'd be a Geodude.

"Well, I suppose you can thank that big storm last week completely grounded the ferries." John noted as the Gym Leader laughed.

"Yeah! That storm was totally radical, but I can see why there were no boats out. Insurance rates are horrible these days. Tell me, is Norman's wife still as hot as she was last time I saw her?"

As John blushed and refused to meet Brawly's eyes, she felt an odd sense of annoyance at that question.
"Yeah, that Norman's a lucky guy: a beautiful and lovely wife, and two great kids. Lucky and upstanding, you really should ask how Norman and Caroline met, it makes me cry every time."

"The dude makes me think about settling down one of these days but trying to get a date on this island is not easy if you don’t spend your day fishing with the fathers, I can’t date my students for all the reasons you can think of, and whenever I go back home to Saffron to see my Mom I can never find anyone who’d be willing to give this island a chance. Makes me worry sometimes I'm going to be alone like old Bruno….but you didn’t come to listen to me talk about my life, you came for a battle. Is a four on four fight good?"

At John's nod the Gym Leader grinned.

"Very well: it's time to see if you’re ready to earn the Gym Badge of Brawly! Come on out, Breloom!"

"Come out my friend, Shedinja!"

As the hollow living shell appeared to fight a green clad fighter with a large tail Brawly eyed the Shedinja in shock.

"Wait, isn't that the thing you can only hit with super-effective attacks?"

John nodded in affirmative, as Brawly looked glum.

"Bummer, that is not what I was hoping for dude."

"Sorry….I promised to use him in this Gym battle after I wasn't able to use him in the last fight."

She remembered that incident. John had felt bad after he scared a little boy with asthma with Shedinja and was told that he couldn't use him in Petalburg City limits by some strange creature called a Lawyer.

Under threat of a law suit. She still wasn't sure what that term meant.

"Ouch. Well I guess I get it, but I guess I have to just....wing it I guess. Breloom if your attacks won't hurt, just hit it!"

"Bre!"

Breloom charged right at Shedinja and hit Shedinja, only to pass right through it and stumble briefly before quickly recovering.

"Oh, dang it I thought that would work!" Brawly complained loudly.

"Bre....."

Or to translate: 'I could have told you that would not have worked, but you wouldn't have understood me.'

"Shedinja, Shadow Claw!" John called as black light grew out from the wings of Shedinja, before Shedinja pointed its head right at Breloom and charged at it.

"Roll with it!" Brawly called. Breloom nodded, before setting an unusual stance.

She wasn't sure what it was meant for, but she soon saw it as Breloom took the hit, but contorted in a way that made the attack only graze it instead of directly impact.
Shedinja spun out of control for a moment but re-righted itself, only for a purple hue to cover itself and fell to the ground.

Defeated.

"Wha?!” John stated in surprise.

"It's Effect Spore! See, when you spar with a Breloom, you can occasionally get a status condition from physical contact. I can’t tell you how many slip-ups in teaching this guy how to swim end up requiring a lifeguard…”

Breloom blushed at the comment, even as she got the mental image of a paralyzed Brawly sinking to the bottom of the ocean like a rock.

"…It was only after the twelfth time that I found out the union was getting on my case for it, and I discovered that lifeguards have one here. Well, that was that day, so who’s your next Pokémon?"

Returning Shedinja and thanking it, John threw his next Pokéball.

"Come out my friend, Swablu!"

As the blue bird with wings like clouds landed on the field, Brawly looked at the bird in shock.

"Dude, that bird's wings….I thought they were exaggerating. They really do look like clouds. I guess I see the appeal now."

Swablu fluffed herself up, practically strutting with the compliment.

"I take it you don't see that many Swablu," John observed as Brawly laughed.

"Not at all. I get Taillow, Swellow, Beautifly, Zubat, Golbat, that one Crobat last Tuesday, and more Wingull and Pelipper than I know what to do with, but never get any Swablu. This could be fun!"

"Bre!" Breloom snapped in response, causing Brawly to chuckle awkwardly.

"Oh wait, it's a Flying-Type isn't it. So that means it is rather super-effective against you. Don’t worry, just pretend it’s like a Zubat. A really fluffy, not blind Zubat."

Swablu looked offended at the comparison.

"Begin!"

"Let's get this started. Breloom, just because it's a Flying type doesn't mean much on defense when it's also part Normal type, fighting attacks will hurt it! Use Force Palm!"

"Bre!" With a glowing punch Breloom charged.

"Dodge, and use Disarming Voice!"

Swooping right over Breloom’s attack, Swablu opened her beak and let loose a sonic wave attack.

Breloom took the attack the same odd way it had taken Shadow Claw, though with clearly more effort.

"Oh, please don’t tell me it's related to one of those Fairy-type things. Does it evolve into that freaky Amorti-thing from Kalos?!” Brawly questioned out loud as John shook his head.
"Oh wait, come to think of it I think Winona has a giant blue bird with fluffy wings. Oh, good, so it isn't that thing. Dude, I was totally off on that one!"

"Bre...."

Kirlia noted Breloom's ire tone. She'd have to make sure that John did not watch those...Kalosian horror movies?

"Now use Headbutt!"

Breloom charged towards Swablu, head lowered and looking ready to impact the bird with spores. She could see John grit his teeth, resisting the urge to use Peck and risk a Shedinja repeat.

"Avoid with Double Team!" He eventually called. As the Headbutt hit, Swablu vanished into mist, revealing a doppelganger had been hit.

Breloom was then surrounded by the fluffy birds.

"Oh crud." Brawly mused.

"Use Disarming Voice!"

The Fairy Type attack hit in surround sound, striking Breloom at all angles. However....

"Bre!"

Breloom was not down yet.

"Use Mega Drain on all of them!"

With a yowl Breloom shot out green tendrils from the neck, dissipating all the copies. The real one, however....

"Disarming Voice!"

Struck Breloom from above, slamming the Grass-Fighting type into the ground, now defeated. Returning his Pokémon Brawly had a good chuckle.

"Not bad, not bad at all. Dude, you're pretty good. However, I'm not done yet: go Medicham!"

The thin Pokémon with pink all over was next, posing as it balanced on a single foot.

"Cham!"

Did it think that doing that made it look tough? She balanced on one leg all the time. Frankly she liked showing off the fact she really had legs now.

"Let's get this over with: use Disarming Voice!"

At John's command, Swablu let loose her song once more, the singing attack flying right at Medicham.
Medicham promptly bent over with incredible flexibility, avoiding the attack completely.

"….Hey, isn't that move supposed to always hit?!

"What can I say man, surfing defies the rules of the average man: also my Medicham can use Detect."

Looking at the Medicham, Kirlia did in fact see glowing eyes that proved that to be true.

"Now that you know my little trick: Medicham use Thunder Punch!"

"Medi!" With static covered fists Medicham bound right at Swablu, who looked rather shocked.

"Use Double Team!"

"Medicham, don't freak out, just feel the flow of it all!"

As the duplicates formed Medicham did not panic. Instead the fighting Pokémon attacked with an odd sense of purpose.

This was not flailing about as often was the case in the aftermath of a Double Team: this was a search.

The fists flew, taking out un-reactive double after un-reactive double, until one duplicate fluttered out of the way of the attack at the last moment.

"Got you!" Brawly declared as Medicham leapt at the last one.

"Mirror Move!" John called, even as Kirlia looked at him in shock.

A glowing yellow ball of electricity in front of her beak, Swablu collided with Medicham attack for attack.

Again Kirlia noticed a slight movement, meant to allow for the attack to impact the target less directly. Swablu herself seemed to slide on down the mirrored attack, not hitting it in full though not directly harmed either.

It was odd….

"Now use Zen Headbutt!"

"Quick use Pe…"

Before John could call the move Medicham slammed a glowing head right into Swablu, sending the little bird falling to the ground in defeat.

"Swablu!"

…. The battle continued on from there, with John having sent out Ninjask next.

Which led to….

"Machoke, use Dual Chop!"

"Ninjask, use X-Scissor!"
The two collided after a long series of clashes, leading both defeated.

As both were returned, it had come to the final round.

John turned to her, nodding. With a smile and a feeling of 'Finally', I bound to the field, ready to fight whatever this Brawly had left to throw out at them.

"Go, Hariyama!"

I was promptly met by a giant whose thighs were larger than my entire body, had hands big enough to completely wrap around my small frame, and a very, very evident difference in weight class between them.

Regardless of the difference though, I did not back down. I felt ready, willing, needing to fight this thing, and defeat it!

Or…maybe that was her Trace ability borrowing the Guts from this Hariyama and making her blood thirsty.

Who knew?

At least it wasn’t that other ability she heard this line had. Trace could be really nasty if you traced an ability like Thick Fat or Stench.

"Begin!"

"Use Confusion!"

John’s command was acknowledged, power surging through her. With glowing blue eyes, she lifted the great mass into the air, though in a flash of pain she dropped it right down.

"What!?" John exclaimed in shock.

"Oh yeah, that whole psychic ‘lift things into the air and smash them around’ thing. Yeah, I know all about that trick. I’ve taught all my Hariyama and Makuhita to control their centers of gravity and break the hold!"

"Hari!" The large fighting type triumphantly declared, slamming his belly. Even John knew exactly what that meant.

"Now, Force Palm!" Hariyama charged forward with a glowing palm, ready to slam her into the ground.

"Teleport!"

Just what she was thinking, and well-timed too. She vanished out of sight, just as the Force Palm shattered the ground.

"Now, use Magical Leaf!"

She reappeared behind the large fighting type, and began firing glowing green leaves into the back of Hariyama.

Like the others Hariyama angled his body in a way that seemed to soften the blows impact.

"Clever girl, or at least I am pretty sure that Kirlia is a girl. Hariyama, blow the leaves away with
Whirlwind, then go into Knock Off!"

Turning, Hariyama swept the air with his massive hands, blowing the Magical Leaf away, before leaping into the air with a dark glowing palm.

The palm was not pleasant to feel, even as the hit smashed into me and slammed her into the ground.

"Kirlia!" John yelled in concern, even as Hariyama hit the ground once more with tremor inducing force.

She could see the concern in his features quickly replaced with relief as he saw me get back up.

"Okay Hariyama, let's end this with Arm Thrust!"

"Counter with Charge Beam!"

Before Hariyama could get near enough to start pounding, I fired an electric beam right into him. The impact staggered the approach, and I felt my powers temporarily boost.

"Again!"

A second beam was blocked this time by Hariyama's large hands, but I felt the power boost again.

"And again!"

"Block with Whirlwind!"

With another hand wave, a wall of wind formed to block the attack, though she still felt a rush of power flowing through her.

"Look, as a Gym Leader let me tell you something: that isn't going to work a fourth time, so why don't you try something else."

"Okay, I will. Kirlia, use Confusion!"

Once more, her eyes glowed blue and she began to lift Hariyama into the air, where he struggled. Only this time, he didn't get free.

"What!?!" Brawly was surprised, to put it mildly.

"Charge Beam increases Kirlia's special attack, so this Confusion is a little tougher this time. Now let's end this!"

She couldn't agree more, and with that she slammed Hariyama into the ground with all her mental power.

And that was enough to win the day.

The underground was noisier than Roxie's Gym, and that was an accomplishment.

It was certainly filled with more people: all of them large, sweaty, and muscular.

The center of the underground chamber was a familiar looking ring, where a defeated Hitmonchan
laid on the ground, completely knocked out and looking rather bruised.

A Hitmonlee was cheering next to it, his rather muscular looking trainer standing on the far end of the arena, grinning like a lunatic.

A familiar looking man was on the end with Hitmonchan, crying even as he returned his Pokémon. Ash, not quite visible to the crowd at the moment, pursed his lips as he tried to recall exactly who this guy was.

Oh right, he was Anthony, the guy who trained Primeape (and with that Ash felt some depression hit). Now, what else about him was there to remember…..

"I'm sorry Hitmonchan, I'm sorry Rebecca. I thought I could win, I thought I could take home the pot and keep the two of us afloat while I find a job…..but I failed. I was too weak….I wasn't able to train Hitmonchan well enough…!" Ash could hear the man shout to himself, even from this distance. It sounded quite devastating.

Somehow Ash felt like it had gone somewhat differently the last time, and that the P1 was not underground like this the last time.

"And with that, our undefeated champion, THE GIANT, has beaten yet another challenger. The 300,000 jackpot is still up for grabs folks, but is anyone brave enough to fight THE GIANT? Is anyone, MAN ENOUGH?" an announcer shouted loudly, heard even above the roaring crowds.

"Ash, you are fifteen, you are not 'man enough', now let's go back the way…..stop moving rapidly!"

Ash ignored his Pokédex, even as he felt Pikachu jump off his shoulder and dash alongside him. Jumping over a few blocks, some chairs, and a passed out guy who smelled like alcohol Ash dashed forward to the stage.

"I'm brave enough!" Ash declared. "And when I win, the prize money will go to An….the guy you just beat!"

"Pikapika!" 'Yeah, we don't need that money….and it sort of sounds odd to say that we're just going to be giving the prize money away?'

"Well, well, I guess we've got ourselves a challenger, and one who isn't afraid to fight for no profit. Let me guess, you wanted to fight Erika…anyway here's the rules! You can use any Pokémon, but it needs to have hands and feet. Tails are allowed, but attacks aren't. It's a battle of wills, of strength and endurance. Choose your Pokémon!"

"Charmeleon!" Ash said with no hesitation, as his Fire-type appeared, roaring his own challenge in the unspoken language of ferocity.

Hitmonlee tensed, ready to begin the right.

"BEGIN!"

"Kick that overgrown lizard!"

"Catch it and spin it around, then send it flying!"
"Char!" 'What, no fire attacks to that thing's face….well okay. I guess I need to give that thing all the help it can get if I want this fight to be fair!'

Many battles had been fought since.

"Nosepass use Spark!" John had called during their sixth Gym match: the Pokémon he had caught after defeating Brawly charging forward in an electric tackle into the large blue fish.

Said fish took the hit as if it were nothing.

"What?!" John said in shock as the Gym Leader merely shook his head.

"Why, it appears you do not know that my Lanturn can possess the ability Volt Absorb. Unlike the Sealeo you had fought earlier, electric attacks are completely useless to it. Now Lanturn, use Scald!

The burning water attack struck Nosepass for the first knockout of that match. Vibrava would take over the match after that and defeated it with Dragon Breath and Earthquake, before she stepped in to defeat the Kingdra that anchored the team after Vibrava was defeated.

Ninjask and Shedinja won the match that followed: Shedinja defending and supporting with Wonder Guard while Ninjask battled offensively.

Then came the final Gym battle….

"Protopass, use Discharge!"

The battle was a harsh one: John started out strong with Propopass's Discharge, Stone Edge, and Stealth Rock: which managed to defeat the Gym Leader's Swellow and Pelipper.

It had later been defeated by her Tropius's Solar Beam, said Tropius in turn being bested by Ninjask.

Ninjask was then defeated by Skarmory, who…

"Altaria, use Flamethrower!"

"Hurry, dodge and use Brave…” Skarmory wasn't fast enough and got scorched.

Falling to the earth burned, Skarmory was returned by the Gym Leader who was now in a corner.

Well, not literally, but she had only one Pokémon left to use.

The woman, dressed in a gray set of odd clothing reached for a Pokéball and held it into the blowing wind.

"I rarely get to fight trainers preparing for the Pokémon League. I must say, this is very unusual and oddly enjoyable. However, the test is not yet done. No, I have one more challenge blowing your way: go Altaria!"

Bursting out of her final Pokéball was an Altaria of her own, and one much larger than John's.

"Dragon Pulse!" both John and the Gym Leader, Winona, shouted as both fired large blue blasts at one another.

The two attacks collided, and Winona's broke through.
"Go, Flygon!"

"Counter it with Dragon Claw!"

Glowing claws and glowing wings battered one another as the two fliers fought.

Would she even need to fight in this fight today?

Altaria took a hit from a Dragon Claw, and as the bird began to fall to the ground she guessed she would not be battling today.

"Now Altaria, Ice Beam!"

"Wha!?"

Altaria stabilized beneath Flygon, with such ease that it was definitely planned, and fired the blue beam attack right below Flygon.

The attack hit perfectly, and Flygon was sent falling, most definitely without a plan.

Flygon was returned before it actually hit the ground, clearly beaten. John looked at his Pokéball sadly as he did so, clearly feeling bad for the trick.

"In air battles, you can't just look in front of you. In the air, you have to use all 360 degrees of vision." Winona explained as Altaria fluttered next to her. "Now, who is your last Pokémon?"

John turned to her and nodded, which she returned and teleported down to ground level and pointing one of her now long, green hands his way.

"Gardevoir," Was what humans now heard when she spoke, and fired the pink ball Moonblast right at Altaria.

Altaria responded with another Moonblast. The attacks met mid-air, before hers broke through and struck.

Altaria didn't lose much altitude from the blast, however.

"Not bad. Your Gardevoir is top notch." Winona observed, before she tapped the side of her winged cap. "However, you still have one more hurdle to pass if you want to win this battle."

From the side of her winged cap burst out streams of light, which flew out towards Altaria. The light in particular seemed to focus around a part of the wing, which unfurled to reveal a stone of some sorts.

Altaria began to glow, as if evolving. Again.

The light faded, revealing an even fluffier, paler blue Altaria.
"You seem surprised. Tell me, is this the first time you've seen a mega-evolved Pokémon? If so, I must sadly inform you that this is the normal you must face. At a League level, a trainer who cannot fight Mega Evolution will not get far. Now, show me if you're ready to fight at a Mega level. Altaria, use Hyper Voice!"

As Altaria began to suck in air, John wasn't far behind.

"Be ready for anything Gardevoir! Use Protect!"

And so, the hardest battle they had ever fought began.

"Hitmonlee is The Kicking Pokémon. It specializes in kicking things until they stop moving. You should not have won that fight."

"But I did!" Ash shouted in triumph, even as Anthony wept at his feet.

"Oh thank you, thank you, thank you! My daughter and I are in your debt kind stranger! If there is anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate to ask."

"Sure. In fact, I do have a favor to ask."

"Anything! Well, maybe not my daughter's hand in marriage but…."

Ash briefly blushed at the idea, but knew exactly what to ask.

"Can you give me directions to the Pokémon Center? I kind of got lost and ended up here by mistake."

"Oh….that's all you want?" Anthony sounded surprised, but he quickly regained control of himself. "Oh, that's the trick isn't it? All the construction and all…if you take the underground passages for a bit you can probably bypass it and come up near the Game Corner. That's only a few blocks away from the Pokémon Center."

"Thanks!"

"Don't mention it….just be careful down here. You can run into some weird stuff….like hobos, and gangs, and just today I found these."

Anthony reached into his pocket and pulled out a pair of familiar looking stones, the same kind of stone that Pikachu wore on his holder.

"Not sure what they are, but you can have them! I've never seen a stone like these before, and maybe you can make use of them. Bye!"

As Anthony walked off, Ash noted the Eviolite in hand.

"So, shall I send another message to Forge Smith?" Dexter inquired.

"….Well, that was unpleasant."

Ash was not the only one to be swept off by the city crowds. Misty and Iris were similarly blasted away by the endless sea of bodies.

Misty's dry unamused tone was contrasted by Iris, who looked like she had spun around a few
hundred times and in dire need of getting personal space again.

"Too many people...." she muttered to herself in a daze. "Need, space."

Able to tell that Iris was still trying to regain her bearings after being swept along, Misty took stock of where the two had ended up.

A grassy field, littered with chalk-drawn battlefields: clearly this was a local park where local trainers were able to practice battle in preparation for facing Erika, in theory anyway.

However despite the fact that few could fight said Erika these days, it was surprisingly busy.

"Come one, come all..." A voice that Misty had heard many times, but had never met, rang out through the air with a tone of calmness tinged with unmistakable strength.

Lorelei.

Standing in the field with all her wonderful glory, said Ice Master (and in Misty's mind honorary Water Master) continued her call, standing next to a seated blue haired woman with a fancy parasol over her and what Misty believed to be a Leafeon on her lap.

Said woman seemed to fall asleep without any warning, though the Leafeon seemed to react to this with a practiced movement of its tail, which rubbed up against her nose like a feather. Sneezing, the woman woke back up, seemingly a little embarrassed about what just happened.

"...When I decide to throw an impromptu tag tournament in a city park, I make sure to throw an improve tag tournament in a city park. We need two more people, one more team. If you win, you'll get any reasonable favor from me, and I do mean reasonable. Please don't be like that guy from last time who asked me to help him fix his motorcycle. I do dabble, but I'm no mechanic after all."

Tag tournament...Lorelei...in the open.....

"Iris," Misty said in a 'no argument' type tone that even occasionally made Psyduck behave. Said wild girl looked at her, curious about her plan. "We're going to enter that tournament."

"What?" Iris asked, sounding less like she didn't want to enter it, but more like she wasn't sure why Misty was insisting on it.

"We have no idea where Ash is, and frankly neither of us want to go into the city traffic again." Irish shivered like she just got a load of ice cubes shoved down her shorts (Misty knew what that was like). "Ash should find his way to wherever battles are going on, and if the Gym isn't open then this tournament is our best shot."

Iris nodded, getting the gist of it.

....

With Lorelei watching and her guest currently sipping a cup of coffee, the battles had begun.

"Ha ha! We are the invincible Pokémon Brothers!" Two blue dressed teenagers laughed at them, posing somewhat ridiculously. "I am Kim!"

"I am Kail!"

"Go Hitmonchan!"
"Go Hitmonlee!"

The two Fighting-types appeared on the field, posing similarly ridiculously.

Not doing anything akin to a stupid pose with Iris, Misty sent out her own Pokémon.

"Go Poliwrath!"

"Go Excadrill!"

The brothers didn't seem all that surprised to see a Poliwrath, but when they saw Excadrill they just stared.

"Um…what is that?" the one called Kail asked.

"An Excadrill?" Iris pointed out bluntly.

"Yeah…what's an Excadrill?"

Iris merely pointed at her Pokémon. A few of the spectators chuckled as Kail simply stared.

Misty could have sworn she spotted Lorelei and her guest watching them. She felt her heart flutter a bit at the idea of her childhood idol watching her.

"Okay, I have no idea what an Excadrill is supposed to be, but it doesn't look like a ghost! Hitmonlee Rolling Kick!"

"Hitmonchan use Comet Punch!"

Both fighting types came in, foot and fist ready to strike.

"Counter with Dynamic Punch Poliwrath!"

"Excadrill use Metal Claw!"

Poliwrath's fist collided with Hitmonlee's foot, as Metal Claws met Hitmonchan's punches.

Both Fighting-types were thrown back with surprising ease, defeated.

"WHA!?"

"But how!?"

"….Apparently you are not the 'Invincible Pokémon Brothers'," Misty snarked out loud.

…

A round after that passed with little fanfare: Staryu and Emolga defeating a duo with a Diglett and a Doduo.

However they were now at the final fight, with a duo of girls: one green-haired and the other blue-haired, who looked a bit more intimidating than the others had been.

"You two….weren't you in that Battle Dome tournament?" the green-haired one observed. Misty noted her voice was unusually deep-sounding for a girl.

"Yeah, we were," Misty confirmed.
"Wish I had been there….regardless the two of us were too busy training to beat her." The green haired girl pointed to the Leafeon girl, who was starting to doze off again even with a freshly drained cup of coffee near her. Said Leafeon woke her up again the same way as before though.

"Why?" Iris asked, sounding curious.

"That's Erika, the Gym Leader here. Assunta and I barely managed to beat her for our badges the other day. You'd think a Venonoth and Dodrio would be enough to sweep a Grass-trainer, but we were wrong."

"She's the Gym Leader…." Misty looked at the girl sitting next to her idol in surprise. From the corner of her eye she spotted Iris also looking at her, but with a more…..calculative gaze. Misty filed that away for later, hoping Iris wasn't going to do anything embarrassing.

"Enough stalling though: go Clefable!"

"Go Rhyhorn!"

The Rock-type and the evolved form of Clefairy appeared on the field without even a witty comment from the Pokédex.

…..Did she really miss that thing?

She noticed Iris flinch a bit at the sight of the Clefairy, but she quickly steeled herself.

"I'll handle the Clefable," Misty told her as she sent out her own fighter. "Go….

Her bag rustled, as another Pokémon popped out.

"Psy!' Ta da!" The duck appeared, posing dramatically.

Misty just stared at Psyduck, horrified beyond words.

Why, did Psyduck just do that?

And right in front of Lorelei!

If she had looked up, she'd have spotted the look of amusement that adorned her idol's face.

"Go Axew!"

As Iris let out her dragon/brother out, Misty idly wondered what she was planning. There was, after all, a big, scary fairy out there.

Axew himself looked rather shocked about being out, but Iris looked confident.

"You and I put a lot of training in after last time Axew….time to show for it."

"Ax!" Axew sounded less than thrilled.

"Thunderbolt!" Clefable's trainer, the green-haired Melissa called as sparks began to form between Clefable's hands.

"Use Water Gun!" Misty called in response, hoping to hit it before it fired it.
Psyduck promptly began spraying the water attack, sending it right at Clefable.

"Block it with Rock Blast!" Assunta responded, as Rhyhorn's horn began to glow white. Several white rocks promptly fired from said horn, blocking Water Gun completely.

"Psy…” 'Well, that's all for me.”

The Thunderbolt fired, right at Psyduck.

"Use Dragon Claw!"

"Axew!"

The small dragon leapt into the Thunderbolt's path, glowing claws ready in response.

The claws met the Thunderbolt, and sliced it apart.

"Hmmm…..not bad. Rhyhorn, use Drill Run!"

"Clefable, use Moonblast!"

As Rhyhorn charged with an oddly streamlined form, Clefable began to form a glowing pink energy attack.

"Axew, you know what to do!"

"Ax!"

Axew charged forward towards Rhyhorn, claws still armed for Dragon Claw.

As the Drill Run got near, Axew ducked under the attack, and struck from below.

That sent Rhyhorn off the attack, and off-course.

"Rhyhorn!"

Moonblast, however, was now ready.

"Fire!"

The attack was sent right at Axew, even as Rhyhorn flew at Psyduck like an out of control, airborne car.

"Psyduck, Water Gun!"

"Axew, Dig!"

Axew could use Dig?

As Axew burrowed into the ground to avoid the attack, Psyduck hit the Rock and Ground-type with the water blast.

Said Rhyhorn collapsed defeated from the super effective hit.

"No, Rhyhorn!"

Axew then popped up under Clefable, sending the Fairy-type into the air.
"Clefable!"

"Now, use Slash!"

The cutting attack, the enhanced Scratch, struck the Fairy-type.

Clefable promptly collapsed, defeated.

"And we have our winners!" Lorelei declared, suddenly appearing behind them.

Misty and Iris jumped in surprise, Iris landing in a bit more of a 'react and prepare to claw someone in the face' way.

Lorelei was smiling at the two of them, Erika at her side with her Leafeon.

"You both were excellent. In fact, you four were excellent." Erika extended a smile with Assunta and Melissa, who were returning their defeated Pokémon. "Pity that I too caught the tournament at the Battle Dome and are thus aware you won't be challenging me. I always do like to see aspiring female trainers: there just aren't enough of us."

For some reason Misty could have sworn Melissa looked surprised to be included, but she put that away as 'none of her business'.

"Now then, for your reward…" Misty opened her mouth, but before she realized she had no idea what to ask for Lorelei took her arms and pulled them out, before dropping something blue in them.

"Wooper!"

"Here's a Wooper. You're a Water Pokémon trainer right? Well, I hope this little guy helps you."

Misty's mind raced, trying to comprehend that Lorelei just gave her, out of the blue, a Wooper of all things.

"Duck." 'Giving someone a Wooper….that sounds like a euphemism.‘

"Now…." Lorelei turned her gaze to Iris, and Misty noted, give Iris a good view of her sizeable womanly features. "What would you want?"

"You said you can do anything, correct?" Iris began, even as Misty started to feel a sense of dread come along.

"I can't fix a bike or fly a plane, but other than that I certainly am talented," Lorelei noted. "Heads up though; I'm seeing someone right now."

That didn't seem to faze Iris though, clearly suggesting that 'spending a pleasurable evening together' was not on her list.

Though she could have sworn she heard someone nearby curse the heavens after Lorelei confirmed she was taken.

"My friend Ash. He is challenging Gyms for the League."

"Oh yes, he was runner-up if I recall," Erika noted. "He certainly showed promise. I'm sure that he'll easily win in Fuchsia, Cinnabar, even Viridian. He won't get much challenge from the others though…."
"He came here to challenge a Gym though. Lorelei, my favor is I want you to let Ash battle her." Iris stated, as she and Axew pointed at a flummoxed Erika.

The entire park was suddenly silent.

'Did you really just….' Misty thought while being partly mortified, and oddly impressed. Iris really did want to help Ash.

'Meanwhile, all you got was a Wooper,' a voice inside her head admonished. Misty promptly reminded her troublesome subconscious that she had been given that Wooper before even being able to say something otherwise.

"Oh, is that all." Lorelei suddenly spoke in a chipper tone. "Sure, I can arrange that for you."

"What!?" Erika questioned Lorelei in shock. Lorelei, smirking, just grabbed Erika and pulled her out of sight for a moment.

"….Dude, is Erika about to be bribed?"

"But Lorelei said she's seeing someone….."

"Maybe she's cashing in a favor."

....

"Will you do it for this?" Lorelei showed the Gym Leader a calendar, the contents of which Erika could plainly see, and blushed even as the Elite Four member flipped through the pages. "You were busy that week, so you didn't hear about the fact that a couple of us got together and made a couple of these rather lovely swimsuit shots for Goodshow while he was recovering in the hospital from that horrible crash he had after the last Lily of the Valley. I'm Miss January by the way: Drasna is Miss February, Glacia is Miss March, Diantha's Miss April, Elesa is Miss May, Clair's Miss June, Fantina's Miss July, Skyla's Miss August, Valerie is Miss September, Gardenia is Miss October, Winona is Miss November, and if you turn to December you'll see this wonderful centerfold of Miss December: the one and only Cynthia."

Erika's blush got worse and worse as the calendar was shown off more and more.

"There are only three of these in existence: Goodshow's got the first, Diantha has the second one, and I just so happen to have the third one. Now, I admit I was always thinking about keeping this around to remind myself I was once as attractive as I am today, but that girl asked with such determination if I could help her friend I just can't say no. So, will you battle the boy for this calendar? After all, I think we both know that the chances of you still being selective of your challengers after the hearing is slim, so might as well start with a boy who seems to have a pair of aspiring lady friends. I'm sure regardless of what sort of teenage dynamic they have, he'll behave better than a creepy old man with too much time on, and in, his hands."

....

Erika and Lorelei returned ten minutes later: Erika holding something under her arm that hadn't been there previously.

"….very well. Ash Ketchum did seem to be well behaved young trainer. Have him arrive at the Gym tomorrow at ten. I suppose I will have to see if male trainers can behave themselves….now if you excuse me I have….business to attend to."
Erika and Leafeon promptly left, even as Lorelei grinned.

"Well, there you go. Hope your friend wins tomorrow. Have a good day."

As Lorelei walked off, Misty watched her idol leave with some unease.

Iris had just solved Ash's problem, all by herself and with her own initiative.

Why did that still make her feel…..inadequate?

Psyduck looked at her with a visible frowned, while Wooper cheered obliviously.

"….Man, I'm lost."

"Pikapi…." 'Yes, we're lost. It feels like Johto, just with less trees and more darkness and Zubat attacks.'

Ash rubbed his head, cringing at he felt some remaining Zubat saliva soaking his hat and hair.

"I am having trouble connecting to the wireless network. I feel…isolated. Alone. Is this what it feels like to be organic, singular and separate from everything? It's maddening, I can see now why you are the way you are."

Shaking his head, Ash took the device out and held it at eye level. "A lack of internet connection didn't make me who I am. That's just life."

"Life sucks then."

"Life is wonderful, it's the best thing there is. Never think otherwise."

"Don't try and sound like Professor Oak," the Pokédex snarked. "You lack the voice tone and wealth of wisdom (for an organic life form) to do so…..WIRELESS!"

The Pokédex suddenly shouted the last one, sounding more like someone who had been cut off from something addictive for a while, then suddenly saw a mountain of it before them.

"Take me, take me, I must reconnect! Take me to the connection!"

"….And what: just stand there and not move?" Ash snarked.

"If possible."

Ash and Pikachu exchanged a look, before Ash put the device away again.

"Yeah…..let's just get out of here, then you can have all the network connections you want." Ash turned around, ready to go back the way he came and at least get fresh air…..

'John?'

A voice rang in his ears, causing him to freeze up.

"Pikapi?" 'Ash?'

"Pikachu." Ash said, now looking around to see if he saw anything out of the ordinary other than underground mosses and graffiti, "Did you hear that?"
"Pika...." 'No....'

"Weird....because I swore I heard something...."

The sound of a loud crash, as if someone had just dropped something heavy, rang out in the distance.

"Pi!" 'Well I heard that.' With unspoken agreement, both trainer and partner ran in the direction of the loud crash.

....

"Hey you, what on earth are you doing...."

A suspicious looking guard was quickly quick attacked out of the way.

....

Bursting through the door, Ash and Pikachu tensed as they saw what was within, before preparing to counter the new, very likely fight they'd soon be in.

Pikachu's cheek sparked, while Ash reached for his Pokéballs.

The room around them was filled with several cages. Each cage was filled with half a dozen black insect Pokémon, all looking miserable.

Crates dotted the room, each filled with a variety of items. Pokéballs, gems, some sort of green stuff Ash wasn't quite sure the origin of.

In the back of the room was a clear plastic tube, in which lied six Pokéballs.

Between him, the six Pokéballs, and the Scatterbug however, existed a couch. A red couch, with fine lacing. And on this couch, a man sat hunched over.

His hair was pale green, with brown eyes similar in color to Ash's. He was dressed in a dark suit, and his skin looked like he had spent a long time living in somewhere hot, perhaps a desert.

He looked up at Ash, and scowled.

"So, this is the intruder who broke into my hideout the guard told me about. How annoying, you're just a kid. I was hoping for something at least a little more impressive."

'John? Is that really you?' a voice asked in Ash's head, sounding female and surprised, as if she had just seen someone whom she'd thought would never return, return. The voice was laced with a great emotion to it, bursting with imminent joy and relief.

Ash just shook his head, not knowing anyone named John. Also, where did the voice just come from?

The man continued to scowl at Ash as he stood up from his seat. "Hearing voices I presume? Well, I suppose that's what you risk with those high level Psychic-types. I got six Pokéballs from a decently placing Hoenn trainer here, and he has one of those things. It and the rest of them might even fetch me more than these Scatterbug if I find the right buyer."

Scatterbug, so that was their names. Good to know. But what was a.....

"Scatterbug, the Scatter dust Pokémon. Scatterbug are native to the Kalos Region, and evolve
into Spewpa then Vivillon. Scatterbug are comparatively rare compared to their fellow insects in other regions, but that is all relative in the fact that being rarer than a Caterpie is still quite common," the Pokédex spoke up as the man noted his talking pocket.

"A Pokédex. Well, well, perhaps you aren't just a nosy twerp. You're a nosy twerp who has something worth as much as half of these damn bugs here. For you see, I'm the infamous black market dealer, Felgrand, and I shall turn you into my profit!"

Ash and Pikachu just stared at the now identified Felgrand in confusion. Felgrand? Who named their kid Felgrand?

And what was with that corny line about turning him into profit?

The man seemed to notice the stares, and scowled further. "I'm from Orre, we have names like that in Orre! I mean really, to me you all have strange names. Brock, Koga, Agatha, those names are utterly bizarre! But enough on nomenclature. I'm one of the infamous Seven Brothers, or Six Brothers and the goody two-shoes. I trade in all manners of goods; stolen Pokéballs, rare Pokémon, even drugs and illegal minerals! I think I'll add Pokédexes to my supplies today."

"You'll have to pry me from the boy's cold, dead hands!" the Dex stated as Ash looked at it in a 'why' sort of way, before pointing his Pokéball right back at Felgrand.

"I don't plan on dying at all, so you're not going to take my Pokédex. I also won't let you take these Pokémon either!"

"I already did take them." Felgrand pointed out as Ash corrected himself.

"Even so, I won't let you sell them like some pirated DVD or something!"

"Pikapi." 'Ash, that was a lame boast,' Pikachu deadpanned, though outwardly he retained an 'I will fry the evil Felgrand' look to him.

'I would have to agree Not John' the voice spoke up again. 'That boast was quite pathetic. However, I would appreciate being freed.'

"Hem hem." Felgrand cleared his throat. "You don't know anything do you? Do you know how much money I made pirating blockbusters a few years back? I still curse Netflix for ruining that for me, but never mind that! As long as there is darkness in man's souls, a desire to obtain things denied and for cheap, Felgrand is a name that will never be out of work!" Felgrand promptly pulled a Great Ball out and threw it right at Ash. "Now, be buried!"

Sensing something incoming Ash and Pikachu burst as far out of the way of the Great Ball as possible. This was warranted when the ball exploded into an Onix, which crushed the space where Ash and Pikachu had been moments before.

"Pika!" 'He just tried to crush us with an Onix!'

Yes, yes he did. As the Onix began to rise up and look at Ash like something to be crush, Ash was quick to act.

'Pikachu, break the Scatterbug out and get those Pokéballs! I'll deal with the Onix!' Ash communicated mentally as he turned to the Onix's trainer for a nice bit of distraction. "Is that all? I'll be freeing all of these Pokémon, after I deal with you!"

"Oh really?" Felgrand questioned from his couch, having sat back down after throwing the ball
"And what could you possibly have that could stop my Onix from stopping you?"

Felgrand got his answer when Ash threw out his Pokéball, releasing a blue turtle who knew exactly what to do when an Onix was around.

The Water Gun attack hit Onix square in the face, causing the great beast to be pushed back and groan loudly.

"Hey! No fair!" Felgrand complained "No using water on my Onix! Dragon Breath!"

As the great rock snake began charging up the attack, the brief thought of why Onix could even use that move in the first place crossed Ash's mind. But he could figure that out later.

"You tried to crush me with an Onix, you don't get to say I'm cheating. Dodge and use Water Gun again!"

"Squirtle! 'Got it'"

As the hazy wind attack was avoided and another water attack hit Onix right on the rest, Felgrand continued to complain.

"This isn't a Gym battle kid, it's a fight! There are no rules, Slam Onix!"

"Well, if there aren't any rules nothing says I can't use water! Now Brine!"

The salty water attack struck Onix in the tail just as it attempted to swipe, causing the great beast to collapse.

"What!" Felgrand demanded as he returned his Onix, furious. "How did you defeat my Onix so quickly?!"

"Well, it's weak against Water as both a Rock-type and a Ground-type, so it's really weak against…." Ash explained, before Felgrand cut him off.

"Well then, taste something that isn't weak to Water!"

Another Great Ball was sent flying right at them, before bursting forth to reveal a large, brown Pokémon.

"Kanga!" With a glowing fist, the Kangaskhan struck Squirtle right in the chest.

Squirtle was sent flying into the air, though with a flip he managed to right himself and land on his feet.

"Squirtle Squir…tle?" 'Going to take more than that to beat…..wait, is that Kangaskhan missing something?'

Squirtle sounded confused about something, and now that Ash looked at the Normal-type, he couldn't help but feel something was off as well.

Something….slight.

"Kangaskhan, the Parent Pokémon. Kangaskhan are often depicted in media as always having young in the pouch, however that is not true. Such as in this Kangaskhan, if the Kangaskhan is not given the opportunity it will not be able to breed, and thus will not have a
The Kangaskhan looked rather miffed at having that pointed out, and responded with another glowing fist.

However before the fist could hit, white fibers shot out from all sides and restrained the fist.

Felgrand turned in shock, having finally noticed the many broken cages, and the Scatterbugs that were now free to use String Shot as they desired.

And they desired to do so against the Kangaskhan attacking their savior, and as more were freed, several shots began to fire at their captor.

"Rhyhorn, blow this crap away!" He threw out a final Great Ball, releasing another dual type Pokémon, who promptly released a burst of grainy wind that battled away, before the beast began to prepare to charge at the Scatterbug.

"Squirtle!" Ash quickly called, and without anything more needing to be said Squirtle leapt over to fight off the Rhyhorn, even as Pikachu began to break the six Pokéballs out.

That of course left him to deal with the Kangaskhan, who was trying to punch him again.

Ash caught the punch with his own two hands.

The Kangaskhan gaped at him in surprise, likely wondering how on earth a human could do that. Felgrand himself hadn't noticed this, as he was too busy failing to beat Squirtle with his Rhyhorn.

Ash pushed the Kangaskhan back, causing the currently child-less mothering Pokémon to balance awkwardly on one foot. However she quickly managed to right itself, before charging at him head first.

Ash took the Headbutt head on, glowing orange as he made use of the very move that Misty had first seen back at the start.

Counter.

Kangaskhan was knocked back, falling to the ground.

Felgrand heard the thump, and turned to look at Ash in shock, his eyes quickly squinting in fury.

"What in the….what the hell did you do to my Kangaskhan? Your Pikachu and Squirtle are ruining me over here! Oh….I see. You are one of them, aren't you? A Bloodliner!"

He looked at Ash as one looked at something that was both disgusting, and dangerous.

"Well, isn't that just great: freaks are here too. And a male freak at that…I've only seen one other male of your kind boy: mostly it's a woman thing. Tell me, do you plan on taking over the world too?"

"No," Ash stated simply, but firmly.

"No? Well, we'll see how long that lasts." Tapping his belt three red lights shot out returning his defeated Pokémon, before he hit it again and releasing a smoke cloud.

Squirtle blasted the smoke away with a Water Gun Counter Shield, but when it cleared only the freed Scatterbug and the six Pokéballs remained.
Bursting down the hallway and into the locked room with a slam before stopping and breathing hard, Felgrand clenched his fists in frustration.

That damn kid beat him!

How did any damn kid get that strong?! That Squirtle was stronger than any Squirtle should have any right to be.

No matter…this wasn't the first time Felgrand ever faced trouble. He had survived prison, in Orre, he could recover from this disaster.

Even if he had to start small…..like after his first time dealing with a Bloodliner.

At least this boy didn't look like he was constantly thinking of ways to murder the people around him, though with them it was hard to tell.

"Wobb…" A cage currently playing host to a blue blob creature moaned as Felgrand turned to it.

"Well, you're a useless and pathetic thing, but you have to be worth at least two cents, right? I started from the bottom once, and then a second time after that, and I'll do so again!"

"Ya!"

"Ya, right….wait." Felgrand looked around the room, trying to figure out who had just spoken.
"Who said that!?"

"Ya ya!"

Spinning on his heels Felgrand turned to the door, and froze as he saw it wide open.

A Yamask was floating in front of him, the Ghost having likely opened the door for….

"Prepare for Trouble, you have some nice stuff, for us I'm sure it is meant!"

"Make it double, though I'm not sure if the boss deals in hemp!"

"Now, you're coming with us. I doubt ya have a permit from the boss ta be operating here."

Oh shit.

……

Twenty Scatterbug were now at Ash's feet, with Ash kneeling to look at them somewhat eye to eye as he asked a rather relevant question.

"So….what do I do with you?"

"Scatterbug are not native to Kanto. Assuming they don't starve to death or become a plague, they will probably be eaten by ravenous Pidgey swarms." The Pokédex offered up a few bits.

"Pika…." 'So, just chucking them out into the local park is a no go….I wonder…. ' Pikachu shook his head, before darting off and returning with a Pokéball from one of Felgrand's crates.

"Um…..I am pretty sure that is either stealing, or altering a crime scene. Both of which I am pretty
"Ash, do you have faith in your ability to lead the police back here? I can overwrite the Pokéballs from their blank state to being yours, just take them and leave the illegal stuff to rot away," the Pokédex noted bluntly. "Taking things left behind by people is a time honored trainer tradition."

Ash, a look of concern on his face as he stuck his hand into the Pokéball crate and picked one out, had one more thing to say before he began capturing the Scatterbug.

"Are you completely sure this won't get me arrested?"

"I have extensive legal data. You have precedent on your side."

The Scatterbug promptly made some chirping sounds, which caused Pikachu's ears to perk up, and in response translate for Ash.

"Pika. "The Scatterbug are okay with it. They don't want to be captured like this again, though they do have a condition. They don't want to fight."

One of the Scatterbug began to chirp loudly, at which point Pikachu corrected himself.

"Chu. "Scratch that, most of them don't want to fight."

"Of course. You don't have to do anything for me you don't want to do," Ash promised as he tapped the first Scatterbug on the head with a Pokéball.

The Scatterbug gave a thankful chirp as it was energized.

Ash repeated this pattern, sans questioning legality of it all, nineteen times. As the Pokéballs all teleported away Ash turned to the six Pokéballs that had been separate.

Squirtle and Pikachu looking on: Ash picked one of the balls out with a thoughtful look.

"This Pokéball's owner is no longer synced with it," the Pokédex noted. "Likely reason: death or legal problems. Would you like to claim this Pokémon as your own?"

"I'd….rather ask first. Pretty sure that's the polite thing to do." Ash observed, before throwing the ball into the air.

Mid-air the ball opened, releasing a flying yellow and black insect.

"Nin?"

It was a Ninjask, a Pokémon that had, in the past, always been used to attack him or his friends and Pokémon. That goon who worked for Kodai, that crazy Colonel guy from the Togepi Kingdom, and Paul.

It was probably not going to attack him…

"Ninjask, the Ninja Pokémon," the Pokédex stated interrupting him. "This Pokémon was the main Pokémon used by Ninja clans originating in Hoenn during the Ninja Wars from over four hundred years ago, this Pokémon moves so fast it cannot be easily seen. A poorly trained Ninjask lets out loud noises that make it fail at stealth."
"Ninja War?" Ash repeated, as one had to repeat any statement that involved the term 'Ninja War'.

"The fourth and final ninja war, specifically. It involved the now extinct Mahogany Ninja clans, the Fuchsia Ninja clans, the Kalos ninja...."

"Nin!" the Ninjask shouted, looking at Ash and buzzing around in distress. "Nin-Jask!"

"Um...." Ash wasn't sure what Ninjask was saying. Help me? Feed me? Do my taxes?

He really hoped it wasn't that last one.

"Pika....? 'Um, Ash.....the Ninjask seems to think you're some guy named John.' Pikachu noted with notable concern, even as he sparked his cheeks threateningly at the Ninjask.

Squirtle similarly posed, ready to fight Ninjask if it tried something.

Ninjask was buzzing in front of him: rapidly moving around him as if looking him over at all angles.

"Nin! Ninjask! Nin!"

Pikachu shouted something back he would never say within earshot of his mother. That seemed to only anger Ninjask, as the bug looked ready to attack.

Tapping a Pokéball on his side, he released Snivy, who immediately fell in line with Pikachu and Squirtle's defensive actions.

"Okay, Ninjask may not be giving any clear answers, but what about...." Ash grabbed a second Pokéball from the group, "...this one?"

....

Several Pokéballs later and there was a six on five Pokémon stare-down between his Pokémon (Pikachu, Squirtle, Snivy, Charmeleon, Pidgeotto, and Butterfree), and the five Pokémon who kept thinking he was named John (Ninjask, Shedinja, Probopass, Altaria, and Flygon).

With only an eye that had an entire timeline to evaluate how well a Pokémon had been trained, and how strong said Pokémon was: Ash knew that if this broke out into a brawl he was going to have to run for a Pokémon Center with many severely injured Pokémon.

Ash held the last Pokéball, which he figured contained the Psychic-type that had managed to talk to him.

"Okay, hope you can give me some answers, and keep the peace..." Ash threw the Pokéball into the air.

It promptly burst into light, revealing a white Pokémon with green limbs and hair whose back was to him.

The Pokémon turned to him, and what he thought the Pokémon was became quite clear.

"Gardevoir, the Embrace Pokémon. Gardevoir are famous for becoming very close to their trainers, and have a higher than average ability to develop the ability to telepathically communicate with them or those with sensitivities to telepathic powers. Gardevoir react to people who threaten their trainers with powerful abilities. For more information on what happens if you threaten their trainers with lead pipes and knives, read Diantha's
autobiography: Journey to Stardoms, Page 394."

The Gardevoir seemed to get the attention of the other five Pokémon, who seemed to be waiting for her reaction.

Much like how Pikachu did with his Pokémon.

So, he assumed she (the voice in his head was female) was the starter Pokémon.

Gardevoir looked him over, even as her face morphed into sadness and confusion.

'No, you aren't John'.

She leaned in closer to him, tilting her head around much like the others had. Pikachu gave a warning spark in his cheeks, which she respected and backed off.

'Yet, you look so much like him. Why is that?'

"Um, John who?" Ash questioned, "John's kind of a common name."

'Our trainer. His name is John Archer, a Hoenn League trainer. We haven't heard from him in.....' Gardevoir and the others looked, worryingly pensive 'Well, we don’t know how long.....it's hard to really tell inside Pokéballs.'

"John Archer you say?" the Pokédex spoke up, catching Gardevoir off guard. Ash opened the blinking device, which displayed an image of someone his age.

Someone who looked a lot like him.

It was….incredibly unsettling. Like someone had taken an image of him, and changed it. Changed it only a little, but the many similarities clashed with those minute differences in eye color and hair shade, driving him to look at the image more and try and process the sheer question of, how?

"Free...." Butterfree fluttered over to get a better look and looked just as shocked as Ash did, a shock that was quickly shared among all gathered Pokémon. 'And I thought Red looked a lot like you....'.

"John Archer: Hoenn League Trainer. In order, John Archer earned the Stone, Heat, Dynamo, Balance, Knuckle, Rain, Mind, and Feather Badges. His League placements are as follows: Top 32. John Archer lost to similar freshman trainer Tyson, who lost in the Top 16 to eventual winner Phoebe. John was found several months ago: dead....."

The last statement caused Ash to drop the Pokédex in shock (ouch), but to Gardevoir....

To Gardevoir and the others who had been his...

'No, no.....it can't be....he can't be....' Gardevoir got louder and louder as she began to freak out, in panic and denial. It was rather painful to listen to; both emotionally and in ways that required Tylenol.

"...examination determined the cause of death to be that he had been smothered in his sleep, with his Pokémon stolen during or after the deed," the Pokédex continued from the ground. "The thief of the Pokémon was eventually caught, who confessed John had been murdered by an unknown person who had paid him off with the now dead trainer's Pokémon, whom he..."
sold on the Black Market. The only thing this now incarcerated ex-cleaner of a Pokémon Center gave on the person was what he called himself: an Emissary."

At the word 'murdered' his Pokémon's eyes seemed to all roll up, at least the ones with eyes, given that Shedinja did not visibly react: before collapsing as if they had just been hit by Cynthia's Garchomp.

The six thumps rang loudly through the silent room, as even the Pokédex remained quiet.

....

As the moon rose in the sky, Ash and Pikachu finally made it back to the Pokémon Center.

As the door opened and allowed their feet to step inside, they were immediately set upon.

"Finally, you're back!" Misty stated, sounding quite concerned. She looked him over, like she was his mother looking for evidence some bully had punched him for his lunch money. "Where have you been....I've been worried sick about you!"

"I got lost," Ash told her, the weight of the day in his voice. A combination of finding out about John Archer, and just how hard finding one's way through Celadon was.

"Well, I can't really blame you for it, seeing as we got lost as well today. Come, I saved you some food."

Ash's stomach loudly growled as she did, causing Ash to quickly thank her.

Pikachu's stomach also growled loudly.

"Don't worry, we still have some Pokémon food," Misty reassured the mouse.

....

"Wait, you managed to get me a Gym battle!?"

At his loud statement Iris nodded, causing Ash to break out into a large grin, even momentarily forgetting about eating.

The grin did not mean he had forgotten what he had learned. He had not stopped thinking about what to do with the six Pokéballs of John Archer. The title of 'Emissary' did not leave his mind.

He had also not forgotten about his dinner, which he would of course finish eating.

However, those issues could not be solved immediately. He could have a long time to digest the questions of morality, or why he had now found about a second person who looked eerily like him.

The Gym battle, however, he could solve immediately.

Reaching forward, he embraced Iris in a hug. He felt Iris tense in surprise, though she did not seem ready to freak out.

"Thank you," he told her simply, which caused her to lose a lot of the tension. As he let her go, he turned to an oddly shocked looking Misty.

"Thanks, both of you. Probably going to hit the hay early: I'm too tired to train well, and I want to be well rested for it. Again though, I really can't thank either of you enough."
"You should be thanking Iris….all I did is save you some dinner," Misty said, somewhat sadly for some reason.

"Well, I did thank Iris: now I'm making sure to thank you," Ash told Misty as he returned to eating.

Pikachu, who had finished his own meal and had grown tired of watching Ash eat, noted that both of the girls were smiling after Ash's actions.

The day may have been long, and stressful at many points, but it had ended and all that needed to be done had been done, and more.

'Now, for tomorrow, and whatever that brings' Pikachu thought to himself, before yawning.

OMAKE

Ambiguously Canon

Ketchumerse Part 4

Earth 041516

"Why are we dressed like this?" Bloodliner Ash questioned his similarly black suited and shaded counterpart, who had insisted that he and Pikachu dress like they were part of the Men in Black or some such nonsense.

"Because we are undercover, we must be discreet as possible," Ash Bond explained with an accented tone, looking far more relaxed, comfortable, and intense in his suit.

"…..But we stand out like a sore thumb here, even if we weren't dressed like this," Ash pointed to the closest life form for emphasis.

Said life form, a gray Ponyta with wonky eyes, waved at them obliviously before wandering off somewhere.

"….Oh, I guess you have a point there. Well, let us waste no more time with subtly, there's a rogue Discord on this Rapidestria wanted by the Discord Continuum and we've been tasked with handling it as they are currently occupied with one of the other threats to that neck of the woods stealing some of their power, an Adiago I think the miscreants name was. The local Dash Ketchum is currently sick and unable to provide aide, so it's up to us!" Ash Bond declared as he reached for and threw a Pokéball.

Out burst an oddly large Pyroar whose mane looked like what he had heard called a Union Jack by others, which Ash Bond promptly jumped and dashed away on.

"Tally Ho! Oh, by the way, if you see anything lime green with a harp around, do avoid her!"

"Pika?" 'What's a Discord. again?' Pikachu questioned, even as he fought the inexplicable urge to sing a song about his question.

"So what, lime green is evil or something?" Ash honestly wondered.

"Pika…. 'So, we basically avoid lime green and we won't be hurt. Makes sense I guess….'
The sky was raining chocolate milk from strawberry pink clouds as music sang out from every plant in the forest.

And the music was all about something called a Digimon.

Also the chocolate milk exploded, costing Ash his warranty on the tux.

"Alright that's it, Goodra Rain Dance!"

Sending out his purple blob dragon, the mighty beast roared and sent to the sky the powers of proper water to dispel the chocolate menace!

.....It then began raining acorns instead, pelting the three of them.

"Ow!"

"Pi! 'Curse word from Earth 111115 that the Author wishes not to write.....It isn't just lime green that is dangerous here!'

"Dra! 'What just happened!?'

.....

Bursting out of a field of sunflowers that were all burning with pink flames, Ash, Pikachu, and Kingler were all laughing hysterically, even though Ash was now down to just his white boxers and his right shade.

The three of them also looked like they were about to pass out from lack of oxygen and looked terrified even as they laughed.

Thankfully a Machamp promptly slapped all of three of them upside the head, and the laughing stopped.

As the three wheezed, desperate for oxygen again Ash Bond returned the Machamp, now dressed in a red military uniform with an oversized and fluffy black hat.

".....The Discord is being very difficult," he explained simply.

"You.....don't.....say....!"

"We are going to need a different strategy."

"Yeah, I'm sure you can lure a Discord with Sweet Scent, maybe a Pokéblock," the Pokédex snarked even as Ash Bond removed a Pokéblock case.

"My thoughts exactly, now did you happen to spy some chaos berries while you were lost? This Discord leaves them wherever he goes; he bakes them in a pie with the souls of innocent children and the heart of an Ash, a Picard, or a Twilight Sparkle when he is bored with a world and ready to blow it up: they have polka-dots, breathe out high quality bricks with Finnish accents, and occasionally dance the jiggy....."

"Yeah, take a left at the apple farm floating in the sky, and punch the sparklemoose, they're be on the right," Ash groaned in a tone that made it clear he did not want to go anywhere near the sparklemoose.
The twitching Master Ball radiated chaos, annoyance, and a hint of lemon as the two Ashes returned to base, all three rather exhausted. Ash Bond now had blond hair and a goatee for some reason and was dressed like a woody archer type, Bloodliner Ash was now dressed in a Star Fleet Redshirt with flashing neon lime-green shoes, and Pikachu had a mustache that was glowing lime green.

"...Well, that was something. Let send this thing off to be friendship beamed and let us hope to never have to deal with this sort of thing again."

Ash meanwhile was just wondering how he was going to explain the shoes back home.

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**Omake 2**

Non-Canon

Further Noting of the Original Author's ideas with my own twists

**Earth 050516**

"Ha ha, ha ha, a back a home I come! Ha ha, ha ha..." A wing knocked in the back of the head, even as his Talonflame fluttered past him. "Oh come on, my singing isn't that bad!" Ash Ketchum, Age classified, and his mighty champions of Kalos: Pikachu, Greninja, Talonflame, Hawlucha, Noivern, and Goodra who came back to his aide for the League, walked down the road to Pallet Town in overall high spirits, even with the wing whap.

For they had won Kalos! It had taken a lot of blood, sweat, tears, and preventing another world ending disaster, but he had finally done it. Winning the League had been a lot of work, and now Ash was ready to go home, celebrate, and prepare for the challenges to come. The Champion League was waiting, and he had things to do to prepare for it. He had to train, he had to plan, he might even have to find a Key-stone and a few mega stones. Perhaps Professor Oak might have an idea of where he could find some. That is, assuming his mother did not lock him in his room for that Prism Tower thing...

"And I say it is tradition! We can't change it now!"

"But we must! We said we would always name our town after the best trainer from it, and he's no longer the best! The boy is!"

"And change my stationary! Never! It would be more economical to kill the boy!"

"Hey, no killing him! His mother is the only restaurant owner in town, I hate microwave food!"

"And I'm turning, I'm turning, we are not going anywhere near that and I don't want to know!" Ash stated loudly as he and his merry band changed course from his house, to the lab. Sure his mother would be annoyed at that, but she'd rather not have him involved in town politic drama.

...

"...Wait, what about naming the town after me!?" At Ash's astonished stare, a face matched by all his present Pokémon (His Kalos team, and all his other Pokémon who were able to squeeze into Oak's sitting room), Professor Oak shook his head.
"About a century ago my father, Pallet Oak (Pallet Oak?) managed to become the most famous trainer ever to come from Pallet Town. He was ranked 921st of the 10,000 best in the world. So, they renamed Pallet Town in his honor. Now that the list was finally updated after the great red-tape crisis during your journey here in Kanto, you are now ranked the 683rd trainer in the entire world. So there is serious debate about changing our name to reflect that."

"A town named after me..." Ash's face briefly looked diabolical, before Pikachu gave him a 'bad Ash' shock. Cured of his brief ego trip Ash was promptly handed the updated list and looked it over.

"So, who are these other 682 guys?" Looking up and down the list he mumbled some names he spotted as he did so in no particular order "Cynthia, Alder, Diantha, Brandon, Tucker, Palmer, Drake, Drake the older guy, Solidad, Johanna, Zoey, Tobias, Virgil, Cameron..."

At the last name Snivy, Oshawott, Pignite, Unfezant, Boldore, and Pikachu suddenly broke out into loud shouting. With alarmed looks Bulbasaur and several other gathered Pokémon started to back away from them nervously, and Hawlucha and Talonflame covered Noivern's ears as if to block out what they were saying.

"...If it helps, according to the numbers you can overcome this Cameron person by winning at least 20 battles with a 85% win percentage by next year," The Professor offered nervously. Noting his still ranting Unova mons, Ash quickly asked if there were any limitations: did he have to go and find some badass tough people on top of mountains, or could he just go see if that Samurai was still around and introduce him to Talonflame and Staraptor. Pidgeot was due to visit in a few days, she might have spotted him on the way in
Ash and Pikachu stared at the Exeggcute.

Misty stared at the Exeggcute.

Iris stared at the Exeggcute, though she quickly resumed eating the scrambled eggs in front of her.

Exeggcute did not seem to mind the eggs being eaten in front of it though, instead it gestured to the envelope in its clutch.

"Exe!"

Gulping down an entire glass of orange juice, Ash reached for said envelope and opened it up, revealing a grass mail loaded with a fancy script.

Ash Ketchum,

This Exeggcute will teleport you and your friends to my Gym for the battle today: I don't feel like dealing with you by the technicality of you being late.

I prefer to beat my opponents with my own skills, not by the horror that is traffic congestion. Honestly they need to finish those subway repairs….

If you do not prompt him, Exeggcute will take you to the Gym 5 minutes before the battle begins. Please don't be showering when my Exeggcute does this, or I will be forced to handle your nudity with any clothing I have on hand: by that of course I mean women's clothing.

Gym Leader Erika

"Well, I suppose that's something," Ash observed, really hoping he wasn't going to have to cross dress.

"Wonder if the other Gym Leaders are this bad?" Misty wondered out loud. "I mean Brock was a normal enough guy, but Lt. Surge was a few eggs short of an Exeggcute…"

Exeggcute glared at Misty, clearly not approving of the pun. Misty gave the Egg Pokémon an apologetic look before continuing.

"….and my sisters…..well, makes you wonder doesn't it?"

Ash put a ponderous finger to his chin, wondering what the other Gym Leaders might be want.

…

"You must prove yourself worthy of entering my Gym, by completing this riddle!" His Mental Blaine declared holding up a sheet of paper with a riddle on it, said riddle was radiating evil aura like it had just come out of a Dark Ball.

…

"If you want to fight in my Gym, you've got to be in shape!" Mental Chuck slapped his belly hypocritically. "For that, you've got to beat my Machoke in a thumb war!" Behind Chuck, his Machoke flexed its thumbs threateningly.
"Pokémon is 90% battling, 9% luck, and 1% smarts," Mental Roxanne told him, a ruler in hand. "I can test you on the 99%, but you really do need to show me your smarts first. Now, this is a 100 question multiple choice test. If you don't pass, you will not battle me." The test gave off a similar aura to Mental-Blaine's riddle.

"I. Love. FOSSILS!" Mental-Byron exploded in enthusiasm. "And I only accept challengers who can prove they love FOSSILS as much as I do! Now, hug all of my FOSSILS!" Behind him, the fossils extended on and on into a seemingly endless hallway.

"I'd love to battle you, but one of my models is out sick today..." Mental-Elesa pouted, holding out a fashion ensemble that would probably make May and Dawn both froth with rage, which too glowed with an evil aura. "I need you to fill in for him, kay?"

He promptly shook his head, trying not to think about the possible horrors any more than he had to.

Viridian Gym

The last four to have challenged him were of pitiful skill: how they managed to make themselves worthy of facing him when a 'by the book, no exceptions' inspector was not around bewildered him.

One did seem like he could be, obtainable at least. He sent some of his smooth talkers to the boy's room.

Nothing major though, getting him in his organization would not warrant bribes of money, access, or rare goods.

He couldn't bribe him with women of the night though, Team Rocket did not work in that field. Too traceable in his opinion.

However this challenger...

"Golem is unable to battle!" a lackey of his declared, sadly having to be fair or he'd get a bit of unwarranted attention his way, as he returned his Golem while sat on his shaded throne.

A Lapras, her third Pokémon after a Pidgeot and Butterfree, bellowed in triumph.

The trainer was a young female named Solidad.

She had fought his Bloodliner a while back and had beaten that idiot in Vermillion earlier. She did possess talent, quite a lot of it.

From what he understood she was going to waste it on flashy visuals and playing dress up with the overly feminine and the metrosexuals, and sadly he doubted he could get her to see things his way and thus not waste her talents.
But crimes of waste aside, he had battles to fight.

"Not bad, not bad at all. It is rare that trainers chose to fight me. It is even rarer that they make me want to stand from my chair."

"However...now that I am standing." Lifting himself from his chair, he held his winning Pokémon in his hands. "You will lose. Go!"

Throwing the ball down, it exploded into a burst of light, revealing his most powerful Pokémon.

"PERIOR!" It bellowed, a mighty beast of rock and earth.

"I've never seen that Pokémon...." Solidad mumbled to herself, before resolving herself. "It doesn't matter. I'll be winning this one. Lapras use Ice Beam!"

With an open mouth, Lapras shot out a shockwave of pale white right at Rhyperior. It looked rather powerful.

How pedestrian though, an Ice Beam.

"Rhyperior....Hammer Arm."

Roaring with a glowing arm, Rhyperior charged into the ice attack, shattering it like it was nothing.

Solidad and Lapras both looked like they had just seen something beyond possibility. He so loved that look.

The Hammer Arm slammed into Lapras, before sending the rare Pokémon flying into the wall, with an audible crack.

Shell damage, from what he had read about among Lapras hunters. It would take a considerable amount of time for the damage to completely disappear though Lapras would be battle ready again in a few months.

"No, Lapras!"

"Lapras is unable to battle! The winner is the Gym Leader, Giovanni!"

Smirking, Giovanni returned Rhyperior and retook his seat.

Potential, yes. But not power, not yet.

Still, she was a worthy test for his most important asset though, and she could probably take out most of his high ranked minions.

Pity she was too traceable to eliminate then. But sadly in this world, one could not simply kill anyone one wanted anytime one wanted. One had to plan it extensively or ensure they wouldn't be missed. Concoct cover stories for cover stories, research the target's background to figure out the most convenient form of 'accidental' death and of course bribes to the relent authorities to make sure nothing is looked at too closely. All in all sentencing someone to death could be such a tiring and complicated affair.
The time came, and Ash and company found themselves teleported into a greenhouse, where a chalk battlefield had been painted in the grass.

Erika was waiting for them, looking over an I-Pad, though she did look up as they came in and her Exeggcute bounced off into the garden somewhere.

"Oh good, you have pants."

Ash did not respond to that statement, it sounded more like she was just messing with him anyway. Though he did have to fight the urge to look down and check.

"So….Pikachu? Butterfree, Pidgeotto….all the starter Pokémon in Kanto….you certainly have an interesting collection," Erika observed, suggesting that she was using that I-Pad to look over his stats (which he apparently had).

"It happens." Ash shrugged, Pikachu managing to roll with the shrug as he was well practiced.

"When I have the time, I do like to give my opponents a glance over, I find it helps me put things into context." Erika sheathed the I-Pad and set it down on the grass as she began walking towards the Gym Leader's end of the field.

"I'm not sure if you are aware, but many Pokémon Leagues offer trainers the same privilege. Knowledge is both a weapon for the opponent, and a weakness. Many challengers have lost because they didn't look up their opponents Pokémon, or did not know about a secret weapon."

"You know what Pokémon Ash has, but he does not know any of your Pokémon?" Iris questioned as Erika smirked.

"Oh but he does, I have Grass-Pokémon."

Gloom, Tangela, etc.

"A trainer also needs to know how to improvise, doesn't he, or she I suppose? What trainer would I be if I wasn't able to battle Pokémon I'm not expecting?" Ash pointed out.

Erika actually smiled at that one. "Well said. Glad to see you are using your actual head. Now, let us get started: your friends may have a seat wherever they want."

"Good luck Ash," Misty told him resting a hand on his arm before as she and Iris took a seat on the grass leaving Ash to go to his end of the battlefield.

"Does a four-on-four battle sound good to you?" Erika questioned.

"Four on four?" He hadn't had a Gym battle like that since…Candice. Wow, that was a long time ago, if he measured time in Gym Battles (given his lack of any other metric)

Did Unova have a law about more than three Pokémon in a Gym battle or something on the Leader's end?

"Is that a problem?"

"No, it's no problem at all," Ash confirmed.

A young, short looking woman with blond hair walked to the middle outside of the field.

"The Gym battle between Ash, the Challenger, and Erika, the Gym Leader, will now begin! Each
trainer will have the use of four Pokémon, and the Gym battle will be over when either side is no longer able to continue. No substitutions are allowed, if you call your Pokémon back it can't return to battle later on. The Gym Leader will open."

"Very well Krista, I shall." Erika removed a Pokéball from her belt and threw it into the air.

The ball burst open, revealing a creature made of both flesh and leaves.

"Leaf!"

"Leafeon, the Verdant Pokémon. Leafeon is an Eeveelution, and one long rumored in Kanto for years prior to a noble's daughter taking her Eevee into a forest. Leafeon is surrounded by clean air and has been used in large cities for air purification projects," the Pokédex offered.

"Leafeon huh…." Ash was expecting something a bit more Belly or Tangled, but this would do.

"Butterfree, I choose you!"

Throwing his own ball, his first capture came out with fluttering wings.

"Begin!"

"Butterfree, use Silver Wind!" Ash called as Butterfree began flapping his wings, sending a storm of silvery powder right at Leafeon.

"Cut through it with Aerial Ace!" Erika countered. Leafeon gave an affirmative yowl as it jumped into the air, spinning as its forehead leaf and tail glowed blue.

The spin attack cut through the Silver Wind like it was nothing, before landing back on the ground with such grace Ash nearly checked for a contest scoreboard out of habit.

He could almost hear himself losing points.

"It appears your opponent has blast processing," the Pokédex quipped. Ash had no idea what that was supposed to mean.

"Hidden Power!" Erika snapped Ash out of his confusion as a light blue ball formed in front of Leafeon's face and was sent at Butterfree.

"Blast through with Psybeam!"

Ash's command was heard as Butterfree's eyes glowed and fired.

The two attacks met in the middle, with the Psybeam winning out and striking Leafeon.

The Verdant Pokémon was sent skidding back, though it did not seem overly harmed.

"Leafeon…" Erika cautiously asked her Pokémon, even as the Eeveelution gave an affirmative mewl of 'I can still win this easily, hands down, and with one paw tied.'

"Very well! Now use…." Erika was cut off before she could finish as she just….

"Zzzz….."

Ash, Butterfree, Misty, Iris, Leafeon, and all visitors just stared at the now slumbering Gym Leader in either 'what the….' Or 'not now….’
Erika woke up a few seconds later, looking somewhat dazed.

"….Oh yes, Leafeon use Aerial Ace!" Leafeon nodded as its head and tail started glowing blue once more.

"Use String Shot….."

As Butterfree began to spew out string, Erika shook her head.

"Do you really think my Leafeon can't cut through a few threads?"

Leafeon did in fact cut through them with ease, even as Ash grinned.

"….then Silver Wind!"

The string spitting stopped as the dust storm followed, the string shot pieces around Leafeon being covered in the bug-powered particles and slammed right into it.

"No, Leafeon!" Erika cried out as her Pokémon was sent tumbling back from an enhanced super-effective attack.

"Great job Butterfree!" Ash cheered, a sentiment shared by Pikachu (Pika!)

"Free! 'It's not over yet.'"

Butterfree was proven correct as Leafeon began to stand up again on shaky legs.

"Well, I don't think you can win this battle Leafeon, but you can win the match here. Leafeon…" Erika began.

Ash, having horrible visions of some sort of grass type move that was Stealth Rock and Sticky Web's nightmare child, was not going to have it.

"Quickly, use Psybeam!"

"….use Rain Dance, heavy misting!"

"Rain Dance?" Ash repeated, not sure what that was supposed to do, other than delay Charmeleon.

Leafeon reared its head into the air, yowling as a heavy band of what Ash could only describe as 'wetness' covered the field like some sort of haze.

Wherever this wetness reached, everything around it got soaked.

The Psybeam was unaffected, and it still hit Leafeon and knocked it out.

However, the wetness had reached Butterfree, soaking him to the bone (if he had any) and….

"Free! 'My wings…..!'"

Butterfree found his wings starting to seize up, the additional weight from the water interfering with his ability to stay airborne.

He quickly began to lose altitude, before crashing to the ground, his wings sodden to a point of uselessness.

"What just…..what is going on!?" Ash questioned in shock.
"I didn't know you could use Rain Dance like that." Misty was surprised. She had never heard of anyone using Rain Dance as some sort of….attack?

"Leafeon is unable to battle, the winner is the challenger's Butterfree!" the referee Krista declared as Erika returned Leafeon.

She quietly thanked it, before taking out another Pokéball.

"So Ash, how do you like my new Rain Dance? I like to call it, the Ultimate Grass-Protection Technique. Do you like the sound of it?"

"The Ultimate….?" Ash asked as Erika grinned wickedly.

"Grass-types have the most weaknesses of any Pokémon that are not made of stone. However, these vulnerabilities all have one weakness: water. It puts out fires, dilutes poison, dampens wings to a point of uselessness, and either melts or binds ice to the floor. Your Butterfree is crippled, your Charmeleon and Pidgeotto sealed. Your Fire-Pokémon can't ignite here, and I wouldn't suggest your Pidgeotto fly in this weather. Now, to deal with the rest of your Pokémon. Go, Tangrowth!"

The second ball was thrown, revealing the massive vine Pokémon.

"Growth!" It declared, and based on Pikachu's eyes narrowing at it he suspected what was said was not friendly.

"Tangrowth, the Vine Pokémon and the evolution of Tangela. Tangrowth's body is mostly made of vines, which can be cut off with no damage. Tangrowth's interior body is unknown," the Pokédex offered as the battle resumed.

"Tangrowth, use Knock Off!" Erika declared. The red tips of Tangrowth's arms glowed black as they swung right at the downed Butterfree.

"Cut the arms off with Psybeam!" Ash called, noting the Pokédex's comments. Butterfree nodded, wing still flapping pitifully.

The beam shot forth, slicing both arms off Tangrowth. The arms landed at the edge of the field, damp and rapidly browning.

Tangrowth ended the attack, but looked none the worse for wear as the arms grew back.

"Shock Wave!"

"Wait, Shock Wave?" Ash questioned, shocked as he heard the command.

The blue electricity formed in Tangrowth's regrown arms, before being fired right at Butterfree.

The electric attack hit Butterfree straight on, letting off only to allow Butterfree to collapse in defeat on the sodden ground.

"Butterfree is unable to battle, the winner is Tangrowth," Krista declared to cheering from the other side of the field.

Ash returned Butterfree, even as he looked at the still damp fighting area.

"Thank you," Ash told Butterfree as he returned him to his belt, now quite stuck.

What was he to do now?
"Pikapi." 'Ash, all the water should help me fight.' Pikachu offered to go out and handle the fight. 'It conducts electricity, and that Tangrowth is as wet as a Magikarp.'

"Maybe later buddy. I think she's expecting me to do that," Ash told him as he took out another Pokéball. "Here's hoping we can wait it out."

"No, you can't," Erika informed him, gesturing towards the soaked field. "I trained my Leafeon's Rain Dance to be highly energy efficient, the water lingers in the air instead of falling to the earth. It won't burn out for quite some time."

Dang.

Well, he'd have to tough it out then, even if that meant Charmeleon and Pidgeotto had to sit out for now. Oh, he could feel Charmeleon fume over that thought now….

"Go, Ambipom!"

Spinning mid-air, Ambipom landed on the ground and grimaced as she felt the soggy ground, even as her fur noticeably dampened.

"Begin!"

"Tangrowth, use Focus Blast!" Erika went for the early kill as a glowing orb was formed between Tangrowth's tentacles.

"Block it with a Counter Shield!"

"A what!?!" Erika questioned as Ambipom jumped into the air, before spinning and releasing a Swift attack in the formation of a giant shield.

The Focus Blast struck the Counter-Shield, and the small fragments of the once proud attack were sent flying back at Tangrowth.

"Oh, that's a Counter-Shield then, not bad. Tangrowth, block it!"

"Tang!" The vine monster declared as its body began to grow thinner. The vines retracted from the main body, before reforming in the arms, which thickened.

This shield promptly took the Counter-Shield, to minimized damage. The arms deflated as regular density was returned to Tangrowth.

Ash gritted his teeth, an act mirrored by Ambipom and Pikachu as the attack failed.

"Hmm, you and your Pokémon sync quite well." Erika commented as she noted their shared frustration.

"Now use Vine Whip!" Tangrowth responded to Erika's command with extending arms.

"Block it with Power-up Punch!" Ash countered as Ambipom's tails glowed orange.

The two extended limbs began colliding in a rapid fury of strikes, the punches having more power but the whips being more flexible as to avoid serious damage.

"Ambi, ambi, ambi!"

"Tang, tang, tang!"
The grunts of the Pokémon were all that vocalized in the Gym as the two moves continued their collision. It was a stalemate, and would remain so until one side gave it.

Ash decided to make the first attempt to break it.

"Ambipom, launch yourself into the air, then use Double Hit!"

"Ambi!" 'Got it!' With one final harsh shove of Power-up Punch, Ambipom's fists turned purple and smashed the wet ground, sending Ambipom into the air above Tangrowth, before launching both tails right at Tangrowth.

Both tails collided with Tangrowth's central mass, striking the great beast and nearly causing Tangrowth to tip over. With flailing limbs and effort though, the massive Grass-type managed to avoid falling over though.

"Tangrowth! Quickly, fire a Shock Wave!"

Ambipom didn't have much time to prepare as she landed on the ground, before getting a solid electrical blast to the chest.

"Ambipom!" Ash shouted in concern as the attack ended, leaving only some singed fur behind.

Both evolutions that Ash had first seen during Sinnoh glared at one another, a shared eagerness to win glowing in both of their eyes.

This glow was mirrored in both their trainers.

"Your Ambipom is well trained, but it won't matter! Tangrowth, grab Ambipom!"

"Get out of the way!" Ash shouted as Tangrowth's arms shot out and bound around Ambipom like a rope, preventing any such escape as they pulled Ambipom towards it like a rope.


As Tangrowth turned Ambipom blue, Ash found himself at a loss of what he could do.

Ambipom's tails were bound: that meant she couldn't use any sort of punching move, or Swift.

What other move did Ambipom even have!? 

"Ambipom, use Astonish!" Ash shouted after a moment, catching his concerned buddy off guard.

"Pika?" 'Astonish? Ambipom can use that attack?'

Ambipom heard him, and she opened her mouth and let loose a red sonic attack. It was small, but the attack struck Tangrowth, breaking its concentration.

As the Shock Wave died down and the arms laced around Ambipom, Ash was quick to capitalize on it.

"Now, Double Hit!"

"Ambi!" The cry of reply that followed had Ambipom's uncharged tails force the arms of Tangrowth apart, allowing Ambipom freedom to jump out of its grip.

Then, once Ambipom was in the air, her tails glowed purple.
"Pom!" *Taste this, you overgrown weed!* Ambipom declared as both her tail fists slammed into the sides of Tangrowth's head.

Ambipom then jumped back from the goliath, even as it fell to the soggy ground in defeat.

"Oh no!" Erika exclaimed as her second Pokémon fell in defeat.

"Tangrowth is unable to battle, the winner is Ambipom!"

At Krista's declaration Erika returned Tangrowth, thanking it quietly before placing it's Pokéball out of sight even as Ash, Pikachu, and Ambipom gave a synchronized fist pump.

"I must say, you are proving to be fairly talented Ash," Erika told him truthfully, looking a tad amused after seeing their triple fist pumping. "I suppose not just anyone can defeat Brock or Lt. Surge on their first try. You do have potential, regardless of how you do for the rest of this battle I will leave you with that compliment. The question is, however, just how much potential? Let's find out, shall we?"

Erika took out a third Pokéball and threw it out, releasing in a burst of light her third Pokémon.

Ash privately assumed it would be something related to either a Bellsprout or an Oddish, and was surprised to see what she had chosen instead.

Misty's screams almost came before he saw it himself.

"Paras," the red mushroom Pokémon declared in a monotone.

"*Parasect, the Mushroom Pokémon. Parasect is controlled by the mushroom on its back, which commands it to drain the nutrients of trees,*" the Pokédex offered him as Ash noted his tiring Ambipom.

"Hey Ambipom, can you still battle?" She turned her head to him and nodded. "Great, let's try and get this over quickly then. Ambipom, Swift!"

Jumping into the air, Ambipom spun as a storm of stars flew at Parasect.

However, Erika was silent. Ash briefly wondered if she had fallen asleep again, thought that was quickly dashed.

"Use Swords Dance!" she called as Parasect rose its pincers up, said pincers glowing red and more powerful.

This did nothing to stop the Swift barrage though, all of which impacted into Parasect without fail.

Ambipom, Ash, and Pikachu gave once more a synchronized movement: staring in confusion.

"Huh?" Misty exclaimed, not sure why Erika didn't call for anything in response that could have helped. "That, that didn't make any sense, though what sense is there to use that….that thing…."

"She might think Parasect can take that hit without it mattering much." Iris offered a possible reason for Erika's actions.

"That doesn't seem right though….why take so much damage so quickly…and without a fight? I mean, getting rid of it as quickly as possible makes sense, but why send it out at all then…."

As the stars faded, Parasect was once again easily visible, and was glowing a light green. Parasect
was also remarkably unbruised from the attack: and what bruised were there quickly dissolved away.

"Pika." 'Well,' Pikachu noted the aftermath of the attack. 'That happened.'

"My Parasect has the ability Dry Skin: a constant supply of moisture is like a permanent recover," Erika informed Ash as to what was going on. "My Parasect can't be simply defeated by hitting it——-

"It'll just have to be defeated by hitting it harder and faster than it can recover!" Ash declared as Erika frowned.

"….No…..That's not a solution." She lied, badly. Clearly she left her politician self at home today.

"If ranged attacks won't do it, let's go in closer! Ambipom, use Double Hit, again and again!"

"Pom!" 'Yeah, I don't think a single Double Hit would work.' She seemed to be quite aware of the weirdness of saying 'a single Double Hit' (and Ash had to agree, that did sound confusing when you thought about it too much), though she ran right at Parasect regardless.

"Seed Bomb!" Erika called as Parasect's mandibles glowed green, before firing seed after seed Ambipom's way.

Each time a seed was fired Parasect flared out its claws, sort of resembling a pinball machine. It was almost comical, if explosive plant matter wasn't involved.

"Ambipom, block it!" Double Hit glowing tails shot out in front of Ambipom, blocking the seeds in a rapid defensive move that one could only see among the most skilled ping pong players.

While slowed, Ambipom still managed to reach Parasect, quite ready to start hitting the mushroom until it stopped healing.

However, just as the palms reached Parasect, a yellow dust shot out from all sides.

"Spore," Erika declared, as the powder reached Ambipom's mouth.

While the attack did hit Parasect, it was only a single outing and Parasect was already healing.

Meanwhile, Ambipom lay on the soggy ground, out like a light.

"Ambipom!" Ash called out in concern. Pikachu echoed his sentiment as Parasect flared its claws again, as it was about to go back into 'killer pin-ball machine' mode.

Getting the message quite clearly, Ash returned Ambipom before she got bombed.

"Ambipom is withdrawn, the winner is the Gym Leader's Parasect!" Krista declared as Erika nodded.

"Good call Ash, Ambipom would not have woken up fast enough to respond. Now, choose your next Pokémon."

Who to choose though: the rain made Charmeleon useless, and probably Pidgeotto too. He wasn't an expert on how rain affected feathered wings, but he didn't want to risk it. The rain would eventually let up, and he'd prefer to try and use them then.

But that left Pikachu and…..

‘You know what, that would actually work.’
Pikachu prepared to jump off his shoulder, ready to win the battle for him, and promptly fell off him in shock as he reached for a different Pokémon entirely.

Holding the Heal Ball in hand Ash through it, releasing his third Pokémon.

"Sliggoo!"

Everyone in the battlefield stared at Ash's surprise choice.

"A Sliggoo….." Erika mouthed.

"Sliggoo?" Iris stated in confusion.

"A what?" the referee asked, frankly quite confused.

"Sliggoo is a Pokémon from the Kalos region," Ash explained to her. "It evolved from a Goomy."

"Oh, you're Kalosian then. Is Sliggoo, or Goomy I suppose, your starter Pokémon then?" Krista assumed as Ash shook his head.

"No."

Pikachu puffed out his chest made a statement about how being the starter was his position and his alone.

"Oh, then where did you get a Sliggoo then? Your records don't mention any former Pokémon you may have Wonder Traded." Erika now seemed curious herself, even as Parasect looked quite ready to get on battling. Sliggoo a bit less so. Ash briefly wondered what Wonder Trade was before shrugging and bringing his mind back to the battle at hand.

"The sky," he stated, providing no further context to the confused twosome. "Now, let's get this battle going again!"

"Very well, though I question how either of you got into the sky in the first place. Parasect, use Spore!"

As Parasect sprayed its water-proof spores at Sliggoo once more, Ash and Sliggoo didn't move. The spores made contact, but they were quickly washed away in the rain. Erika blinked as Ash grinned.

"So, that Sliggoo can use Hydration…..well that's inconvenient. No matter, X-Scissor!" With its enhanced claws, Parasect formed large, glowing purple extensions and leapt right at the Dragon-type.

"Block it with Sludge Wave!" Ash called for Sliggoo's newest attack. Sliggoo nodded, even as a purple wall of sludge formed between him and Parasect.

X-Scissor struck the poison wall and was thrown back, though without damage, even as the moisture in the air ate away at Sludge Wave to a point that it was virtually dissolved away.

"Again, before Sliggoo can reform the wall!" Erika called as the wall began to recede. Parasect flew right at Sliggoo, ready to slice him down.

"Dragon Breath!" Ash responded, as a hazy blue flame struck Parasect head on. The bug was sent skidding back, trembling though otherwise unaffected, and healing quickly.
"Hmm, not bad, but it will take more power than that to defeat my Parasect. The moisture in the air will prevent you from making Parasect fall, you can't use Dragon Breath or Sludge Wave fast enough." Erika stated her opinion on the outcome of this fight.

"Yeah, I won't be able to beat you until I deal with your weather effects!" Ash declared as Erika blinked.

"How do you plan on doing that? You can't Dragon Breath it away, and I am fairly certain none of your Pokémon known Sunny Day, Sandstorm, or Hail."

"But my Sliggoo does know Rain Dance!" Ash commanded, a command that took Sliggoo a few seconds to pick up that he was in fact being told to use it. Sliggoo shone light blue for a couple of seconds before the move took effect.

"You are going to fight my Rain Dance….with Rain Dance?" Erika stated the statement like someone had just told her they were going to fix a city destroyed by bombs, with more bombs.

As a dark cloud formed over the field, water poured down onto the already soggy soil and wet plants. On the side of the field Iris skirted out of the way of a few rogue droplets.

All present quickly noticed something though, the rain drops got thicker as they got closer to the ground, as if they were absorbing moisture in the sky around them.

The rain quickly cleared away, and the battlefield's air lacked the ever-present 'moisture' that had plagued it since Leafeon's bout.

In essence, Erika's water seal was gone.

Erika had a shocked look on her face, the sort of look that was rather comical looking. It was somewhere between 'no, this cannot be, it isn't possible!' and 'System Error: system crashed. Rebooting'.

"Ash beat rain…..with rain." Misty sounded both impressed, and shocked.

"My weakness sealing techniques, my protection maneuver…..foiled…." Erika muttered to herself in shock.

"Yep, it's foiled all right, but we still have a battle to fight. Now Sliggoo, Dragon Breath!"

Erika snapped back to full attention as the Dragon-attack struck Parasect, pushing the Mushroom Pokémon back the same as before. This time however, it was not recovering.

"You are proving to be quite….crafty, boy! Parasect, Seed Bomb!" The seeds were sent flying once more, impacting into Sliggoo with small explosions. Sliggoo took the hit well, but more of the attack was probably not welcome.

"Now, X-Scissor!" Erika sounded a bit more peeved than she had been pre-Rain Dance, even as Parasect jumped at Sliggoo again with charged claws.

"Sludge Wave!" Ash responded as a sludge wall rose up and blocked Parasect again.

However, the wall this time had more integrity, meaning that Parasect got damaged from the attack. It slipped off the wall, only to tilt to one side as a purple sheen covered it.

"No!" Erika exclaimed: her Parasect was poisoned.
"Now end this with Dragon Breath!" Ash called for a finisher as the dragon attack charged in Sliggoo's gullet. The attack fired, slamming into Parasect and sending it flying.

It landed on its side at Erika's feet, defeated.

"Parasect is unable to battle: the winner is the challenger's Sliggoo!" Krista declared as Ash grinned, Sliggoo cheered for itself, and Pikachu nodded.

Erika returned Parasect in silence, though she gave its ball a pat before pocketing it.

"You've…proven to be quite unique. Clearly you do have the potential to be quite good. You have a very unique mind. However….." Erika held up a last Pokéball and pointed it at Ash. "It is still my duty to defeat you. Badges don't go to just anyone after all. Go." She threw her Pokéball into the air, releasing her final Pokémon.

A Pokémon that made Misty cringe and back away faster than Parasect had, confusing Iris quite visibly.

Ash however, knew why this was the case.

"Vile!" the dark plant Pokémon with a large flower on its head declared.

"Vileplume, the Flower Pokémon and the final evolved form of Oddish obtained by use of a Leaf Stone. Vileplume's flower is filled with toxic pollen, do not eat, inhale, or lick it. Vileplume are often associated with the night compared to its sunnier counterpart Bellossom,"

the Pokédex noted as the Grass/Poison-Type and the Dragon-Type eyed one another, ready to fight.

"Begin!"

"Sliggoo, let's get this going with Dragon Breath!" Ash ordered as Sliggoo fired the breath attack right at Vileplume, dead on center.

"Dazzling Gleam." Erika declared as Vileplume lowered its flower and pointed it at the attack.

"Dazzling what?" Ash questioned as a pink glow formed in the center of the flower.

The glow quickly exploded out into a giant storm cloud of pink dust. The dust tore through Dragon Breath and slammed right into Sliggoo, doing massive damage and leaving several odd coloration spots on Sliggoo's form,

"Is that a Fairy-type…." Ash began asking as Erika grinned.

"Yes, yes it is. Now use it again!" The pink dust attack fired at Sliggoo once more.

"Quickly, block it with Sludge Wave!" Ash commanded as Sliggoo, with some struggle, rose up the toxic wall.

Dazzling Gleam failed against the toxic wall, leaving an open battlefield, a still energetic Vileplume, and an exhausted Sliggoo.

Ash briefly considered returning Sliggoo and starting over with another Pokémon: Pidgeotto or Charmeleon obviously, though Sliggoo gave him a quick look that discouraged this plan.

Unlike Ambipom, Sliggoo could still fight, and now that Dazzling Gleam was stopped he had to see what else this Vileplume had.
"Dragon Breath!" Ash called again as Sliggoo began to charge the attack once more.

"Mimic," Erika replied as Vileplume glowed purple briefly, before opening its mouth wide and firing its own Dragon Breath, before Sliggoo could finish charging.

The attack struck Sliggoo, causing the slug dragon to fall over in defeat.

"Sliggoo is unable to battle, the winner is the Gym Leader's Vileplume!" Krista declared as Vileplume cheered.

"Good job Sliggoo, take a good rest." Ash told his Dragon-type as he returned him.

"She's impressive, isn't she?" Erika referred to her large flower Pokémon, who adjusted her flower as if it was a large brimmed hat. "Among all of my fourth badge Vileplume, she's my top choice for defeating Pokémon who are normally hard for Grass-types to overcome. Now, who will choose to face me in this last battle?"

Ash's hands lingered over two specific Pokéballs, each good for this battle….when he noted the ground.

The still soggy ground, even if the air had been cleared.

Both Flame Charge and Fire Pledge touched the ground.

….Well, he was going to have some heat for this, but the choice was obvious.

"It's all up to you!" Ash declared as he sent his last Pokéball flying. "Go, Pidgeotto!"

With fluttering wings, his first Flying Pokémon found herself out, ready to battle.

"Begin!"

"Pidgeotto, use Quick Attack!" Ash called. White streaks formed around Pidgeotto, as she took a sharp dive and sped right at Vileplume.

"Block it with Sunny Day!" Erika called as Vileplume lowered her flower right at Pidgeotto, from within a bright light flashed.

However, despite the blinding light Pidgeotto still flew through and smacked into Vileplume, flying past the plant Pokémon and fluttering on the other side.

"Caw! 'Keen Eye for the win!'" she declared, even as the light engulfed the entire field.

Sunlight and Grass-types….that meant two things.

Chlorophyll, and probably Solar Beam.

He'd have to be fast then.

"Pidgeotto, use Quick Attack again!" Ash called as his white-streaking bird flew at Vileplume once more.

"Dragon Breath!" Erika called as Vileplume fired the copied Dragon-move quicker than before, right in the path of Quick Attack.

"Use Aerial Ace and dodge!" Ash quickly responded as Pidgeotto dove lower skimming the damp
grass, the white streaks vanishing and the Flying-type coming from near the ground, under the Dragon Breath.

The attack hit, sending Vileplume flying back. However, it wasn't done yet.

"Let's finish it up with one more Aerial Ace!" Ash called as Pidgeotto swung back around for another attack.

However Erika was ready this time.

"Use Façade!" Shimmering red Vileplume charged at Pidgeotto, faster than Pidgeotto was flying thanks to the sunlight enhancement.

The attacks collided, sending Pidgeotto flying back out of control, pin-wheeling through the air in a flurry of singed feathers and smoke.

"No, Pidgeotto!" Ash cried out as Erika pressed on further.

"Now, Dazzling Gleam!" Vileplume jumped into the air, spinning as she let out a huge burst of pink light that rained down on the still out of control Pidgeotto like a rainstorm of pain, and pink.

"Block it with Gust!" Hearing Ash's call, Pidgeotto began flapping her wings, creating a wind storm that blew the dust away before it could hit.

Grinning as both their Pokémon landed on the ground safely, the battle continued.

"Aerial Ace!"

"Façade!" Both trainers shouted as their Pokémon charged at one another again, natural speed against speed of the sun.

Both attacks collided, and both pushed off each other in equal strength.

"Dragon Breath!"

"Steel Wing!"

The breath attack was reflected off the metallic wings, completely ineffective.

"Gust!" Ash called as the metallic wings faded away, even as Pidgeotto prepared to unleash a ferocious windstorm at the Vileplume.

"Get in Pidgeotto's face, and use Dazzling Gleam!" Erika shouted. Vileplume nodded, before dashing and putting her flower right in Pidgeotto's face.

"Caw?" ‘Wha?’

*BANG!* Pidgeotto was sent flying, blinded by the harsh, bright powder

"Pidgeotto!" Ash called in concern, Pikachu echoing him in his own tongue.

"Is that…..it?" Misty whispered, unsure if Pidgeotto could survive that hit.

"No…." Iris observed, even as Pidgeotto was continually pushed back by the pink light, slowly
being absorbed into the damaging mass.

All eyes were drawn to the mass, where a new light had begun to glow within it.

A blue light.

"Is that...." Ash asked no one in particular, even as the light grew more intense, and the vague shape of Pidgeotto within the light began to grow larger.

Wings, talons, body, beak, head, crest feathers….it was all getting bigger.

"Well ****!" Erika swore with a word Ash didn't quite catch, with Vileplume looking like she was seeing the moon devour a thousand innocents with a straw.

The Dazzling Gleam was torn apart, revealing what had happened in full.

"Pidgeott!" the evolved Flying type declared loudly. 'Well, this was unexpected!'

"I can't believe it!" Ash shouted in joy at this. This hadn't happened last time until after Indigo, this was wonderful!

….Even if this was not going to make Charmeleon any easier in trying to re-evolve.

"...Neither can I," Erika muttered, sounding quite sure of her own imminent defeat.

"Pidgeot, the Bird Pokémon. Pidgeot is strong enough to carry passengers on its back across entire continents, moving at Mach 2 speed. Mach 2 speed cannot be generally achieved in Gym battles or League matches, but this Pokémon is quite fast. Pidgeot prefer to live in old-growth forests with tall trees, with a particular preference towards Sequoioidae trees."

"What trees?" Ash wasn't sure what a Sequoioidae tree was: though he doubted they grew apples.

"A sub-family of Cupressaceae," the Pokédex offered unhelpfully. What did that even mean anyway: was it a tree they used to make cups?

"I can give you a Dendrology book later, let's finish this first." Erika seemed to have regained some luster, as if she had managed to figure out a way to possibly win this.

"Very well!" Ash declared, even as his brand new Pidgeot spread her wings out imposingly at Vileplume.

"Ash, the evolution did not lead Pidgeot to learn any new moves," the Pokédex informed his master as Ash moved to turn his hat backwards.

"That's alright; I don't think that's necessary: Pidgeot, Aerial Ace!" Pidgeot lunged towards Vileplume, wings outspread and flying faster than before.

"Vileplume, Dragon Breath with all your strength!" Erika declared as Vileplume breathed in, before unleashing a torrential storm of draconic energy, larger than all previous Dragon Breaths.

Pidgeot slammed into the Dragon Breath, and sliced through it like a knife through butter all the way to Vileplume.

The attack hit home as Vileplume was sent flying, leaving a muddy trench in her wake.
Vileplume came to a stop right in front of Erika, spraying mud on the Gym Leader's pants that would probably require a dry cleaner to remove.

"Vileplume, is unable to battle," Krista declared as the Sunny Day finally dissipated, "The winner is the challenger's Pidgeot. The battle goes to Ash of Pallet Town!"

Pidgeot landed in front of Ash, even as her trainer and Pikachu ran up to the bird and engulfed her in a big hug.

"That was amazing! You were wonderful Pidgeot!" he gleefully stated. Pikachu's mirrored statement caused Pidgeot to let out a joyous cry.

Footsteps behind him had Misty and Iris come over, smiles on their faces, even as he heard Erika return Vileplume and offer some words to her.

"That was amazing Ash! Good job!" Misty congratulated as Iris noted Pidgeot. "So, Gym Battles really do make you stronger," she observed as Erika began to walk over towards them. "How strong will you become if you beat all of them, however many of them there may be?"

Ash laughed, not quite sure how many Gyms there were in a region anyway. One only needed eight after all…..

"The minimum amount of Gyms in a region at any time is equal to the amount of Types: a Gym for Grass, Fire, Water, Normal, Flying, etc." Erika answered Iris's question as she came upon the three cheering teens and their Pokémon, "Of course, some Gyms are easier than others. I'm certainly better than Kanto's Bug, Flying, or Fairy Gyms, as are Brock, Surge, Blaine, and a few others. Generally though, 8 Gyms in a region stand out as the toughest: for example the Rock, Fighting, Electric, Fire, Normal, Flying, Psychic, and Water Gyms of Hoenn, the Rock, Grass, Ghost, Fighting, Water, Steel, Ice, and Electric Gyms of Sinnoh, and the Bug, Rock, Fighting, Grass, Electric, Fairy, Psychic, and Ice Gyms of Kalos."

Well, it looked like he took the high road in Hoenn and Sinnoh at least: Ash wondered about his other travels though.

"But enough on that: Ash Ketchum," she told him directly, "You've proven to be a quite exceptional battler, one I rarely see in my Gym at any time, let alone in my male challengers. Giving you this badge, I recognize I am probably going to have to let all challengers in again, but perhaps they'll be more like you and less like….some people." Erika said the last part darkly as she took the Rainbow Badge from her pocket and held it to Ash, "However, you have earned this badge, and all the headaches it's going to give me. Good luck in the Pokémon League, no matter how many more badges you may choose to earn."

"Thank you," Ash told Erika respectfully, reaching for the Badge and preparing to enter the customary 'Badge Get' pose, only to find that Erika would not let go of it.

"Zzzzz….."

Awkward silence dominated the room as the Gym Leader had fallen asleep standing up, holding his badge in the sort of night grip that reminded him of his mother with a pillow, or him with a pillow according to her.
Viridian Gym, several days later

The girl came back sooner than he had expected.

This time, she was ready for his original plans. Pidgeot's Defog had ruined his Onix's Stealth Rock and then her Butterfree had Bug-Buzzed his Dugtrio.

"So, you've done better thus far, and you weren't too shabby the first time. I however," Giovanni noted as he took out a Pokéball once more, "will not be standing this time."

"I doubt you'll remain that way," Solidad quipped.

"We shall see….go Rhyperior!"

The moment his mightiest Pokémon hit the floor, she returned Butterfree and sent out Pidgeot again. Probably fearing that Butterfree would end up much worse than her last Pokémon she used to fight Rhyperior, being much less solid and all.

"Use Steel Wing!"

"Thunder Punch!"

....

Pidgeot laid on the ground, quite thrashed.

Rhyperior looked little the worst for wear. Solid Rock was a wonderful thing.

"That was an improvement, I suppose," Giovanni noted, still in his chair.

"You haven't seen anything yet," Solidad promised, holding a Pokéball in hand.

"Did your Lapras exit the E.R when I wasn't looking?"

Solidad scowled his way at that comment, but she responded with throwing out a new Pokémon for this contest.

"Slow!" the Slowbro declared, a headband adorning the creature's vacant head.

"A Slowbro, with a Muscle Band? Or is it Focus, I can't quite tell and frankly it matters not. You cannot defeat me so easily with such a paltry Pokémon."

His Rhyperior had been trained to fight the Elite Four, to one day be used to capture the Legendary Pokémon of Kanto and Johto! What could one Slowbro do against it!?

In response, Solidad put her hand to her necklace, where a bright light glowed.

Giovanni's eyes went wide with recognition, as the bands of light met up with Slowbro's headband.

She found one of those stones, and the right one at that, in only a few days!?

As the light engulfed Slowbro, it began to change as the shell elongated up the Slowbro's body.

"This changes nothing," Giovanni declared to all present as Rhyperior prepared to fight the Mega-Evolving Pokémon. "I've fought such Pokémon before, I've beaten more impressive evolutions!"
The light burst away, revealing a Slowbro who was now spinning in a way that would make a Hitmontop envious.

"We'll see about that," Solidad declared: as both of them ordered their Pokémon to go at each other.
Poison War Prologue: The Joy of the World

Chapter Notes

Okay, first of all, I'd like to offer a BIG apology for the lack of update. A mix of real life issues, the connection here not cooperating, and the lack of comments (it's a bit harsh to do all that work and not get many responses) is why I haven't updated anymore. But here's the next chapter. Just as a word, it's just the preface to a major turning point for this story, and the next one will be where the plot is going to take a completely new path. Hold on to your seats, cause here we go!

Celadon City – Night after Gym Victory

"The distance between the immediate area of Saffron City, in this case Celadon City, and the immediate area of Lumiose City, in this case Vaniville Town, is approximately 9706 kilometers. For additional forms of distance measurement, please press 1."

Ash, his newly evolved Pidgeot, Pikachu, and his pencil and paper did not press 1. The Pokédex thus continued without delay.

"Mach 2 is roughly 2700 miles per hour. Assuming perfect conditions, Pidgeot would arrive in Vaniville Town in about four hours, though I doubt such conditions would occur. I also doubt you expect her to fly without stopping at least once, and do be aware you are not allowed to create sonic booms over urban areas per the rule of law."

"I don't. I mean, I want you to get to Serena as soon as you can, but I don't want you to kill yourself doing so." Ash told his Pidgeot firmly, quite aware that his Pokémon might very well push themselves too far trying to meet his wishes.

"Caw." 'Understood. I won't stop at every bird feeder, not sure I could even fit on most of them anyway, but I won't ignore everything that looks appealing if I need to take a break.'

"Many trainers have their Pidgeot go on long distance flights for their training: the Johto Gym Leader Falkner wrote a very influential book on the matter after his famous battle with the Elite Four Member Bruno. His ace Pidgeot single handily defeated the Elite Four member's Hitmonlee, Hitmonchan, Hitmontop, and Machamp before being defeated by Bruno's famous Giant Onix, who promptly wiped out the rest of Falkner's Pokémon. Falkner referenced training flights from Johto to Kalos, Alola, Unova, and other regions, and since then many trainers have followed in his footsteps. You will not appear out of the ordinary."

The Pokédex's comment of training Pidgeot was noted, but Ash wasn't quite sure he wanted to tell Pidgeot to train all the time by going off to exotic locales. Maybe it was just doing what Falkner suggested, given that he was a bit of a jerk last time around.

Falkner did know the hypocrisy of complaining about people seeing Flying-types as sitting Ducklett to Electric-types, but then calling Chikorita a sitting duck to his Hoothoot, right?

Of course, that left the trickiest part of this entire plan.
Dear Serena,

A demonic entity told me you are going to suffer....

Ash held the sheet above the Pokédex, as if expecting it to be burnt away.

"I am a Pokédex, not a laser emitter."

The Pokédex apparently didn't do lasers.

Ash briefly considered getting Charmeleon out to burn the paper, but his concerns were dealt with when Pikachu grabbed the paper and tore it apart into little bits.

He tried again:

Dear Serena,

How are you? I'm fine. Have you noticed anything that looks like it will cause you suffering....

Pikachu immediately grabbed that paper from him and tore it up.

"Pikapi..." Pikachu deadpanned, 'Ash, that could mean anything from a blood test to a summer sidewalk sale to an ugly sweater.'

"Oh, good point," Ash admitted, before he tried again.

Dear Serena,

How are you? I'm doing well. I recently won my fourth Gym badge, it was pretty cool. The Pidgeot who is giving you this message won it for me. She's amazing. I recently heard something that suggests you might be in grave danger....

Pikachu tore his paper up, though Ash thought he was getting close to something good.

Dear Serena,

How are you? Since our last letter, I've been doing well. I'm currently out on my Pokémon Journey, and have earned 4 badges so far. This Pidgeot evolved to win me my last badge; isn't she cool? I have caught a lot of really great Pokémon, whom I'm sure would love to meet you if you can ever come back to Kanto. Or maybe I might end up traveling to Kalos, would that be cool?

I think there are a few Gyms near where you live, right? A Bug-type and an Electric-type Gym, right? Or I am I thinking of somewhere else?

Recently, I encountered a crazy person. This person was rather mad, but he said some odd things I just can't get out of my mind. He said something about my friends being hurt, and that means you among others. Now, he was probably just on something, but do you mind being careful? I want to sleep better at night.

I know you and I were worried we would fall out of contact due to me traveling all the time and you not wanting our moms to peak into our mail, but maybe Pidgeot would make it work? What do you think?

Your friend, Ash.

Looking it over a few times, he felt like it worked. He got the message across, but did it in a way that
made his sanity look good.

Pikachu didn't tear it up into confetti, so it was probably okay.

Now the only thing left to do was to tie it onto Pidgeot securely. That would be easy compared to writing it, right?

---

_Fuchsia Gym, the next day_

"Use Psybeam now!"

At his command, the yellow hypnotist Pokémon Hypno's pendant glowed, before firing a massive beam of light.

The Venomoth fluttering in the air tensed, but was overwhelmed before it could muster a counter. The bug-type fell to the ground, powder falling from its wings as it hit the ground, defeated.

"The Gym Leader's Venomoth is unable to battle, Hypno is the winner! The winner is the challenger, Paul!"

Said trainer smirked, looking quite pleased at his victory.

It was nice to see his Hypno pull its weight again. Clearly the threat of punishment gave it all the motivation it needed after it lost to Ketchum's monkey.

Returning his Psychic-type, he strolled over to the defeated Gym Leader, who was holding a badge for him.

"You appear pleased with yourself." Janine, the rookie daughter of Koga observed as a smirk dominated his face.

"Of course I am, I am merely taking the badge that I should have gotten in our last battle. We both know that if your Arbok had not gotten those two critical hits..."

She held up a finger to his face, as if to shush him.

"The Seventh Rule of the Ninja, and the wise words of a Unovan Elite Four Member I met some time ago, say that accomplishing your mission is all that matters, not how you do it. A win is a win even if it is won by luck or with dirty tactics. While you are quite correct in saying that if I had not gotten those critical hits you'd have won, the fact of the matter is you did not, and thus I won that battle."

'Rule of the Ninja' or no 'Rule of the Ninja', that still didn't count. Unless you were using Super Luck or a move with enhanced critical hit chances, critical hit based wins were not a show of skill but dumb luck.

"Say, I noticed you used a Nidoking and a Raichu this time. What happened to that Mr. Mime and Onix you used last time?" She sounded genuinely curious.

Turning away from the girl, he didn't bother to answer her question.

What about them, anyway? They weren't his problem anymore.
Even with the critical hits, they both performed terribly.

Heck, even Raichu didn't perform all that well this time around. She'd better shape up, or she'd be joining those good for nothing...

Something whizzed by his ear, sticking into the wall. He stopped as he noticed it was a shuriken.

He looked over his shoulder to see the Gym Leader looking his way, looking rather cross.

"Truly, I wonder why I'm going to even mention this, but I made a promise to the warden that I'd pass this on, and you are here."

"Go on?" He prompted.

"In a few weeks’ time, Fuchsia will be hosting a Tag-tournament..."

"Pass."

She continued as if he had not even spoken.

"...for the right to be one of the first two trainers, and any guests they may bring, to enter the Safari Zone for the first time in forty years for an entire day, with a limitless ball count."

Perhaps he had passed on it too soon.

Kanto's Safari Zone. A region designated a protected area centuries ago, guarded ferociously by the government for decades. A region depleted on its Pokémon during the Ranger Wars, and sealed off ever since from public access.

All day in one of the richest Pokémon areas in all of Kanto, home to some of the rarest species of Pokémon in the region in large numbers. It was also said that several regions had arranged for their own rare Pokémon to be transported there to breed in safety from poachers and habitat loss.

Access to that, with no limit. With a single day's work, his Pokémon Team could grow massively very quickly.

"You've got my attention," Paul smirked at the ninja girl, "Now tell me, where do I sign up?"

"I don't know, you just said you'd pass so you obviously don't want to know." The smirk on Paul's face slipped back into his usual scowl.

"Where do I sign up?" he said roughly, not liking the way Janine was messing with him.

"I'll tell you, on one condition."

"And that condition is?" Paul had a feeling he'd regret this question as soon as it left his mouth.

"Apologies for not answering me before and I'll tell you what you want to know." Paul gritted his teeth and clenched his fists at his sides, it had been years since he'd had to apologize to anyone and this girl was forcing him to do so.

"I…I…I apologize," he forced out.

"For…?"

"For not answering you earlier." He was going to find some way to make this girl pay for this. Janine
smirked at him and let a shuriken spin on her finger.

"I accept your apology."

"Now, where do I sign up?"

---

**Route 17**

Four living beings, and a sentient mechanical apparatus, sat at the edge of land, where the sea wafted a few feet below them in its endless blue.

The largest of these beings reached her arms back, and threw a line into the sea water, a lure floating up from the rippling impact point.

Another just stuck her pink tail into the water absently.

"**Activating DexNav program,**" the Pokédex declared out loud as Misty absently listened to it. Apparently it had been nagging Ash to try the feature out for the last few days, having been distracted from doing so earlier by the 'falling from the sky' incident and only remembering about it after Celadon, and he had asked her to let it do so for her.

Mostly because she would actually have use for it.

"**DexNav program operation, commencing scanning for local Pokémon life forms. Current fleshy human fishing, so I will sort out the land based Pokémon for now. Pokémon in water detected, identifying species. Species identified as Tentacool, Magikarp, Tentacruel, Shellder, Staryu, Horsea, and Seadra. Would you like to know about the various land based Pokémon located behind you?**"

"No." Misty had a pretty good idea that if she said yes, the thing would start with Bug-Pokémon. Next to her, her new Wooper nuzzled into her side affectionately, her Slowpoke absently did some of her own fishing, and Psyduck grumbled something about why he was on 'knock out Tentacool' duty.

The water around Slowpoke's tail bubbled a bit, and Slowpoke let out a long, slow declaration of surprise as she lifted the tail out of the water, revealing a sucking red Magikarp.

"A wild Magikarp appeared!" the Pokédex stated the obvious.

"I see that." Misty grumbled as Slowpoke lowered her tail back into the water as the startled fish swam off.

"You know, it would probably speed things up if you just went into the water and grabbed one of the Pokémon you are after, which I assume to be Tentacool, Tentacruel, Shellder, and Seadra, or possibly just use the abilities I know you possess to make them come to you. Fishing is incredibly taxing and time inefficient." The Pokédex offered some unwarranted advice even as Slowpoke lifted her tail up to reveal a second Magikarp.

"Fishing is relaxing, that is not relaxing." Misty growled tersely as Wooper and Slowpoke failed to read the mood. Psyduck however, was more familiar with it.
"Psy." 'Let me guess, you are either reacting over nothing as if it were the end of the world, or you had a bad dream last night. If it were the later, I'm told humans say that the best way to get rid of bad dreams is...'

"That is none of your business!" Misty snapped at him, startling Wooper. She quickly removed one hand from her currently inactive rod to nudge the little Pokémon back to her side and calm him down, even as Slowpoke's face finally morphed into a 'oh crud, my trainer just yelled loudly' as she pulled up a Horsea sucking on her tail.

"Additional Horsea Data Analysis complete, sending data back to central database," the Pokédex stated, ignoring the drama. Then again, as it could not understand Pokémon, it really couldn't if the thing even wanted to.

Psyduck leaned in towards Misty, looking at her with the best form of intense gazing possible for it.

"...Fine..." Misty sighed in an exasperated tone, "I had a bad dream, and before you ask, no it was not related in any way to Ash or Iris." While that certainly did worry her, that was not the dominant part of her mind, subconscious or otherwise.

She took a deep breath, even as Slowpoke pulled up a third Magikarp.

"It was about my sisters. The dream...it was about them coming back and finding me. I know that them actually bothering to do that is extremely unlikely, and even in the dream I sort of knew that. But they did...and they tied me up and threw Weedle on me: slimy, sticky, buggy Weedle. Then they stuffed me in a Vileplume..." Already shaking as she started talking about the Weedle, she shivered again about going through another Vileplume toxin incident. "Everything got real trippy after that: Violet grew a copy of my mother's head on her arm, and Daisy suddenly had giant hoop earrings made of clouds...but thankfully I woke up after that before it got any weirder."

She was gripping the fishing pole tightly causing it to vibrate slightly, though as she got it off her chest her shoulders seem to relax a bit. The shaking lure didn't seem to attract any more takers though.

"Duck." 'Well...I can't help you there with my limitless wisdom, I don't really do nightmares, that's more of a you thing than a me thing.'

She leveled a glare at the duck for that comment. As usual, it had no effect.

"Ignoring your emotional issues," the Pokédex spoke up, a beep going off from it as it scanned the next Magikarp Slowpoke pulled from the water, "there is the more pressing question of why you have not reeled in anything yet. My algorithms state you should have obtained a Tentacool by this point, based upon your casting range and Tentacool behavioral studies."

"Well, my experience with fishing says that it takes time, a lot more time than any algorithms you may have," Misty snarked back at the machine, even as she heard Slowpoke's telltale signs of catching something again.

"The data does not lie; something is very...that Magikarp is of an unusual color!" The Pokédex was suddenly shouting as the attention of all around shifted over to Slowpoke, who was holding a golden-colored Magikarp up in the air. Even she looked rather surprised.

"Oh yes, it is unusually colored," Misty stated without much enthusiasm.

"That is all you have to say?! That is incredibly rare, even among Magikarp! Unusually
colored Pokémon are supposed to ignite feelings of awe and eagerness in trainers, as they immediately try and capture it for bragging rights and, more importantly, so I can get extensive data! This is not a Magikarp merely to be scanned, no I must deeply analyze it! Why aren't you capturing it so I may do so!?

"Honestly, I don't really care about its colors," Misty admitted to a stunned Pokédex.

"I want to capture all of the world's Water Pokémon, and I already have a Magikarp. Capturing a second one just for its colors doesn't make any real sense for me, particularly as I already have a Gyarados. So, I really don't see the reason..."

"Reason? Reason!? What is wrong with you!?" the Pokédex exclaimed in shock and horror as Slowpoke began to lower her tail. "And don't you even dare let that fish go you dim-witted mammal!"

---

**Professor Oak's Lab**

"...And so, after breaking through the lines surrounding the forces of Lt. Surge at the end of the Decolore Island Campaign, former Gym Leader turned Commando Muramasa and his Scizor Masamune retired from his position as both Commando Leader and Gym Leader. Most say it is due to injury, but some believe it was in response to what he saw and did during the War. He now runs a Trainer Academy in Johto to this very day....."

*The End*

Credits rolled down as the television documentary ended.

".....They certainly white-washed that, though not as badly as they used to." Oak muttered.

"Bulba." Bulbasaur seemed interested in what was going on.

"Scatta." One of Ash's Scatterbugs agreed before jumping off and wandering off.

Yes, the Scatterbug. He wondered how Ash had obtained them, but after what happened with the Goomy did he really want to know?

For all he knew, Ash stole them from an organized crime syndicate. His heart couldn't take that sort of stress.

And he did not want to be the one to tell his mother Ash had gotten killed saving Pokémon from criminals.

He could only be thankful his grandson didn't get up to such craziness.....

**RING-RING-RING, RING-RING-RING, PHONE CALL....**

The phone at his side started going crazy, as if someone had used Teeter Dance on it. He immediately reached for it.

"Hello, Professor Oak speaking."

"Come quickly! It's amazing! I've done it, I've finally done it!" The excited voice at the other end of
the line exclaimed joyfully, before hanging up just as suddenly.

"Bul?" Bulbasaur inquired as Professor Oak stood up and went towards his closet.

"Oh, that was an old friend of mine from college who lives down the road, his name is Kim Monocles Boxer. An unusual name I know, but his family is kooky that way. He's an inventor of moderate success and a great tendency to cause accidental harm."

He emerged from the closet, an oxygen tank and mask, a fire extinguisher, gas mask, metal club, and a Pokéball studded belt.

"I have urgent business in town that has just come up! You wanted hands on experience Rirtson, you're going to have to give the Gyarados pond their annual flossing for me!"

The intern Rirtson Rojo didn't have a chance to respond before Oak was out of the door.

....

A quick jog the streets that did not garner as many odd looks as one should get when dressed like you had a desire to gas people and then smack them upside the head with a bat afterwards.

Professor Oak rounded the corner to the Boxer residence, and dropped all of his equipment in shock. Not the belt of course, he had pants to keep up after all.

"I've done it, I've finally done it! Three years of hard work has finally manifested my crowning achievement!" The graying mustached scientist shouted, dancing in front of a vacant lot like he had just won a Pokémon League with a Sunkern, Rattata, and a Magikarp.

"...What....what on earth have you done?! Don't tell me you rebuilt that ray gun, I had that thing crushed by an Onix for a reason!"

"No, no, no, nothing like that! Look, look, look!" Doctor Boxer pointed at his vacant lot, where his house had once been.

"Yes, I see your home is missing. I also see that you still have those Mr. Mime themed gnomes in your vegetable garden....." Professor Oak's planned statement on how ugly those things were, and how they had given his grandson nightmares three times in the past, were quieted when he noticed what was in the center of the missing homestead.

A single cube.

"My word...." Professor Oak declared as he approached the cube, apprehensive as one might be approaching an egg that was unidentifiable.

"Yes, yes, touch it! I know you want too!" His more eccentric fellow grinned as the Professor picked the cube up and held down a single, round button.

The Pokémon Professor darted away as the cube unleashed a massive burst of energy, much like a Pokéball. However, instead of taking on the shape of a Pokémon and solidifying, it took on the shape of something much larger.

Doctor Boxer was grinning proudly.

"I have cracked the code no one has ever been able to crack. I have found a way to isolate the unique Pokémon attribute that allows Pokéballs to absorb them, and applied it to other forms of matter.
Now, I still have some kinks I'd like to work out: I've already patented the process with the proper authorities, but I'd like to set up some insurances against accidental activation first, but after that I am putting this idea out to market! My dear Samuel, I present to you my greatest invention ever, the invention that will truly change the world of every person on the planet…the Item Capsule!"

And also presenting, with no visible damages, the Boxer Home.

---

*Crimson City Battle Club*

"Char, char, char!" Charmeleon gloated, standing on top of a Weepinbell and Drowzee like a king. 'More, yes, bring me more! Bring me more punching bags!'

Squirtle slowly backed away from the gloating lizard, even as his opposing trainer returned his Pokémon and walked away.

"You know, that's the fifth Weepinbell today, and that's not counting the ten Bellsprout and that Victreebel…." Ash noted to the referee, who was willing to explain.

"This city was once the seat of a powerful clan known as the Fisher Family, at least before they moved to being economic powers instead of war powers. They won many battles with the Bellsprout family, and the evolved Victreebel were the primary manner the Lords used to punish deserters, traitors, and spies."

Good to know…..

Perhaps that was why Jeanette's Bellsprout was so powerful back in Indigo. It was some sort of ultra-breed Bellsprout bred over the course of centuries for the sole purpose of judo flipping Groudon.

….That was an interesting mental image, and he wondered if he'd ever get to see it.

Well, he had probably been here long enough. Misty and Iris were probably done, so he'd go and…..

"Hey Ash!"

Ash froze as he reached for his Pokéballs, as he found a new challenger waiting for him.

"A.J?"

His opponent from before Vermillion, and from the Battle Dome grinned, before holding out two Pokéballs.

"Hey Ash! Been a while hasn't it? Anyway, I hope you don't mind, but I want to get some training in before I get to the next Gym. Did you hear that Erika's actually opening her Gym up now?!"

Yes, actually he did hear about it.

"I want to earn my third badge there, want to help me out?"

Yes, but he felt sort of awkward about it. He didn't want to keep Misty and Iris waiting because he wanted to fight some more.

Pikachu gestured at his shoulder, causing him to turn over behind the viewing glass, where he saw Misty and Iris standing. Iris nodded, and Misty shrugged.
Ash was 90% sure that meant 'go ahead'.

"Okay, let's do it then. Squirtle, take a rest." He returned his turtle, who nodded in acknowledgement.

"Okay Snivy, you're up!" He sent out his Grass-type from Unova, who had rested up from her earlier bouts.

He'd return Charmeleon, but Charmeleon was still upset about not getting to battle Erika. So if he tired himself out, he only had himself to blame.

"Okay, time to meet my anti-Grass aces!" A.J threw his Pokéballs into the air, revealing a Butterfree and Beedrill.

Ash saw a Rain Dance in his future. He also saw Misty flinch and back away a few steps and nearly back into a scary biker dude.

He briefly saw the Biker snarl at Misty, and for some reason that made his blood boil. However, she quickly glared at him and made him leave, and his blood cooled off just as quickly.

"Begin!" The ref shouted, ignorant of boiling blood as A.J pointed his way.

"Okay Butterfree, use Gust!" Butterfree began to flap its wings, sending a good looking wind storm at Ash.

He figured his Butterfree would have had a similarly strong Gust back when he still knew Gust. A.J was clearly doing a good job training his Pokémon.

"Block it with Leaf Storm Snivy!" Ash called. Snivy grinned, before sending the Grass-type Overheat (with reversed effects) at the storm.

The two attacks collided, cancelling each other out.

"Beedrill, use X-Scissor quickly!" A.J ordered as Beedrill flew ahead with glowing blue stingers.

"Block it with Metal Claw!" Ash responded as Charmeleon's claws glowed gray and the fire lizard charged.

The two attacks collided in the middle of the battle field, X-Scissor was held at bay.

"Now Snivy!" Ash's command was quickly met by Snivy jumping into the air and towards Charmeleon, "Use Leaf Blade!"

The grass-attack smashed down on Beedrill, the green tail knocking Beedrill onto the dirt with a satisfying thump.

"No, Beedrill!" A.J shouted in concern.

"I know about Erika, in fact I actually battled her a while back," Ash informed a stunned A.J as he revealed his Rainbow Badge in his jacket.

"Whoa……"

"She's tough, and she knows how to counter bugs. She has combos that can stop them from flying."

"She can what!?!" A.J exclaimed in shock, before steeling himself and noticing his Beedrill stand up.
His Butterfree fluttered over to the downed Bug, ready to aid if need be.

"Well in that case, I'll train my Beedrill to fight on the ground as good as he can in the air! And my Sandslash doesn't have wings! Thanks Ash for the warning, but I'm feeling pretty good about it."

"If you say so…." Ash returned his focus to the battle, "Charmeleon, Flame Charge!"

Charmeleon stomped his feet, igniting before charging right at the grounded Beedrill.

"Use Electroweb Butterfree!"

"Use what?" Ash repeated as Butterfree shot out electrified string, which formed around Flame Charge and snagged Charmeleon, causing him to crash and skid across the ground.

"Yeah! It took about a hundred dollars' worth of batteries to teach her to do that, but it was so worth it! Pity the Cerulean Gym isn't still open, that'll be killer there. But enough about that, Beedrill use Brick Break on Snivy, on the ground!"

With a glowing stinger, Beedrill sped across the field on his legs, moving only a bit awkwardly. Snivy tensed, ready to respond.

"Use Leaf Blade, then Leaf Storm!"

Snivy grinned, before energizing her tail. She clashed with the Brick Break, equaling it before getting above Beedrill, and letting her Leaf Storm rip.

The leaves impacted into Beedrill, pushing the bug into a crater and defeating it.

"Beedrill!"

"Beedrill is unable to battle," the ref declared as Snivy grinned.

"Sni." 'Well, that was easy.'

And as Murphy once said, never jinx things.

"Aerial Ace Butterfree!"

Butterfree slammed into Snivy, sending the Grass-type spinning. She eventually righted herself, but was shaken.

"…Vy…." 'I am getting sick and tired of that move. One of these days, I am going to hit someone with it!'

Could Snivy use Aerial Ace? Ash wasn't sure, but he didn't have time to ask because…

"Char!"

Charmeleon had managed to break out of the Electroweb. And he wasn't happy.

"Char!" 'How dare you tie me up like I'm some Tauros?! Do I look like some Tackle happy ground dweller?!!'

Butterfree made a mewing sound that Ash suspected translated to 'Yes, yes you do.'

Charmeleon roared in response, fire building in his mouth. The fire became a raging inferno, which
released upon Butterfree.

Charmeleon had used Flamethrower.

Butterfree fell to the ground, charred and defeated.

"Butterfree is unable to battle! The victor is Ash!" the ref declared as Butterfree was returned.

"….Good job, you all deserve a good rest." A.J told his bugs as he grinned to Ash.

"Well, I guess the three of us have some more training to do. Thanks for the heads up about Erika though, I want to see if I can get Beedrill really up to the tops on the ground before I face her. Say, how many Pokémon did she fight you with?"

"Four," Ash informed the Sandslash trainer as Charmeleon was oddly silent, he had been grinning since he got Flamethrower working properly and it was now starting to get creepy.

Snivy was just looking like she wanted to start imitating Charmeleon and make Aerial Ace work, which was going to be weird he just knew it.

"Four huh….." A.J looked thoughtful as he debated this information, "I left my Rattata back home with my Pa for company, and my Geodude and Tentacool wouldn't really be good for that Gym. It might be a good idea to see if I can catch a new Bug at the Bug Catching Contest….yes that's exactly what I'll do!"

"A Bug Catching Contest?" Ash questioned. Ash was fairly certain this was not Johto, it would have taken them at least one more week to get that lost.

"Yep, it's one of the International Bug Surveyors projects, they host 'em all over every few months or so. It's later today, and even if you don't win you can keep a Bug. If I can catch a Venonat or Paras….." He left on those words, but not before telling Ash where the park was.

Now, all that remained was figuring out if it was worth asking Misty if she'd tolerate him going to one.

…

"What, more bugs!?"

The mental images of crawling Weedle all around her, of swarming Beedrill and menacing Scyther flashed through her mind, no matter how fast she shook her head no.

"Thought I'd ask…" Ash sounded properly apologetic. That was nice, she really did not want to deal with an Ash who was dead set on…..

"A contest? Is it merely to capture the most Bug-type Pokémon?" Iris asked Ash, sounding curious.

No, no, no…..No. No bugs for you! No bugs for anyone…..

Except Butterfree, he was already here. And the Scatterbug Ash had someone found in Celadon, defying all logic.

"It's a contest to capture the best Bug-Pokémon you can at the local park. Each trainer is given two special Park Balls: if you find a better Bug Pokémon than the one you find first you can use the second one to catch it, and release the first one. You get to keep the Pokémon you catch, and if you win you get an evolution stone of your choice from the Stone Town Mining Company, who are one
of the sponsors. A lot of trainers get Leaf Stones here, so they can evolve Weepinbell into Victreebel. If you catch a really rare Pokémon, you'll even get a photo on the wall of the park office and a bit on you in the local news."

The young voice who explained it came from behind her, turning around Misty found a dark haired boy sitting on a bench, stroking a Caterpie that was on his lap.

The hair was a distinct shade from the dark hair color Ash and Red had, and he had blue eyes. He seemed a tad sad somehow.

He was still touching the bug though so…

Ew, ew, ew, ew, ew, ew, ew…..

"Oh, I see…" Iris had lost her interest. Good.

"I caught my Caterpie in the last contest, I lost to a guy who caught a Beedrill but I don't really mind. A lot of people capture Pokémon there as their starter Pokémon."

The boy continued to ramble, and looking over her shoulder she saw a spark of something light up in Ash's eyes.

Great, now Ash had a reason.

"Excellent: enter the contest," Ash's Pokédex spoke up, adding more fuel to this bug-filled fire.

"The data from the local park is desirable. As I was not able to obtain the data I desired from fishing, I demand compensation!"

Really, it was just a golden Magikarp. Give it up already.

"I saw you win all those battles, you're really good." The kid addressed Ash, still sounding pitiful.

"I try to train my Caterpie, but the trainers around here never go easy on me. All the other kids my age have stronger Pokémon, and they really hurt Caterpie. How did you get so strong?"

"Training, that's how." Ash told the little boy as he reached for a Pokéball he hadn't used today and released it.

She took a step back as the black Kalos bug Scatterbug appeared.

"You train the best together, and I think my Scatterbug is just at the right level to train with your Caterpie, what do you think?"

Ash smiled at the boy, whose eyes lit up, fires of joy evaporating away the clouds of depression. Soon, Tackle met Tackle as the two Pokémon trained.

It was spontaneous, something that wasn't planned or even really discussed. Misty never heard the boy's name mentioned at all, he never gave it and Ash never gave his.

The entire thing was just Ash deciding out of nowhere to help a little boy get stronger. Right there, right then.

Where did anyone get such kindness? She'd never seen anyone do anything like this without having an ulterior motive. There had to be something, some point in his past that made Ash like this, maybe a head injury or something that's made him act so selflessly.
From the corner of her eye, she noticed Iris also watching the spectacle. There was a certain, evaluating and most unsettling, approving look in the eye that rubbed Misty the wrong way.

It wasn't malicious, or evil, or anything that made Iris look like the bad guy in some action movie. No, it was another sort of unsettling all together.

One that brought up a whole bucket of insecurities that had been lingering for quite a while. Misty forced her eyes to focus on something else other than the strange glint in Iris' eyes. Choosing not to look at the bugs Misty instead studied Ash's face, an excited fire in his eyes and a grin on his lips; even though this was a training battle for a boy they'd only just met. Seeing him like this gave Misty a fluttering feeling in her chest which she quickly pushed aside to be dealt with later when she was alone.

With a final tackle, the two Pokémon disengaged, both looking quite exhausted, before they both began to glow.

Ash grinned, and the little boy's eyes went wide, as Caterpie turned into its solid cocoon form, while Scatterbug became rounded and white.

"Metapod and Spewpa, Both are Cocoon Pokémon. They naturally evolve in a short time after taking form, which can be accelerated with training in this stage," the Pokédex spoke as the boy grabbed hold of his Metapod and hugged it.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" he exclaimed again and again, tears of joy in his eyes. Ash grinned as he knelt down and petted his own new Pokémon.

"No problem!"

**Entrance to Crimson City Park**

The building he had been directed to for the contest rules was a log built structure at the edge of the park. Normally it was just a hub for maps, guides, and other little necessities.

Here though, he was among about two dozen trainers (or young aspiring ones here to capture a Pokémon that was mostly safe) including A.J and the boy he had just been helping, present with their Pokémon (Pikachu for him, Sandslash for A.J, and Metapod for the boy).

About a dozen portraits of remarkable catches hung on the wall: he saw Jeanette Fisher in one of them with her Scyther and Bellsprout. Who knew she had once had such dorky braces?

The other most catching photo was one of a trainer who had a Caterpie of a golden color. That would probably be an instant win if Ash ever saw one.

That didn't matter though, he had a mission and he would achieve it.

"Scanning, scanning….Pokémon data analysis of gathered Pokémon initiating…."  

And it was not the Pokédex's mission.

"You have one hour to capture the best Bug Pokémon you can find. Each trainer is given two Park Balls, and you can only keep one Pokémon in the balls at any given time. You can keep the best one, and the winner can choose from one of several stones!" A warden dressed man declared, sweeping
his arm over a display of evolution stones: Fire, Water, Thunder, Leaf, Moon, Sun, Shiny and Dusk, with the Dawn Stone not being present.

"Now, begin!" he declared, as everyone ran out at once

....

"Activating DexNav program. Scanning Park for all present Pokémon species; Scanning, scanning…would you like me to play loading music or make one of those aggravating buffering icons?"

"No," Ash told the device he was holding in front of him as if he was using some sort of waking based A.R phone app on the go, Pikachu trotting along at his side as they walked through the park.

"Very well. Pokémon species identified: Rattata, Pidgey, Bellsprout, Caterpie, Metapod, Butterfree, Paras, Parasect, Weedle, Kakuna, Beedrill, Venonat, Venomoth, Ledyba, Spinarak, Oddish, Yanma, Shuckle, Poliwag, Magikarp, Ekans, Hoothoot, and Pineco. Our location in Western Kanto is the reason for the primarily Johto residential Pokémon, though we are near the generally accepted extent of their range in Kanto. No Scyther or Pinsir, statistically known as 'instant win Pokémon' detected in this park. You currently only have caught the Caterpie line, and my scans on these species is not sufficient."

"So, who’s the closet?" Ash cut to the chase as the Pokédex calculated a response.

"A Shuckle is located ten steps in front of you."

Ash looked up from the device, only to see a rock. It wasn't even a red one with holes in it.

It was just a regular rock, albeit one with a lot of cracks in it.

"I just see a rock." Ash stated bluntly.

"Try breaking it," the Pokédex suggested just as bluntly.

"Pika…." 'Iron Tail should work,' Pikachu suggested. At Ash's nod, Pikachu leapt into the air and charged the metallic power of Iron into his tail.

The resulting Iron Tail slammed into the rock, causing it to explode into multiple parts and spill out….

"Shuckle!" A round, red stone with multiple holes and a pair of yellow tentacles. Or, as the Pokémon stated its identity as, a Shuckle.

"Shuckle, the Mold Pokémon. The berries that end up within Shuckle ferment into a healing juice that is quite popular among hippies. Shuckle do have the potential to win Bug-catching contests, and also the potential to have you thrown out for catching a unfair Pokémon as they are not generally found in tall grass and the forests like other Bug-types."

So, it was all depending on the judge huh? Well, it still had a good shot….

Of course, that required him to weaken Shuckle first to capture it, but with the defenses Shuckle had that really only left one choice.

"Pikachu, use Zap Cannon!" Ash called. Pikachu nodded, as the heavy electric ball began to spiral in
Pikachu's hands.

Pikachu lunged at the Shuckle, who glowed with a Withdraw attack with a loud shout of "Shuckle!"

The Zap Cannon struck, causing Shuckle to collapse amidst paralysis.

"Go, Park Ball!" Ash yelled as he threw his ball at the Shuckle, said bug being energized and sealed in the ball.

It wiggled a few times, before stopping without a solid click.

"Huh…." Ash noted the lack of that finalizing click.

"Data registration beginning, and yes that is normal for Park Balls. It will make the more common 'You got X Pokémon', sound upon the end of the contest." The Pokédex informed him. "If you let it out, it will no longer be captured and will run away. Park Balls were upgraded with Heal Ball tech a few years ago after years of incessant prompting by the Scyther Society, so Shuckle will no longer be paralyzed."

Ash picked his now Shuckle carrying ball up, before holding it to Pikachu.

"So what do you think buddy, think this Shuckle would be a good friend?"

Pikachu rapidly shook his head no, so fast you'd think Ash had asked him 'do you think Misty would appreciate me breaking into her secret base at two in the morning in a Pinsir suit while Yodeling off-key about the Electabuzz like he was related to Casey?'

Given that Shuckle only had about two lines of dialogue between being found, and being captured that made Ash sort of curious as to what Shuckle exactly said.

Or was he better off not knowing?

….

"Weedle."

The pointed bug type crawled past Ash and Pikachu, sounding bereft of emotion and totally ignoring them. It didn't tense, or attack, or anything. It just, squirmed past them. It was quite abnormal behavior, to say the least.

"Weedle." A second Weedle crawled past the exact same way, doing the exact same ignoring of them.

"Weedle."

"Weedle."

"Weedle."

"Weedle, a Bug-type Pokémon that is part Poison. Weedle is not acting as it normally does, and I have yet to detect any data that suggests the reason why," the Pokédex stated the obvious as a parade of Weedle continued to move in a single direction in a straight line.

"Oddish." The straight parade of monotone Weedle were broken up by an Oddish marching in tow with them, similarly behaving oddly.
"Oddish, the Weed Pokémon. A species found in Kanto and Johto, and an introduced species in Hoenn that has spread rapidly, Oddish are said to have the odd behavior of digging themselves into the soil during the day to absorb nutrients. This is less odd than what that Oddish is currently doing." The Pokédex continued to state the obvious.

"Pi! Pika!" Pikachu darted in front of the vacant Oddish, 'What on earth are you doing!'

"Oddish."

Pikachu was walked into by the Oddish, who knocked him over onto the ground. Pikachu was promptly walked on by an Oddish, several Weedle, and a Venonat that wasn't skipping as it normally did.

As a Spinarak followed, Pikachu unleashed an electric burst, paralyzing it before pushing off the ground and knocking the somewhat singed spider on its back.

Ash threw the second Park Ball at it, which promptly absorbed the bug and shook a few times. After it stopped, the center button of both it and the other Park Ball began to flash.

Ash reached for the first one, and hit the button. The Park Ball released the Shuckle, who muttered something before dragging itself away from them.

Pikachu sparked his cheeks, hissing something back at the Shuckle that Ash would not want to say on the same continent as his mother. Just what on Earth did that Shuckle say to make Pikachu that angry?!

"Spinarak, the String Spit Pokémon. Spinarak captures its prey in web nets and is most active at night. Spinarak's data inside the Pokéball quickly changed from an unidentified oddity of the mind to normal in about .167 seconds, suggesting that something is causing the odd behavior in three different Pokémon species. All of these species share the Poison-type, suggesting a common link."

"Poison-type huh..." Ash pondered, before his eyes narrowed, "like Ekans and Koffing! This must be a Team Rocket scheme to capture Pokémon!"

"Oh, it's not us!" Out of nowhere Jessie, James, and Meowth all poked their heads out of a nearby tree, startling both Ash and Pikachu.

"Prepare for Trouble, but this is not our doing!"

"Make it double, you are just fooling!"

Oh great, they were doing their motto thing.

"To protect our target from silly delusions!"

"To unite you with proper conclusions!"

"To denounce the virtues of assumptions and guesses!"

"To extend reality and wash away ignorant messes!"

"Jessie!"

"James!"
"Team Rocket, informs the uninformed at the speed of light!"

"Accept the truth now, or prepare to fight!"

"Meowth that's right!"

"Wobbuffet!" Out of nowhere, their Wobbuffet had joined in. Since when did they get him?!

"If we had the technology to control Pokémon like that, you'd be aware of it," Jessie told him bluntly, as if they had not just done a hammy motto that got old sometime after he got hit with a chandelier.

"And even then, what good would that do us? We're stalking you until we are to do otherwise; we aren't on active Pokémon snatching duty and won't be until we are told to resume it. Sure, we did take all of a guy's Pokémon the other day, but he was asking for it and he was a complete douche bag." James continued, before he looked confused. "Though come to think of it, what does that even mean? No one's ever told me what douche bag even means, perhaps I need to consult the internet?"

"So, yeah…don't blame us for whatever creepy stuff is going on here. We're just as odded out by it as you are, but good luck on this contest of yours kid! We're rooting for ya!" Meowth finished for the trio and the silent Wobbufett as they slunk back into the leaves as if they weren't ever there.

Still in the dark as they had been before Ash had his perfectly reasonable theory about the cause of all of this, and now very creeped out: Ash and Pikachu quickly made a beeline for the other end of the park in the exact opposite direction from Team Rocket.

....

"The Pokémon are acting really weird, right?"

"Yeah, I know. I've only been able to get a Paras this time: the Venonat won't battle even when they have Ember sent at them. I really want one of them, but they are acting nuttier than my bag of peanuts and I keep hitting trees trying to get the possessed little things."

"Yeah it's totally freaky. It's like some Bloodliner crap or something. Do you think one of them is cheating?"

"Well, if they are, I'm going to introduce them to my Growlithe's teeth!"

"Not if my Doduo gets to first!"

Ash listened in on the conversation between two trainers: one with a Doduo and another with a Growlithe, with unease.

Was that what was going on?

"Do you think that's what's up buddy?" he asked Pikachu, who frowned and looked contemplative on the question.

"I cannot say. While I have access to a lot of the data from Rota's Library on Bloodliners, I cannot use it to determine if what is occurring is a control phenomenon. I could if I had field data to work with, but the data Rota has is not up to my standards. Perhaps if you were to ask Misty to provide some I could determine if this is in fact a Bloodliner’s doing."

Ash pinched his lips as they continued to move through the challenge, not liking the implications
much at all.

Of someone abusing their powers to win, or how much anger that seemed to inspire in others.

It made him worry, though not for himself. He knew it was dangerous for him, but for some reason when he heard those trainers threatening to attack the possible Bloodliner cheater, it made him think about them going after Misty and Iris, and that made him worried.

It also made him want to go up to them and have Pikachu fry their Pokémon so they wouldn't be able to do it. The idea of either of them being hurt made him feel…..angry.

He didn't quite know why though: was it because he had thought he had lost Iris already and was lucky enough to get her back? Or because he knew Misty had been through enough bad things in her life?

Or was it something else.

"Yanma…"

Ash and Pikachu stopped in their tracks as they approached a babbling brook, along which several Poliwag waggled on shore and a Magikarp leaped out of the water.

Among them was a singular red and green bug Pokémon, with four clear wings with orange stripes on them.

"Yanma, the Clear Wing Pokémon. Yanma are able to use their wings powerful force to shatter windows. As such, many ancient nobles wished to eradicate them. Today, Yanma are a rare Pokémon found in small numbers mostly in Johto, Sinnoh, and Kalos."

"Yanma's rare?" Ash checked what the Pokédex said.

"Yes, Yanma is rare. Did I not imply that strongly enough?"

So, Team Rocket actually caught a rare Pokémon in the old timeline? Well good for them.

And if it was rare…then he'd get what he was after.

"Pikachu, use Thunderbolt!" Ash called. Pikachu nodded, before jumping into the air and sending the electric bolt flying.

Yanma's eyes flashed green, and ducked under them.

"Detect detected" the Pokédex stated.

"I know…." Ash knew what Detect looked like.

Yanma turned around and flew at the now landing Pikachu with glowing wings.

"Okay Pikachu, I think that's Wing Attack, Dodge it!"

"Pi!" 'Don't have to tell me twice.' Pikachu ducked as the Wing Attack flew over him.

Yanma turned around and flew back, this time glowing green.

"Yanma's ability, Speed Boost, is active. Speed Boost Yanma were a favorite of the legendary biker Yugo: famous for his stunts and his complete lack of coolness when off his bike…."
"Pikachu, meet Yanma head on with a Counter-Shield!" Ash ignored his Pokédex's rambling as Pikachu jumped into the air and began spinning.

Wing Attack collided with the shield, stopped and leaving a shaken Yanma.

Pikachu landed on the ground as Yanma fell, appearing paralyzed.

"Go, Park Ball!" Ash threw the ball formerly belonging to the foul mouthed (?) Shuckle. Said ball quickly absorbed Yanma.

As the ball began to shake with no sign of escape, Ash grinned widely. This would be it.

He'd be able to get what he entered this competition for.

...

While Ash was away doing...bug things, she and Iris were left to their own devices.

Which in this case meant sitting on a restaurant patio with food and drink that Ash had bought for them using the money on his Pokédex. Once he knew that they were settled into their seats he'd dashed off to catch some bugs.

A shiver ran through her as she thought about the slimy critters, she did appreciate the fact Ash had thought about her....and Iris first though. A subtle warmth gently pulsed in her chest as she thought about it.

Taking a bite of her sandwich, Misty noted that there was only one other person outside eating today: a pale girl with dark hair done up in a pair of ponytails with ice-colored eyes wearing a long sleeved red shirt and long black skirt. She was nervously alternating between picking at an order of nachos and spinning a glass of water that had lost a lot of ice, as if expecting something to come out and attack her.

Did this place have a gang problem along with a bug problem?

Or worse, a problem with gangs who use Bug-Pokémon?

Taking a sip of her glass of water, she was soon to regret this action.

"So, what is your relationship with Ash exactly?" Iris asked out of nowhere.

Misty spat out her drink and coughed harshly at the unexpected query causing the nervous looking nacho girl to jump in her seat.

Recovering from her coughing fit misty wiped her mouth with a napkin and turned to a perplexed looking Iris. The dragon girl had probably never seen a spit-take before.

"Wh...wha...what...." Misty managed to stutter out as Iris continued her line of question.

"I am curious. My parents taught me that it is considered polite to ask."

Polite? Polite to ask what exactly?

Why could she feel a sense of foreboding, a feeling that she would greatly regret this conversation at some point in the not too distant future? At least the shy girl would be too shy to listen to their soon to be very private conversation.
"Well...I do happen to like Ash a lot," Misty said lowering her voice to make sure she wasn't overheard. Talking about her feelings wasn't her strong suit so being quiet about it was for the best. "He's been a very good friend and travelling companion to me. His kindness is probably the best part about him, it's rare to see someone do the things he does without wanting something in return. But if you're asking how I feel about him in a romantic sense..." Misty paused, hoping that Iris would drop the subject but one look at the dragon girl's face told her that there was no indication of that happening. With a small sigh Misty continued, "...I do find him attractive and not just because he's good looking, I'm not shallow like that, his personality makes him attractive too. The way he's so selfless and caring it's just..."

She stopped talking when she saw Iris nod. Good, any more and she'd have gone as red as a Pokéball. The blush she was already wearing was bad enough, she was just glad that Psyduck had stayed in his ball for once and not come out to comment on her admission. Her hand hovered over the duck's ball just in case he decided to make an appearance.

"I see....so you are interested in Ash, but are not currently actively courting him."

And you wanted to know that, why?

She asked Iris that, though after taking a few moments to phrase it more diplomatically.

"I don't know how humans teach it, but I was taught that when you are thinking of courting someone, you should ask anyone whom they are with first."

Something about that sentence did not click with Misty.

She had seen plenty of shows about old-fashioned marriage proposals where the parents bargained their children off. She had also seen plenty of somewhat less old-fashioned, but still old, shows where it was considered necessary to ask the permission of the parent of your future girlfriend (boyfriend only applying if the boy was raised by a single mother for some reason) first.

But the way Iris was phrasing it, sounded more like you were asking the person's current wife or girlfriend, for permission to date their husband or boyfriend (or husband or boyfriend to date their wife or girlfriend for more modern gender equality).

She couldn't have understood that properly, it had to have been misspoken.

"In the time I have known Ash, he has shown himself to be strong, with the promise of getting even stronger." Iris began with a bit of a blush on her face. Misty had the oddest feeling that her comments about his looks and Iris's about his strength were closer to being the same comment than it sounded up front. "And his personality is quite nice too. I have an older brother, you see, he is quite powerful. However, he is a jerk, and because of that while he did sire a lot of offspring, he never had a permanent mate."

"Uh...." Misty wasn't sure where Iris was going with this.

"I probably do need to figure out how humans court one another, given that none of the methods I know would work. Neither Ash nor I have wings and would not be able to court each other by grabbing one another and freefalling in sync, or by building a nest to show off to him. When I do know, I do plan to initiate courting."

Yes, Ash would find you building a nest to show off to him to be quite weird.....

"Well." Misty had had enough of this embarrassing conversation and decided to end it before it got weirder than it already was. "I hope you figure it all out, and seeing as we're both interested in Ash.
We'll just have to see how it goes. I hope things don't get unpleasant between us over who wins." Like fighting to the death, Misty would prefer that things didn't get anywhere near that stage.

Iris once again looked confused at Misty's response, which given how this conversation had been going so far it couldn't be a good sign.

"Sure, but the way you are talking makes it sound like if one of us ends up as Ash's mate, that means the other one cannot be as well?"

It was Misty's turn to look confused this time, what was Iris talking about now? Exes?

"I don't know how humans deal with things like this, but as we are not exactly humans does it really matter how they do it?

Misty was debating if her nerves would survive asking Iris if she meant what she thought she meant, but she was spared that by a sudden arrival.

"Misty! Iris! Hey!"

Ash was back.

He greeted them with Pikachu on his shoulder, with something clenched in his hands. Probably some Bug-type ball or something.

Slipping in behind him was a short girl with short cropped brown hair and round glasses, dressed in a purple shirt and gray shorts. She made her way over to shy girl's table, where they began to talk about something over nachos and water that looked a lot colder than when she had seen it last: ice refill perhaps?

…She only noticed that as she tried to not focus on the imminent arrival of a Pinsir or a Beedrill or some other nasty thing.

"Guess what? I won!" Ash declared.

"That is great Ash!" Iris complimented him.

"So, what do you get if you win anyway: a complimentary Weedle?" Misty forgot what the little kid had said about prizes, and doubted it was worth thinking about bugs any more.

"No, actually the Weedle were behaving oddly. It was rather weird…. the prize for first place is an evolutionary stone of my choice." He unclenched his hands, revealing a blue stone with bubble patterns inside it which he held out to her.

Her eyes widened as she saw what it was.

"You want to capture all the Water-Pokémon of the word, right? Well, it would be hard to do that without this. Now if you can't find a Cloyster, you can catch two Shellder instead. Or if you ever find an Eevee, you can have a Vaporeon," Ash explained, smiling the entire time. "I mean, I'm not evolving Pikachu anytime soon, so to me this would just be a paperweight."

Ash entered a bug contest, just to help her out?

Her face flushed, even as she reached for the stone in his hand.

She tried to ignore the look on Iris's face as she did so. A look that was not jealousy.
But approval. Somehow, that was more unsettling than if Iris had been glaring daggers at her.

**Gringey City**

Um, Gringey City?

Ash read the sign at the front of the city, the one that gleefully stated that this was the city he had visited in the last timeline, a dirty and polluted mess of a place with jerks and his very not a jerk Muk.

However the city he found himself staring at was shiny and clean, with no smog, no sludge, and it did not smell like his shoes before he had them replaced during Hoenn.

"Pika…." Pikachu shared his confusion, muttering something about why he wasn't currently being assaulted by the local pathogens.

"Well this city is certainly badly named," Misty thirded their shared confusion, even if she did not have the experience of seeing Gringey City when it was in fact a gringey city.

"It is?" Iris didn't get it.

"Gringey generally means dirty or ugly. This place is incredibly clean." Misty explained.

"Oh, it once was quite bad…." The three turned, finding themselves facing an older woman, who was riding a bicycle and looked quite healthy for her age.

"Ah yes kiddies, I remember it like it wasn't ten years ago. Yep, this city used to live up to its name quite well, if we didn't have beer we'd probably have died of thirst before the smog got us. It was a city of the poor and the destitute. But, one day a man who escaped this place came back with the dream to make it worth living in. Arceus bless Tokiomi Borealis….." She pedaled off, apparently done with being a chatty old lady and returned to the city proper.

"….Aw, I wanted to give exposition," the Pokédex grumbled from Ash's pocket.

"Well, we can't walk around this place, and we should be able to get through it with a few hours before nightfall," Misty declared as he began walking into the clean city, followed by Iris.

Ash went forward as well, though he was deep in thought with a frown on his face.

If Gringey City was clean, where did that leave Muk?

Pikachu picked up on his mood, and addressed it.

"Chu…." 'Ash, remember what happened with Krabby? We ended up going off course from meeting him, but fate had us cross paths regardless. Muk'll be the same way, I'm sure of it. We just need to find a dump or a hugging convention and I'm sure he'll come hugging.'

Ash's frown gave way to a smile with that in mind.

Even if Muk wasn't at the exact spot as before, that did not mean that Muk was gone forever.

Plus, it was actually nice to see something in this world be inarguably better than the old one. Hopefully, more places would be like that. Perhaps Cinnabar Island wasn't turned into a decadent tourist trap, and maybe Volkner never lost his enthusiasm for battling.
Or maybe Maiden's Peak didn't get haunted by a super-powerful Gastly that defied the rules of Pokémon and reality as a whole and was actually a nice place to live.

….Perhaps he should have checked.

**Outside Gringey City**

"Deli!"

The Delibird that had appeared before them was laughing even as Jessie, James, and Meowth were sipping emergency hot chocolate and nursing a few bruises.

"…..No one told me that bird knew Kung Fu," Jessie muttered.

"I had no idea it could use Brick Break…." James whimpered.

Trying their luck at capturing it had not been a good idea.

"What do you expect; it's the official Team Rocket Delibird." Meowth gulped the rest of his hot-chocolate down and cautiously approached the bird.

No longer interested in beating them up, Delibird reached into its satchel and pulled out a letter with a large R on the side.

Meowth took the paper in hand, careful to ensure he did not anger the Delibird by doing it wrong.

Delibird nodded, accepting his method of paper handling before flying away. As soon as Delibird was gone, Meowth opened the letter.

"WAHH!"

And let out a startled yowl, freezing in place.

"Meowth!" Ignoring their chills and bruises, Jessie and James ran over to their partner and took the paper from him, wondering what horrible news it contained.

They dropped their mugs as they took in exactly what it said.

    *The capture of Felgrand for me was beyond any expectations I had for you.*

    *I have been looking for one of the infamous Orre criminal brothers for some time now, and now I have one.*

    *Your pay has been doubled, and promotion is possible for you three in the near future depending of future developments.*

    *Giovanni*

They stared at the paper for several minutes without speaking, before they simultaneously, and without prompting jumped high into the air, shouting at the tops of their voices in joy.

"This is wonderful! The boss is thanking us, and we got more money!" Jessie beamed.
"Tons of cash isn't really big to me, but a promotion...I've always wanted my own jet!" James grinned.

"Yeah, as long as we keep an eye on the kid everything's going to be smooth sailing for us! Now, if he'd only leave a town with a top notch police force and all of those pesky security cameras."

"Well, they can't stay on them forever, so once they leave we'll stick to them like stink to a Stunky." James declared. At the 'what's a Stunky' looks coming from his teammates, he shrugged.

"It's a saying in Sinnoh."

"Sure...." Jessie and Meowth did not seem to believe him.

"Your lack of culture aside, let us celebrate our increase in money and respect in the way that only sophisticated individuals as ourselves are capable of." James declared as his fellow Rockets processed the statement for a bit.

"Improv dance party?"

"Correct!" James declared as the trio's energy began to rise in preparation for the sudden onslaught of dancing to begin.

Thankfully they were interrupted before they could do so.

"Yeah, you are not dancing here," a teenage girl's voice declared. Turning, their dance levels falling rapidly as they went from party mode to serious mode, the trio found themselves confronted by a single ponytailed blond with blue eyes dressed in orange shorts and crop top, flanked by three Tyrogue.

"Huh, it's one of those battle girls." James observed.

"With a trio of rare pre-evolved Pokémon who evolve into rare and valuable Fighting Pokémon," Jessie continued James's train of thought.

"This is great then! Not only did we get a pay raise from the boss, we might be able to cinch that promotion up the Team Rockets ranks with them!" Meowth unsheathed his claws as the Tyrogue trio tensed.

"Leave, or else," the battle girl repeated as James threw a Pokéball at her, releasing Inkay in a burst of light.

"Yeah, we're going to choose 'or else'. We are on too much of a roll to give up now! Inkay, use Psybeam!"

As the floating squid charged the psychic attack, the girl's first glowed orange.

"Boost," she declared, before lunging at Inkay and punching the Kalos Pokémon with her glowing fist.

James was sent flying when he caught Inkay with his body.

"Oh.....well that was unexpected...." Meowth deadpanned as the girl turned a harsh gaze towards him, which he narrowly avoided flinching over. He idly heard the sound of Jessie being attacked by the Tyrogue.

"So, by no chance you aren't some lost or future companion of the Bloodliner kid we're stalking over
yonder, are ya? If so, if we point you towards the boy will you go quietly and forget that we wanted to take your rare and valuable Tyrogue?" Meowth asked as she held out her once glowing arm at him, which once again glowed with a move he was pretty sure was Power-up Punch.

"Boost. I don't travel with a boy," she declared before going at Meowth with her punch.

It was a pretty well trained punch, not merely thrown like most would. She clearly had trained with someone at some point in how to throw punches.

However Meowth had spied on his fair share of martial arts classes, particularly after a time he gained a deathly fear of Machop after reading a fraudulent fortune cookie.

So he knew just when to dodge the punch, and when to counter attack.

Opening up wide, Meowth bit the girl on the arm right behind her glowing fist.

The fist stopped with the power upping, though the girl's face did not seem to be registering a pained expression.

Her faced was hard to read as her non-empowered hand grabbed Meowth by the scruff and threw him into the air.

"…..Your bite….." she declared as her face became more readable, in what could only be described as disappointment. "Felt like nothing. I barely felt it at all…how unsatisfying. Boost."

With a third enhanced punch and a statement that probably would sound weirder to Meowth if he thought about it a bit more, she punched Meowth.

The cat was sent flying through the air, towards the recovering James and the bruised Jessie, even as the Tyrogue got out the way for the resulting collision.

The result was the three primary members, and Inkay, being sent flying into the air.

"Team Rocket is blasting off in a way that is starting to become a pattern!" They screamed as they flew into the sky.

"Inkay!"

*TWINKLE*

A rustling in the bushes caused the blond to prepare to lunge at it, but she relaxed when she saw who it was.

"Wha…what was that?" the nervous dark haired girl asked. "Why did I hear screaming?"

"The twinkling sound effect was also rather bizarre." The short girl adjusted her glasses as she looked up, as if looking for a resulting star.

"Nothing, it was just some members of Team Rocket. They were nothing….though the Meowth was odd, and I have no idea where they got that floating psychic squid." She seemed generally ponderous on the matter.

"Regardless of their presence, you have removed them. As we have fulfilled our own assignments, our operation can now begin." The short girl declared as more nearby bushes rustled.

"So, all the preparations are in place I take it? Excellent, you three never disappoint me."
The three girls immediately turned towards the approaching voice, a female voice lower in pitch than their own voices.

"Y….yes, everything is r..r…ready…” the pale girl stuttered in a nervous tone, even as the arrival walked up to her and placed her hands on the back of her head.

She then pulled the head in close, and captured the nervous girl’s lips with her own for a good long while. When she retracted her lips, the pale girl was blushing a red that would be considered quite fetching among Slugma.

"I'm sure it's wonderful Aurora, you really need to stop doubting yourself. Confidence looks much better on your cute little face than nervousness, dear." Turning to the bespectacled girl, the apparently leading woman continued her question.

"The power to the backup generators have been cut. Upon the city-wide shutdown, they will not be able to continue powering themselves."

"Excellent." The fourth girl approached the glasses wearing girl and bent over, turning her head sideways as to not bump into her glasses before kissing her as well.

Pulling out, the taller girl continued.

"You always do a wonderful job, my sweet Vedia. He'll be dead before nightfall now. Of course, my only regret is that I don't get to kill him with my bare hands, but this will be much more practical, and much safer for you three. No point in revenge if you lose the ones you love getting it; am I right?"

She moved on to the athletic girl, who was grinning like mad.

"So, when do we get to start busting heads?! Those Team Rocket punks were nothing!"

"Team Rocket?" The new girl looked confused as to what they'd be doing here.

"Oh, a duo of them and their talking Meowth were skulking about. I took care of them, though for some reason they ended up being blasted into the sky instead of pummeled. It was weird. …" 

"Well, as long as they are gone they aren't a concern. But, for clearing out some potential threats…." And the gathered girls were three for three when it came to getting long, passionate kisses from our fourth girl.

As the two pulled out for air, the fighter looked eager for more.

"Oh come on Belladonna, why don't you give me a nice Poison Fang? You know I love those."

The now identified Belladonna shook her head as she walked past her towards the Gringey City Harbor.

"Evanna, you know that you won't be useful after I do that."

"Oh come on, you know I can handle plenty of those before passing out. 4 in one night if I recall my current record…” Evanna said in a tone that was more fitting for discussing hickeys than Poison Fangs.

"I am well aware that you are quite durable sweetie, I am also aware that after one of my bites you only have one thing on your mind, and this is not the time for it. Maybe after we're done here I'll give
you a nip, but this is not the time for a roll in the hay."

Evanna sulked a bit at the lack of poisonous bites, but Belladonna continued to the edge of the cliff, and down towards the beach below.

Where her army had gathered.

All in a daze they stood, enthralled by her power over all Poison. Tentacool and Tentacruel, Grimer and Muk, Beedrill and Arbok and Golbat and many more, all waiting for her command.

"Tentacool and Tentacruel, form a bridge straight to that power plant!" She pointed across the bay opposite from where she stood, "Ensure you are wide enough together that no Pokémon falls in. We are here to kill humans, not to drown Oddish. Once you are there, shut the plant down and keep it that way until you are told otherwise! Do not let anyone get in your way! Kill any humans, but don't harm any Pokémon unless you have to. If any Pokémon are going to die today, it would be the disgusting Grimer and Muk among you, not some guard Growlithe!"

They all responded in affirmative, monotone declarations of 'yes mistress', even the Grimer and Muk she had declared loathing for, before the Tentacruel began to form the pontoon bridge flanked by their unevolved counterparts.

Grinning, she turned around, presenting herself to her three gathered partners in all senses of the word.

She was a tall teenage girl, looking in appearance towards the end of her teenage years. Her dark black hair went down to the small of her back, with the tips of the hair on her forehead died green. Her torso covered by a black blouse with a central yellow streak that was quite good at showing she was quite noticeably more busty than her partners. Her legs were covered with blue jeans, her feet by purple and black boots.

Her face was sharp looking, with her ears protruding from the side of her head like little horns through her hair. Her eyes were as red as a Tentacool's body crystals, and below her eyes hung a pair of thin, zigzag marks.

"My dear Aurora, my sweet Vedia, Evanna sweetie…let's go. "

______________________________________________

OMAKE

AMBIGIOUSLY CANON

KETCHUMVERSE PART 5

EARTH 081516

The skies cracked in the rainy town.

The winds howled, ripping apart houses.

Gas prices at the nearby gas station began changing every second, going from five cents a gallon to twenty dollars a gallon to an orange a gallon in reckless abandon.

Ash, and an Ash in a ranger uniform stared at the ongoing events of the universe in question.
"What's going on?! We just got here, and everything is going mad! Is Shamouti happening?!
"Ash asked his more experienced Ranger counterpart, who shook his head and held up a scanning device.

"No...that portal we took put us out of the Pokémon multiverse. We are in some other universe..."

"You mean, like that world with the talking red puppet and his goldfish?"

Pikachu huffed at the reminder of that world. He had business with that Ernie fellow.

"Yes...though this isn't that universe. In fact..." Ranger Ash made a face of disgust as he read the scanner's result, "Oh...well that explains it."

"What does?" Ash questioned, even as a bolt of lightning seared the ground between them. Only an indefinite amount of time with Pikachu in the old timeline, and over a year with him in the new one, kept Ash's nerves calm.

"This is the universe of Bella Swan." The ranger said it as if he was saying 'this is Cyrus's pet Shellder, Bobo'.

"Bella Swan?" Ash repeated the name, not sure who that was. He'd as if it was a Swanna, but that was not the time for it.

"This universe apparently has the rule that everything must revolve around her. As we do not worship the ground she walks on and cannot be punished by the laws of this universe, the universe is falling apart as a result of a reality breaking paradox."

"Wha?!"

What kind of messed up universe was this?

"Don't worry...I'm calling up a portal now. When we leave, the universe should right itself. Hopefully we can get out of here before a shape shifting native imprints on us."

"Um, what?" He didn't like the sound of that.

"Hello, Earth 081616!" Ranger Ash shouted as he ran through a portal, quickly followed by Bloodliner Ash, "Finally, we should be in an entirely normal..."

"Oh come one!"

"Another me! This is complete overkill!"

Both Ashes paused as they found themselves being glared at by hundreds of Ashes: each with a Pikachu and five other Pokémon. He noticed versions of him dressed as he did in Kanto/Johto, Hoenn, Sinnoh, Unova, and Kalos with his regional teams there (Cool, he got a Noivern!), and others with different Pokémon. There were even versions of him with Alolan Pokémon.

"...Um..." Ash wanted to try and de-escalate this.

He promptly failed horribly, as both he and his Ranger counterpart got pulled into an Ash for all.

**Ketchumverse 5.5**
The Ash in charge of recruiting new members rubbed his head as he tried to figure out how this universe worked.

"All right. So apparently, your world’s version of us reincarnates several times. You're all technically the same person yet still managed to retain some sense of self-identity apart from the others. And then the timeline splits into three sections to make everything more confusing! Am I getting this right?"

The Ash in front of him nodded, as well as the ones to that Ash’s left and right. Each was wearing a blue tunic and hat as well as brown leggings and leather boots. To complete the medieval ensemble was a sword and shield strapped to their backs.

"And how do we differentiate between all of you?"

The first one caused three boxes to appear with text saying "Appearance", "Differences in equipment and companions", and "Figure that out yourself, moron" before highlighting the middle box.

The second one held an Ocarina up before shouting, "Hyah! Hup! Kyaa!"

The third one just reached into his pouch, grabbed a stone, and promptly transformed into a Mightyena.

"Fair enough. Would you like any help freeing Laramie Ranch from-" Ash broke down snickering, "-Garydorf?"
Hey there, everyone. Long wait is long, and I apologize for it. The internet refused to be a dear and let me post stuff here for quite a while so...

Anyway, I know that's no excuse, but I hope you guys enjoy this chapter. Those who follow the story at Fanfiction.net will know that this is the chapter that pretty much changes everything in this saga, and doesn't pull any punches on events and revelations, so strap yourselves and get ready for the ride. Enjoy!

Gringy City

The world was wonderful.

Certainly it wasn't all perfect. There was sadness and misery, some cruelty, and occasionally you lost track of one of those little things you just couldn't live without.

However what was the point of dwelling upon that, when there was so much more to see.

The beaming smile radiating happiness from acts of love from one's knee or lips, the pouring eruption of relief as a parent and child reunited, pride as one's hard work paid off in a work of sweat in manners of physical creation or intellectual achievement, all these feelings were wonderful.

If people could just focus on the hundred good things that happen, and not the single bad thing, the world would be a much better place.

"Emma! Emma!"

"Come back, please!"

The voice of two children rang through the streets, panic and fear radiating off them like heat off a Fire-type.

Looking down from the roof she was sitting on, she looked down and saw a pair of small heads darting about, shouting in frantic tones.

Children in distress? About an Emma?

Person, or Pokémon?

There was only one way to find out.

'Is something wrong?'

Ask bluntly.

The children froze, before their heads darted around as they tried to find her

They didn't look up though, so they wouldn't be able to see her
"Who…who said that?" One of the little children whimpered. She frowned at the distress she was feeling.

'Don't be worried, I mean you no harm I only want to help.'

"You do?" The little girl asked with wonderful, hopeful innocence. The other, a boy, not so much.

"Who are you?"

'A friend.' She told them simply. 'Now, who's this Emma you are looking for?'

About half an hour later found the children in a park a few blocks away. With tears in their eyes, they were hugging an old looking Arcanine, who had a balloon string in her jaws with a perfectly intact balloon floating above her head.

This fit the holes in the little children's story. Apparently the girl, Ginny, had accidentally let go of a balloon and cried about it. Emma had taken this tear up more seriously than warranted, and went out chasing after the balloon to make the daughter of her trainer happy again.

"Thank you!" they exclaimed even as Emma looked around curiously, as if unsure who they were thanking.

Perhaps the Arcanine could tell in the country, but even in a clean city sniffing out one single person is a bit of a tall order.

She couldn't help but smile. It was always nice to do good in the world.

'It was no problem at all.' She prepared to take her leave, when the city suddenly dark.

The children began to whimper in fright, clinging Emma in fear of the dark.

"Grrr…" Emma growled at the sudden darkness that had frightened the little ones.

In the darkness that had once been Gringy City she was left in a great confusion, a feeling echoed across the city interlaced with another emotion.

Fear.

________________________

Power Plant

Walking towards the control room with an unflinching pace and perfect poise Belladonna was not phased at all by the sight of the two guards pointing guns at her.

For the first six years of her life, she had lived in Gringy City when it lived up to its name in full. For the next five years after that, she hadn't experienced the parts of it that he had cleaned up.

She was quite used to guns. They didn't make her flinch. They were silly toys anyway, weapons of the powerless to try and pretend to be powerful.

If you weren't a Bloodliner, train a Pokémon. A gun didn't make you look like anything but unsightly.

If you wanted to mask how weak you were, wear a paper bag.
"Don't move!" one guard shouted. The other just shot at her.

She didn't obey the first, and the wall of filth that rose up to block the bullet made the other one irrelevant.

Some would call it Sludge Wave, she just called it filth.

"Disgusting," the second guard said of her actions.

True. Virtually everything she could do was disgusting. But he was hardly in a position to say it.

But as the old saying goes, an eye for an eye.

And filth for filth.

Her cheeks filled with… vileness, bulging before she spat it right at him.

His screams were thankfully only brief.

She turned to the other, a gray haired man with yellowing teeth and blue eyes, who dropped his gun and looked at her in terror.

However his fear was not for himself.

"Please don't kill me! I have a family."

She didn't relax, nor did she move.

"The hours suck and my co-worker's an arse, but it pays well! I was able to put my son through college despite his autism, and my daughter would never have been able to get that surgery without it! Please, don't kill me; I don't want to leave either of them alone in the world!"

He was crying in fear. A fear for others, and not himself.

"Mommy..." she heard her younger self whimper in her head. For a moment she was not here in a Power Plant, but at her childhood home.

...

It was a place filled with garbage her mother never through away.

Little her, hastily made pigtails in her hair that clearly lacked adult aide, was at the foot of a garbage strewn bed where a large shape lay, a back to her turned red from sickness, "Mommy....can you please help me.....I'm icky....it won't stop...."

The shape did not move.

...

Pushing the thoughts away, Belladonna was nonetheless still affected by it.

So she punched the man in the chest.

He folded over in pain, before she hit the back of his head and knocked him out.

She promptly threw the still living guard into a closet and shut the door.
With a glowing purple hand she carved a message into the door: "Living Guard Inside"

She whistled, and at the sound an enthralled Nidoqueen stomped towards her from down the hall.

She pointed at the door and gave a command.

"Guard it. I’ve decided to spare the human inside of it, ensure he is alive until the time we leave."

Nidoqueen robotically nodded. With that act of mercy done, she moved toward the control room.

They had a point they had to reach, and until it happened this Power Plant would not generate a single watt for the city.

The city was black as night.

As dark as Zekrom's body armor.

As devoid of light as the heart of.....well Ash had a mental tie in mind between Hunter J, the Iron Masked Marauder, Kodai, and maybe Ghetsis. If he had some time to think on it, perhaps he could decide who was definitely more evil.

A feeling of dread could be felt growing from every home as the populace tried to return power by rapidly flicking the switches of their devices.

But, a city without light was not the place to do it.

"This is not normal," Iris observed.

"Yeah, no kidding," Misty snarked. Iris looked at her, a puzzled look on her face.

'Power outage...Power Plant...,' Ash thought to himself.

'Muk,' Pikachu offered telepathically, now with 20% less connection trouble.

There was no time to lose, they must get to the Power Plant immediately! Having been in similar situations many times before Ash could feel that there was more to this than just an average blackout, there was a nagging in his gut that screamed trouble.

Ash frowned as he noticed again Misty and Iris, the former explaining to the latter what kidding meant.

Part of Ash, the one who had traveled across regions for a lengthy period of time of 45 Gyms (plus 7 Frontier Brains), wanted to just dart towards the Power Plant, ready and able to get Muk and stop this disaster as soon as possible.

However, that Ash was quite possibly... some age younger than he was, and thus didn't realize that would be somewhat awkward.

So, he had to make sure it would not be in fact, awkward.

"Do you think that something might be going wrong at the Power Plant...?" Ash tested the waters.

Misty and Iris considered his words, Misty looked thoughtful while Iris shrugged.

"It is possible, perhaps a swarm of electric Pokémon is at fault," the Pokédex backed him up.
"So, I mean this sucks but none of us know how to turn on a Power Plant," Misty pointed out.

"I do."

"No one asked you." Misty glared at the Pokédex's comment. The Pokédex didn't respond choosing that now wasn't the best time to start an argument with Misty.

"The people who do might be in trouble," Ash pressed. He shook his head.

"Look, if I don't at least check it out, I'm going to worry about it all night. I'd rather be proven wrong and see the situation be on its way to being fixed, than wake up tomorrow and see someone reading a newspaper about hundreds dying from a sudden power outage and an exploding Power Plant. If you don't want to…."

Iris flinched as the sound of something crashing in the distance rang loudly, followed by the sounds of a response siren suggesting that whatever had crashed was being taken care of.

"I do not want to be in this city longer than I have to, even if there was light. At least you do not smell like car exhaust and…." She sniffed the air and looked confused. "Burnt Aspear berries?"

A cart rolled by them through the darkness, being chased by a short man who was shouting something about his roasted Aspear berries. It was an odd event, one they didn't have time to respond to.

"Agreed. If the Power Plant is on fire or those Team Rocket members that keep bugging us are around we'll do something, if someone cut the wrong wire we leave." Misty nodded, and with that decided they were on their way to the Power Plant, hopefully without any more carts rolling on by.

... First sign that the Power Plant's problem was not normal.....the floating line of Koffing that, as commentary by James suggested, could explode.

Second sign the problem wasn't an average one was that the Koffing seemed off somehow. Like they weren't quite all there, even by the often spacey standards of a Koffing....

No wait, that was a Weezing. Still, the Koffing looked a bit, dull in the eyes.

"Should we attack?" Iris suggested.

"No, that's a bad idea. Koffing explode, and explosions are rather painful," the Pokédex noted.

Misty's eyes widened with realization as she turned to Ash with a serious look on her face as she reached for and handed Ash three of the Pokéballs she had on hand, Wooper, Poliwrath, and Slowpoke.

"Use that glove of yours and send these back to the Professor, and swap in Goldeen, Starmie, and Gyarados. With Wingull, Staryu, and Psyduck I should be ready to handle it."

"Handle what exactly?" Ash questioned as Misty pointed at the Koffing ring.

"I've seen that look before, it's what a Pokémon looks like when a Bloodliner is controlling them. We're dealing with a Poison Heart Bloodliner."

Ash took in that information with a sense of dread even as he pulled out the H.O.P.E glove and
began the transfer.

Someone like the three of them, was responsible for this?

"So… this is what it looks like," Iris mused in a sense of horror as she looked at the entranced Koffing. At Misty's odd look she elaborated.

"I know that I can control Dragons, but I have never actually done it." The unspoken 'I would never mind control my family' was hanging in the air.

With a flash the Pokéballs that Misty wanted came through via the H.O.P.E glove, and in a burst of light the three Pokémon were released into the surprisingly clean water.

Gyarados looked ready to deliver the customary 'I am a Gyarados and I will destroy anything that bothers me I see' roar, but with a finger up to her lips Misty prevented not only alerting the Koffing wall (which was really, really bad at listening. The Pokédex later would comment that Koffing are low ranked on Pokémon sound perception), but also making the people in the powerless city have a 'oh why, oh why, is that happening on top of a black out' moment.

For blackouts were bad, Gyarados attack were worse, and Gyarados attacks during blackouts is just kicking a person while they were down and stealing their shoes.

Misty jumped into the water and dived down below with Goldeen following in tow. Iris leaped over the smaller Water-types and held onto Gyarados. Ash, after remembering the H.O.P.E glove was water proof, then remembered that the food stuff in his bag wasn't.

He paused to leave his bag where it was, and let out Sliggoo.

"I'm going to stop a crazy person and save innocent lives, make sure no one swipes my stuff!" Ash told the Dragon as he jumped into the water sans perishable good, followed by Pikachu.

Sliggoo let out a confused sound, but complied none the less as Goldeen sank into the water below, and Starmie and Gyarados swam along the water's top, below the line of the Koffing's sight.

Koffing, bad of hearing and not all that bright.

...

The way the Koffing looked, it brought to her memories of the look that adorned Golduck's face as she used her powers on him, before he too looked like that.

In fact…

"Goldeen… I tested my powers on you when I caught you… what's it like?" Misty asked the fish she was swimming alongside nervously.

Goldeen did not respond, in being silent said more than a thousand words could.

A red light flickered beneath them as Misty was quickly snapped out of dwelling on Goldeen's silence.

"Goldeen, below you!" Misty shouted as a pair of tentacles shot up. Goldeen avoided the Constrict attempt, as a Tentacool with the vacant expression of control swam up to stop them.

Misty briefly considered trying to override the control the Poison-Heart user had on Tentacool, but she briefly glimpsed in Goldeen's nearest eye as she considered this.
The unsaid message was clear: she could not do that again.

Not if she ever wanted Goldeen's respect.

"Goldeen, Horn Attack."

Goldeen seemed to approve of her decision, and so flew at the Tentacool with her horn at the ready.

...

As Starmie hopped out of the water behind him, Ash found himself surrounded by a large swarm of possessed Vileplume.

As they all prepared to let out a burst of deadly spores much like what Misty had gotten in her system back in Cerulean, Ash had only one response.

"Charmeleon! Pikachu!"

His partner leaped into action along with his unleashed first Fire type, and unleashed Flamethrower and Thunderbolt.

The Vileplume were overwhelmed and fell to the ground in defeat, but as they fell the water behind them erupted to reveal a large blue and red Pokémon.

"Tentacruel," the Jellyfish said in a monotone.

"Tentacruel, the Jellyfish Pokémon. Tentacruel tentacles grow back quickly after being severed. The Tentacruel is also quite toxic," the Pokédex noted as Pikachu fried the Tentacruel before the toxicity could become a factor.

Of course a dozen more rose up in response, flanked by dozens of Tentacool. All of whom promptly began firing Poison Stings.

Ash, Pikachu, and Starmie scattered, while Charmeleon ignited with Flame Charge to block the attacks.

For blocking attacks with your flaming body was far more badass than dodging.

"Char! 'That was weak. Weak! You can't defeat me that easily, you fish! Now, I will boil your ocean and show you real strength!'

"Charmeleon, we do not have time to boil the ocean, also I don't think they are technically fish!" Ash shouted as Charmeleon let loose one warning Flamethrower than sent a Tentacool skidding across the water like a skipping stone, but followed them anyway.

Muttering something about the fact that he could totally boil the ocean once he evolved, Charmeleon followed nonetheless.

...

On the shore of the metallic and odd smelling Power Plant, lay a row of Kakuna lay defeated.

A wall of Gloom were blown back by a swipe of Excadrill's Metal Claw.

A Weezing hovering in the air was knocked down by Emolga's Electro Ball.
As two Weepinbell attempted to grab for a Slam, Iris and Axew knocked both back with Dragon Claw.

A Nidoking down the way was hit by a Dragon Rage from Misty's Gyarados, who had followed them onto land.

Said Gyarados was currently behind them, blasting at a flanking squad of Beedrill.

Running through the corridors of the building was confusing, and Gyarados's battle growing more distant was somewhat worrying…

"Ty!"

Three identical cries rang out as three pink humanoid Pokémon shot out from ahead.

Tyrogue, and they all came at once with attacks.

The first punched Emolga down with a glowing red fist.

The second swept at Excadrill's feet, tripping him.

The third spun right into Axew, knocking her brother into the wall.

"Ax!"

After the attacks her Pokémon managed to get back and were ready to fight their attackers, though the sound of Axew's pained squeak made her furious.

Excadrill and Emolga could handle the other two, that Tyrogue was hers!

She turned to the spinning Tyrogue, a glowing green claw ready to slash, when her claw was struck by a glowing orange fist.

She shifted her attention to the side, revealing a blond haired girl about her age, dressed in orange with a glowing fist that no human could possess.

No words were said, but blows were soon under way as a four way fight quickly broke out in the halls.

...

Skipping across the water, a Tentacool eventually slowed down and came to a stop at the pier she stood on, sinking into the water below.

Looking down, the water bubbled and rippled, just as the water burst and the Tentacool went for her head,

However before the Tentacool could do so, she extended a hand and the Tentacool froze in midair, stopped by psychic powers.

'This isn't natural. This is...control,' she thought with a frown.

...

The home was a nice one, well paid through military pension and shrewd stock investment. She remembered it well back then, though now a days it was lonely.
The living room the two were in was homely one: well lived and decently clean for a home of two where the adult was a male. On the center table lay a book titled "To be the Very Best, like No One ever Was?" by Casey Snagem, since a victim of tomato sauce, a book by E.B White with a Ducklett on it with a trumpet, since given to charity, and a framed photograph with a gray image: an elite unit from the wars known as the Surge Battalion, led by a giant man with a Raichu and two Pokémon she didn’t know the names of: a giant spider and a limbed eel.

One of the men in the photograph was also here, though well since aged. He was kneeling before a younger version of herself, who had tears in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" he had asked her.

I didn't answer. I couldn't answer. He sighed a knowing sigh.

"I know it's hard. I know your voice, but no one else does. To everyone else, you are mute. It is hard to lie, but to the world your voice died with your parents."

He was her uncle, who had taken her in after her family had suffered a car accident. Though as she didn't remember her parents, he was more than just an uncle.

But there was the fact that she could never produce the sound to say it, or anything for that matter. The only word her new classmates had for it came from the book they had been reading: mute and dumb. The last one had earned a harsh comment from their teacher to never use that last one, and that it was well covered by the school's bully codes.

There was another word for it though, a word that was the most loathed phrase to her even now. Aphonia: No Sound.

'I hate being silent. I want to say hello to people, I want to tell them what I think. I even want to try and answer math questions…..but I have to pretend I can't.'

Her uncle smiled sadly and took to a knee, before putting a hand on her shoulder.

"I always believed that you need to see the good in the world. I've seen the bad parts of it… I hope to never tell you what I ended up seeing. It's why I am always helping people: be it at the soup kitchen or opening a door for someone. Kind acts make the world a better place in a way hate and anger never can. There is so much wonder in the world, but so few people can see it. Some fear it."

"You have an amazing power. You can do things that no other person can, and you've always have. Even if they never know it, you've saved people. Mrs. Crock and Mr. Swanson would have both gotten seriously hurt on that ice last year if you hadn't used your gifts. However, there are people in the world who can only see darkness. They and I can both watch the news: I can see a moral decision and they will see something evil in the same event. People might not see your abilities as I do.....as blessings that give you the chance to not only help so many people, but also to be able to communicate like everyone else. I don't want to see you hurt..."

The two of them hugged, as he continued.

"The world is always moving to becoming a kinder place. War is growing more distant each time we choose not to do it, and human and Pokémon are growing closer every day. Kindness is winning the world, and one day it will become so kind that everyone will be treated for who they are, not what they are or where they came from."

"And it is the responsibility of everyone, you and I included, to make it kinder one act at a time. No act is too small; one must always fill the world with all the kindness you can."
Shaking her head and looking across to the Power Plant with determination in her eyes, she teleported across.

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*Fuchsia City*

"You know, why is a badge given by a ninja a heart? Shouldn't it be a kunai or a toad or something?"

Curious as to where the toad part of being a ninja had come from, Red stopped as Yellow turned around and continued her line of questioning.

"What, don't you know Red? Toads and ninja's go together, like snakes and ninjas. And ramen and ninjas!"

Yellow's comments made his heard whirl, he suddenly saw the Gym Leader (whom he planned to challenge soon, but had seen pictures of and her victims running to the Pokémon center screaming for Pecha berries and about having caltrops in their shoes), lying on the back of a giant Politoed with a pipe in its mouth, sipping ramen even as Ekans swarmed around her feet.

It was… an odd image.

Reflections on ninjas with toads, snakes, and ramen were stopped however, when he noticed Yellow having also stopped.

She was looking at a Pokémon ahead of them with the wide, 'Oh my god that is so adorable I just want to hug it' way his mother used to, such as when his Pichu had hatched all those years ago.

Mother…

Shaking the depressing thought from his mind Red looked over the Pokémon that was making Yellow go gaga.

It was a blue… thing, cute but really Red had no idea what it was supposed to be, hugging a log deep in slumber.

"Oh my… that Pokémon is sooo cute… Red can you please catch this Pokémon? Please!" Yellow asked loudly. On his shoulders he felt his former Pichu, long since Pikachu, flinch at the volume.

Oddly enough the Pokémon itself didn't wake up, didn't even twitch at the sound of Yellow's yell. Apparently it was a deep sleeper, a Snorlax relative perhaps?

Looking the Pokémon over once more, Red shook his head.

"What?! Why not?!" Yellow pouted. He answered by pointing at the creature, a gesture she followed until she came across a hope breaker.

A collar, with a tag on it.

*Owned Pokémon*

*If you see this Pokémon, I will be back shortly. He just gets into fits in stuffy places and sleeps better*
away from them.

If I don't come back, assume I was eaten by a Palossand or something similarly horrifying and bring him to my home at 626 Pelekai Lane, Melemele Island

"Oh…so he has a trainer…” Yellow moped for a few seconds more before looking back in curiosity.

"Melemele?"

Melemele.

"Is that… part of the Seafoam islands?"

Red thought on it for a moment, though he eventually shook his head.

"Huh… wonder where this guy is from then?"

More importantly, what was a Palossand?

As if reacting to the thought of a Palossand, Pikachu shivered on his shoulder visibly.

"… I suppose I'll be meeting with you after the damn tournament is through…” An old, gravelly voice rumbled from up ahead, just out of sight.

The word 'tournament' caused Red to focus in on it.

"Oh lighten up Kaiser, don't you want to see what your good work in the Safari Zone has accomplished for the Pokémon there? Or just the happy faces of two lucky trainers and their friends as they leave it?" a female voice with an accent Red couldn't quite place questioned as the older voice huffed.

The old man muttered something that made him instinctively cover Yellow’s ears.

He heard the woman mutter something about grouchy old men, even as he began to hear steps.

Soon the voice's owner came to view, revealing a brown skinned woman with dark hair that flowed down her back. She was wearing a blue-green blouse and tan pants, with a pair of armbands on each arm that were red with white flower patterns. A hip pouch on her hip had some sort of brown Pokémon on it with the words 'Mudbray Conservation Group' on it. Red immediately began associating the Pokémon on the pouch with the name 'Mudbray'.

The woman's eyes were on the sleeping Pokémon, though she quickly focused in on them.

"Oh, did Stitch here get in your way? Sorry, but meeting with that old warden is stressful enough without the poor little guy being scared by that gun totting nut." She picked up the blue Pokémon, who did seem to relax even more in his slumber as she continued.

"Anyway, perhaps I should introduce myself. My name is Lilo."

"Hello Lilo, my name is Yellow, and this is Red." Yellow spoke for him as she was used to do.

His gaze met with Lilo's, and the air was quiet for a moment. However both knew what was coming.

"I need to unwind after having to talk and do mind numbing paperwork for the last two hours, and you seem like a trainer to me." She reached into the hip pouch and pulled out two Pokéballs, one active and another that was glowing red in the center in inactive mode.
She tapped the active one, causing its activation button to glow red even as she activated the other.

"How’s three on three sound?"

Red nodded, even as Pikachu hopped off his shoulder and looked at Lilo in an evaluating way.

"A Pikachu huh… well I think I know just who to call." Replacing the inactive ball, she tossed the active one into the air and let out a blue, purple, and yellow Pokémon that looked like someone had put a Hitmonchan and a Kingler in a blender.

"Crabrawler vs Pikachu!"

Red eyed the Pokémon showing off fisticuffs at him with some wariness.

He had never fought of, nor heard of, this Pokémon. He would not be able to see a path to victory that was really clear until he battled with it a bit.

However the currently unclear path had an obvious starting point, give the likely typing of Crabrawler and its clearly physical leanings.

"Thunderbolt!" He spoke, as Pikachu's cheeks sparked and a surge of lightning shot at Crabrawler.

The attack hit, stunning the boxer, though as the bolt ceased it did not seem to have suffered as much damage as expected.

Did it have Filter?

"Oh I get it: you thought Crabrawler was a Water-type didn't you?!" Lilo stated as Red blinked.

Or… that could be the reason. So it was a Fighting type then, and probably just one given the lack of flames, metal, leaves or any other type indicators.

"Wait, it's a non-aquatic crab?" Yellow, who had taken a seat at the edge of the fight, stated in surprise as Lilo nodded.

"Yep. Now time to show off his Fighting-type moves! Crabrawler, Power-up Punch!"

With glowing orange pincers Crabrawler threw an extended punch right at Pikachu.

"Dodge!" Red ordered. Pikachu ducked to avoid one, jumped to avoid a second, and got hit with a third and was sent rolling across the dirt.

Pikachu got up after the hit though, pretty well after the blow.

"Not bad. Okay Crabrawler, now use Dynamic Punch!" Crabrawler nodded as the crab began to wind up the left pincer with a really powerful punch.

Red was starting to see a path to victory.

Victory Odds 63% and climbing.

"Pikachu, stay low to the ground and use Thunder Punch!"

Reaching across his body, Pikachu covered his right wrist with its left paw and thrust his right paw down towards the ground. This caused a yellow ball of electricity to form over said right limb.

Extending his arm out, the punch sliced the field apart as Pikachu ran at Crabrawler,
Crabrawler shot out his claw, however the attack missed Pikachu: going just micrometers above the fur.

The Thunder Punch then hit Crabrawler right in the chest.

Crabrawler toppled back, before hitting the dirt in defeat.

"No, Crabrawler!" Lilo recalled her defeated Pokémon as Pikachu huffed and returned to his side, looking proud of himself.

"Well, that was pretty good Red," Lilo stated as she reached into her pouch for a second ball. She seemed to be reaching for something else, but decided against grabbing it at the last moment.

"I've heard that trainers here in Kanto train for competing in Leagues. We don't have that in Alola, and I must admit my curiosity is peaked. If I end up here for too long, I may just try them out myself, I've heard about how some trainers can enter a League with a single badge."

Red did as well, he remembered Ash had done the same. But yet he still fought more Gyms….was it because they were so weak, or did he seek out challenge where it wasn't needed? Either way now wasn't the time to think about that.

"Go, Charmeleon!"

As he threw out his Pokéball, Lilo responded with her own.

"Go, Exeggutor!"

Victory odds quickly flashed as he prepared to battle the Grass type, only for the Pokémon to be revealed as he, Charmeleon, Pikachu, and Yellow looked up.

And up.

And up.

And up.

And up more.

"Tor!" The really tall, really strange looking…..'Exeggutor' stated.

Yellow, trying to look all the way up, lost her balance and fell over.

"Wha!? That… that can't be an Exeggutor!.

"Oh, it is. The real Exeggutor," Lilo calmly explained to Yellow, who was still trying to grasp how tall it was, and was only able to do it on her back.

If that was the real Exeggutor, Red preferred fictional ones.

Still, the bigger they are, the harder they fall.

"Flame Burst!" Red ordered as the fire ball flew from Charmeleon's maw right at the great lumber.

"Block it with Poison Powder!" Lilo declared. Red had trouble figuring out how that worked, even as Exeggutor began to thrash about, as if in a great windstorm.
The purple powders showered down from it in a great torrent of pollen, which took on the Flame Burst and blocked it.

"Whoa!" Yellow exclaimed in shock, and Red had to admit he was similarly impressed.

"Seed Bomb!" Lilo pushed as seeds shot up from Exeggutor and began to fall like bombs.

"Rock Tomb!" Red ordered. Rotating stones formed above Charmeleon, blocking the explosive seeds entirely. "Now, Shadow Claw!"

Darkness encompassed Charmeleon's arm even as his second Pokémon charged right at the giant. The claw swipe struck Exeggutor, causing the great tree to stumble, though it did not fall.

That….caught him off guard.

That was supposed to be super-effective, I know Exeggutor and Exeggcute…' Red's mind was reeling, his Victory Sight was going haywire.

"Now, use Draco Meteor while Charmeleon is under you!"

"Draco what!?" Red exclaimed out loud.

Exeggutor's heads glowed orange, and a deluge of death fell from above down on Charmeleon without escape.

Even as the powerful attack raged, Red was actually getting to see things more clearly now.

Clearly, somehow, this Exeggutor had a different typing. Grass-Dragon most likely. That gave him knowledge.

And from there, power.

Victory odds at 40%, let's see if he could get them higher.

As Charmeleon struggled back up, Red knew what to do.

"Now, Dragon Claw!"

Charmeleon nodded, lunging at Exeggutor with glowing green claws.

"Poison Powder!"

Exeggutor danced again, and instead of meteors toxins rained down from it, covering Charmeleon. The Dragon Claw petered out as his Fire-type crashed to the ground, muscles seizing up in pain.

Victory odds, rapidly falling.

"You win this round." Red declared as he returned his Charmeleon.

Lilo grinned, as she returned her freaky Exeggutor.

"Good job Exeggutor, you deserve a good rest. Now, final round then, and I know just who to use! Go, Mudsdale!"

She threw out a final Pokémon, revealing a massive creature with dreadlocks and brown coloring.
"Whoa, that's big!" Yellow declared, "Are all Alolan Pokémon so big?"

"No actually." Lilo stated as she pulled out a white ring from her bag, which held a brown crystal in the center.

Red looked at the Pokémon for a moment: it looked defensive, and it was probably related in some way to that Mudbray she had on her belt.

That wasn't even factoring into what the woman had just taken out of her bag. He didn't know if it was connected to the mysterious stone had been given by Scott, or if it was something else entirely, but he wasn't going to take any unnecessary chances if he could help it.

The name Mudsdale implied it was a Ground-type, though other typing along with it was possible. Given its form and name, Ground-Water, Ground-Normal, and Ground-Rock were possible.

That left a certain type of Pokémon best suited to fight, Grass Pokémon.

"I choose you!" Red declared as he sent out his third Pokémon.

Victreebel the yellow pitcher predator Pokémon appeared, shrieking for battle.

Lilo grinned, even as Mudsdale stomped in readiness for battle. However before they could start…

"Lilo! There is more damn paperwork that you need to sign, now! Some bureaucrat just faxed it in!" the grumpy old voice of Kaiser shot through the battle, as Lilo looked annoyed.

"Damn… well sorry but I'm going to have to run." She returned Mudsdale to the disappointment of both Yellow and Victreebel.

Noting the looks she grinned, "But don't think this'll be the last time we can battle. There's a Tag Tournament coming up, and I plan on entering it. It'll be fun, and the winner can enter the Safari Zone and actually capture Pokémon there legally. None of my friends back home will believe that Exeggutor can be so tiny unless I capture one here after all, and there are other Pokémon they need to see to believe I want to capture. So, interested?"

He nodded, as Lilo grinned.

"Well here's where you've gotta go..."

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**Gringy Power Plant**

Leaning back in the foreman's chair in control room, Belladonna watched as her Golbat, currently hanging from the ceiling, got a message.

More specifically, her Golbat was getting a message from her Nidorino, who was barking after her Oddish picked up the vibrations given off by her Ekans in the earth, who was currently watching that man.

A bit complicated, and really she'd have found it much easier if Ekans, or better her, could have just killed him. Sadly, circumstances made the simple route risky, and these were her Pokémon.

They were not wild ones she was borrowing, or ones who the world was better off without like Grimer or Muk, she did not want them being put down.
Golbat frowned, and screeched a bit.

To a human anyway, or to her wonderful girls. But to her Golbat was speaking, plain as day.

'Sorry, Tokiomi is still alive. Doctors are struggling, but he isn't dead yet'.

"Damn," she swore. How hard could it be for a damn old man to croak from some disease that people only started to live through after doctors realized Golbat blood leeching was not effective?

The door to the control room creaked open, diverting her attention as she saw who had come in. Her gaze melted from 'damn, why wasn't that bastard gone yet' to 'kind' as Aurora entered, looking nervous and rather shy.

"Um…I checked the back as you asked…the entrances opposite the ones we used are frozen solid. We are good…..what should I do now….?" she stuttered as Belladonna stood up.

Belladonna felt a pin of sadness pierce her heart as Aurora flinched, which was followed by a renewed burning hatred of Tokiomi as she walked to her dear and hugged her.

"Evanna and Vedia are all that we need to watch this place, you can stay with me. I mean, if you want to." She wasn't sure if it was quite needed, but she always got the sense she always had to give Aurora a choice. She didn't force Vedia and Evanna to do anything, but she felt like she had to make that as obvious as possible with Aurora.

"I… I'd like that," Aurora murmured as Belladonna began to melt into the shy girl.

Not literally. She could figure out how to use Acid Armor if she really wanted to, but she didn't. No, she merely leaned down onto Aurora, embracing her as much as possible in her loving arms and comforting bosom.

"I'll always be here for you…" She felt Aurora relax a bit as she whispered into her ear. "I love you, my dear Aurora. I love you all so much. I will do anything for you three… anything."

That included punishing those who hurt any of you. Sure, she wouldn't react to some human bumping into them by melting his face off… but with Tokiomi…

He would die. It was what he deserved.

...

The feeling of Belladonna holding her…it was so comforting, the warmth of her arms, the softness of her skin, her scent, her very presence made Aurora feel safe and oh so happy. Aurora she wished she could always be held like this, by her Belladonna..

For a girl who had been hurt so much, for one who was part of something she hated in pollution, she was so loving, so kind.

She could make her so happy, be it on a simple date or somewhere humans couldn't see them. The thought of those activities, with Belladonna, or with Vedia, Evanna, and/or Belladonna made her blush.

Humans….said as if she was talking about some other creature. It was sad to think about.

Not even two years ago she thought she was human. She had everything in the world, money, knowledge, a loving father. The only thing she had been missing was a license for a Pokémon, and a
mother, but her father had loved her mother dearly and could never remarry.

Father… what had happened? Was the father she had known for her entire life before she had first frozen something been an illusion?

The cold man that had replaced him after that, and then the hurtful man in both tongue and actions, was he her real father?

The year and a half after the point he had thrown her out of his life, she had never mentioned him to Belladonna. It was painful to talk about, the times she had tried too only brought tears to her eyes. When she had cried, Belladonna and the others had comforted her, but she had seen Belladonna's eyes.

When they were not comforting her, they had a seething, angry rage, a fiery gaze that promised destruction, a desire to make whatever caused her to cry to be ripped apart. She was scared of what would happen if she ever pointed them in the right direction.

Sadly, she had blurted it out after she had accidentally ingested a bottle of liquor they had stolen from a vacant cabin. She had woken up naked, yet surprisingly not smelling of sex, with Belladonna sitting at her bed side with a serious look on her face.

That day she had learned not only of Belladonna's dislike for alcohol (as well as the fact she did not hate her for drinking it by mistake, and the fact she had a stronger view of consent than many), but what a 'you have hurt one of my beloveds, now you die' mode Belladonna was like.

And now they were here…and her father was going to die.

She wasn't sure what she thought about Tokiomi Borealis, but she knew what she thought of the Daddy of Aurora Aoi Borealis.

She didn't want to kill Tokiomi, in case her father was still somewhere inside of him, trying to get out.

'Oh, but what's going to happen if you tell Belladonna no? If you betray her, like you betrayed your father when you turned out to be a Bloodliner?' A dark voice in her head told her whenever she wanted to try and talk Belladonna out of it. 'Do you want to be thrown away again? You aren't worthy of love if you betray the ones you love.'

In the end though, she couldn't stop it. In the end, her father would be dead.

And the blame would all be hers.

As if sensing her discomfort Belladonna began to nuzzle her, as if trying to rub away whatever was bothering her.

Meanwhile elsewhere in the plant

A wall of living mire fired a bulleting blaze of sludge right at Ash, who ducked to the side to avoid it with Pikachu, Charmeleon, and Starmie.

"Well, it smells like Muk…" Ash poked his head around the side to see the blasting wall of pollution, and one that was notably larger than the others. "And that Muk looks like our Muk…"
"Pika…" "I'd say it smells like him too, though the Grimer are not helping there so I might be wrong, if some of them would go away I could probably confirm…"

"Grimer, the Sludge Pokémon. Grimer are created by a combination of human pollution and Chi-rays, which look like X-Rays when written but are as different as ice cream and lard, from the moon. Don't ask how that works, but I've heard some Alolan is looking into it at their famous observatory." The Pokédex gave some useless trivia that interrupted Pikachu.

"Think you can try and hit him for me? I can make the shot if you do." Ash held a Pokéball in hand as Pikachu nodded, cheeks sparking.

"Charmeleon, cover him!" Ash requested. Charmeleon nodded, before leaping out and firing a Flamethrower.

The Flamethrower drew the attention of all the Sludge Bombs, causing a concentrated firing that shattered the Flamethrower.

However Thunderbolt was able to fly behind it, moving over the controlled Grimer and striking Muk, who sizzled a bit and slumped over.

He was fine, but paralyzed.

"Okay, go Pokéball!" With a well-pitched curveball that could have earned him Casey's eternal respect if he had chosen a different career path.

The curveball was well on track to hit the paralyzed Muk, when a Grimer rose up to block it.

The Grimer was sucked in to the ball, which promptly shook before vanishing off to Oak's.

"Excellent capture! The Pokéball will neutralize Grimer's toxins and odor, making it perfectly huggable if you so choose," the Pokédex stated as Ash reached for another Pokéball.

That…wasn't supposed to happen, but it was probably just a fluke.

"Okay, let's try that again. Come on home Muk!" Ash threw another excellent curveball if he did so himself.

The ball was once again intercepted by a Grimer, who was also sent to Professor Oak's Lab. Ash was starting to have a flashback of his time in the Safari Zone and how he'd gotten an entire herd of Tauros.

"Muk, the Sludge Pokémon. Muk is the evolved form of the Grimer who keep Mukblocking you. Muk are known to smell horrible in warm weather, more so than usual. Being touched by a non-captured Muk is lethal." The Pokédex stated once more unhelpfully.

Ash pinched between his eyes in frustration, even as Starmie rolled off behind him as if going to get something.

"This isn't working. I'm going to run out of Pokéballs doing this… we need some way to stop those Grimer…"

"Char!" 'I say we charge them!' Charmeleon suggested.

"That actually might work…" Ash admitted. They'd just have to avoid the Sludge Bombs and…
"Gri!" They shouted in monotone, even as a putrid cloud began to spew from their mouths.

….and the Poison Gas. Fun…and potentially lethal given the circumstances.

"Poison Gas isn't lethal and has a small range, but it can poison you. This poison is lethal, and it can explode violently if exposed to electricity and extreme heat," the Pokédex stated as Pikachu looked annoyed at being reminded of that. Charmeleon looked like he was willing to see the explosion idea through.

"So, it is lethal?" Ash stated as the Pokédex replied in the negative.

"No, the gas is fine, it's the poison you get from the gas that can kill you."

"So it's lethal?"

"No it isn't."

"Yes it ....."

Starmie interrupted the two of them with a cry Ash could not try and describe in writing.

Ash, Pikachu, Charmeleon, and the Pokédex turned to the Water-type, to find it had a glowing, floating box.

IN CASE OF MAGNEMITE INFESTATION

The red words were plastered on the side of it. The top of the box tore open via Starmie's Psychic, revealing dozens of Pokéballs inside.

"Hacking now" The Pokédex simply stated as what had to be done became quite clear.

Five minutes later

Ash rubbed his sore arms after five minutes of rapid fire A-grade throwing.

However it was worth it….for the last Pokéball in the box had struck and captured the nearly recovered Muk.

However the thirty Grimer that had still been with Muk before the ball barrage had begun had been very dutiful in protecting their boss.

So now…

Meanwhile at Professor Oak's Ranch

Bulbasaur looked up from his sunning rock to see the Professor being chased by Muk, and thirty-two smaller Grimer, with arms outstretched for hugging.

He promptly backed away before any of them noticed him.
Back to the Power Plant

….Well, hopefully Professor Oak would be alright. The Pokédex did say that Pokéballs made Grimer and Muk sanitary, right? Wonder if you could eat off one?

But, he couldn't change that now. After about the 10th part of his barrage Pikachu had confirmed that the Muk here was his Muk, and now he was safe and sound and no longer under someone's control.

That was great, and now he had to find the one responsible.

His arm was still sore, so he didn't have the same oomph to his releases this time, but it was private so it would be fine.

Joining Pikachu, Charmeleon, and Starmie were Snivy, Yanma, and Butterfree. With Sliggoo guarding his stuff outside the plant that was all of them.

"Okay, we need to find the person responsible for all of this. Split into teams of two and call us if you find anyone!"

With that order the Pokémon split into three groups: Pikachu and Starmie, Yanma and Butterfree, and Charmeleon and Snivy. Darting either down the hallway away from where the Grimer had been, up towards it, or going back and taking a turn he didn't that left Ash and the Pokédex.

"Pikachu's taking that right, so I'll do the left."

Five minutes later found Charmeleon and Snivy in the middle of a rather big scuffle.

They were doing fairly well for themselves though.

"Sni." 'You know, I doubt that is a legal move,' she snarked turning her gaze from Charmeleon as she avoided a Beedrill's jabbing attack before jumping over said Beedrill and smacking it with her tail. It briefly glowed light blue, though the color didn't stick.

Charmeleon, who was sweeping away a platoon of Weedle with an Ekans whip, and occasionally smacking it up the head when it tried to bite him, didn't care.

After swiping away another Weedle attack, he spotted an approaching Nidorino charging his way.

"Char!" 'Charmeleon use Fling!'

The Ekans was flung right into the Nidorino's path, tangling it up and causing both to grind to a halt.

Idly knocking a Bellsprout away with a Leaf Blade, before attempting to hit an Oddish with Aerial Ace and having it fail on her again, Snivy bounced back and landed close to where Charmeleon was.

"Vy." 'One, that was a terrible Ash impression. Your voice is too deep. Two, can you even use Fling?'

Charmeleon chuckled in response, as if laughing at the idea of someone having to research throwing your enemies.
However the chuckles came to an end as a line of Gloom advanced, spewing a giant storm of Stun Spore at them. Meanwhile from the other side several Nidorina started shooting Poison Stings their way.

The two starter Pokémon took stock of the situation, before in unspoken agreement switching places and confronting the respective threats.

Snivy leapt into the looming spore storm, not fazed by it as Leaf Storm began to charge. Charmeleon charged a Flamethrower even as the Poison Stings grew closer.

"Sni!/Mell! ‘Fire!’

And both attacks flew towards their respective targets. Leaf Storm blew away the bulk of the spores before smashing into the Gloom, while Flamethrower burned away the purple barbs and scorched the Nidorina.

Both starter Pokémon and fellow Team Plasma Busters nodded in acknowledgement of one another, even as Charmeleon whacked away the Oddish she had failed to take down earlier.

However the battle soon resumed as a swarm descended from afar.

"Vy…” 'Your region has too many Poison-types'

Charmeleon had no response to that statement as two massive swarms of Zubat came at them from both directions.

Leaves and fire billowed around both as the swarms got close.

As Charmeleon charged them with a flaming body, Leaf Storm flew.

The attacks blew away dozens of the bats, but more kept coming. Several of them flew down low, before speeding at Snivy with speed.

Snivy narrowed her eyes at these bats, using Aerial Ace the same as Pidgeot did, trying to take in as many details as she could.

As they got close, her tail began to glow. It started to turn blue.

Knocked by this attack, she rolled on the ground before managing to push herself back on her feet, even as the third Zubat flew right her with Aerial Ace.

As Charmeleon roared with delight for his battle, she had to win this one.

One more time, she focused everything she had ever heard about Aerial Ace and how it works into her tail. She felt it grow in power and glow blue.

With that, she charged at the Zubat as fast as she could.

Two forms of Aerial Ace, the tackle and the slice, soon collided as her tail met Zubat's body. They struggled against each other for one second, two seconds, three seconds….

And Zubat was flung back, defeated and laying on the ground.
Snivy smirked at the feeling of a nice, perfected Aerial Ace, even as she began to glow.

...

Elsewhere in the Power Plant a Venonoth was blow down from the sky by Water Gun, while a second was hit by Wing Attack.

The attackers, Staryu and Wingull, continued their barrage even as their trainer and her most faithful Pokémon stared down an approaching line of Arbok.

The controlled snakes fired a barrage of Mud Bomb attacks.

"I've cover you!" Misty shouted as she formed a Whirlpool to block the attacks.

"….Psy…" 'Sigh….fine…' Psyduck struck the ground with a glowing Secret Power. The light traveled through the ground, before shocking the Arbok.

The two ran past the stunned snakes, even as a few of them began to flake.

Shed Skin was activating.

Feeling a sense of impending 'giant snake is behind you with poison' vibes, Misty shouted back to her other Pokémon.

"Psyduck and I are going ahead, finish these guys off would ya?!"

As the shedding finished two of the Arbok tried to use Bite, but got a Water Pulse and a Water Gun for their trouble and were blown back.

Shouting a quick thanks to the Pokémon behind her Misty rounded a corner, followed by a stumbling Psyduck. It was clear.

They took another corner, and it was also clear.

The third was clear as…

Misty felt a blow to the back of her head, and started to fall.

Slowly.

Psyduck froze mid-run, seeing his trainer falling to the ground.

Either by trip or deliberately, he threw himself between her and the hard ground, his stomach cushioning her fall.

"Du…" He groaned as the weight of her head struck him.

Misty recovered from the fall quickly enough, and noticed the pained duck who had saved her from a potentially bad injury.

"Psyduck…" she stated in a concerned tone, unsure of what had caused her to trip. He muttered something in response, so he seemed to be okay

"Your Psyduck is very loyal," a female voice stated, even as she got back on her feet, followed by Psyduck whom rubbed his now sore belly.
Misty glared down the hall, from where a human form was approaching. A short girl, with brown hair and...

"Wait..." Misty breathed as the girl continued to grow closer. "...I saw you yesterday. You were at that restaurant with nachos."

"Correct," the short girl she had glimpsed briefly stated as she adjusted her glasses.

"So you're the one..."

She was interrupted by the girl shaking her head.

"Negative. I am not. That is Belladonna, I am merely here to assure that our goal is met," the girl stated in a tone that was somewhat emotionless: not fully devoid of it but she was definitely not going to win any emoting contests.

It was cliché, but Misty felt the need to say it.

"What is your goal then?"

"Justice," the girl stated simply.

"Duc..." 'Huh, I could have sworn this Power Plant was pretty ecofriendly...'

Somehow, Misty doubted she was after that kind of justice.

Misty moved to make the girl move, but she found her legs weren't moving. A glance down at them revealed why.

Shadows. A shadow had extended from the girl, and was restraining her legs.

"Have you ever heard of the move Shadow Sneak? It's a technique used, mostly by Ghost Pokémon, to attack an opponent first via a shadow. I can use it as well," the girl explained, "But unlike them, I can use my shadow for more than just hitting something. Of course, my shadow always hits first."

Misty smirked.

"Sure, you do move first, but that just means I can counter it better."

"How? Your Psyduck can't, not with my Gastly using Lick on it."

"Du? 'What Lick!?" A large tongue suddenly washed over the duck, causing him to stiffen.

"Oh, just this..." Misty formed Whirlpool again, and threw it at the surprised shadow girl.

The girl was knocked into a wall, releasing the shadows from around her legs. Psyduck was still paralyzed, so Misty picked him up and looked around for a disembodied tongue.

She saw it moment before it licked her face, allowing her to bend over and avoid it, before a Water Pulse hit it straight on and knocked it away.

Misty smiled as her Staryu and Wingull flew over to her, looking quite well.

"Good, we're all together! Now, let's..." Misty's eyes widened in surprise as a shadowy fist formed behind Wingull, and hit the bird right into the ground.
Like Psyduck with her, Misty ducked to catch it.

As Psyduck began to squirm under her, seemingly recovering a bit from the lick, she put him on the ground, said duck being a tad woozy, and glared down the hallway where the girl was once more standing.

"So, you are like us? How interesting...What is your name? Belladonna can get it from you later, but it would be more polite to avoid having to resort to such measures."

"Misty," she told the girl tersely, not quite sure what the girl was referring to.

"Vedia." She gave her own name, even as Misty suspected she was preparing to attack her with a shadow again.

---

*Live Guard Inside*

The words were cut into the door Ash found himself walking by, and he paused to open it. Before he could reach the knob however, the Pokédex spoke up.

"I wouldn't do that."

"What, you think it's a trap or something?" Ash retracted his hand a bit from the knob.

"Possibly. It is also possible this is a legit person restraining door, I am detecting life signatures beyond this door. However, removing that person would make him vulnerable to roaming Pokémon, like that Nidoqueen you beat up."

Said Nidoqueen groaned on the floor, defeated. Ash really didn't like leaving the Pokémon like that and would have captured it if it wasn't already captured.

"Huh....but I could have sworn you said..." Ash questioned in response.

"The Pokémon in question had been inside a Pokéball at the time, had it been out it would still be affected. The casing of a Pokéball negates the control, not being captured in general."

Huh, like Team Plasma's machines. That made sense...

"Perhaps I need to be clearer about what I say...yes I need to double the word count I use. I'll fill you in on all the details I didn't properly elaborate on..." The Pokédex began to mutter as it expounded more "...Gyarados, the Atrocious Pokémon. Gyarados are vicious creatures that have caused the end of entire civilizations in only a single day, and thus went unstudied until an ignorant young man named Jared Kowaski evolved his Magikarp named Mr. Fish and thus gained an unparalleled understanding of Gyarados psychology and dietary needs, though he lacked most every other skill. This knowledge of their mindset is presumably the only reason he has not been mauled, blasted, or eaten yet. Gyarados are easily provoked and were the greatest threat to ancient mariners in all recorded histories, greater than scurvy, syphilis, storms, whirlpools, rocks, alcohol induced directions, and splinters combined. An ancient civilization in the Orange Islands won three separate wars with Pokélantis because Gyarados independently destroyed the invading armadas. Their danger to all around them led to the great Kalosian Gyarados culling and Magikarp poisonings that all but wiped out the species population there, warranting a controversial declaration of conservation that many still find..."
self-destructive. It is illegal to import a Gyarados or Magikarp to Unova on threat of death and massive fines. Gyarados are a predatory species easily capable of eating humans in large numbers, the largest recorded single loss of life from a single Gyarados bite is 24 humans and a Pidgey. They are attracted to splashing water on the edge of the water, which induces a vicious attack instinct. Their stomach acid is capable of dissolving steel with a P.H of...."

"That isn't necessary." Ash managed to quiet the device down before it got too fact heavy. "Just….try and speak clearly, not more."

"Aw…" The device quieted down as Ash found himself at the door to the control room.

One, two….

With a harsh kick at the mental thought on three he burst into the room, ready to end this nonsense once and for all.

Only to get blasted into a wall, his left arm iced to the wall.

Ash struggled, trying to break it apart, but it held firm.

"Odd ice detected. Ice is denser than that found in nature or used by Pokémon, though it is also less cold. Your risk of hypothermia and frostbite is reduced." The Pokédex was quick to comment on his current state of ice imprisonment.

Said ice had come from a girl about his age with black hair, with ponytails and a sweater that seemed odd for this weather. Steam, the sort that came from the cold instead of heat, was wafting from her fingers, which were arranged in a manner much like a gun. Despite the gun like fingers, she looked rather frightened as his approach, as if shocked he had gotten this far and had fired on reflex.

Ice? But it was Ekans and Beedrill and other Poison types doing this, not Ice-types. Were there two of them?

"Well, this is unwelcome," a much deeper female voice growled

Rising from a chair in the back of the control room approached the owner of the voice, a tall teenage girl, even taller than Iris and probably quite a few adults. Her black hair was long, and dyed green at the tips. Her face was sharp looking, and she….

She had the same marks on her face that he did, and had seen on very few others, amongst them Yellow.

However, Ash saw a lot of someone else when he saw her: Red. Her eyes were redder, sure, and her face was a lot sharper, but it had a nagging theory of 'you look vaguely similar'.

And Red in turn looked like someone else: himself.

"How did you get this far?" she demanded, looking him up and down before her face went from 'angry' to 'fury built on worry'.

"Where are Vedia and Evanna? What did you do to them!?!"

"Who?" He replied honestly as she narrowed her eyed as him. Her hand began to glow purple, uncannily in a manner that normally was a sign that Brock would get jabbed, before she reeled it in.

So she was the Poison Bloodliner?
"Now, tell me." Before he could speak she growled at him, her eyes glowing an orange-brown. "What did you do to Vedia and Evanna? The two female Bloodliners guarding the Power Plant, what did you do to them?"

"I didn't encounter anyone like that. I encountered plenty of Pokémon, but no one who didn't come in with me" Ash felt the answer slip out of him, as if he couldn't help but not speak. It was…

The glow faded from the girl's eyes, as she looked at him in ire.

"Well that explains it. You must have snuck in while my Sweetie and Sweet take care of your friends. No matter."

He didn't pay much attention to her words, as he was still trying to process what had just happened.

What had just happened to him? It was like he couldn't help but talk, and still be as truthful as he had been earlier. Though why he said anything about Misty and Iris was beyond….

Wait. Was that a Bloodliner's ability, like how he could give his Pokémon more power unconsciously at times? That wasn't a Poison move though….

Was this girl like him, someone who possessed two Bloodlines?

In the corner of his eyes he noticed the other girl with her, the ice one, looking at him in confusion, before her eyes went wide with shock. The other one didn't notice this, as her hand was once again glowing purple like she was going to Poison Jab him.

Unlike Brock though, this probably would not end with him dragged off by a laughing Poison-type.

Was he immune to it though? He had never actually been hit by a Poison-type since coming back in time, so he wasn't sure.

He didn't want to find out, though.

He tried to get a move to start, but Power-up Punch didn't seem to want to activate from where he was bound. Could he try to Quick Attack his lower body to kick her?

The dual bloodliner looked ready to hit him, even as the ice girl looked like she was trying to say something, but couldn't. He wasn't the only one seemed to notice this.

For Poison Jab deactivated, and the taller girl turned to the shorter.

"Aurora, is something the matter?"

Aurora. So, that was the name of the Ice Girl.

The now named Aurora was looking at him with the same look of shock and he had seen earlier.

"I'd tell you that you can leave the room while I kill him, but the body wouldn't really be fixed...."

"No. That's not it. Belladonna....it's just....he looks like you."

The words were spoken out loud, causing Belladonna's face to morph into one of unease. His probably also did, but he had a lot on his mind beyond it so he had no idea what his face was currently set to.

"Well, I guess we both have dark hair...." She bent over to look at him closer, before reaching for
and stretching his…earlobe?

"… Our earlobes are both unattached, and we both have these….whatever they are on our cheeks, but that's hardly going to prove anything. I mean, unless he's also a Bloodliner or something."

She looked at him again, her eyes glowing once more, "Now, tell me the truth, you're not a Bloodliner."

"I am a Bloodliner. Not only do I have the ability to do anything a Lucario can, but I also can increase the strength of my Pokémon whenever I need to. It makes my eyes glow, apparently."

Again, the truth slipped out of him as Belladonna took a step backwards, away from him. Her face was now stunned, looking like she had just discovered something she had thought to be impossible.

Aurora gasped, her hands covering her mouth in shock. Though she did look somewhat relieved, as if glad she didn't realize this after the fact.

"…Do you know your father? Were you raised just by your mother…” Belladonna asked him, much quieter. Without her eyes glowing with a Bloodline.

The truth did not burst of him this time, this time the words spoken were those he choose to say.

"I only know my Mom," Ash admitted as Belladonna walked back over to him, before reaching out and touching his face.

Lightly. Curiously. Her red eyes looking into his brown ones, trying to see all she could.

"You look different from me, but what doesn't… it really is there.” She turned to Aurora, looking at her in immense gratitude.

"Thank you My Dear….you stopped me from making a horrible mistake."

She turned back to him, a much gentler smile on her face now.

"You stopped me, from killing the Brother I never knew I had."

One word. A word that could never be unsaid.

It was out now, and could never be unspoken.

Her fist colliding with the intruder's claws, Evanna's face was split in a maddening grin.

There were few things in life, after all, that could match the rush of a good fight, the exchanging of blows and the meeting of fist to flesh.

Only love could match the intensity of a good fight.

Around them their Pokémon were still fighting, though those battles were winding down. The fights would be over soon, though she suspected that they would soon lead to more fights.

But such thoughts were not for battle, her thoughts must only be on her opponent.

Everything about an opponent's techniques in a fight revealed something slight, you just had to know how to spot it. Once you did, a fight was the purest form of conversation any being in the world could provide.
The girl, whose name wasn't important and she had not offered it, moved with sharp focus when she attacked, though the focus wasn't aiming to a definite end goal, like overpowering, flow control, or disorientation.

Meaning that while she had long had practice in fighting or combat, she was not trained by a human martial artist, or a Fighting-type with a disciplined style of combat. Her fighting style seemed to be something more instinctual, wild but controlled, the way she attacked made Evanna think her opponent had been taught by a clawed Pokémon. The green energy claws around the other girl's hands only provided more proof to her theory.

Hardly a mark against her: such a fighting style may not be as razor focused, but it also meant finding a read on weaknesses was much harder. And that made the fight all the more invigorating.

A slash and a punch both hit, Evanna felt blood begin to drip from her right cheek while her opponent was sent flying into a wall.

No matter for either, like a Pokémon not only could they take more and recover faster, but it was also much harder for them to ever get a scar. Pokémon that respected scars on their species did so because it was much harder to get one than it was for humans. Of course as a result of how a human skin was, heat dissipation via sweat was much more efficient. Pokémon could take more hurt before being permanently harmed, and Humans could withstand the heat of battle for much longer: she could do both of course, and so could her opponent.

Neither heat nor pain would stop this fight.

Another exchange of blows, and Evanna got to see her opponent's eyes.

A glance of only a few moments, but those moments revealed more than a hundred words could.

This girl was an orphan who had lost her family twice.

Just as Evanna herself had lost both her mother, and both her fathers.

How did your birth parents die?

She didn't ask this question; no this wasn't the time for vocalizations.

This was a time to hit the ground without even a casual declaration of Boost (always a fun word to shout with each strengthening punch), while avoiding a blast of Dragon Breath. Debris was a good shield after all.

Was it like what had happened to the family she had no memory of? Victims of a Typhoon like the storm that had left her an orphan (Urobuchi was its name, she looked it up a few years ago out of curiosity), or some other disaster.

Yet, you were taken in by someone afterwards….

Avoiding another slash and punching her, Evanna wondered who had taken her in.

Evanna herself had been taken in by a marital artist named Kyle Narec, who was not a Johto native. He had taught her everything he knew, and had not rejected her when her Bloodliner powers had been discovered.

Was this girl that lucky? Belladonna, Vedia, and Aurora certainly weren't.
Taking a blast of Dragon Breath to the chest, she looked at the girl's eyes and wondered.

How did you get orphaned twice?

The eyes of someone who had lost their family twice was distinct from one had lost it only once.

Both of them had those eyes. The eyes of an orphan who knew they had gotten a second chance, and had it taken away from them.

"So brother, what is your name? I feel rather embarrassed I didn't ask for it sooner. You heard mine of course, Belladonna, though if you want to put a last name to it you can call me Belladonna Narec."

One thing Ash had noticed when he had traveled back in time was that Misty was a bit less prone to random bursts of anger.

It might have been because of how her life had went, but as he recalled most older females were somewhat more mellow than Misty had been, or May, or Dawn, or Iris….come to think of it Serena wasn't as prone to mood swings either.

Maybe that was just a thing with females within the range of whatever his age was. Perhaps Serena just happened to be out of the thick of it.

However, with Belladonna having gone so rapidly from wanting to kill him to being friendly maybe it wasn't just an age thing. Though then again it wasn't as if Misty ever found out he was her long lost brother or something so perhaps this was a normal reaction.

She was also somewhat blushing in embarrassment at the admission of her not knowing his name.

"Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town."

Belladonna blinked at his response, which was rather odd. Was it so wrong to always mention his home town?

"Huh, name and home town. Pallet Town..." Belladonna looked confused as she tried to think about it, "Where is that exactly?"

"Pallet Town is found south of Viridian City. It's mostly known as a small country town that is tending liberal in the last few decades more so than other areas south of Viridian, though it is well known for being the home of Professor Oak which likely is a factor to this political tendency."

Surprisingly, this did not come out of the Pokédex's speakers, but from Aurora, who covered her mouth and blushed in embarrassment.

Belladonna nodded at Aurora's info dump, while Ash noted the political comments with disinterest. Ash didn't care about politics in the old timeline, and he felt the same way in this one. All he knew about Pallet Town's rep in this timeline is that he collected Trainer cards and was rumored to spend 70% of his government salary buying boxes of them and ordering rare ones online.

"So, my little brother's a country boy." Belladonna grinned at him, Ash wishing she wouldn't call him that.

Just because they had some similar elements to their appearance and history didn't make them
siblings, and she embraced the idea a bit too quickly.

Not helped of course, by the fact he was still frozen to the wall. Apparently neither of them had an ice pick on hand.

"Well, I'm from the city myself. This city in fact," she said 'this city' with little affection, "I'm from the Old Cesspit."

Ash wasn't sure how to answer that, an issue quickly filled in by Aurora.

"The Old Cesspit is the bad part of Gringy City, a status it had even back in the bad days when it was even worse than it currently is. It's riddled with crime, drugs, misery, and prostitution, though it is oddly also known for several well respected, hidden gem restaurants." She again blushed and covered her mouth after spontaneously info dumping.

"Yeah, it sucked," Belladonna blandly noted of her birthplace.

"Anyway…what else do we need to know about ourselves now? Oh yes…how old are you? I'm sixteen."

Sixteen? Huh, he'd have guessed older himself. She seemed to pick up what he was thinking.

"Yeah, I get that a lot."

"I'm fifteen." Fifteen going on who knows how much, but he wasn't going to bring that up here, or at any point if he could.

That would just be weird.

"Fifteen….that means you're the same age as my dear Aurora here…" She turned to the ice girl with a wide smile on her face.

The smile was just as kind (as in, not an 'I will hurt you' smile), but it was different somehow.

Turning back to him, Belladonna looked intent on continuing her questioning train.

"So, you and I were both raised by a single mother. Did yours suck?" she said the last part with extreme flatness.

"No!" Not in this or the old timeline. Never.

She seemed taken aback by the volume of his response along with the growl that had rumbled in his throat when he'd answered.

"My bad….I apologize for that. It's just…my mom sucked. Vedia's mom sucked. Aurora and Evanna's moms died before they knew them so I can't really say on them but there is a pattern going so I am not optimistic. Between the four of us, we only had one good parent, and he was a martial artist whose career was spent punching mountain Graveler for training for martial art tournaments. Nicest guy in the world apparently, but he's an extreme minority."

She seemed genuinely regretful for her assumption about his mom, and she did give an explanation.

An odd one given the fact the one good parent among the four (where were the other two? He hoped Misty and Iris were okay) apparently punched living rocks to toughen himself up, but she did seem to want to explain herself.
"I understand… anyway about my mom," Ash talked, given he couldn't do anything else right now but wait until someone found him. "She's the nicest person in the world. I never knew my dad, but she was always there for me. She's a great cook, and she's pretty smart, at least smarter than I am. Not that being smarter than me is hard, but that's not really the point. She's always supported me in everything I do, and I wouldn't be who I am today without. Thinking back," Aka, noting things that happened after he left in timeline one and a few talks with her after that, "She could have been bitter. She's not even 20 years older than me, and she had to raise me by herself. But I think she did a good job of it."

Belladonna was silent for a moment, her lips pinching against each other. She spoke after a moment.

"She sounds… nice. I wish she was my mother… because mine, as previously stated, sucked. A lot." She took a deep breath before continuing.

"Like you, I never knew my father. My mother didn't say much about him either, except he was good looking and had an accent that screamed foreigner. They 'daycared', she never saw him again, and nine months later… I assume it's the same with you?"

Ash wasn't quite sure why she used the term 'daycared', as he was pretty sure a place you put small children was not supposed to be a euphemism.

"I don't know….I never liked asking her about it." He had some tact.

"Try cheap alcohol, it loosens lips," she quipped with all the darkness of a Dark Pulse.

Uh, no. He was not going to get his mom drunk. That had a 50/50 shot of either finding out something about his father he didn't want to know (ranging from angry ranting to something his whatever aged mind from the original timeline was not meant to know), or her dialing random people and telling embarrassing stories about him if he had to guess.

"Well after that….life sucked. The woman was a hoarder who couldn't care to get rid of anything, and cared less about how clean anything was. It attracted Grimer."

"Grimer? Surely it couldn't have been that bad?" Ash was sure she was exaggerating at this point.

He briefly noticed Aurora rapidly shaking her head in response to him, as furiously as Max had that time someone had grabbed a piece of May's pizza.

Unlike that guy though, he didn't get hit in the face and called something rude.

Belladonna just hit the wall ferociously, her hand glowing purple and melting the surrounding concrete. When she spoke she was talking a lot faster and angrier than she had been before.

"It was that bad! The only reason anyone could even move in that damn shack was because they ate enough of the crap that you could actually crawl in there! And they talked as they did so, muttering and singing and gulping all night! I could never sleep through it because I could hear exactly what they were saying, and when I actually could so I had nightmares! The only time I was ever out of that damn hovel was when I was at school, and those damn freaks of nature, if you can even call a freaking piece of sludge a freak of nature, caused me to have to stay home from it because they literally ate my cloths, sometimes off me, and my backpack, sometimes off me, and my homework, sometimes right in front of me, and Mr. Stuffy, right out of my arms, and…"

She seemed to catch the stunned looks that he and Aurora had been giving her, and she took a deep breath, closed her eyes and also dialed her volume down.
"Sorry…" she apologized as she reopened her eyes, they were calmer now but they still held that burning anger she'd displayed seconds before.

"No problem, I probably should have phrased that statement of mine better…" Ash gently put out there.

"…Anyway, when I was eleven I was finally thrown out after she found out I had been seen kissing a pair of sisters. As it turns out, there is one thing my mom won't hoard." Belladonna's face grew pensive as she recalled this. "You know, I wonder what ever happened to Annie and Oakley after that?"

The fact that Belladonna was attracted to girls registered in Ash's mind, but it didn't really linger.

While Ash had issues with being stuck to a wall, and of Belladonna performing terrorism, he could care less about who she liked.

To him, if both sides were consenting nothing else mattered.

Though his thoughts did linger on the names she mentioned, Annie and Oakley. Weren't those the names of those girls who got Latios killed at Alto Mare? He'd have to ask Pikachu later.

"I'm sorry to hear about that," Ash genuinely told her as she waved him off.

"It's hardly anything to be sorry for. I've been far better since I got away from that woman, and if I had never left I'd have never met My Dear Aurora here, or My Sweet Vedia, or Evanna Sweetie."

She was smiling as widely as Aurora was blushing red, and the implications of what Belladonna said began to connect.

"Wait, which one's your girl...."

"All of them," Belladonna said her smile growing wilder as the anger in her eyes changed to an almost giddy happiness.

With two timelines worth of memories, and adventures including, but not limited to saving the world, getting stranded on deserted islands, traveling to alternate dimensions, riding Legendary Pokémon, being part of a featured film, nearly being sucked into the afterlife, dying, the end of time and space itself, meeting various caped crusaders, time travel, space-time travel, and channeling magical ocean power: Ash could say with some certainty that this was a new one.

With a fresh grin, Charmeleon's battle partner blew away a Nidorina who had been at her eye level.

She was clearly enjoying her new evolution, and with it her new powers.

"Serv." The Servine formerly known as Snivy grinned, 'Well, I certainly could get used to this.'

Charmeleon rolled his eyes and blasted a swarm of approaching Spinarak with Flamethrower.

Yeah yeah, Evolution is wonderful and we should all do it. Of course, it wasn't like you automatically evolved if you did X, learned Y, or anything so simple.

Except with stones, but they didn't count.

Servine knocked an Ariados back with Aerial Ace behind him, even as a Nidoking charged his way, horn lowered for a horn attack (quite possibly being Horn Attack).
He grabbed the horn, locking the great charger in place.

"Ser….." He thought he heard the sound of limb movement as Servine spoke again. 'Still, I do miss how long my arms were before.'

Slamming the Nidoking to the ground with a hard wallop, Charmeleon turned and leveled a long look at Servine.

"Char." 'Look, sometimes you give something up when you evolve. Mostly you just lose the ability to jump into people's laps and the ability to hide easily. The higher power levels are worth it.'

Servine still looked somewhat bothered by her now smaller arms, and so Charmeleon looked ready to continue, though his attention was briefly torn when he heard something climb over the Nidoking and fire Poison Stings.

He avoided them with a twitch, and didn't even look back to see the possessed Weedle trying to kill him.

He just flicked it away with his tail, not even turning around to look at it, as he began to glow.

Servine blinked in surprise, though it was a tad hard for him to see when his body was glowing, changing, and his eyes were probably going through complicated changes that he couldn't name, Ash definitely could not name, and if one of the lab coated people saw it would warrant a lengthy lecture on eye lids or something.

As the glowing ended, he was frowning.

Giving Servine a long look, the restored Charizard did not bellow the return of his great power, but growled a simple statement.

'That, was officially a Scolipede. No, it was in fact the fearsome Deathropod, legendary scourge of souls. That Weedle was never here, and I did not just evolve after flicking it away.'

Servine rolled her eyes in response to his statement.

They were both getting towards the end of their rope. Around them, all six of their Pokémon had already collapsed in defeat, meaning this was now one on one.

Whoever struck most forcefully now, would win it all.

Evanna's fist glowed with power. It glowed with all the power of her bloodline power to use Power-up Punch.

A punch that had charged a lot of power in the course of this fight.

Her opponent narrowed her eyes at her, an energy claw ready to strike her, just as she was planning to strike her opponent.

"Boost," Evanna stated simply as she prepared to strike…

"Yan!"

Only for a light green glowing something to fly between them and smack her in the face.
The blow was hardly a knockout blow, but it did knock her to the ground.

Evanna glared up from her fall, to see a Yanma buzzing between her and her opponent.

How rare…and unexpected. And unwanted.

Her opponent looked somewhat confused at the Yanma, though Evanna could see realization slowly dawn on the girl's face like a sunrise, before she began moving towards the downed Pokémon, in particular the dragon thing, with a look of concern.

So she probably knew where that thing had come from, and trusted it, or who had sent it, to take over for her while she checked on her Pokémon. But that left a question unanswered: who had sent the Yanma.

That meant she wasn't alone… Belladonna, Aurora, and Vedia!

Evanna got back on her feet, a sense of urgency flowing through her like a flood.

This girl wasn't alone. Her family could be in danger.

She'd deal with this pest first, and knock the girl out afterwards. She'd let Belladonna decide what to do with someone like them.

Then, she'd go protect her family. They would not die.

Not for a third time.

Pssssshhhhhhh.

The sound rang through the air, followed milliseconds by her horror.

Seconds after her horror came the String Shot that stuck her main arm to a wall by a Butterfree that had flown in behind the Yanma.

...  

Everything that had happened on that day before Azalea town exploded into murder was hazy to her, but the moment the façade of kindness broke she saw what truly lay in their Johto hearts.

It had been an act of concern of her ten-year-old self, an act of unrequested kindness.

A woman had lost her grip on her carriage, sending a screaming infant flying down the streets.

She had been in the way of it, exiting a grocery store ahead of her orange clad father as he went through a tedious check out.

So, she had done what anyone would have done in that situation, though she wondered later on if there was a hidden truth in this rural town, that she was the first to truly act on her morals and ran towards the runaway carriage, an infant screaming in panic within it.

She hadn't notice the creature's tail sticking out when she had stood her ground; steeling herself with all the lessons her father had taught her.

She caught the carriage mid-flight, stopping it before it hit traffic. Before the baby was flung onto the unforgiving concrete.
Her torso even caught the child before momentum (or whatever it was called) flung it out.

All around her the civilians looked at her as a hero: smiling that she had managed to save the child.

"Slow…"

The low, pained cry of the creature whose tale she had accidentally stepped on while saving the baby changed their faces however, from admiration to hatred.

It was a fast change, a wicked change. A change that was too fast to have been normal.

Was this the real face of an Azalea town dweller? Of a rural person? Of a Johto native? A mask of kindness, masking an endless hatred that would erupt like a volcano at the moment it could.

She wasn't thinking that then of course, she was wondering why all the kind people were now looking at her like she had just killed the baby she had saved.

Then she was only thinking on defending herself, and not sending the carriage flying, when the bystanders flew at her with fists and screams of hatred for stepping on the Slowpoke.

A brief flicker of hope rang though her when she heard the shouts of the baby's mother, a flicker that was smothered when she felt a purse hit her in the back of the head.

…

"Evanna…Evanna…"

Unlike their voices, this voice was kind.

It was his voice.

Her eyes slowly opened, followed shortly after by a sense of pain from multiple parts of her body.

"It's going to be alright," the muscled man who was standing over her told her gently. He was dressed in an orange fighting gi, with a blue belt and arm bands. His hair was black, and his face bore several scars, an X shaped on his left cheek and a slash above his right eye.

Several bruises covered his body as well, much fresher than the scars on his face. Just as fresh as the ones she could feel on herself.

"Why are they doing this! I was just trying to help…it was an accident!" Evanna cried, as he extended a hand and gently touched her shoulder.

"Yes, you are totally right. It was an accident, you aren't in the wrong. Come, let's get out of here. We can go somewhere else… anywhere else."

"Anywhere?" she whispered, as he nodded.

"Does Kyle Narec ever lie? Now, let's get moving before they find…"

"There she is!"

"Slowpoke assaulter!"

The mob had returned: and they were armed with weapons and Pokémon. Mercy had not returned to their eyes: only a desire for harm remained in them.
"Run." Her father didn't need to tell her twice, and they ran from the mob.

Briefly, momentarily, hopefully, desperately, her mind saw this as how this story ended. Truthfully she didn't remember much of what happened next: just her running, and running, and running.

She did remember a sound though.

Pssssshhhhhhh.

She hadn't thought much of it at the time, mostly because all she could think of at the time was running as far as she could, but when she stopped miles afterwards she had finally realized that her father hadn't kept up with her, and he never returned.

When she heard the same sound from an Ariados as it caught and ate a Pidgey, she knew exactly what had happened to her father.

Shortly after the realization hit she let out an anguished scream.

...

"Not again….not again……" Tears were coming out of her eyes now, blinding her to however the bugs and the dragon girl were looking at her.

"…And that's how it all happened."

Belladonna was the only one in the room not blushing after she finished explaining how she had three girlfriends.

Aurora more than Ash in any case, Ash was merely just processing the whole thing. He had the oddest feeling he had to remember it later, particularly as the Pokédex hadn't given any indication it recorded anything.

Really, the thing was being unusually silent. It was starting to unsettle him.

He did have one thing to say about the entire story though.

"Isn't being in a relationship with multiple people illegal though?"

"Silly brother, I have no use for the laws of man," Belladonna stated after she finished laughing. Her face then quickly morphed into one of 'did I really just say that'.

"My bad, I mean the laws of humans. It doesn't matter what any human says is right, none of us are human so we shouldn't be bound by their laws. Plus have you seen the law codes? It's perfectly legal for you to screw someone behind your wedded partner's back, but the moment a wedded couple decides that they want to be just as close to a third person as to each other it's immoral and depraved. Tell me how that's sensible."

"Adultery and Bigamy is actually illegal in Johto still," Aurora blurted out, though she blushed and covered her mouth after it slipped out.

"…Johto makes more sense than the rest of the world? Well lovely, the world must be all fucked up and we're all going to die from a reality crash," Belladonna darkly joked.

'Too late for that, girl who keeps claiming the two of us are related. It already did that.'
But, before he started thinking too much on the end of the old universe, Ash decided to continue the time stall by pressing a question.

"You think you're above the law?"

Thankfully he didn't say it in an Elliot Stabler tone, but more in a questioning way. Belladonna thus was obliged to answer, and not to attack him.

"Yes, we are all above it. You, me, my dear Aurora, we aren't human nor are we Pokémon. We make our own rules just as they make their own."

"Where in those rules does it make it okay to invade a Power Plant?" Ash questioned. Belladonna was quiet for a minute before she responded.

"This Power Plant, is the one that powers the medical equipment that keeps the bastard Tokiomi alive"

Aurora's father? He had come up during Belladonna's story, so Ash did not need to be reminded of why Belladonna hated him.

But all this….

"Okay, so let me get this straight. Tokiomi is in a hospital which gets its primary power from this Power Plant?"

"It gets all of its power from here after Vedia severed the secondary source's cables." Belladonna cleared up a potential hole in her plan before Ash could even point it out.

That additional few seconds of stall time aside, he had other options.

"I take it he's probably hooked up to one of those machines with all the tubes, packets of fluid, and monitors that flat line if you die?"

"I'm sure those things have a name."

Sadly Brock wasn't here to tell them their make and model, and the Pokédex wasn't spurting it out either.

"So you decided to take over a Power Plant and shut it off, so he doesn't have machines helping keep him alive as he has a surgery, putting him and countless other people in danger of dying."

"Only a few people might die at that hospital who isn't him, and most of them are at the hospital because they smoked or drank too much. Believe me brother, I'm not a monster. I waited until he was transferred out of the hospital with the dedicated cancer ward to one specialized with self-inflicted damage from drugs and other poor life choices."

That doesn't make you much better.

"Look, Tokiomi is a horrible guy, I'm not going to argue that. But isn't this a little much?"

Ash's gentle question was again not answered right away, and he noticed that Aurora was looking rather unsure of it herself. Belladonna however, did have a response ready.

"Brother…you've never lost anyone, have you? You've never seen anyone you care about greatly suffering because of the actions of someone else? Your life was a lot easier than mine, and I suppose I can't blame you for that, nor should I. I was always told it was the job of older siblings to protect
their younger ones after all. However…”

Belladonna reached her left arm out as far as she could, pointing it at neither him nor Aurora. The arm promptly glowed with Poison Jab as she began to speak with a tone Ash had heard before, though not from her.

"When you do feel that emotion, and I do hope you never do, there is only one answer to it. You must punish the ones responsible, with no holds barred. You must make the one who hurt your loved ones feel every bit of pain they did, with extensive interest. Tokiomi betrayed Aurora in the worst way possible, he hurt her deeper than any flesh wound could. Such a man doesn't deserve to walk this earth. Such a man doesn't deserve to die peacefully. Such a man deserves to die suffocating on his own accumulated tar buildup as his veins seize up like a Saffron traffic jam!"

What Belladonna was talking about, the emotion she was putting into her words….the last time Ash had been near such feelings.

“Primeape in the air, detected. Unknown landing trajectory, exact landing coordinates and survival percentage incalculable with present data. Team Rocket may be consulted to amend data deficiencies.

*Twinkle*

Ash just stood in shock, his mind barely able to process what had just happened.

'Ash, that was Primeape,' Pikachu stated, similarly shocked.

"Not bad Pikachu, not bad. That Primeape did show promise, but if it was blown away that easily it wasn't that good to begin with. Return."

A familiar voice, a very familiar one, was the one talking. Following the sound of a Pokéball returning a Pokémon, Paul walked out of the tall grass that bordered the road, and caught Ash's eye.

"Oh, it's you." The trainer greeted with his usual level of disdain, completely ignoring Misty and Iris, "So, how's it been lately? Cheat you way to the Pokémon League by beating a couple of bimbos recently, no wait you already did that."

Paul. The trainer who had challenged his ideals with strength unlike any he had faced.
The trainer who had brutalized Chimchar, and abandoned who knows how many other Pokémon.
The trainer who had blown his Primeape away.

The trainer, who may have killed his Primeape. Ash's vision was flashing red as his memories of Primeape flew through his mind, even though they didn't get on well to begin with when they separated an unbreakable bond had formed between them and now with what Paul had just done that bond might not happen again. Ash's vision was now fixed a blood red, as was Pikachu's with electricity flaring from his cheeks and a vicious fire burning in his eyes.

Even if Paul could not have known that Primeape's history, that did not sedate Ash's rage. Ash's look of shock turned into a snarl of anger, Paul's usually unmovable sneer of disdain briefly flickered as his eyebrow twitched in surprise at the change in Ash's demeanour.

"If I did cheat my way to the Pokémon League Paul, then why would I still be battling Gym Leaders, and beating them better than you, a trainer who doesn't cheat?" Ash countered, surprising Misty and
Iris with the amount of anger in his voice. His fists were clenched tightly and visibly shaking from barely contained anger, Ash could feel his fingernails digging into his palms through his fingerless gloves. The small amount of pain seemed to only fuel his anger even further.

... Was when he himself felt them, after Paul had sent Primeape into the sky to his possible death. That same rage, that same rage that Misty was right to point out was not normal for him, in this or any timeline, was in Belladonna too. Somehow that gave more weight to her theory of their relation more than their earlobes or hair ever did. And that worried him.

Clearly his face reacted to his emotions, given that he heard Aurora give out a concerned gasp and Belladonna, somewhat hesitantly, stepped towards him and placed a hand on his cheek.

"You know what it feels like, don't you?" She asked simply.

Ash didn't react, lost in the emotion of the memory as a single tear rolled down his cheek.

"I'm sorry." Belladonna said empathically, wiping the tear away with her thumb. A darkness briefly flickered in her eyes, unseen by anyone else, as she started to think of a way to punish the person who had hurt her newly discovered brother.

Misty lay on the ground, struggling to move with a shadowy limb holding her down.

She was alone bar Vedia, who was standing in front of her with a vacant expression that was neither emotional, nor devoid of emotion.

There were no Pokémon still out of their balls, they had all been returned since. It was just the two of them, and she was the one pinned down.

"Why do you oppose our goal?" Vedia questioned.

She didn't reply immediately, so Vedia continued.

"You are just like us, and I do not mean in the mere fact that we possess Bloodliner abilities. I can see it in your eyes; you know what the world sees of us. What humanity sees of us. You've been rejected by your family. How long ago was it you were thrown out? It can't have been that long ago. I used to see those same eyes when I looked into a mirror."

"A mirror huh... well maybe when I was twelve. You're rather short," Misty quipped as Vedia's facial expression morphed briefly into annoyance.

"Belladonna thinks my lack of height, a common trait in my family, is cute." A pout almost forming on the other Bloodliner's face.

Misty was in no place to judge that, she didn't have the eyes for judging the attractiveness of other girls.

"Perhaps at one point, I didn't see myself as Human. I probably still don't. But you know...recently I can't help but see things differently. In a better light."

A light by the name of Ash Ketchum, who seemed to just make everything nicer when he was
He had a certain joy about him, a kindness and optimism that reflected off everything around him.

"Interesting," Vedia stated in a surprisingly genuine tone.

"I take it you have thus met someone you care about, who cares about you back. You have your own Belladonna then?"

'I do not have a girlfriend.' Misty blushed. Though replace the girl part of that statement with boy…

"Interesting how your Belladonna led you to the conclusion that humanity isn't as bad as you thought, while mine led me to the realization I can exist as something other than humanity. Fascinating, though in the end I feel your conclusion is wrong."

'Wrong? You think that looking to people and believing that they can be good, that they can improve, that they can change for the better, is wrong? I'm sorry little girl, but I cannot allow anyone to use that view to hurt others!'

Misty looked around, not sure what that voice came from. It certainly wasn't her own, and it wasn't Vedia's.

She looked just as confused as Misty about the voice, as if she could hear it herself.

Seconds later someone appeared right between them, as if from nothing. Before Vedia could respond the new arrival held out an outstretched hand, and sent Vedia flying down the hallway into a wall.

The new arrival turned to her even as the shadow holding her down faded, allowing Misty to get up and look the new arrival in the eye, finding her a few inches shorter than her.

The girl had purple hair and eyes (or some shade of it, but what was a scarlet and ruby but red?). She was wearing a white shirt that covered her arms like some sort of dress shirt with bits of yellow highlighting buttons and edges of the garment, followed by purple pants and black shoes.

'So, I take it that the girl I just sent flying is the one who is causing the power outage?' The girl's mouth mirrored the motions, but no sound came out of it. But that voice did ring in her head again.

This girl was telepathic.

"One of them anyway, but she's not the one controlling the… wait, how are you…?"

'I can't physically talk, but I am able to use my Bloodline to use telepathy. My name's Anabel.' She stretched out a hand, inviting a handshake.

Misty returned it to her savior.

"Misty."

The sound of footsteps caught both of their attentions, turning rapidly down the hallway where Vedia was back on her feet, looking rather annoyed.

---

_Bang_

The door to the control room rang a solid smash.

The three in room exchanged looks over it.
"I locked it," Belladonna stated simply as the door was banged again.

The door cracked, and shattered despite the lock, revealing the source of the banging.

Posed with his paws on the earth and his tail raised, Pikachu looked ready to speed forward like the wind.

Behind him stood Starmie, glittering like a star of hope.

To the side of Starmie stood a Servine, arms crossed and looking determined.

Above all of them towered a Charizard, claws menacing and flames billowing from his jaw. The way Charizard was stanched it was clear who broke the door.

Wait a minute, Servine and Charizard? As in…

What did he miss?!

Pikachu glanced in shock at his predicament, then eyed Aurora and Belladonna in fury and began to spark.

"Pikapi!" 'Alright, I don't know what happened here, and why Ash is frozen to a wall, but I am assuming you two are responsible for it. Eat volts!'

Thunderbolt was then fired right at them.

Aurora, appearing quite reflexively, held out her hand in a finger gun manner, before shooting out an Ice Beam from them.

The two attacks collided, cancelling each other out.

Seconds after the attacks launched his other Pokémon were dashing forward: Servine to him with a Leaf Blade attack to slice him out of the ice with a clean chop.

And Charizard, charging at Belladonna with glowing Metal Claws. She blocked the attack with her own hands, glowing with Poison Jab.

She was trembling with trying to not be smashed by Charizard though, and was probably only standing because her legs were currently using the wall to keep her from being crushed.

Now that he was freed, Pikachu was glaring at him, an action mirrored by Servine. Starmie didn't add to the glaring, but the poor thing was probably simply too confused to react to anything after they did that pose entrance.

"Pikapi!" 'Ash Ketchum, what is going on here!? I leave you alone for…minutes, and I find you frozen to a wall by what I can only call a Female Red, or John Archer, or you…'

"It's complicated." Ash would explain it in full later. Now was not the time to explain how he had ended up frozen to a wall by one of his (possibly) sister's girlfriends.

Speaking of said girlfriend, she had hopped on the back of Charizard and looked ready to try and Ice Beam him. Charizard didn't seem threatened by this, and gave a deep, intimidating growl aimed her way.

Seemingly in response to her girlfriend being growled at, Belladonna lunged forward and bit Charizard's left arm. Probably with Poison Fang.
Charizard glared at her for that, and looked ready to Flamethrower her in the face for that. However before he could, or Ash could tell Charizard to not do that (as Ash was not sure that being hit with a Flamethrower in the face would be nearly as harmless in this timeline), a Golbat shrouded in blue hit Charizard in the chest.

This sent Charizard stumbling back, freeing Belladonna. Charizard, shaking off his bitten arm with no visible sign of poison, glared at the Bat.

Aurora fell off her perch on Charizard, and was now standing between Charizard and the rest of them. Pikachu and Servine glared at her, looking ready to introduce her to Thunderbolt or Leaf Storm.

Golbat let out a series of loud screeches that Ash had no idea what that was supposed to mean. A threat to not hurt his/her master (seeing as Ash did not know how to tell a boy Golbat from a girl Golbat and this one didn’t seem to be possessed like the others around), a suggestion to run like the dickens (whatever a dickens was), perhaps an offer to trade Pokéblock recipes to let him fly away.

Belladonna grinned as Golbat finished, and Ash had a sinking feeling that he knew exactly what had happened.

"These are your Pokémon, right? They are pretty tough, just as I'd expect from you brother."

At the last word Charizard, Servine, and Pikachu all turned to him with mirrored expressions of confusion and shock.

"Are you aiming to compete in the Leagues? Hmm, I can't help but think that'll just hurt you in the end, but I suppose you have to find that out on your own. Perhaps it's just my pessimism kicking in. Until then, I'll be rooting for you. After all, we don't have any reason to be at odds anymore. He's dead now."

Aurora lowered her head at that revelation. Ash felt his jaw drop at how lax she was about saying that.

"Ser…" 'What on earth is going on here!' Her confusion was shared by Pikachu and Charizard alike.

"Well, now that he's dead we have no reason to stay. Nice to meet you brother, hope to see you again sometime!" With that cheerful tone Belladonna dashed over to Aurora, who had a Shellder in her arms that she must have released at some point.

The moment Belladonna touched Aurora both of them glowed, before flickering out of sight. Unseen, the teleporting duo stopped twice and left as a teleporting quartet, leaving a large swarm of confused Poison Pokémon behind.

"What!"

"Pi!?" 'Why isn't this making sense?'

"Char?" 'Shellder can Teleport?'

"It's rare, but they can be taught it. Teleporting Shellder were used in warfare for hundreds of years, even during the Trainer-Ranger wars. It has fallen out of practice in the last twenty years," the Pokédex chimed as Ash looked at the thing in annoyance.

"Where were you for the last half hour?"
"Being silent. Family drama is rough even without stunningly intelligent systems like myself involved."

... 

Giving a running explanation about what his conversation with Belladonna was with his team kept Ash's mind busy as they ran through the halls, bar the occasional confused Poison Pokémon that either attacked them in confusion (80%), or needed directions out (20%).

"Pikapi?" 'So, is she really your…?' Pikachu asked the big question as Charizard roared threateningly at a Gloom, who promptly ran from him crying.

"To be honest buddy, I don't really know. A lot of what she said, how she looks…maybe she is, maybe she isn't? But if she really is my sister, what does that mean for Red, or John Archer? Heck, might as well put Ritchie in this while I'm at it." Ash frowned as he remembered his friend who was a lot like him back in the day.

Pikachu gave him a look for that statement, and for the term back in the day. Could they even use that phrase?

"Yeah, he has brown hair, but I don't have red eyes. Brown and blacked haired siblings exist, like May and Max." For some reason as Ash said that, he suddenly wanted to spurt out, reflexively, that he was the older sibling.

The sound of fluttering wings caught Ash's attention, and he looked down the hallway. Charizard looked eager to fry something, and looked somewhat disappointed as Iris, Butterfree, and Yanma flew over to them.

Well at least the bugs did, Iris just ran.

"Iris!" Ash yelled in joy for seeing her alive again. Joy that his friend was alright, that his Unovan traveling companion was alright, that his… was alright.

Ash wasn't sure what other word fit in that feeling, and it really wasn't the time to consult a thesaurus or something to find the right word.

Iris grinned as the two were now face to face. Butterfree fluttered back over to him while Yanma sped around the two of them like a really happy airplane.

"Oh good, you are alright. I was busy fighting a girl in orange for a good while." Ash at this point noticed that Iris was looking rather bruised, and a desire to ask Iris if she was okay welled up in him.

"I am fine." She picked up on his concern and stopped him before he could do or say anything on the matter.

"You sure…"

"Yes," she said with finality, though without any annoyance at his insistent concern. She sounded oddly more appreciative of it than he'd assume she'd ever be, at least at whatever age she was when they first met.

(He had always assumed she was his age, but that was not a viable metric)

"Are you okay?" she asked him after a moment. Ash wasn't sure how to answer that.
“Well…” He had some idea of what to say, but a teleporting duo appearing between them stopped him from continuing.

And it was not Belladonna, back to give him a hug or something like that.

It was Misty, and Anabel?

It was the first name that came to mind when he saw the purple haired girl who had teleported Misty over (since he was quite sure Misty could not do so). She did look like her, and she didn't have anything that was obviously a sign that she was not Anabel, like a different skin tone or gender.

But Anabel here? That seemed contrived… sure she wasn’t among the Battle Frontier Brains Scott mentioned, but this couldn't really be her, could it?

He wasn't the only one with duplicates after all, he remembered that James fiancé and Jessie looked a lot alike. Come to think of it, was said fiancé still planning to trap James again in that dungeon…

Thankfully before he had to think about said dungeon too much, Misty spoke.

"I should probably introduce you," Misty began, noticing his confused look and Iris's suspicious one.

"This is Anabel, she saved me from a Bloodliner girl who could control shadows." Misty introduced the now confirmed Anabel, said girl smiling at the gesture.

'It was nothing. I was only doing what was right'.

Her voice rang in his head, much like how a legendary Pokémon's voice did (as compared to Meowth's that was vocalized).

Iris seemed confused as why she was hearing a voice, and Anabel continued.

'I used to be able to talk, but I am not able anymore. However I am able to communicate this way via my Bloodline power. Misty told me that you are also Bloodliners like me, is that really true? I have never met anyone else like me before.'

"Yes, yes we are," Ash stated simply, still somewhat surprised. Anabel looked at him I some confusion.

'Is something the matter? You seem confused about something, surprised as well.'

Anabel's simple statement, nowhere near as blunt as Iris's tone, caught him off guard.

"Wha…?"

She blushed, but continued.

'I can sense the emotions of people around me. Your emotions seem… tense for some reason. They were that way before I showed up, but they seemed to spike when you heard my name. Do you know me somehow?' She asked as Ash tried to think of something, anything to say that would not be weird.

"Oh, I just knew a few Anabels back in school and I hadn't heard that name much since so I was surprised to hear it again…" he offered as an explanation.

Thankfully Iris had something to say before someone could say that Anabel was not a rare name (though as far as he could recall he had in fact only met a single Anabel in his travels).
"So you can read minds?" Iris sounded uneasy about that as Anabel paled.

'No...no....well yes I can but I actually have to focus on doing it, I can't simply walk by someone and know their pin numbers or anything horrible like that.'

"Pin numbers?" Iris inquired, a question that was Ash was a bit interested in as well, seeing as he was pretty sure his Pokédex had muttered something about it at least once.

"Something bankish, I don't really know. Anyway Anabel, do you have any responsibilities here?" Misty asked Anabel in a change of direction that Ash was not sure the reason for.

'Not really: all I really have is my uncle's house. Technically it could have been put into maintenance trust under some legal thing since my uncle was my guardian and a veteran, but I am not sure about leaving. I don't really have anything in mind if I did go on a journey, I can't exactly fight in Leagues without a voice.' The last part was stated with a tone that was sad, but in a matter of fact way more than anything else.

Though why did that last part make him think of Belladonna's words about the League?

"Well then, perhaps you can figure something out later, when you are out with us," Misty stated with finality.

Anabel's eyes went wide with shock, a face that was mirrored by Iris. Ash was pretty sure that his face was the same way.

"What, I can't invite anyone?" Misty questioned with a harshness that was a bit more like the old Misty as Ash shook his head.

"No, it was just unexpected, that's all." No longer looking as aggressive about it Misty turned to Anabel, who looked ready to ask more questions about it before she made a final decision on the matter.

Then the sirens went off, loudly startling Iris and breaking Anabel's chain of thought.

"How far can you teleport?" Misty rapidly asked Anabel, who had a thoughtful look on her face. The question of 'if she'd come with them' would seemingly be solved if in fact she was about to act as their getaway driver, sort of speak.

'Far enough'. With that, they had a new traveling companion, and would not get arrested over it.

"Wait, what about Sliggoo!?" Ash shouted as he and Misty returned their other Pokémon before their quick escape.

…

Thankfully one can teleport to your dragon and teleport again quite quickly before the cop who had called for the closest Drowzee unit turned back to see that the dragon and the stuff with said dragon were gone.

---

**Team Rocket HQ**

Hidden in the mountain range that formed much of the Kanto-Johto border, Team Rocket had a base.
It was a nice base, and fairly well protected. Few knew it was here, and fewer still would have a chance of ever taking it down.

Its security wasn't really what was on Giovanni's mind however. There were two things actually.

One, the recent message he had received from one of the scientists Team Rocket was funding. It was something about cloning, and a success of some sorts. He'd think about it later.

The other however, was much more pressing.

Jessie, James, and Meowth had recently managed to capture the ending of the recent Gringy City Power Plant incident.

The incident was being blamed primarily on the Giva Dam project, the Pokémon that had attacked the Power Plant that were not toxin based were those who were displaced by the construction and were angry, and the toxin based ones were those from Giva City who were angry at the shutting down of the toxin producing plants that had been their habitat.

The fact that Giva City was being blamed for both was kind of amusing, but thanks to Jessie and James he had the truth.

It was nice to see that his Bloodliner had been acting in the way he had hoped he would, but this did open up a new front for him.

After all, someone hadn't been talking properly, but that would soon change.

A pair of guards nodded before stepping aside and placing a pair of keys into identical locks as once. This in turn led to the door they had been guarding to slide open, even as he walked through.

The room itself was dark bar the sliver of light that came from the rapidly closing door, though lights quickly flickered on to reveal his special guest.

Felgrand, now bruised, beaten, and locked away ever since he had been brought here, was before him, and he would give him the answers he sought.

"What do you want?" He was a hard nut to crack, but perhaps it was good he had not gone mad yet.

"Oh just vast wealth and power, same as everyone," Giovanni quipped, before he held up a photo of Ash.

"Yeah, that's the Bloodliner who busted my operation," Felgrand muttered, "What of him? I can't exactly tell you where his mother is if you feel like playing an old fashioned game of hostage and blackmail, or are you more interested in getting your own without having to send one of your honey trap agents…"

In respond, Giovanni took out a second photo, the clearest image of Belladonna that the three had gotten him. Said image was then enhanced by his best computer men.

So it was quite clear, and Felgrand would see all the details.

It shut him up quite quickly. At least on the idea that he'd send one of his honey trap agents to seduce the boy.

"So, the Bloodliner has a sister or something? She's probably just as annoy…” Felgrand went silent as he looked over the image, and quickly grew into a look of fear, an utter fear the likes of which
was hard to get without a sense of your own impending, painful doom.

"No.....it can't be…"

"So, you've seen her before?" Giovanni pressed as he rapidly shook her head.

"No one should look like that, not anymore. I killed her! I killed her years ago, me and A, B, C, D, and G! She can't still be alive, cloning is impossible for humans!"

The seven brothers of Orre were seven brothers, born in alphabetical order. Felgrand was the F brother, and the E brother was the one who was not a criminal. Calling themselves by their letters was a shorthand they used.

It was also something they did as some sort of pact to not rat on each other. He was quite… enduring that way.

Honor among thieves was annoying when the honor was not being held among your own thieves.

As to the cloning part, somewhat irrelevant but he had a scientist on his 'I pay you, you help me' roll who was currently trying to prove that saying wrong. But he wasn't a factor so he wouldn't mention it today.

"Who did you kill…" Giovanni pressed as Felgrand continued to look horrified, as if he had seen a monster come back to life.

"They both look like her…no one else had those marks, that hair! He was the only one of us who got away from her, she wasn't human. She had a Bloodline, just like that boy, she could affect people's minds. Ever heard of that old talk about sending good vibrations? She sent evil ones, into our minds!" He shivered in disgust.

"I assume then, that what you are saying is that both these Bloodliners look like her?" Giovanni pressed as Felgrand shivered.

"More than we ever did. I don't know which of my brothers were so stupid as to break our agreement, but it is clear someone couldn't keep it in his damn pants! Our mother lives on in those two! Tell me, who fathered those monsters, I need to know who I need to wring the neck of!" Felgrand snapped as Giovanni shook his head and turned around.

"Talk you damn Kanto bastard, talk!" Felgrand demanded as Giovanni exited the resealed prison room and walked back to the office, noting everything that the Orre native had said.

---

Speaking of Orre

From behind, three things could be said of this man.

One, he was more muscled than most human focused Gyms. He looked like he could shatter a melon with an absent grip of a single one of his hands.

Second, he was wearing a red jacket, black pants, and basically nothing else. His muscles were thus quite visible.

Third, he had a massive mustache that could be seen from behind. It was a thin, terrifying mustache.
Next to him stood a man who looked much more to seed than the muscled man, though given his appearance that merely meant 'could not kill you by pinching you'.

"Boss..." the seedier looking man began, looking at the battle simulation data that was displayed before them, "Where did you find this kid?"

"I told you where I found him." The deep voice of the mustached man was deeper than any Dugtrio burrow.

"Yeah, but I don't believe it." The seedy one saw the screen as a Metagross beat a Salamence with a Sludge Bomb in V.R.

"A kid like this, in the desert? How'd he get there?"

"Don't know, don't care." The muscular man growled.

"This kid's a genius: he's beaten all our simulations. I'm the only other one in our merry band to do it, and he did it on his first try. I took three tries to beat the Salamence, and none of you lot even got that far."

"...Still sir, Agrev told me what happened when you met this kid. He doesn't remember who he is, and he said some strange stuff. I mean, who doesn't know what a Pokémon is? And what in the name of Gloom is a Clembot?"

"I don't keep people around for their personality Wakin: if I did I'd kick the lot of you out." The muscular man grinned as the screen they were watching left virtual reality for reality, revealing a gray haired youth clad in a blue jacket lying on a table, a V.R device covering his face.

The device retracted away, revealing a gray haired youth. The boy's eyes shot open, revealing golden eyes.

"This Wes kid may have the memory of a new calculator, but he's a genius battler. I don't care what he has to say about Clembots and asking if my Skarmory's flesh and blood, with him Team Snagem's going to go places."
The blond Trainer stood at the edge of the Saffron Gym, which seemed oddly empty and missing the usual flashy flairs.

A tad unsettled but none the less determined he pushed the door open.

What lay before him was a large, fancy looking staircase, and not much else.

"I didn't go to the wrong place did I?" the trainer asked out loud, despite being alone.

"Yo, I'm a highly advanced bit O' progress! Ya think I would take ya to the wrong address?" the Pokédex in his pocket snarked.

The sound of rapidly approaching footsteps echoed through the halls as the older teenager smiled.

"Hello Gym Leader? I'm Dan of Goldenrod City. I am here to challenge…..

A short fellow, probably a newish trainer 15 years or so old, crashed into him, his eyes streaming in tears.

"No no no! I was wrong, this was a terrible mistake! Why didn't I talk to people before I….ggu..gugg.." 

The kid was now in the air, squirming as if something was strangling him.

Dan immediately reached for his Pokéballs.

"What is this, some sort of Ghost Pokémon!? Crobat, find it!"

With a quick throw a large purple bat with four wings materialized and began shrieking. While loud, it did release powerful supersonics that would reveal an invisible presence.

Crobat stopped shrieking and turned to Dan, shaking rapidly as the kid dropped like a ragdoll.

"That…..was not a ghost," Dan whispered to himself, "I know ghosts, I beat Morty. This, this is something else."

The door suddenly shut behind them, as a form began to float towards them from atop the stairs.

"So you noticed what was befalling the fool and decided to investigate it with a fairly high power presence detection method. Not bad, you at least have experience if nothing else."

The form landed mid-staircase, staring at him with blue ices. Her hair was dark and long, her body lithe.

"I am Sabrina, the Gym Leader. Tell me, are you worthy?"

The way the Gym Leader stated the question gave him, as the Alolans said, chicken skin.

"Of what?"
"Continuing to live," she simply stated as her eyes glowed. Moments after a lot of Pokémon teleported in around her.

Multiples of various species and counts: Abra, Kadabra, Alakazam, Hypno, Drowzee, Espeon, Natu, Xatu, Exeggute, Exeggutor, Jynx, Smoochum, Girafarig, Wobbuffet, and several other Psychic-types were all glaring him down.

"There are just too many people in the world if you ask me. Most of them have no reason to exist, they are just unremarkable. Average. Humans cannot grow, and thus there are simply two kinds of them: those who are remarkable, and those who are just wastes. There are far too many of the latter in the world, and one should do something about them. I at least think so."

Dan and Crobat backed away from the giant mob in immense unease.

"A serial killer Gym Leader, I thought this only happened in Unova."

She seemed annoyed at the comparison.

"Do not compare me to some lunatic with a knife. I am fair if nothing else. If you can prove that you are in fact a remarkable human, you may live."

"I could be Lance and I am not sure I could beat ten, twenty, thirty…"

"Are you not a League competition regular in the Silver Conference these last few years? You should have many Pokémon, even if you came here to expand and train your team further to try and see if you can get past the Top 16 in Kanto to break your rut. I have long stolen the technology to block the limiters, I insist on a proper measurement of potential."

"And yes, I am reading your thoughts," she told him simply as Dan's body shook in terror.

He had braved many dangers in Johto, he had nearly been eaten three times, crushed by rocks twice, and had fought Whitney. He had been bitten by an Arbok, breathed in Vileplume spores, and fought Whitney after mentioning he didn't like softball.

But this, this was the moment he felt his end.

Crobat fluttered in front of his face, so close one could make jokes about it. The fluttering was all he heard, and his body stopped shaking. He knew this was going to be difficult, if not impossible to get out of but he'd be damned if he didn't try. If this really was the end, then he'd go down swinging.

One arm went for his Pokéballs on his belt, the others his inactive ones in his bag.

The inactive ones did activate, and his active ones stayed active.

In several bursts many new Pokémon now joined him and Crobat.

Typhlosion, standing tall, strong and bellowing a challenge with flames raging around his neck.

Ampharos, a light of hope even as the pendant around her neck glimmered with the power he had hoped would have broken his rut last year.

Golem, solidly stoic.

Slowbro, more alert than usual.

Sandslash, digging at the air in eagerness for battle.
Arbok, no longer interested in biting him.

Jumpluff, now sitting on his head like a hat.

Poliwrath, flexing muscles for battle.

Bellossom, arm flexed like that Unovan poster.

Pinsir, the reason Bellossom was Bellossom.

Granbull, growling.

Magmar, having made good progress at not burning wooden floorboards.

Octillery: ready to fire.

Gligar: hanging from the ceiling.

Bellsprout: caught on the walk here.

As he felt his pulse beginning to race, he noticed the grin forming on Sabrina's face. It was small, the corner of her lips tugging upwards as she read his thoughts, understood his fears. She drank them in with delight and amusement.

'I won't give you the satisfaction', he thought defiantly as he took a deep breath and straightened his body to steel himself. It was a facade at best, but it was the first step to fool himself into thinking he had a chance against her. Backing his thoughts with action, he said aloud, "I am going to live."

Her grin grew a fraction, as though further amused by his meager attempt at defiance. "If you manage to impress me, I'll guarantee it." Her hair shifted as her psychic powers manifested, wreathing her in a haunting shade of lavender light. She levitated in the air and looked down upon him. "All the same, if you can't live up to that bravado... well, I'll give you a sneak peek."

Visions danced in his head of what fate would be bestowed upon him in defeat.

It drove him to make sure it didn't become reality.

?

"Oi! You!"

Ash wasn't sure what was odder, the fact that Gary was whatever age he was before time broke, or the fact that he had the same hair, marks, skin color, and other little things as Ash. It was only his clothes, voice, and Garyness that made him distinct, and even then the Garyness was a bit out of date.

"Finally you're here, now we can finally tell it like it is," a lookalike of him dressed like Tobias grunted.

"You really need to stop. I mean really, just stop." Drew him pointed a rose at him like it was a ruler or something.

"You'll never win, you can't win, so just stop making us look bad," Cameron cosplaying as him declared.
"Me losing makes you look bad?" Ash questioned their logic as he looked at the little Cameron him.

"I mean, you beat me with five Pokémon to my six fair and square. I think that makes you look really good," Ash continued as Cameron-him broke a branch he did not have in hand microseconds before.

"Oh sure, how mature," Harley-him bawked.

"I thought I was being rather mature about it." This wasn't making any sense or following any logic. In fact Ash wasn't sure this was even operating under Harley logic.

"The only thing that will fix your incompetence is us taking your Pokémon, killing your mother, locking you in a prison guarded by soul sucking demons for a crime you didn't commit, and starting yearly Ash hunts!" Ash-Tobias declared with sadistic glee.

As the others nodded, they all suddenly stopped as they seemed to notice something was missing.

And it was not common sense. Only Ash seemed to be aware common sense was on an all expense page vacation.

"You should be crying and declaring us wrong before running off to a mountain for years at this point." Drew in an Ash paintjob pointed out as Ash shrugged.

"Ignoring the fact that you guys aren't making any sense at all, I don't really know many of you that well but Cameron and Gary. Besides them, none of us are close friends and it doesn't hurt that much when you guys...do whatever it is you are doing. I mean Tobias, I don't even know where you came from."

"Hmm, good point," the lookalike of him wearing Tobias garb stated as he poofed into a version of Ash in Bonnie's get up. The Drew-him turned into Dawn and the Harley him became his mother, while still looking like a version of himself wearing his mother's clothes.

Ash could already feel his eye twitching reflexively.

Before things got weird however, well weirder than they already were, a large rock in a top hat and a cane fell from the sky and crushed them all.

Then everything else was just... different.

....

Flying over a field that billowed smoke, Ash found himself on a blue Charizard.

Red was flying near him on a Charizard of the titular color, looking so red that Ash was pretty sure a hot rod somewhere was jealous.

"Yes brother, mother wasn't able to save me, but she was able to save you from our father. She managed to sneak you off to your uncle's farm in Pallet Town, while I was left to the tender mercy of our father in his castle. I suppose I can't blame you for it nor old man Oak for killing him, but I do have to deal with you. You will join me in overcoming the rebellion and bringing order to the land and restoring the Charizard riders!"

Before he could figure out what was going on there, Ash found himself sitting in a throne in a dark room, feeling rather unsettled.

He also had blond hair for some reason. Rather nice blond hair too.
The sound of a helmet hitting the ground caught his attention and stopped Ash from wondering if his hair was May, Dawn, or Serena quality care.

"Don't you recall? The two of us used to play chess together as boys. Of course, I would always win," a somewhat distorted voice stated somewhat mockingly.

"It's been a long time, big brother."

A figure then approached him, John Archer!?

"The eldest son of the late consort _ and 17th heir to the Imperial Throne, John Verbena Archer at your service." The dead possible brother took a mocking knee to him before looking up towards him in a manner that made Ash's hair stand on end.

"You thought that I was dead? You were wrong. I have returned, your highness, and I've come back to change everything."

...

"Wait ladies, wait!"

Ash was now walking down the road to Pallet Town, without blond locks, and found Gary on his knees, crying.

Ash immediately moved to try to reach the guy, but for some reason his legs weren't moving.

"Sorry Greg, but your harem is now Red's harem," Yellow's voice rang out as she and Red were now suddenly visible, with Gary's cheerleaders now hanging on Red.

Red was also grinning like Oshawott after he snuck a cake past everyone and ate the entire thing.

"Give it back! My precious, my precious!" Gary was sounding like he really needed a lozenge now.

"My name's not Greg!"

"Prepare for Trouble!"

Ash was suddenly turned away from Gary and Red, and found himself staring at the Team Rocket Trio, framed by psychedelic colors?

Well, at least this made some level of sense.

"And make it double!"

"Oh, I sure will!"

Suddenly the psychedelia was broken, James was that Domino chick, Meowth was Cassidy, and Aurora and Belladonna were behind them.

Goodbye sense. It was nice knowing you.

Belladonna flung Jessie and Cassidy over her shoulders like duffel bags, Aurora holding Domino under her shoulder as one would carry a bag.

"No way, triple! Score!" Belladonna and Aurora fist bumped with wicked giggles before skipping away with the Team Rocket girls to comical sound effects Ash wasn't sure how to articulate.
Before Ash could try and move in response he was turned around again, only to find himself...

...floating in the air in front of a really tall lifeguard’s chair, with a pixelated version of himself sitting in the chair.

"Oh my Ashy boy, you don't even need me to have crazy dreams." MissingNo chuckled before pointing down, "Time to see what's stranger today: my twisted wonder, or your confused mind."

With that Ash suddenly found himself on the ground, laying on the ground as he heard footsteps approaching him, and he briefly thought he saw some familiar legs approaching him.

...Only to wake up with Pikachu sitting on his chest and looking at him in concern. John Archer's Gardevoir was also out, looking at him with a frown.

At the edge of his hearing, he could swear he was hearing MissingNo shout in annoyance about him waking up before he could mess the dreams.

'You appear to have suffered a strong dream. Tell me, what happened.' Gardevoir inquired

"I...have no idea," Ash admitted.

Gardevoir tilted her head, and he elaborated.

"I think it came from what happened with Belladonna saying that we're... but I don't get why it gave me blond hair."

'Yes, Belladonna...I've been meaning to talk to you about that.' The Hoenn native Pokémon floated over to the other side of the Secret Base structure before turning to face him.

"Yeah, the girl who may or may not be my sister, has three girlfriends, murders people who anger her, what about it?" Ash questioned.

"I appreciate the exposition as I cannot pick up what the Psychic-Fairy type may or may not be saying. I will of course add all necessary information and observations," the Pokédex beeped.

"Joy."

'Very well, I will handle the parroting. Anyway, as things were I happened to be listening in on your conversation with her yesterday Ash. We all were.' When Ash translated that, he traded the words 'we all were' for 'the John Archer team all to hear it'.

"So it appears I was not alone in my wise decision of observation," the Pokédex quipped. Ash had a momentary urge to whack the technological bit for that one.

'Don't push it. Anyway, I feel that there is some truth to what she was saying.'

After translation the Pokédex, which was open, loaded a page which held a somewhat unpleasant looking woman's mugshot. She had a face that was sharp looking, much like Belladonna's.

"I did do some searches and I can confirm that she was at least telling the truth of her life in the Old Cesspit. At the very least, there was an eleven year old girl named Belladonna Tyrian in Gringy City's Old Cesspit whose mother was arrested for child abuse, child abandonment, and creating a public health hazard with her hoarding. She's currently serving time in a
woman's low security prison and will be doing so until you're twenty, and has apparently been beaten five times on record to date by several other inmates who find her treatment of her daughter worthy of fists, feet, and various blunt objects to the face and torso. I was also able to find data matches that support the information given about Aurora's family and the bits that came up about the other two girls Vedia and Evanna. It is possible I may be inaccurate somewhere in my data analysis, but my algorithms leave a chance of error at below 1%.

Ash would offer to check his work, but Ash had the oddest feeling such math would kill him, or at least render him blind.

"Pik."  'Tyrian huh, fitting name.'  Pikachu gave a huff at Belladonna's possible surname.

After having it translated for it the Dex sounded appalled.

"Do you not know semi-advanced semantics? That name means imperial purple. Royal purple. It has nothing to do with tyranny, except when it's worn by a crazy person with an empire under him."

'Color facts and confirming that they were not making up their backstories is interesting, but I feel we are missing the, forest for the trees I believe humans say. At least some old man John and I once met liked to espouse that phrase. The fact is that in a short period of time I have encountered not one, but two people who resemble John, you and Belladonna.'

After translation the Pokédex flashed an image of Red.

'And we also have evidence of a third such person who resembles John strongly. If it is just four people across two regions, it would be a very unlikely coincidence, possibly a few quirks of chance and the fact that Belladonna probably would benefit from a therapist and quite possibly medication. However, I don't think this is just four people...I think there are more lookalikes to you and John Archer in the world.'

"So what are you suggesting, I use the internet to find people who look like me?"

"I would suggest you not do it. Algorithms suggest a 45% chance of a crime occurring from such an action, and common sense will dictate that I find a way to slap you mid-way through such an action," the Pokédex added.

'No, I am suggesting I go looking for them.'

At her declaration all present looked at Gardevoir in surprise.

'I am a teleporting magical creature, I am perfectly capable of looking through a wide area,' she defended her idea.

"Pika?"  'And you are also quite capable of running into Hunter J, or Team Rocket, or that Felgrand guy.'

Gardevoir had a dark look at mention of Felgrand, but continued.

'I have my teammates, we are quite capable of avoiding being captured when we are not locked in Pokéballs. Ash Ketchum; we do not know each other well. In fact this is the first time I have come out of my ball since we met, despite your attempts to get us out to be fed. However I know that someone has to look into this conundrum. If there are only two others who look like John and yourself, then I am worried over nothing. But if there are others, that must mean something. It's
better that one of us figures it out, before it becomes an issue.'

After translation the Pokédex added.

"I am capable of tracking the unique magnetic properties of your Probopass via my navigational and map features. It's possible I can communicate with Probopass the same way."

The silence that followed had palpable gravity.

"...If that's what you really want, then I won't stop you. Just, promise me you'd be careful," Ash told Gardevoir after a moment. She nodded, before floating out of the Secret Base with a telepathic pull on her fellow five Pokémon.

"Don't leave until I learn to communicate with the Probopass via magnetic fields!" the Pokédex shouted after her, before humming to itself as if it was starting to try and speak with magnetics.

Ash promptly closed his eyes, not wanting to think of if you could communicate with magnetic fields, lest his dreams involve him attracting loose change and having coins stick to his legs.

---

A few hours later

'You know, I've never seen so many stars.'

"Yeah, I noticed that too. I think a lot of people notice it. I know I did."

The night was approaching its retirement age, though it was far from dead and light came only from the moon and stars above. Yet the little cluster of secret bases were not vacant, for two occupants found themselves lying on the ground.

Looking up into the stars, and pointing at them on occasion.

For when one woke up early and lacked a coffee maker or an internet link that wasn't the Pokédex, what else could you do but look at the stars.

"Sorry, but I don't know any of their names. People have books on them… then again people have devoted their lives to stranger things," Misty admitted.

'Makes you wonder, are we the only ones who gave them a name, or do you think there are aliens out there who give them their own names. Wonder what they call our star then?'

"Probably something more creative than 'The Sun', I hope."

The two laughed a bit at that, before Misty pinched her lips and pointed up.

"You know, now I think about it I think I see the Big Dipper. Or, maybe the little one?"

'Hmmmm, Big,' Anabel declared with finality, and that would be that.

At least until the Dex complained and pointed out that it was actually the Perpendicular Dipper. Somehow.

"Why are you looking up?"
Misty and Anabel's eyes rolled up to find a taller figure standing over them, looking confused.

"We're just looking at the stars," Misty explained.

"Why?"

'Because they look nice.'

"Really? They just look like glowing spots in the sky to me. Sure you can navigate with them, but just looking at them? Humans have those things called maps they use to navigate if I recall, do they look at them for fun?"

'Some do,' Anabel stated honestly.

And Iris's confusion on the concept was perhaps even greater than the resulting laughter.

---

A few hours later

There were side effects of waking up early, and they were well known.

A sense of tiredness, lower energy later in the day, etc. One could counter this with certain beverages, but one would have to then deal with the consequences of giving someone coffee.

Misty was quite aware of this. Anabel was quite aware of this. Iris was quite aware of it, though she had no idea that coffee would help.

The fact that Ash, when he emerged, looked similarly tired as they did was thus a surprise. Pikachu looked a bit tired as well, but nowhere near as much.

"Were you looking at stars instead of sleeping too?" Iris quickly asked him. Ash blinked at her in confusion for that one.

"No? I… had some odd dreams," Ash admitted.

'You aren't kidding,' Anabel noted, before blushing. 'Sorry, they just were really, really at the front of your mind, it's hard to ignore it. Sort of like a really bright light….family trouble right?'

"Family trouble? Did you dream your mother was trying to kill you?" Misty inquired in a manner that suggested she could emphasize with such a dream.

"Er….no. It's sort of a long story…." With a loud series of rumbles the stomachs of Misty, Iris, and Anabel all growled at once. Ash's followed a few moments later.

"…Let's see what we have to eat, I'll talk while we have breakfast."

"Pikapi." 'You do that. I've heard this story enough today, I'm just going to blast trees with Thunderbolt to make sure Team Rocket aren't hiding in them.'

…

Thus amidst fruits and other staples of breakfast the four were capable of making on their own (unchanged since Anabel had not implied to possess nor be skilled with portable skillets), Ash explained what he was too tired to explain the day before.

"…I have no idea if she is or isn't related to me, but she sounded pretty convinced about it, it was sort
of weird. She just accepted it as fact as soon as her girlfriend said we looked similar, who does that?" he finished as his three companions had a variety of different expressions.

Anabel looked contemplative.

Misty still looked a bit stunned after he explained that all four of the girls were in a relationship with one another.

Iris, who had Axew out on her lap munching on an apple, had her face flicker into that of comprehension, and seemed to have something to say on the matter.

"It sounds like she really wants to have a family of her own."

At that observation Iris had all the gazes of the present on her.

In the distance the sound of a Thunderbolt going off, followed by a cry about it happening again, was faintly heard. No one went off to investigate it, for they were too busy looking at Iris in surprise.

"You said she had a bad childhood, right? Maybe she is so desperate to have what she never had she is being seeing things that are not really there."

"The way you say it, she sounds like that musician guy who moonwalked? His name's on the tip of my tongue, but I know he had some childhood issues and ended up trying to regain his youth as an adult…"

"The tip of your tongue?" Iris wasn't sure what Ash meant by that phrase.

'It means you have the name of something in mind, but you can't quite remember what it is,' Anabel offered.

"It still does not make any sense, and what do you mean by moonwalking now that I think about…"

"Hellb, what thee hell are oyu kids doing hsere!"

A loud, slurred voice rang through the air, even as Pikachu darted out and sparked his cheeks in a threatening way.

A large man, muscular and garbed in white, stumbled in front of them, shaking his fist and stumbling a bit. His eyes were visibly red.

Iris sniffed the air and gagged.

"That man smells weird."

"He's drunk," Misty declared. No one argued with her.

"Iths vis private prjoperty obf hte bareatie restaurtna, noat some pubulically owned htsi-parbk!"

"What?" Ash did not speak drunk.

"I ma going to tehtrash you ahll and edarg yours qso the bluke lady wsohe namde, agh scrwe it get 'em ljal jmy pokemoin!"

The only part of that conversation any of them got was him flinging Pokéballs at them, sloppily. Several just fell at his feet and sprung from there.
"Mala Mala Mala Mala Mala Mala Mala Mala, MALASADA!"

An old brown skinned man, somewhat chubby and garbed in blue and yellow, chuckled as his phone went off.

His grandson certainly had a good ear for ringtones.

Reaching for the corded device, he pulled it up to his ear and plopped down on his couch.

"Alola, Hala speaking," he stated kindly.

"Alola!"

Hala smiled as he recognized the voice.

"Lilo, it's been too long. Tell me, is that old Gogoat Kaiser..."

"Yes." Hala couldn't help but laugh at the blunt answer.

After his laughter trailed off, the room was filled with political commentary for a few minutes. Had the aforementioned grandson been here, he'd probably be confused of how Mudbray reintroduction, farming rights, dirty energy taxes, and differing ship standards were connected.

He would share this sentiment with many people much older than him.

"...And I thought traditionalists were a pain to deal with back home. Some of these rural conservative types seem to think the moment a Mudsdale is wild in Kanto again it will be the rhubarb apocalypse. Really, I am going to enjoy taking a break in the tournament a few days from now, the only time I've had any bit of fun here was fighting this kid."

"Oh?" Hala was curious about the last part. He would prefer if he could to not talk about politics longer than he had too, he was still tired from dealing with Team Skull Mass Banana Protest.

A Kahuna's job was to get people's Meowth out of trees, rescue drowning tourists, and fill in as Santa Claus that year Greg had that bypass surgery. Defending the right of rapping punk girls to consume bananas was not in the job description, nor was dealing with the type of person who believed females should never eat bananas.

"His name was Red. Good battler, though he didn't talk much. He seemed to be pretty sharp. I think he's also entering the tournament...I can't help but want to resolve our little tie." She sounded eager to battle him again.

"Red?" Hala questioned.

"I didn't ask if it was short for Redford. Anyway, I think the politicians are appeased and Kaiser no longer carries one of those airport metal detector wand things around me all the time, so I think I might be done in time to see the next Kahuna Battle Royal."

"Only if someone can get Acerola to pester Nanu enough to show up." Hala laughed as the phone call ended with mutual laughter and the distant sounds of a cranky Kaiser.

"Kokoooo!"

Just as Hala hung the phone back up however, a familiar call rang through his house, even as the
loud sound of displaced air suggested something was here.

Hala sighed. It was Tapu Koko again.

Tapu Koko. Island Deity. Protector of the innocent, when it so chooses.

Tapu Koko was powerful, and generally did actually do its job. Tapu Koko saved many innocent lives during times of crisis. He had seen the creature punch a tidal wave in half and quell a typhoon with great force with his own two eyes.

However Tapu Koko also liked to mess with people. The Guardian was not above appearing in people's houses, shouting its name loudly, and flying away as people screamed in shock. More recently Tapu Koko had discovered his own root beer cellar, and that it liked root beer. So raids were sadly common.

Regardless of what lock he put on it. Or heavy object.

It had even taken Z-Rings and given them to people it decided were interesting. Among them was a master thief who stole from rich tourists and gave to the middle class, an archaeologist with a lisp and a missing thumb, and twins at Professor Kukui's Pokémon School named Velvet and Frax Lono.

Nice kids those two, the Lono twins. Their mother was a store clerk named Jasmine, absent father who Hala had no idea the name of, dark hair, red eyes, and marks on their cheeks that Hala had no idea the origin of. They were actually near ready to begin their trials.

"Kokoooo!" and with that Hala knew the Guardian was gone.

Oddly enough without enough time to raid the cellar for imported root beer.

---

One Drunken Battle Later, back in Kanto

The drunken man lay on the ground, having been knocked unconscious by the shock of defeat with six Pokémon lying on the ground around him (Machoke, Golduck, Poliwrath, Kingler, Raticate, and Magikarp). Pikachu, Emolga, Wingull, and Anabel's Kadabra didn't look even winded from the brawl.

"...Well it is true what they say: sailors from across Azure Bay really are the worst drunks. Really sorry about that, he had to fill in as a waiter at last night's political dinner and he's still recovering from the exposure to so much concentrated hypocrisy." A female voice, quite a bit less drunk, rang out as a waitress appeared behind the drunken man, looking rather annoyed at what had just happened.

The waitress turned to them, revealing her face in full. The waitress was dressed in a waiter style that Ash had noticed was more common in Kalos than here (given that he had noticed, with experience, that a common waitress garb around here would be a maid outfit that was oddly roomy to wear), being that of a white shirt and black pants and skirt. Her face however....

Well, in the old timeline Misty had somehow, for some horrible reason, obtained photos of the first time he cross-dressed as Ashley. The images had made the Princess Festival (or festivals, he wasn't sure) a drain on his wallet.

This waitress looked like an older version of said Ashley cosplay, if he had continued to have a face that could pass as feminine instead of gaining the ability to grow facial hair.
The waitress, about his age roughly, had a lighter skin tone than he did, and didn't have nearly as sharp a face as Belladonna, nor was she as tall, though she still was taller than Anabel and about level with himself and Misty. She did have those marks on her face that he and Belladonna had, red eyes, and her white shirt strained in a way that hinted at other similarities with Belladonna's physical appearance.

Or was he just seeing similarities, and he was starting to see people who may or may not be related to him wherever he looked? That could become unhealthy, both mentally and socially.

It might have just been his imagination after all, though the waitress herself did look at him for a bit longer than he felt necessary, as if his appearance confused her. She quickly got over it however.

"So you guys ended up getting Scouse's drunken rage did you? Sorry about that, the Baratie does not endorse our employees drunkenly throwing Magikarp at people. I really should make it up to you….oh yes, that'll do quite nicely." The waitress came to a realization at the end of her dialogue, clapping her hands as she did so.

"What will do nicely?" Misty pressed.

"Baratie rule Number 6, if a customer or customers defeat a Baratie employee in a Pokémon Battle, even if he is so drunk off his ass he thinks that the new Gym Leader down in Fuchsia is Bruno on a unicycle, they get a free meal at the Baratie as long as they do not order expensive imported alcohol! By the time we can drag that lump back it'll be just before lunch hour!" the waitress stated with enthusiasm, again clapping as she finished talking.

"I don't know, we didn't eat all that long…" Ash was interrupted by his growling stomach.

The stomach growling was promptly mirrored by all who were not passed out from shock at their own defeat. Even the now blushing waitress.

"Oh, so I'm not the only one who's hungry all the time? Even more reason to get Scouse to a barrel of lemon juice quickly then! Name's Ashley by the way, probably should mention that now given I'll probably be your server in about ten, fifteen minutes!" Again she clapped, was that a thing with her?

Back with Hala, Alola Region

His library potted plant was knocked over.

Oddly enough not in the direction of his Z-rings though.

As Hala lifted the hydrangea back upright, his eye caught a gleam on the floor. A white band lay on top a paper of some sort. A Z-ring.

Frowning Hala picked up the ring, and gave it a sniff.

Tapu Koko. It had this ring, but didn't decide it was a good idea to give it to someone?

Peculiar, even for Tapu Koko.

The paper it had been on top of was a print out of stats with a photo of Lilo on it. Yet the stats were off.

For one thing Hala liked to think he'd know if Lilo had been born male. Also the photo was somewhat off, as if it was in a slightly elevated position.
Curious he poked it, and the photo slid away. Revealing the actual photo to be of a boy who looked a lot like Frax and Velvet, but with brown eyes and a slightly different facial structure, and not just because he did not appear to be Alolan native.

The paper had a name for this boy, Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town.

Lifting the paper up from the ground, Hala eyed the print out with curiosity.

"What are you trying to say Tapu Koko?" Hala asked around, before noticing in the corner of his eye another likely act of Tapu Koko.

A book sticking out of his bookshelf. One that he didn't leave like that.

Paper still in his right hand, Hala took the book out with his left and noted what book it was.

*The Traveler who began the first Golden Age of Alola and traveled the World: King Kahele*

A historic book written by a former trial captain turned history major with help from Tapu Koko's favorite thumbless archaeologist, King Kahele was a disconnected figure from the majority Alolan History.

It wasn't said on what island he was born, with legends suggesting he deliberately kept that vague for the sake of unity during the age of divided islands. As was tradition then, as a sort of proto-trial he like all male youth of the time were instructed to take to the seas for a month at least. Those who survived it were deemed men.

Those who didn't were deemed fish food.

Like many, he traveled for far longer than a single month. At the time managing for longer periods of time was said to make one much more fanciable. However he traveled for half a decade, and visited the world. Myth had no idea how he did it, though Professor Burnett had some theories she was investigating on the matter.

The lands that today were called Almia, Kalos, Hoenn, Oblivia, and Unova: they were among the lands he visited among many others. When he returned his boat was laden with many rare treasures and foreign things, amongst them several of the species of Pokémon that inhabited Alola today such as Fletchling, Emolga, and Machop.

With these and allies he met abroad and in Alola, he became the first unifier of the islands.

Kahele's era was known for a variety of things. It was the peak of the pre-Kapu law era, before the rise of the titular castes and traditions. From one of his allies, and later wives, Liliana, writing was introduced to the islands. He had the remarkable distinction of being the only known ruler of the united islands, and one of the few rulers of a single united island that had rarely occurred prior to Kahele's time, to have had none of his wives murder each other or any of their children.

It was speculated that this was from a combination of laxer proto-caste at this point in time, a generally peaceful time without major stressors like droughts or serious earthquakes, and the novel concept of Kahele having selected his wives with 'getting along' in mind.

His former trial captain and Tapu Koko's archaeologist without a thumb disagreed if Kahele's wives got along better due to his era being the peak of non-heterosexual culture in ancient Alola or if they just happened to be friendly or ambivalent among themselves, though they both agreed that Kahele did appreciate some of his warriors in that manner.
Kahele was also the first to use, and possibly the creator, of all modern Z-Crystals, which played a great part in his island unification. He came back from his voyage with many crystals and primitive Z-rings, and legend said he himself created them. Totem Pokémon also began to appear shortly after his return for reasons unknown.

Kahele ruled the islands for several decades; a benevolent ruler who ruled efficiently. In areas he was not competent in, either his allies or his wives ruled, and legend said he spent much time ensuring that his heirs would not kill each other for power.

Legend suggested it was done by fostering genuine family ties and discouraging the use of pointy weaponry or poisonous substances in the households. Modern science suggests that good parenting was also involved.

He was quite successful at it, and when he abdicated and left the throne to his third eldest Hekili (after his eldest daughter expressed a preference to remaining at her passion for designing temples, among them the modern Ruins of Hope and Conflict, and his second eldest desired to continue his mother Liliana's goal of writing down all the oral histories of Alola), who ruled just as well for several years.

During this time farming techniques reached a peak of efficiency in the region not met again until mechanization, the library of Liliana became, at that point in time, the greatest source of knowledge in the world with histories from all over the world, and the foundation of modern trials were established to reduce the amount of young men lost to the waves, even opening said trials up to young women. The golden age seemed posed to go on for years, if not centuries.

Oddly enough other parts of the world were having just the opposite. The area around the modern day Kalos region, including Kalos itself, experienced a lengthy epidemic of a disease later called 'the Dark Pestilence', which had begun shortly after Kahele visited. Other regions experienced strange disasters caused by Pokémon no one had ever seen before, or since, triggering the fall of nations, the deaths of kings, cities burning in great blazes, and the mysterious vanishing of an entire mountain, as if it was eaten in a single night.

However Kamehameha of Ula’ula Island, an ambitious man who had risen via Kahele's prized system of merit based promotion with genuine skill, desired power and so conspired to murder Kahele's entire family. The Golden Age ended in a single night of betrayal and bloodshed, and the islands entered a period of island vs island warfare.

Many still to this day debate if this era of fighting was worse than the era that came before Kahele, where islands were divided into their own separate tribes who fought among themselves with horrible brutalities.

It ended with a descendant of Kamehameha conquering the islands with the strength of his troop's Skarmory feather swords, at which point he crowned himself Kamehameha the First. He became the king who'd later receive the first Meowth to ever arrive in Alola.

Much of the direct legacy of Kahele and his royal family were lost during the interim centuries, mostly because Kamehameha wanted to destroy their legacy. Ruins, books, and plot points about one of Kahele's children or grandchildren escaping death in numerous fictional stories written centuries later were the most tangible legacies of the family, the latter died out after the entire family was proven to have been murdered at the same time, as discovered by Tapu Koko's favorite archeologist.

The story did lack a crazy faith healer who did a good monk impression, as he heard was the case of a similar, much less fondly remembered family in a country far from Alola.
But why this book of all his decently vast collection of them? Why did Tapu Koko leave this book for him to find, along with a paper about someone who looked uncannily like Velvet and Frax the trial going students?

"Kokooo!"

As if realizing his confusion, a loud wind blew past him. Tapu Koko.

Turning around to the sight of his hydrangea once again being on it's side and spilling dirt out, he also noticed something else having changed.

Another book, but this one laying open to a specific page.

He didn't need to see the cover to know what book it was. It was another book written during the age of Kahele.

Several of these books were considered staples, being in use for centuries. Several were written by his wives: the native born Malea's book of native plants and their edibility, as was Wailani's book of ocean currents that made cross island travel much safer.

This book however, was a bit more obscure. If was by one of his foreign-born wives, Lif, and was a compilation of stories from all over the world that she had discovered during their travels and painstakingly translated into multiple languages.

Prophecies of the end: be it of nations, eras, cultures, and the world.

He had read it as a child, after hearing rumor of a story that suggested that Tentacool were survivors from a previous universe. The book had that legend in it. He hadn't touched the book after though, but the writing style was distinct: a relic of Lif's alphabet of origin even when she wrote in Liliana's alphabet or ancient Alolan.

This was not, however, the legend on Tentacool. Hala really wasn't sure what region it had come from. Also the book seemed to be missing pages, and he had a suspicion that Tapu Koko had them. As was the parts that seemed to have been scratched out and rendered unreadable.

What was left however, Hala could read.

...Upon the mixing of two into one to the birth of those who hold the staunchest of opposites, the sleeping shall awaken. Born in number of ones, they shall always be support but not of two. The crown of the king is beyond them, and the twos shall be magnets to the ones. From lands without a crown, the shadow of the throne lingers upon all. Restrained by the shadow and judgment of the world, be opposites bound in blood...

Read, but perhaps not understand a bit of it. Prophecies were a headache even without translations.

Righting his plant and taking a look at the data of Ash Ketchum, Hala figured that would be easier to start, and better for his sanity, than trying to search through a book of grammatically archaic legends of the omega.

Back in Kanto

The restaurant that the possible sister of his who just so happened to share his cross-dressing alias, for some reason that he could probably blame MissingNo for and be seen as being reasonable for it, was floating.
A Boat Restaurant, or a restaurant on a boat, blue and red with a giant Magikarp head for a stern. Was that a new one for him, floating restaurant boats? It was hard to keep track of all the things he'd seen in his travels, given he had done everything from be part of major motion pictures to getting trapped under the ocean and nearly losing his soul on multiple occasions.

The water around the boat was clear and bright, though it did seem to have some disturbance in the distance. Perhaps it had some sort of large Pokémon in it.

Entering the boat through a large door, Ash was surprised to see the inside was surprisingly…posh? Was that the word for fancy carpeting, nice looking seats, and folded napkins and utensils, posh?

"Pi?" *I'm no designer, but I question if this fits the aquatic boat aesthetic.*

Ash couldn't help but agree. He had been expecting something like a tavern, with a bar and pool tables and hairy men yelling at each other about everything, not something that looked like a place Norman took his wife whenever Max was gone.

An old looking man, in the 'crotchety and fist waving' sort of way waited for them inside, instantly drawing Ash's attention away from contemplating restaurant aesthetics. He was, despite his age, none the less dressed in the white garb of a chef, though the peg leg was atypical for a chef in Ash's opinion and the mustache that looked more like rope than hair.

Would it be rude to check that it was hair? After all, who braided their mustache like it was rope, or let it grow large enough to tie yourself to a pole with. It was even the right color.

"Throw him in the back until he sobers up, I'll have words with him then." The man grumbled as Ashley nodded before grabbing the man by his ankle and dragging him away.

The old man then looked the four of them over with a contemplative eye.

"You were in that tournament back in Lavender, well at least three of you were? The one run by that chubby touristy dolt?"

"You mean Scott?" Ash pointed out with some annoyance in his voice. Scott was not a dolt.

What was a dolt anyway? He was sure someone called him a dolt at least once.

"Oh, you've met him huh? I suppose he'd be the kind of person you'd get along with, too much cheer and not enough broken bones in him. Guy's always talking about some sort of Battle Frontier, he had this harebrained idea of a Battle Restaurant before I got the blubbery fool to leave. Anyway, if that fool got drunk he probably tried to battle you, and you probably beat his ass five ways to Sunday. So eat what you want, it's on the house, Ashley will serve you in a moment."

And with that the peg-legged old man wandered off towards a room Ash suspected was the kitchen. Or was he hallucinating the sound of boiling oil and the scent of cookies just as he may be starting to see siblings everywhere?

'Oh, is this typical for trainers to be served for free if they win battles?' Anabel was genuinely curious.

"Nope," Ash said with certainty. You had to pay at Lake Valor before you battled for your right to be seated, though they were at least nice enough to not require a payment per challenge. May mentioned quite explicitly the place was not cheap, and she would not have done so if the place was not known for very good food.
Or if she had a birthday to buy for in the following few months, most likely.

Ashley ended the conversation by approaching the table, a memo pad in hand, pen held in her ear, and a nametag with Sennenryu written on it. Ash assumed that was a last name.

At least it wasn't something like Getchem, Snagem, Gotcha, or Getya. That would warrant his head into the table and shouting into the wood.

"Okay, so do you have any idea what you'd like to start with?" Ash noticed the girl visibly resist the urge to clap after speaking, which he could only assume had some history behind it, and at that point a worry swept over him.

How did Anabel eat out if she couldn't speak?

....

As it turned out, there was a simple solution to that, so simple that Ash would have slapped himself for not thinking of it sooner. It was so simple it wasn't even worth mentioning.

So in the end it didn't matter, and the delicious food that came from the kitchen of rope-mustache man himself put it out of his mind, as well as thinking about any possible siblings.

Thank you distracting capabilities of good food, particularly free food!

"Ring-Ring-Ring, Ring-Ring-Ring, phone call from Professor Oak."

Though the loud ringing of his Pokédex could distract from the distractingly good food.

Putting the machine to his ear, Ash wished the Dex had a more phone-like build. Or at least floated on its own power in front of his ear.

"This is Ash."

"Ah my boy, good to hear from you. Now, might I ask you about the many, many Grimer you sent me just now?" The Professor spoke in a tone that was only vaguely threatening.

"It's complicated, but it was the most humane way of doing it." Ash simply offered. That should be sufficient. He also made a mental note to bring Muk over to ensure Muk remembered him as soon as he could.

"Oh I see. Well then I won't pry, though between them and the Goomy I swear you attract strange events like no one I ever seen. Heck given where you are I'm surprised you haven't seen anything strange happen."

Other than drunken battling and a possible sibling waiting his table?

"The restaurant you are at is famous for only hiring people who are not only qualified, but can stare down the owner's Gyarados for two minutes without blinking, and his Gyarados is among the largest known in captivity. It's over 40 years old, has fangs thicker than some car models, and it's not allowed in several cities out of concern for life. As I recall he caught it during the war and decided not to eat it out of pity."

A distant roar sounded, as if from the other side of a lake. Once again Ash swore he heard the sound of Team Rocket being blasted into the sky, but that couldn't be right. That had happened only a few hours ago.
"My occasional watching of the Food Channel aside, I have something urgent I need you to do. I need you and your friends to hightail it to Fuchsia, ASAP."

"Asap? Sap is not fast at all."

"It means As Soon as Possible," Misty offered Iris.

"Why not just say that?"

"I'm going there anyway, but is there a reason you want me there quickly?" Did he miss something, like that freaky storm that nearly hit a bit before the League? He got an invitation around that time for meeting a Pokémon Master, but the thing got cancelled for some reason, and it wasn't the weather.

Was that hitting early?

"In a few days' time, there will be a Tag Tournament held in the city. All money earned from it will go to the Safari Zone, the thing was set up by several company sponsoring such as Devon Corp, Lysandre Labs, Silph Co, and the Verich Shipping Conglomerate, as will a rare opportunity. The winners of the Tournament, and a few friends, will be allowed to enter the Safari Zone for an entire day with unlimited balls. It's a priceless opportunity for me to study the population, one I haven't been able to obtain in 40 years. I need you and Gary to enter, preferably on multiple teams, and your friends as well, to increase the odds."

Ash opened his mouth, ready to check that Misty, Iris, and Anabel had no objections. He hoped they didn't, there was no reason for them to object to him going there to win and see his Tauros…

"I'm in. I'm sure there are Water Pokémon there for me there."

"I want to get stronger, you can have the other parts."

'I have no objections'

"Okay then Professor, we're in agreement," Ash stated in loud glee.

"Excellent! Between you three and Gary I know we can do it! I'll be rooting for all of you! Now I have to go get my Pizza!" With that the phone conversation was over, before Ash could even introduce Anabel.

"Well you've got something to do, so unless you are planning for dessert I'd suggest skipping out now. It'll take you a few days to get there, so don't dawdle" Ash heard the owner shout from the kitchen.

…

A few hours later found the four on the road, the sky was clouded and the forests had grown silent.

In the quiet, a question was raised, but not one that began with sound. For it was Anabel's suggestion, and one she alone could offer.

'You know, I could just teleport us to Fuchsia. It would be a lot quicker, and I can promise you that my teleporting won't end with us appearing in the midst of a car intersection or inside a wall, I have a sort of sense about that sort of thing.'

The group stopped moving after she brought this up, the others all trying to figure out the best response for such a statement. Eventually Ash had something to say in response.
"That would be faster," admitted Misty.

"It would but that wouldn't actually help us out all that much," Ash pointed out. "I mean, you know how we all have our own goals?"

Anabel nodded.

"I want to compete in the Pokémon League, Misty wants to capture all the water Pokémon in the world, and Iris wants to get stronger. We need to walk if we want to get the opportunity to face challengers or find a nice place for Misty to fish," he continued, gesturing to a nearby stream. "Teleporting around might actually hurt us in the long run."

That's when Iris piped up. "Couldn't we just Teleport to the Gym and train for a few days there?"

Ash scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "I kind of feel that training in the same place for days before attempting a Gym gets tedious, you know? Especially when you compare it to the road where there's all sorts of new things to explore. For me, it's just a lot funnier with a bonus of getting a lot more experience from variety. Does that make any sense?"

'I do see what you're saying. I never thought of that before.'

"It's not a bad idea though, in case we ever get lost."

The moment Ash suggested getting lost, the sky rumbled with the piercing sound of thunder.

Rapid glancing around yielded no place to get out of the rain. No caves, tree hollows, or thick tree canopies. This forest clearly wasn't a member of the old growth club.

"Weather is also an acceptable reason to teleport," Misty declared as thick rain began to fall on them, impacting the ground with the intensity of a Charizard staring contest.

Moments later the four were as if they were never even there.

"Wobb!?"

"You're right blobby, that's new."

Much to the confusion of Team Rocket.

___________________________

Several hours later, Fuchsia City

In the last few hours they had managed to find the registration center, a place to eat, and the Gym, which was actually closer to town than Ash remembered it.

That wasn't so much help however, being that the Gym being closed for a rather interesting reason.

Currently out for a job testing the security systems of I Am Not Going To Tell You. Do not loiter. Gym is currently on lockdown. Security includes trip makibishi, vaguely mild explosives, guard Voltorb, and other hindrances I do not have legally say upfront. This isn't Cinnabar, hotels are cheap and plentiful. I should be back after the tournament unless I am killed, at which point I apologize for the inconvenience.

It would seem that they were going to be here a while, even if they hadn't sped out of the way of the rain.
Worst come to worst there was a Battle Club in town.

Ignoring time control issues Ash was now in his single hotel room (odd he could afford that these days), and it was about time he do something he hadn't had the chance to do yet.

"Muk!"

"Muk!" 'Ash!'

Hug his favorite slime monster, brought over from Oak's lab and thankfully not leaking bad smells. Thank you Pokéball technologies.

Pikachu, Bulbasaur, Squirtle, Butterfree, and Servine were on the bed, watching the hug in some amusement.

Wiping a tear from his eyes, the turtle had something to say

"Squir." 'A Boy and his slime monster. Is there anything more beautiful?'

"Bul…." 'I can think of one thing more beautiful…'

"So Muk, do I need to explain anything more or do you have a good understanding of things?" Ash asked as he ended the hug.

"Muk!" 'Time broke, you caught me again, and you even got my old buddies from back in the day.'

"Bul…." 'Yes, why did you that again? The things are a nightmare, only Charizard seems to like them and that's just as training.'

Hence why Bulbasaur and Charizard swapped: Charizard wanted to show off and perfect his new power via fending off their hug attacks, and Bulbasaur needed a break/wanted to file a complaint.

"It's complicated."

"Bul…" 'Try me…'

"They were all being controlled by my possibly half-sister in a plot to kill one of her sort of father-in-laws." Muk visibly shivered at the reminder.

"Saur." 'No seriously, why did you do capture enough slime creatures to bury half the town in hugs?'

"Ser." 'No, that's actually what happened.'

Bulbasaur and Squirtle stared at Ash in shock.

"Squi?" 'Have you always had…?'

"No!"

Themons were caught off guard at Ash’s volume, Butterfree fluttered back, Muk inched back, and Pikachu tensed up. Noticing this Ash took a deep breath, and continued in a softer tone.

"I just…I don't know. I never really gave my dad a lot of thought, he was basically someone I knew existed, and I guess I'd have liked to meet him one day, but it was never all in my face. But ever since Lavender Town…"
"Red was weird, but I can handle people looking like each other inexplicably. Nurse Joy's stopped tripping me up long before I got stuck in a sunken ship back in the day. Sometimes people just look alike, but then it became two people, and three, and now four, and then Aurora put the idea in Belladonna's head, as well as my head."

"I would have loved a sibling. We could have shared a parent, or mom could have remarried someone and they had a kid already or they had one later, or Mom could have decided to take in some random kid she found on the street. I'd have loved to be a big brother, or a little brother, or something. But not like this."

"I don't want to always be looking at people and wondering 'do we share eyes or face marks or earlobes because of chance, or because we share the same father'. I don't want to discover that people terrorizing places are in fact related to me. What's going to be next, am I going to find out that Paul dyes his hair and powders his face and he really looks like me? Is the next time I run into other members of Team Rocket who aren't Jessie and James they are going to look like me? When we get to Indigo, are half my opponents going to secretly be related to me?"

With that Ash plopped down on the bed with a thump, yet despite lying on rather soft sheets he didn't seem any less stressed.

Pikachu darted to Ash's side and brushed up against his trainer.

'\textit{This is about that Ashley isn't it?}''

"Is this going to be a thing? Maybe I've just been thinking about it since then, but is that going to be my life now? Constantly seeing them everywhere, or just seeing something that's not even….""

Servine silenced him by covering his face with her tail.

'\textit{Stop thinking, that's not your job off the battlefield. If it happens it happens, if not it's no reason to go crazy.}''

Butterfree landed on his stomach before adding in his own two cents.

'\textit{If it does happen, it's a surprise. Just as much a surprise as a party, or a tornado, or other things….'} Ash wasn't sure what Butterfree meant by that, he occasionally got like that after he flew off on his own for a time a while back.

'\textit{However, you can't let that make you afraid of life. Surprises will happen, you just have to be ready for them without going mad about it. Plus, we have other things we need to be worried about at the moment.'}"

"Bul." 'The Tauros.'

At the reminder of his 30 steers Ash pulled out the Pokédex, the screen glowing with various competitors in the upcoming tournament.

"Research completed on our possible foes. Would you like information on Mike, the Fire specialist? Perhaps Rachael Trapper from Crimson City? I assume you know all there is to know about Gary Oak of Pallet Town, perhaps Lilo of Melemele Island or Nikki of…"

"Have any of them won a League?"

"No, most of them are rookies without a League challenge to scar them emotionally, or as a mark of glory. Cynthia hasn't decided to pop up if that's what you are worried about."
"Then it's fine. I'm sure I can handle anything," Ash stated with confidence, a desire to find his Tauros again pushing back his earlier stress, at least for now.

'So, what do we do if we lose? Do we just....'

"We won't lose. I believe we'll win," Ash stated still with confidence.

'And if we don't?'

"Then in that case, we take a page from Team Rocket's book. If they can break into secure places, surely it can't be difficult that we can't do it. We didn't manage to get to Primeape in time, I'm not going to lose family again," Ash said this with the same level of confidence as before.

Squirtle didn't look as convinced.

'Maybe if Pidgeot wasn't off delivering love letters for you it would be, but we are currently missing our giant stealth bird right now'.

Blushing a bit Ash waved his water type off.

"If Pidgeot isn't back yet, or if she gets back and is too tired, I'll think of something. Between Muk slithering past, or hugging, security, Charizard flying me overhead, and Pikachu just blasting things we are going to get them back."

"As your technological resource I would like to point out that I can hack the motion sensors. However I am also obliged by my programing to remind you that your mother would prefer you not get a criminal record." The Pokédex offered its services.

"Of course, we're not going to lose. Nothing this tournament can do will surprise me whatsoever."

Simultaneously all gathered Pokémon slapped themselves, bar Butterfree whose limbs would not reach that far.

Squirtle helped the poor bug by slapping him with his tail.

A few days later found Ash in the Pokémon Center, holding up a 6 and looking for whoever else in the room had a 6.

That person would be his partner until the end of the tournament, and he had gotten a lengthy email from the Professor explaining that he must not get paired up with Gary, Misty, or Iris if possible as to improve their odds.

How the professor thought he could influence that was beyond him.

Ash had originally hoped to increase the odds even further by having Anabel join, but she had declined. No voice and all. Pity too, she was just as good at battling as he remembered.

Flashback

A part of him had been curious, there was a need to know. Was she as good as she had been? That need, that question had led to his current situation, a training session against Anabel. Just like the battle in the Battle Tower Anabel didn't say a word when commanding her Pokémon, although there was an actual reason for it this time and not just a battle tactic.
Facing Pikachu on the field of battle was a Kadabra, spoon in hand and glowing with psychic energy. Ash had expected to see Espeon or at least an Eevee but Anabel had chosen the Psi Pokémon to be her partner for this training session. His eyes searched Anabel's face for some sign of what she had planned but her lilac eyes gave nothing away.

"Pikachu, Quick Attack!" The yellow mouse took off at high speed towards the psychic type but with a flick of the spoon Kadabra sent Pikachu sideways into a tree, then flying upwards into the branches. "Thunderbolt." A streak of electricity flew out from the leaves of the tree but a quick Teleport and Kadabra was out of harm's way.

As Kadabra appeared slices of psychic power came from the spoon as it was swung through the air, the waves of purple energy flew into the branches of the tree in an attempt to hit Pikachu. A cry of pain from the electric mouse proved that at least one attack had found its mark.

Pikachu fell out of the tree and managed to land on his feet, disappearing in a small cloud of dust as he used his speed to avoid leaving an opening. Ash had talked a bit of strategy with Pikachu before the battle, it was only a theory but he had to assume that to read someone's mind enough to know what they were going to do next Anabel had to know where they were. With Pikachu moving too quickly for her to see and Ash leaving Pikachu to his own devices, that should level the playing field, it was only a theory but it was all they had to go on. This new Anabel was an unknown, she looked and sounded like the one they knew but with all the new things in the world like Bloodliner abilities and psychotic step/half/whatever the proper term was-siblings all he could do was theorize.

Kadabra eyed the battlefield cautiously watching the puffs of dust as Pikachu changed direction, trying to find a pattern to the movements only to get blindsided by a series of rapid fire Thunderbolts. The Psi Pokémon teleported again, this time appearing with his back to a tree to avoid attacks from behind. A glance at Anabel and a confirming nod in return Kadabra closed his eyes and was surrounded by a bright energy signifying the use of Calm Mind. Kadabra's eyes snapped open as a wave of psychic energy expanded outwards from his body. The psychic wave wasn't something Pikachu could avoid and sent the mouse sprawling across the ground.

"Pikachu!" Ash called out. The Mouse Pokémon pushed himself back to his feet and shook some dirt from his fur. He burst into full speed again circling Kadabra and attacking with bursts of Thunderbolts, at random intervals he would ram into the Psi Pokémon with Quick Attack. At the moment of contact he would get hit by a counter attack but simply powered through it and kept going.

A look at Anabel and Ash saw that this wasn't the same one he'd fought in the Battle Tower, her moves and battle skills were as impressive as ever but she lacked the experience of a seasoned Trainer. Her skills weren't as sharp as they had been and some work and they would be given what he knew about her new history it was obvious she didn't have the knowledge gained from constant battles to back up and hone her skills.

"Pikachu, let's finish this."

"Pika!"

Pikachu stopped circling Kadabra and ran up the backside of the tree, dropping towards Kadabra while using Thunderbolt. Seeing the attack, Anabel had Kadabra counter with Psybeam. The two attacks passed each other in mid-air and hit their target causing a small explosion as the psychic energy interacted with the electricity cloaking Pikachu.

When the dust cleared both Pikachu and Kadabra were knocked out. Ash smiled as he and Anabel walked over to collect their Pokémon and treat their injuries, yes this wasn't the girl he'd known but
she was still as good a Trainer and one day might even be better.

Flashback ends

Ash glanced around the busy room, wondering if his partner was holding 6 but just not looking his way.

Ash felt his heart stop for a moment when he saw Paul with an unsettlingly 6 like number, but thankfully it was quickly shown that Paul in fact had 9, not 6.

Taking a deep breath, Ash put the possibility of having to balance ensuring he won and got to see his Tauros again, and the horror of Paul possibly grabbing some of them, behind him. That was no longer possible, and this tournament was not going to have any unexpected surprises in it at all!

"Red I can't believe it! Red, I found the guy with the other 6, and it's Ash from the Battle Dome! Can you believe it, you two are going to be battling together?"

Ash felt the de-stressing from a few days ago melt like ice in the summer heat as Yellow darted in front of him, bouncing a bit and grinning widely. Following her slowly was the dark haired trainer that he fought at the Battle Dome, his own Pikachu on his shoulder just as Ash's was.

"You two are both amazing, so there is no way either of you are going to lose!" Yellow stated, oblivious to what Ash was thinking now even as he tried to ignore the fact she had marks on her face like himself, Belladonna and Ashley.

"This is going to be the greatest team up ever!"

---

Meanwhile, rescued from What Could Have Been

Mount Auburn, Kalos Region

Long ago, Alain had vowed to himself to become the strongest mega-evolution trainer.

It was not so odd a desire. He recalled many trainers having some sort of desire like that back when he worked with Professor Sycamore.

Did they still have that? It had been some time since he had been there.

Regardless of changing times, he knew that while any wanted to obtain such goals, everyone had different ways of achieving them.

The 'isolating themselves for intense training' was one such method, but one that Alain did not believe himself.

You could train on top a mountain all you want, but you had to wait for the challenges to come to you. You also only trained yourself to deal with the conditions of mountains.

When one traveled, you looked for challenges over infinite terrains.

Though sometimes the wanderer had to come to the stationary, and that was why he was on top the mountain.

Standing on one end of the summit, Alain looked across the pinnacle, his Charizard growling at his
Staring back at him was another trainer: darkly dressed in black and blue just as he was, with black hair and odd marks on his face. Curled around him was a massive Steelix, adorned with a large helmet with a Mega Stone in the center.

On the Steelix stood five other Pokémon: a Roserade, Talonflame, Octillery, Jynx, and Ursaring.

"So, I heard your name's Vermell." Alain tested his opponent, seeing if he'd make the first move.

The snow continued to fall, neither of them making the first move. Yet even without movement, the tension was laying upon the area thicker than the snowfall.
Hey, just to make some things clear. As the title implies, this specific chapter was originally posted during April Fools two years ago in Fanfiction.net, however, since Crossoverpairinglover didn't want to be mean and make a joke chapter just to pull the readers' legs, part of what happens here is canon to the story itself. Do not worry; the tournament arc will be posted tomorrow.

... 

Staring at the perfectly round stone between them, Otoshi remained in a still, serene pose. His shirt was off, his hands clasped together, and his legs crossed, the pounding of a waterfall filling the air around them with thundering sound.

Like his partner Marowak, his eye were closed and all his mental images were being pushed into the stone.

"…..Has it been two days yet?" Otoshi opened his mouth slightly.

"Maro," his partner rasped back.

"Then it appears that that monk had the wrong idea on how to access the power in this stone and we have simply been doing nothing for 48 hours."

"Wak."

Like an explosion the two darted for the waterfall, sticking their mouths into the flow and swallowing all the water they could return to their systems.

The stone lay where they had left it, held in place by Marowak's bone. Its secrets still a mystery to them.

...

Frowning the author looked over the scene, observing the tale it created with the mighty writing tool.

"No…no…can't figure out what to do from here. What can Otoshi do that would warrant his own story, unless I was to add that into an actual chapter of the main story…but I already jump around enough already I don't think I can survive doing it for vaguely important matters. That Solidad scene pushed it as was."

Sighing the author pointed the writing tool at the scene.

"Well, time to cut you away. Sorry Otoshi." And with that, the writing tool of Reset Bloodlines, a chainsaw, revved up and was ready to cut the scene into pieces.

"Wait!"
The chainsaw was stopped from cutting the scene to shreds by a figure without a face, distinct only by a well-manicured suit and a large silver watch. The author deactivated the chainsaw, but didn't sheath it as he turned to the figure.

"What do you want?"

"To improve production of course," the faceless entity noted.

"Execu Tivem Edlin, what are you going on about?" the author questioned as the figure took out an vanilla folder and flashed its contents.

"This is Ashes of the Past: do you see it?"

"Yeah."

"That fic updates constantly, several times a month. Look how far it is, and compare it to this fic. Clear mismanagement." Execu declared as the author sighed. "You don't even have 1000 reviews yet."

"It also has been around for longer than Reset, and it stalled for about a year around the second movie's events. I'm also fairly certain that Saphroneth writes chapters in pieces constantly, I only start serious work on them after the previous chapter is uploaded. I find the feedback useful going forward and implement it as I write. As for the reviews, give me a few chapters."

"You still could be a lot more efficient and accurate."

"Everyone can be more of something," the author noted as the executive adjusted the non-existent glasses on his face. "I sadly can't work on the fic all the time, let alone put down ideas. I've tried to force ideas before…look at my second Harry Potter fic and third Naruto one for how that ends. Actually don't do that…"

"You really should follow my advice. Executive guidance aides has fixed many series and allowed them to become great. Watchmen, Codename Kids Next Door, Dragon Ball Z, One Piece. Executive guidance makes good decisions all the time."

"Pokemon alone has so many places of known or likely executive meddling that I can use it alone to counter all those points. Shall I start with the issues that popped up during the early Shudo run I actually agree with to some extent, or perhaps the GS ball backtrack that made Johto into a slog? Movie's 3 changed ending is hardly a major one outside of a unfortunate implication about Molly, but then we get into the fogger ones. The entire incident with Tobias for example, though I admit I am not sure if that was executive meddling or a last minute willing decision, and Unova's league makes me wonder who scrapped the original plan and how much time did the poor buggers have. Alain's not nearly as reeking of the stink of meddling as they are, but I still have my suspicions. Not as much mind you, but still."

"What, a writer who thinks that Shudo isn't the great perfection? How refreshing, mind spreading whatever illness you have to the X-Men, Kirby, and MLP fandoms?"

"I try not to get wrapped in up that. Plenty of characters are written well outside their original authorship, and no writer is perfect. Comic books offer many examples of this phenomenal. Plus have you ever seen Shudo's notes? The guy had ideas, wrote good episodes, and a vision…but his vision is frankly unsettling."

The executive tapped the air, manifesting a pair of light novels. He skimmed through them, grinning.
"This is brilliant. Truly your story would benefit from these ideas."

"Did you even read those, or my story? I do adapt bits of it: trainers have a decent failure rate, Gym Leaders can be shut down for losing streaks, though not at the unreasonable number of three, the fact that Delia owns a restaurant though that I think was specified only in the Summer Camp Gaiden..."

"The what?"

"But I am not bringing in some of the needlessly gritty parts. I do not want extensive poverty; bits of it are fine but not to the extremes he wanted. That unearthed and translated comment of his implying that the entire series was just a daydream of Ash's will not apply, for this is not a Creepy Pasta or W.M.G page or something. Pallet Town didn't get its name from the one good trainer it had, trying to explain how a guy who was like 950th out of 1000 is better than Gary or Ash in the anime has more holes in it than half the fanon clichés in Naruto and Harry Potter combined. Most men don't turn to crime, nor do they wallow in their failure for the rest of their lives. I do not need ten year olds being married, I aged them up for a reason, and the slightly foggy but persistent comment on 'Misty having nothing but bad luck with men', is staying the heck out. Misty has a backstory, it's established and it is sufficient. I am not adding implications to it of that nature. I am not Frank Miller!"

"You know boy, that last one gives me an idea."

"All Star Ash and Pikachu will not happen. Fans got annoyed when the series said Ash Ketchum was age ten once."

"Not that. If we want to catch up to Ashes of the Past, we need a hook that it doesn't have."

"We do have hooks it doesn't."

"We need better hooks, no we the best hook of all. We need cheesecake."

"You want Ash and company to visit a Cheesecake Factory restaurant? Well, I suppose that wouldn't be of any harm, though-"

"No you fool, I am not talking about food. I am talking about fanservice. This fic will swarm with fans if you give them what they want."

"Character development?"

"Ba! No one cares about that. They want purple prose on curves and breasts, and maybe some detailed descriptions of musculature for the ladies reading. No, they want Lemons."

The author frowned before whacking the script with the butt end of the chainsaw. The frozen scene of Otoshi faded away, and was replaced with another one.

....

It was late at night in Hoenn's sunny shores. Max was asleep, and May was off with friends for the night. Grinning Norman leaned down to wife and whispered into her ear.

Caroline giggled, before grabbing her husband by the neck and LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON (Honey, those were new socks I just bought) LEMON
LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON (The Pokemon based pun was promptly so bad 4Kids twin self from an alternate porn self would never say it).

LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON (Max was oblivious, and would be when he went down for breakfast tomorrow, as was for the better).

LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON

LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON (Their marriage was quite healthy, as was their love for one another)

LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON LEMON

LE-LE-LE-LEMON

(And now, the weather. Rainy with a 20 percent chance of thunder.)

…

"What the Distortion World?"

The author shook his head at the executive's use of that realm as a hell term.

"You wanted lemons. I don't think I'll ever wrote Lemon in this fic, so there you go. That's as close as I'll go."

"But…but…"

"….Look, I've done a lot of things writing. I've experimented, and I know what I can and cannot do. Also I am rather sure that would cost me readers, more than whom'd I gain, and it would risk the rage of the mods. I wouldn't even be able to bother the Spacebattles community for help if I did so. So, as I am an old fan of New Chance even if I don't read much Naruto fanfiction anymore, I'd thought I'd borrow a joke from it."

"Why?" the executive questioned.

"Because based on feedback I got trying to figure out what to do for April Fools day I was told that it would be a bit of a slap in the face to write a chapter that was completely made of jokes. That scene is thus canonical to the Reset story, occurring around the same time as the next chapter does as it spans two in fic days, giving this some sort of importance. As it is, there are a limited amount of characters in fic who are currently in positions to be able to have sex with a consistent partner, and as those two are both married and vaguely plot important…"

"This fic is quite clear whose getting with whom. Why not just skip the formalities and have Ash LEMON with Misty, Iris, and Anabel?"

"Because people happen to like reading the fic for the formalities. Plus none of them are at a point they’d realistically do that. Ash isn't quite in tune with romantic relationships yet, Misty isn't at a point she'd be willing to push for a relationship with Ash, Iris won't do so unless Misty does or she takes too long to do so, and Anabel's a new main character and has to develop first. Unless you want to argue either of them would be willing to pay a prostitute for an evening, they aren't LEMON for a few chapters."
Execu Tivem Edlin took out another vanilla folder and began skimming it. The author assumed he might be ready to give up and he'd go bother some other incarnation of the writer's muse.

"Clemont, Falkner, Georgia, Dakim, Lorelei."

"Two gym leaders, an anime only character, an Admin, and an Elite Four member. What of them?"

"The Resetverse has other authors who write in it. Have one of them write LEMON."

"None of them have ever asked me about that," the author pointed out.

"Make them write one."

"I don't do that. I don't tell them to write any character: they ask me if I can, I make sure they aren't going to write Tobias as if he was Velma Dinkley, and they do so. I don't interfere outside of canon flow and the occasional decline of a character because of my concrete plans or because someone else is writing them. I occasionally give suggestions when they ask, but other than that they are free to do whatever they want."

"Like LEMON."

"Why do you keep saying that in singular all caps? Again I reiterate that no writer in the Resetverse as of now has any plans on doing those as far as I know. If someone came up to me and asked 'can I write LEMON' I would not be totally against it. Sure the writer would have to be aware that he or she'd get a lot less links than the others do, I think T.V Tropes has a rule about that, but as the side writers serve a role as filling out elements of Reset that I am only able to partially explain in the main fic, like Twenty Gyarados Bill and the twins from Chapter 2, or ones I am not willing to touch, like the theoretical LEMON or Human x Pokemon romance, also theoretical, those will only happen because someone asks to do them. I am not going to order anyone to do anything they don't want to do. Honestly one of the parts of this fic I truly enjoy is what the co-writers do, with ideas I would have never considered being fleshed out. For example…"

…

"And this actually works?" Jeanette questioned her traveling companion. Said companion grinned, sitting underneath the freezing waterfall in only his pants alongside his Sandlash

"It does. Trust me, getting your Pokémon used to what they are weak against helps control their panic and gives them more resistance to it. Sure it won't halve the damage or cancel it out, but every bit more they can endure from attacks helps."

"I see…" Jeanette noted A.J's words, before glancing down at her Bellsprout.

"Well, I don't think we have a hot spring around here we can use, but we do have a cliff. Tell me A.J, do you think that paragliding will help with damage from Flying-type attacks?"

"Maybe Gust…." A.J suggested as Jeanette procured a paraglider, and then one Bellsprout-sized as both trainer and Pokémon eyed the cliff with determined expressions.

"…I would suggest you not do something that drastic as your first one. Maybe you could work with ice and get under this water. It's really cold under here."

"Oh…" Jeanette mused, before putting away the paragliders.

"Very well, I am prepared for that as well. Allow me a moment behind that sycamore."
And the girl and her Bellsprout walked away, both of the human's faces blushing slightly. Bellsprout seemed more confused why the tree was needed.

...{reasoning}

"It sounds like you are writing by the seat of your pants, like the Dragon Ball writer. Thus you need my, Execu Tivem Edlin, to ensure you don't write something stupid."

"Toriyama was suffering from burnout at that point. A lot of Shonen writers do that, it's probably what killed Bleach. True Oda just got hornier, but Oda is an odd fellow whose starfish learn to speak via word puns. As to outlines, I do in fact have one. I have a general idea where the fic will go, and where it will end, and the major plot points that come up. The one oneshot I ever rejected completely was because of that. However I run a flexible operation, I change my plans all the time. Ash didn't get Dawn's Buneary at the time he got Snivy, they didn't just find Anabel lying on the side of a road, and Belladonna and company weren't in the original script. I think they worked out for the better. The co-writers can expand characters in their own way, like Georgia, the chapter 2 twins, Falkner, and Lorelei for example, and it doesn't do anything negative. It only is a positive."

"But one of those one shots did change a plan of yours. You wanted…"

"Spoilers," the author deadpanned.

"But it was a plot element…"

"An easily changeable one and probably better in hindsight to change. Now…" holding up the writing chainsaw at Execu Tivem Edlin the faceless executive backed away slowly.

"Do you want to be written upon?"

"Very well, you seem to be in somewhat capable hands, for now. But I will always win in the end. Now, I have golf with Darkern Edgier this afternoon, so I bid you adoo."

With that the executive left as the author shook his head.

"How one makes Golf darker and edgier I have no idea. Now, I probably do need to end this at some point, probably with something the readers would actually be interested in. Hmm, I once did silly trailer esc things back in my early days, why not something like that, and even if I don't show every scene in it 100% it won't matter because I can just say it was a joke! The perfect escape clause!"

Grinning the author swung the writing chainsaw and began writing the final part of this chapter.

...{reasoning}

Standing amongst the flames of the ruined lab, the being heard a sound he was not familiar with.

A chopping sound, even amongst the flames.

Mechanical sounds then replaced the chopping sound, even as a figure approached him on two legs. A Persian walked along his side, only on four legs.

The human grinned.

"So, this is the end result of Doctor Fuji's research. I must admit, I am surprised."

The scene shifted from the burning island to a battle field, surrounded by cheering fans. Two
teenagers, both with black hair, stared at their opponent, whose Pokemon was a massive Mudsdale.

"I never did get a chance to truly battle you, now allow me to show you," the woman declared as her ring began to glow, even as she and the Mudsdale moved in sync.

"The power of the people and Pokemon of the Alola Region."

The scene shifted to a battle field enclosed by walls, where a Squirtle was staring down a Nidoqueen.

The Gym leader, a young girl dressed as a ninja, pointed as the Nidoqueen roared and charged at Squirtle, who dodged the attack and blasted with a water stream.

The scene shifted again to a youth dressed in blue, staring at a decaying building, ravaged by time. Walking towards it he bent to a knee and dusted off a lump in the sand.

The shape of a faded blue bell was revealed.

Another scene change brought a computer screen littered with the names and stats of his competition. Ash K, Gary O, Red T, Jeanette F, Pete P, and dozens of others littered the purple haired youth's screen.

The scene then changed to a temple in a black beach, where a pink haired pretty boy and a tall girl with black hair and z marked cheeks entered. The pink haired boy placed the ball before an icon, even as the girl looked at the ball in unease.

"Great Tapu Fini..please, heal this Pokemon."

The scene shifted again a final time to a traditional looking, sandy beach where a legion of armored men stood like an army, a tall figure leading them.

Opposing them was a line of white uniformed men and woman with many pockets, a gang of hooligans, and normal looking people with rings on their wrists. A slouching man in black, a stout man in a yellow jacket, and a tall blond with green eyes seemed to lead them.

The two sides glared down each other for a minute, before both charged at each other for battle.

COMING SOON TO RESET BLOODLINES

THE FUSHIA TAG TOURNAMENT ARC!

WES'S ORIGINS!

POKEMON THE FIRST MOVIE, RESETVERSION!

INDIGO CONFERENCE RESETVERSION!

AND COMING TO THE RESETVERSE ONESHOTS: TEAM CIPHER VS ALOLA! THE CLIMACTIC BATTLE THAT WILL REVEAL A MAJOR SECRET OF THE RESETVERSE!

The Author put down the chainsaw smiling, before pinching his lips.

"I probably should add a list of suggested readings." And so the chainsaw revved up again.

TO FOLLOW THE PATH TO ALOLA VS CIPHER: DAKIM GAIDEN, CLAY INTERLUDE, CIPHER INTERLUDE, GUZMA INTERLUDE, SANPEI INTERLUDE, KIAWE INTERLUDE,
AND FUTURE INTERLUDES THE AUTHOR WON'T SWEAR TO AT THE MOMENT. STAY TUNED!

....
**The Tag Tournament Part 1**

*Tournament, Fuchsia City Stadium*

Tossing a Pokéball in hand, Gary eyed the opponents he and his partner were facing now in the moderately-sized stadium the tournament was taking place in (standard build, nothing remarkable about it).

Right off the bat, no warm up, first round, first battle. This was a trial by fire, adapt or lose, there could be no middle ground.

Gary would say something about life being unfair and all, but he saw that Ash was after him so he didn't exactly have it much easier.

At least his opponents didn't look too tough, a spindly-looking nerd with glasses even his grandfather would find ugly and some muscle bound idiot. He didn't quite catch their names.

"Begin!" The announcer declared.

"Go Voltorb!" The nerd shouted in a nasally voice, releasing the explosive prone Pokéball.

"Growlithe, go!" Gary countered by throwing his Pokéball and releasing his chosen fire Pokémon.

"Machoke, I choose you!" The muscle bound idiot released a Machoke. That left only his partner to choose a Pokémon.

"Hypno, stand by for battle!"

The four Pokémon were now in play, and the battle would now begin.

"Data analysis ongoing," his Pokédex stated to no importance.

"Swift attack!" the nerd declared in an almost threatening manner. Voltorb flashed in acknowledgement, before firing a barrage of stars.

"Ember!" Gary countered. Growlithe barked an acknowledgement, before billowing forth dozens of sparks. The sparks and stars collided, cancelling each other out.

"Rock Smash!" The muscled one declared as Machoke roared and leapt forward with a glowing orange fist. Growlithe growled in response.

"Use Flame Wheel!" Gary countered. Growlithe engulfed himself in flames, ready to meet the Rock Smash head on.

"Don't bother. Hypno, use Psybeam!"

His partner's Hypno fired a beam of glowing light from his pendulum faster than Gary had ever seen. The Psybeam hit Machoke before Rock Smash and Flame Wheel even connected. The Psybeam pushed Machoke back right into Voltorb, and both Pokémon were sent flying into the arena walls.

Both fell from the impact, defeated. Gary and Growlithe could only stare, even as the crowd murmured in surprise.

"Voltorb and Machoke, both are unable to battle! The winners are the team of Gary and Paul!"
As the crowds broke into cheers that hid the tears of their opponents, Gary turned to his teammate in shock.

"That's some power you have. Are you sure you only have four badges?"

Paul smirked at that question. Gary couldn't help but feel a chill descend his spine when he saw it.

"You mistake quantity for quality. No, every Gym Badge I earned came from a Gym with real power and prestige behind it. I push all my Pokémon past mere limitations. That's how I win my battles."

As the purple haired Trainer returned his Hypno and walked away Gary took a look at Growlithe, who was sitting at his side and looking at Paul's leaving form with what seemed to be a frown.

How did they get that powerful?

"I am just wondering, what is a Pokémon Master to you?" A memory flashed in his mind of a conversation he had not too long ago.

"A great Trainer, isn't that obvious?" had been his reply.

"Yes, but what makes a Trainer great?"

"Stupid novelist," Gary muttered to himself. Why did his words keep coming up, was it some sort of wicked sorcery that writers used to ensure people quoted them?

…Perhaps that explained some of his Grandfather's odder friends.

"Data analysis interrupted before completion. Please restart data collection process," the Pokédex complained.

---

**Meanwhile at Saffron Gym**

Dan had never expected the last image he'd see in life would be a crazy yet rather attractive woman in a beam war with his Typhlosion and Mega-Evolved Ampharos grinning like she was having the time of her life.

He had always assumed the last thing he'd see would be a ceiling.

But no, he just happened to go to the Kanto Gym run by a monster, and for the last three hours he had been on the brink of death being attacked by the lady and what seemed like an army of equally crazy Psychic types.

The entire Gym was strewn with defeated Pokémon, his and hers (the only consolation being that he had checked and they were all alive and back in their balls). He was down to only his two most trusted.

Sabrina had many more, and had simply decided to finish it herself.

Grinning as her mental power collided with a combined Flamethrower and Dragon Pulse, she began to push the attack back. Seeing this, both his trusted partners tried to push even more power out to counter it, but Typhlosion was already running on Blaze.
They had given it all they could give. His death was now approaching him slowly but surely. He could run, but that wouldn’t delay his death by much, and he didn’t want to have his last act be abandoning his best friends.

"Well, ya’ chances right now are like a screw. Pity how our time together flew." His Pokédex sounded as sad about his impending demise as the rapping it does was, well sad.

In that moment, Sabrina overwhelmed his two top Pokémon, his two best friends. The world then exploded.

"As you just saw, a scissor can cut rock if it's sharp enough!" As memories of his life flashed through his eyes, he remembered the words of wisdom he had taken to heart during his first Gym battle he lost.

"Ha ha ha ha...well what do you know kid, you really did learn something. This Badge is yours, hope it's worth the wait." And his eventual return to challenge the same man and earn the badge he wasn’t ready for the first time around.

He saw his Typhlosion standing, barely holding himself up. But a grin was mirrored between them, as they had accomplished what many believed to be impossible. A defeated Goldenrod brand Miltank.

He, Arbok, Golem, and Jumpluff cheering after clearing the final battle of their first Silver League Semi-Final round robin.

His bright idea to take his first year’s tournament cash prize and go visit the Goldenrod Game Corner with it.

Three years ago him deciding that it would be much smarter to use his money to invest in stock markets. The market slumped the next day when a spike in piracy messed up the markets.

Last Silver League he had an intense match in the Top 16 against a rookie Trainer named Cleff. A dark-haired Trainer with red eyes and odd marks on his face, Cleff had performed shockingly well for a rookie, having traveled around Johto with several traveling companions. Their match had been the closest Dan ever fought in his entire life, with his Ampharos using their Mega Stone to turn a 2-5 battle into one final battle between the sole remaining Pokémon. In the end however, Cleff managed to defeat Ampharos and lost to an eventual semifinalist named Jon Dickson the next round.

He had heard a rumor that Cleff bought several acres of land east of Violet City after the match (Land was cheap in Johto as long as you weren’t within spitting distance of Goldenrod City or the coast). Apparently Cleff was better at resisting the urge for risky money gaining schemes than he was.

However as this was a recent memory he’d never get to find out if the rumor was true however. For now the world was black as death.

"Death? You really think you are dead? Silly boy, you proved yourself too strong to die”. He could have sworn he heard that crazy woman speak as the memories finally stopped and he slipped into unconsciousness.

Tournament Round 2 Battlefield.
Red's thoughts were not interrupted, even after the announcer gave the names of his opponents, Al and Sasha he believed.

Victory Odds: ???

The interference to his internal calculations were not coming from his opponents. It was from his partner, who was looking contemplative.

He had been that way since he had seen the first fight, where Gary teamed up with that purple-haired Trainer. Perhaps he was familiar with him. He didn't exactly know what Ash got up to when he wasn't around, perhaps they had fought at some point and Ash recognized him as a potential threat.

Not exactly wrong. Red had glanced at a number of contestants and the purple-haired one did seem like one of the strongest here, with the possible exception of Lilo given he knew she had some sort of secret weapon involving a bracelet and stone.

He had done some further research, his stone was something called a Keystone which was tied to Mega Evolution. However he didn't see a Keystone on that bracelet, was there something else in the world that wasn't Mega Evolution?

He had tried to look up Alola, but the first thing he got was a tourism shop. Adding in 'bracelet' only brought in more tourism, and something about an ancient king and rumors about him traveling to another dimension. Also malasada ads. Those just made Red hungry, which had only benefited a local deli and not his search for answers.

Neither Trainer they were facing looked as much of a threat as Lilo or the purple haired Trainer that Ash seemed to be worried about, but he couldn't exactly go easy on them.

After all without his Victory Sight he felt like he was battling naked. It was odd, not knowing the chance of winning. Was this how it was like for normal people?

Yellow had said that he and Ash teaming up was 'the greatest team up ever' quote unquote. It was a strong team up to be sure, he didn't doubt Ash's power nor his own and it was unlikely Ash hadn't improved since, but adding Ash into his battling style was going to take getting used to.

"Begin!" the announcer declared as Ash, after a moment's thought, had a Pokéball ready.

"Yanma, I choose you!" Ash called as he threw a Park Ball out. The ball exploded, releasing a buzzing dragonfly.

Yanma. One of the fastest Bug-types in the area. If you weren't in Hoenn, Scyther was the only faster bug you didn't have to go far to find. An interesting choice.

He himself had caught a Butterfree at a Park Contest at his first time at one. It was how he had gotten his Leaf Stone he used...

"Go Rhydon!" one of their opponents, a blue fedora wearing Trainer with a Magby on his shoulder yelled as he threw out an Ultra Ball, which burst and revealed the giant Rock-Ground type.

"Rhydon, the Drill Pokémon and the evolved form of Rhyhorn," a voice rang out from somewhere Red couldn't figure out the exact origin of.

"Rhydon evolve when Rhyhorn realize they need to develop greater intelligence to solve problems other than charging at them. Rhydon are immensely strong and can rival dynamite in their efficiency in creating tunnels. Rhydon can be trained to withstand both pools of
magma and pools of water, with the latter being surprisingly harder to accomplish."

A Rhydon. The guy had something that strong to counter Yanma? He had to find the right counter to it, but without his victory odds to rely on he'd have to wing it. He was thinking Victreebel, but the raw strength of Rhydon plus issues with speed and possible shared fire...

Damn it! He would not be sure if this was the best move at this juncture. He'd have to be impulsive with it.

"Go, Poliwrath!" Red decided in the heat of the moment. His second Park contest-originating evolution (thank you Beedrill), came forth with a muscle flex.

"Poli."

The final enemy Trainer, a girl with long black hair with red streaks in it, smirked.

"Go, Bellossom!"

In a burst of light the pure grass branched evolution of Gloom appeared. Perhaps she too had gone to a bug-catching contest and won a stone.

Regardless, he had a battle to win. A somewhat naked battle sure, but a battle nonetheless.

And one he appeared to have made a less than optimal starting choice.

"Poliwrath, Water Pulse on Rhydon!" At his command Poliwrath began to charge up the giant blue sphere in between his hands.

"Yanma, go!" Ash ordered. Red didn't see what Yanma could possibly be going to, but he heard the bug speed into the air with loud wing vibrations.

"I don't think so! Rhydon Rock Blast!" Rhydon's horn began to glow white, Rhydon entering a wide stance. Rhydon then began to fire burst of white solid energy towards Poliwrath, who finished Water Pulse and fired it.

The two attacks collided, cancelling each other out in a burst of smoke.

"Now Mega Drain on both of them!"

Green energy stream shout out from the smoke, one wrapping itself around Poliwrath's arm. The second stream shot into open space. Yanma had avoided it easily it seems.

"Now Yanma!" Ash ordered. Now what, Red wondered, when he saw where Yanma was. Yanma landed on Bellossom, knocking the grass type onto the ground and restraining its movement. This cancelled out the Mega Drain.

Yanma, for lack of a better term Red could think of, used Body Slam on Bellossom. A move that Yanma could not learn.

"What! What are you doing!?!" Bellossom's Trainer demanded. "That's not a move! This isn't a wrestling match! Show this loser a real move, Bellossom; blow it off with Stun Spore!"

Orange powder began to leak out of Bellossom's petals, but Yanma vibrated its wings and blew the dust away like it was nothing. The wind shredded a few leaves on Bellossom, but Red got the distinct feeling they were specifically reduced to only tear a few petals.
"Wow! Yanma has completely pinned down Bellossom. I have no idea what Ash was thinking at the time, but it came through with clear results!"

What on earth was Ash thinking anyway? Red thought echoing the announcer, he couldn't see where such an idea could possibly have originated from.

"The average Yanma weights over seven times more than the average Bellossom." The odd voice declared, apparently to explain what Ash had been thinking.

"As such, Yanma can easily pin down a Bellossom, even if this would never happen in the wild for a variety of reasons. Yanma's wings can also be used to disable most of Bellossom's potential escape maneuvers."

The Magby shoulder Trainer wasn't having any of it.

"Interesting but futile! Rhydon, knock that bug off with Hammer Arm!" Rhydon roared as it charged at Yanma, glowing arms ready to smack that bug off.

"Brick Break!" Red countered, having no idea if this would be strong enough to counter it without the numbers.

As Rhydon moved towards Yanma like an incoming train Poliwrath appeared before it and struck Rhydon's center armor with the fighting attack.

Rhydon yowled in pain from the impact, stumbling back a bit. Apparently it would be sufficient.

"Hey, a little help here!" Bellossom's Trainer complained.

"Okay Yanma, now toss!"

"What!?" Said Trainer echoed Red's own sentiments. Yanma couldn't use any move with 'toss' in its name.

Yanma flew up into the air, Bellossom bound in its limbs. Red had no idea where that idea had come from, but as he could see it he had a vague idea what Ash was at least intending to do.

"Blast that thing down with Rock B..."

"Don't you dare, you idiot! You'll hit my..."

"Poliwrath, Water Pulse!" Red interrupted the two theoretical partner's arguments as Poliwrath formed a water blast and sent it flying. It struck the attack charging Rhydon and knocked it down even as Yanma flew down from above at intense speeds. Seconds and feet from hitting the ground Yanma released Bellossom for impact and flew back up.

A few moments were spent in silence before the ref made a call.

"Rhydon is unable to battle!" the Ref declared as Bellossom stood up, shakily. Her Trainer was grimacing.

"Just wow...that was pathetic. Rhydon beaten that easily, guess I have to do everything here. Bellossom use Magical..."

"Quick Attack!" Ash countered. A green and white blur flew by Bellossom at an amazing speed, slowing down to reveal Yanma who landed on the ground with a distinct wing pose. Bellossom then
fell, Quick Attack with a Speed Boost enhancement was too much for the Flower Pokémon too take.

"Bellossom is unable to battle! The winners are Ash and Red!"

"You saw it here folks! Another amazing battle, and this one was filled with surprises!" the announcer declared.

Red couldn't help but agree. He couldn't predict what Ash did here on his own, and he doubted Victory Sight could either.

Yet for all the oddities of his plans, it was plain to see with, or without, victory sight that Ash was strong. Quite strong, and clever.

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**Back at Saffron City Gym**

Floating over the defeated Johto-bound Trainer and his two remaining Pokémon, Sabrina shook her head.

"Why do they always assume that I mean 'if you lose you die'? Here I thought I was being quite clear that you just had to prove that you weren't pathetic, that you weren't a waste of life. Well, even if the boy isn't very good with word comprehension, holding out against me for as long as you have, as well as you have, shows you are something special. You will live."

The last part wasn't simply her speaking aloud. No, this statement had a target. One who had only just arrived, his feet in perfect kicking distance for the defeated boy's head.

"Again? You let another human live? Really, he isn't even on the list," the Emissary of the pain that was the Bloodline King snarked.

"I could care less about your list," Sabrina reminded him as she floated over to stare down at the cloaked figure with a good few inches of elevation for intimidation purposes.

"A pity you don't, My Lord spent many years researching it. It is quite accurate."

Sabrina rolled her eyes at that.

"I've noticed. Those idiots up in Cerulean got hauled off by that brother of yours. Executioner I believe you call him. I can only imagine what he's done with them since."

"You can read minds, you don't need to imagine it."

That line did not warrant a response. After a moment the Emissary left the kicking range of the boy's skull, and was looking more at her than anything else.

"My Lord once again extends his invitation to you. The position of Bloodline Queen is still open and you'd be quite perfect to fill it."

Sabrina's response to that idea had not changed, only gained strength with new information.

"I have no desire to be married to that cretin. Plus I don't need to read your mind to know he has an heir."

"Your vision and his vision are not so different that they are irreconcilable. Plus there are benefits to
being the Queen other than providing the one who'll rule the world his entire life, which you are quite correct in that it is a position already filled."

Sabrina crossed her arms, shaking her head.

"Oh yes, I am well aware of his reputation. His abilities certainly do help with that. However I have no desire for carnal pleasures, and if I was desperate for a child I could drag any random man from the streets in here with my power and do it at my leisure. I prefer to stay as I am, and your Lord is hardly the kind of person to just let people stay as they are. Of course if the King was really so desiring of me he'd have come himself. I suspect you have some other reason then?"

"Yes in fact. Recently the King has grown to question if one of the possible candidates should be terminated. He was previously tested and seemed salvageable, but losing to not only another candidate, but then being outmaneuvered by that strange byproduct over in Gringy City...we request you test..."

"I'm not J, I have no desire for money and I have better things to do than your bidding," Sabrina said frankly.

"I'm not blind; my Psychic Heart allows me to see a lot more than most anything else alive, and it grows stronger every year. How else have I recently started to amuse myself with the riddles that old man in Cinnabar comes up with for his granddaughter? I know who you're talking about; Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town. I hardly see your problem with him, if he was human and came barging in here shouting about a Gym Badge I'd probably find him worthy to live. Also it seems like he is well on his way to meeting that odd little goal your master has for Dual Bloodliners just like your 'byproduct' did; and unlike the one who beat him, bar the part about fighting to the death of course. The boy has some odd thoughts, but I sincerely doubt he's a killer at heart."

"Then again, from what I see in your mind the King's pretty disappointed about the general lack of killing, isn't he? How many like Ash and the 'byproduct' are willing to kill each other like in the King's bloodthirsty fantasies went so far? Four, five, maybe six? Not even one percent that. Even the more aggressive ones like that 'byproduct' don't aim their lethal intent where he wants it. Figuring out they are the same actually made Belladonna not want to kill him."

"Your defiance will not be appreciated," the Emissary threatened as Sabrina laughed.

"You act as if I'm expected to want his appreciation. Do give him this message however, if he thinks the world needs to change he should work to change it himself..."

"My Lord has already changed the world." The Emissary gave a final quip before leaving. As the creep left, Sabrina's gaze turned inquisitive.

"Yes, he does have some odd thoughts. Why does Ash Ketchum associate me with a doll? Hmm... I'll have to look deeper into that tonight. Still, I do have to return this Johto boy sometime, survivors are the best bait. When a good trainer lives, twenty poor ones think they have a chance."

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**Back to the Tournament**

"It's two to one now folks! Can our visitor from Alola take down these two young women with six badges to both their names?"

Ash found himself looking at a battle that was familiar, yet not. It was a good distraction from
thinking too much about how Paul was here, teamed up with Gary.

Trainers he had seen before, briefly at Indigo, battled someone who he'd had never seen before. A someone who Red did seem to know, if his intense look at her was any indication.

Finding out about it would at least keep him from thinking too much about the what-if of Paul and Gary winning. Mostly Paul.

"That's Lilo," Yellow, who was standing between the two of them, piped up. "She's a Trainer from far away. She uses some weird Pokémon and battled Red a while back, but they didn't get to finish."

"Yeah, I'm still surprised that Lurantis isn't a Bug-type," Ash admitted as he witnessed the bug-like (yet actually just Grass) Pokémon avoid a Silver Wind from Assunta's Venomoth and a Rolling Kick from Melissa's Hitmonlee. "I wonder if Sudowoodo and Lurantis are related then."

"You haven't seen anything yet. Trust me, you should see her Exeggutor, it's really cool!" Yellow exclaimed.

"Is it golden?"

"Nope!"

Ash didn't a chance to pry any further into the question of what Lilo's Exeggutor before Lilo pointed at the two opposing Pokémon. Ash noticed that she had a strange armband of sorts on, but he couldn't tell what it was exactly.

"This is it! Lurantis use Solar Blade!"

Lurantis held both of its scythe-like arms into the air. Both glowed bright with the powers of the sun, before Lurantis lunged right at the two.

The attack connected with great force, sending both opponents flying. Clearly the earlier damage had taken its toll, for even Venomoth was down.

"Venomoth and Hitmonlee are both unable to battle! The winner is Lurantis! Victory goes to the team of…"

"...That wasn't even her going all out," Red spoke up. Turning to him, Ash could feel both Red and his Pikachu boring into him with serious looks.

"She is the most powerful opponent here."

"I'll take your word for it." Ash wasn't ready to declare that to be the case yet, but somehow he doubted arguing with Red would really get him anywhere. Plus Paul seemed to have gotten stronger since he last battled him, so Ash had no idea just how strong he was at the moment. Same with Gary, who Ash had no grasp of exactly how tough the guy was at the moment.

Red resumed his preferred state of silence, as Anabel chimed in to him.

'While I cannot say if she is indeed the strongest, she does out power her partner considerably. She would be a tough opponent to defeat, if only because none of us are familiar with the Pokémon she uses.'

Ash nodded in agreement, though he could take some solace in the fact that said unknown opponent was not fighting Misty and Iris.
They were up next.

"Paul and Gary Oak, Ash Ketchum and Red, Mike and Tim Mortis, Lilo and…"

The sound of a shouting baby obscured the partner's name.

"…We've seen many strong battles today folks, and we won't be letting off now! The teams of Rachel and Hugo and Misty and Iris are next! So let's give them a big round of applause.

"Now go!" the shaved bald yet bushy mustached muscular fellow, most likely Hugo, declared as he threw a Great Ball. It burst open to reveal a Nidoqueen.

"Staryu, I choose you!" Misty shouted, releasing her brown battler, who landed with a flourished spin.

She'd have used Gyarados, but he was resting at Professor Oak's at the moment after the four of them had ended up tied up in a giant festival outside of town. They had come for the food, but then Ash somehow got roped into riding for an injured Ponyta jockey and then she joined in with Gyarados… it was fun but nothing really important beyond warranting her letting Gyarados take it easy for a few days.

"Go!" the one named Rachael, given she was the well-dressed girl of the two, shouted as her Pokémon was released.

Misty was not happy to see what came out.

"Chh…" the Pinsir hissed, pincers clashing together.

A bug, specifically one with bone shattering pincers and a gaping mouth. Joyful.

"Excadrill!" Iris declared as she sent out her giant mole, who flexed his steel claws at the Pinsir.

"Begin!"

"Nidoqueen, use Sludge Bomb!" The Nidoqueen leaned back, sounding like she was horking something up.

"Excadrill!" Iris called. As the sludge was spat out towards Staryu, Excadrill jumped in the way. The sludge struck Excadrill, which dissolved away without any lasting effect.

"Huh?"

"And right out of the gate, we see an excellent display of teamwork. I admit I have no idea how that worked, but I think that was suggesting that Excadrill is a Steel-type. Steel-types ladies and gentlemen are immune to poison attacks!"

"But not fighting attacks! Pinsir, Brick Break!"

Brick Break caused Pinsir's right arm to glow white. Pinsir jumped into the air, falling towards Excadrill with the Brick Break ready for the impact.

"Rapid Spin!"

Staryu shot forward, spinning round and round at faster and faster speeds. The attack collided with
the Brick Break, stopping Pinsir's momentum and knocking the bug away.

Staryu landed in front of Excadrill as the two Pokémon exchanged nods. Iris turned to Misty and grinned.

Misty couldn't help but grin back.

It was interesting. At one point she found Iris worrying from a 'will she stab me in my sleep' way.

Then she had worries of a 'will she woo Ash with feminine wiles' (though Misty wasn't quite sure what a feminine wile was, or if Iris would even think of anything like that).

Yet here they were in their second battle together, and they were actually working rather well together.

"Strength!" Nidoqueen's Trainer shouted, as the massive Pokémon roared with glowing orange arms.

"Cool it off with Water Gun!" Staryu fired the water blast, striking Nidoqueen right in the chin. The attack pushed the beast back.

"Knock it off! Double Hit on Staryu!" Pinsir's horns glowed purple as it charged forward towards Staryu, pinching them like a deranged pair of scissors.

"Fury Swipes!"

Excadrill intercepted, one glowing claw striking the first horn.

Both lost their luster, as the second pair of sharp instruments collided.

As Pinsir's two strikes were done with, both of Excadrill's claws shone once more, and Excadrill swiped once.

Then twice.

With four hits Pinsir was knocked down.

"Shadow Claw!" Nidoqueen was done being blasted by water, and ignited her left hand with shadow. The shadow hand flew forward, striking Excadrill.

The mole was pushed back by the impact, even as Pinsir got back up. Slowly, and in a manner that was creepier than it needed to be.

"Strength!"

"Brick Break!"

Coming from the left and right Nidoqueen and Pinsir had Excadrill surrounded. There was no escape.

"Staryu blast that bug with Wat…" Misty was interrupted by Iris's raised hand. The wild girl didn't look concerned.

In fact she was grinning.

"Excadrill, use Metal Claw!"
Very quickly after the command Excadrill's claws shone metallic silver, before the claws struck both Pokémon. Both attacks leaving marks, the two Pokémon were sent flying.

"I heard you always wanted to do that. Hope it was just what you wanted," Iris stated to her Pokémon.

"Drill!" Excadrill sounded like he agreed.

However Misty caught something in the corner of her eye. Pinsir twitched, just as Nidoqueen began to right herself in midair.

They weren't done yet.

"Use Bubblebeam on both of them!" Misty shouted before they could counter. Staryu fired the bubble spray the two had recently perfected at a fast pace.

The bubbles struck Nidoqueen first, then Pinsir. Both however, were equally affected by the attack.

"No!"

"Pinsir!"

The two mons crashed back on the ground.

"Thanks." Iris stated with immense honesty.

"It was nothing."

"It was something, a Bubblebeam," Iris stated the obvious as Misty resisted the urge to explain to Iris what that phrasing meant.

"Pinsir and Nidoqueen are unable to battle! The winners are Misty and Iris!"

…

"They're stronger."

Red's statement was short, and took Ash and Anabel's attention off the cheering crowds.

"Well, of course they are. I practice with them all the time and they work on themselves on their own as well." Ash noted. At Red's confused look Ash explained.

"When you travel with friends, you're able to train with them. It helps both, and it's better than training by yourself. It helps everyone, me, Anabel, Misty, and Iris. We all may have different goals, but together we help each other prepare for them."

Red nodded.

"Yes. I guess that does make sense. Doing things together also is probably where your two friends gained their ability to work together as well as they have. We should try and match them."

"Sure….what do you have in mind?" Ash hoped Red wasn't going to suggest traveling together across Kanto to build up team ability. He had been in enough time bending before reality had reset itself, he didn't need any more Baltoy time machines, Celebi time paradoxes, and Gothitelle time illusions.
"Dinner!" Yellow suggested as Red nodded.

"Yes. That will do. We shall eat together tonight. The Pokémon Center is as good a place to do it as any."

"Uh, sure." Ash wasn't sure what else there was to say. At the very least Anabel didn't seem to be glaring at him, so that was a good sign at the very least.

Then again, he wasn't sure he had seen Anabel, either version, glare. Not even at Team Rocket, and they were quite glarable. Was that even a word?

Red nodded.

"How's five sound?"

...

"...Did I jump onto the dinner idea too fast?"

At Red's honest question as the two walked back from the Pokémart before dinner was to be had, Yellow mmmed before replying with an honest tone.

"Nope."

Yellow did seem to believe that, so Red would take that opinion and stick with it. Social interactions had never been his forte beyond polite sportsmanship, and the little girl was always better at them than he was.

But he supposed he did have to start somewhere, and his partner in a tag tournament was probably better to do so with than, say, a lawyer.

Even without Victory Sight to direct his conversation (unlike for supply shopping for the best deals), he had the perfect topic in mind, battle combinations. They didn't have a chance to do so today, but tomorrow would warrant it. They'd have to figure out what six Pokémon to have active and all effective combinations...

"Since we are eating with Ash, we probably need something to say. I should be fine, but you need something to say. What are you going to talk about all dinner, battle combinations?"

"Yes."

Yellow stopped walking and shook her head at it. Red was unsure of why.

Was it a faux pas? He thought it was just 'don't mention politics', or was it sports? Maybe some third thing...

"Red, you can't just talk about that. I mean, not only will two of your possible future opponents from the Battle Dome but your opponents for this next battle will also be at dinner. Dinner conversations are supposed to be light and cheerful, battle combinations aren't that. I mean, I guess you probably could talk about them, but not at the start."

"Then, what else is there to talk about?"

Yellow hmmmed thoughtfully for a moment.

"You should ask Ash about himself. Where he's from, what Pokémon he started with, stuff like that."
"I'm sure you could relate."

"He's from Pallet Town…but I have never been there so could I change it to what's Pallet Town like? Would that work just as sufficiently?"

"Yup!" Yellow exclaimed, just before an odd sound ripped through the air.

Both companions twirled around to a side street, around where the sound seemed to have originated. The side street didn't look that odd, beyond a store that apparently was called 'Profuenster Family Back, Hip, Jet, All sorts of packs' that Red might visit later if the tear he'd been noticing in his bag wasn't able to be fixed by the needle and thread he picked up today.

There were a few pedestrians of note, the most noteworthy one being a brown haired woman sitting on a bench, still wearing a large red bag. No sign of what that odd sound was.

With no further information available the two resumed their way back to the Pokémon center.

---

**Five o clock**

One thing Anabel had noticed since in the days since she joined Ash and his friends was just how easy it was to talk among people her age.

She and her uncle talked a lot, and she was at perfectly at ease with him, but it didn't take even a week for her to feel quite comfortable talking with them. She could have never imagined that with her old classmates.

There was also just something, euphoric, about being able to talk to people. To have people know what you are saying, and even if they couldn't say something back they could still nod and acknowledge her mental words.

It was unfortunate then, that such a system broke down if they were under scrutiny. Or in close company in any case.

With Red and Yellow at their table, alternating between talking with and eating, it would get messy if she tried. That was why she had requested that she'd avoid talking this meal, and they agreed to it, after a good few minutes of trying to find another way.

It was oddly pleasing that they disagreed with her so vehemently.

"….And other than that Pallet Town is kind of small. I could have sworn it was bigger when I was 10." Ash finished explaining as he took a sip of his drink. Red nodded, Anabel assumed he was processing the information.

Red didn't seem quite in his element here. That could explain why his approach to Ash about it was a bit awkward.

It wasn't something Ash could have said no too without causing trouble tomorrow, so she wasn't annoyed with at all.

"….I know! I swore that Cerulean City was a lot bigger when I was there the last time." Yellow piped up, before looking at Ash for a moment.
"I was wondering, whose your first Pokémon? Red started with his Pikachu back when it was a Pichu."

Pikachu let out an approving sound at that revelation as Ash gestured to his shoulder riding partner.

"I started with Pikachu here."

"Really? I was under the impression that you would have had a Bulbasaur or Charmander." Red stated as Ash shrugged.

"It's a long story involving a pair of twins."

"Elwood and Aideen aren't their names by any chance?"

Ash squinted, as if trying to access a memory buried deep in his mind, before his eyes lit up.

"Oh yeah, them. I feel kind of bad they had slipped my mind, but it probably was them. Wait, you know them Red?"

"He does. We met them at a Battle Club, they aren't half bad," Yellow elaborated. As Ash caught up on refreshing that lapsed memory Anabel half listened, the rest of her focus going out into the Pokémon center on what else was being discussed around them, her mind picking up a few straight thoughts.

"During a trip to Johto, I heard of an ancient craft involving the creation of Pokéballs from Apricorns. You know, those unpleasant tasting nut trees you find around sometimes? They actually have a use. I did some research and have been doing some dabbling to see if I can make Pokéballs myself. I'm sure it will be handy in case of an economic crash, I just have to figure out a few kinks. The hinges are murder, but I think I figured out the rest of it including a little theory I heard on how to alter their properties, though the artistic finesse for them is going to require help. Any chance you are skilled with approved Pokéball paints?"

"Sorry I can't pay for a nicer meal sis. I love my work at the Aether Foundation, there isn't anything like seeing an Oricorio fly again after someone tried out an illegal gun, but they don't have the best vacation hours and I don't exactly roll around in my pay. Also Faba is a jerk, though Wicke is a delight to work with. No, not like that sis, stop grinning!"

She could feel a flash of a memory of a smiling woman in white and pink. She could see why the young man might consider her a delight.

"Did you see some of those rookie Trainers on T.V these days? That Ash Ketchum is something else. He actually got that SJW off her high-Ponyta. That Red's pretty tough too, did you see his last battle? Good thing I retired from trying to fight the league circuit, I'd probably get stuck with one of those two monsters in the first round, I always got the tough rookies."

"You retired because you sucked at it, Greg."

"….No I didn't."

The third table continued in their conversation, the entire time neither Ash nor Red heard it.

They either didn't care for their growing fame, or just didn't hear it. Anabel wasn't sure which it was, and she wasn't going to check.

"…Tajiri." Red gave as an answer. Anabel's attention was brought back in, where Red was looking
at her with a frown.

"That's my last name."

Oh.

She could feel her face form an embarrassed grin as she idly reached for a French fry.

Red finished off a sandwich before reaching across the table and picking up Ash's Pokédex.

"Unauthorized user detected, even if you do sort of look like my assigned human. Also your hands are rather hot, please don't cause me to overheat, and do wipe your hands before touching my buttons. My human's wiping skills are not sufficient in my opinion."

Red rose an eyebrow at that comment but said nothing more as he began pressing buttons inside the sentient machine, though he did wipe his hands on a napkin first.

The machine's comments made Anabel think though.

Ash had mentioned that he encountered a girl who looked a lot like him and thought they were related. Similarly the Pokédex was right in that Red and Ash looked a lot alike.

There were differences true, Red was paler and had darker black hair than Ash did, he also had red eyes while Ash had brown ones and marks on his cheeks, but in height and build there were very similar, if not identical.

Did Ash notice that? She could see Misty's face on Red as he fiddled with Ash's Pokédex, and she had a face that reminded her of her uncle after he realized something about that movie that really made it clearer once he did.

Her most external thoughts pretty much screamed that same feeling, so she couldn't really ignore them. Iris didn't have the same look, but she did seem to notice the similarity rather strongly.

Really the difference between the two wasn't Red's paler skin tone or Ash having marks on his cheeks that Anabel wasn't sure the origin of (and when she had asked the other day Ash wasn't sure what they were either).

No, it was something in the way they just, behaved. Ash radiated a cheerfulness and determination to himself that was rather charming, like someone out of one of those long running animated shows.

He was capable of feeling other emotions than those of course, his cheerfulness didn't get to a point he had only one setting to himself, but outside of the immediate source of stress (like the Gringy City incident), he seemed to simply find life itself enjoyable.

She rather liked that. People who didn't dwell on everything bad in the world, and enjoyed the world around him while helping people who needed it whenever he could.

Like that farm girl they had met a few days before the tournament who needed help with an upcoming Pokémon race and festival. She had heard Misty comment that this wasn't the first time he had done something like that.

Red, didn't feel like that. Without even reading his mind it seemed like he saw the world as just… less wonderful than she did. He had decided at some point that the world wasn't a nice place, and never could be, and behaved in a subdued manner to it ever since.
He wasn't incapable of being happy, but he generally wasn't. Often by choice.

He and Ash had the same height and the same body type. Both were skilled Trainers, and she'd hesitate to judge which one was technically a better one at the moment. They had their physical differences true, but it was their mental differences that, in her mind, gave Ash an edge over Red.

She could only hope Red would learn to be a bit happier. It wouldn't do him any good in the long run to be constantly melancholy at best.

"Your Yanma," Red asked Ash, Anabel turned to look back at Red with a thoughtful look while masking her own thoughts about the two trainers in question.

"Yeah, what about it?" Ash replied.

"This Pokédex, never thought I'd ever get to touch one (and you should feel honored to do so, the device commented), says that Yanma are generally special attackers, especially when they evolve."

"It evolves?" Misty sounded horrified, and she was in fact so. Her mind was radiating fear like a fire did heat.

"Yanmega," Ash and Red said at once, causing Yellow to chuckle.

Misty mouthed the word, as if saying it too loud would summon a swarm of them to fly off with her.

"Your Yanma only used physical techniques. Why is that?"

Ash shrugged as he responded.

"Simple, Yanma doesn't like doing special attacks."

Red stared at him blankly, as if Ash had just said that the Moon was going to kill them all while grinning.

"What?"

"I noticed when I was training Yanma that Yanma really liked doing physical attacks, and gave them 120%, but whenever I tried to practice Silver Wind or Sonic Boom the passion wasn't there. So I decided that I'd work with what Yanma liked to do."

Red still looked at Ash like he had just said something in a foreign language, and sounded completely incomprehensible in doing so. Anabel could understand why of course, Red was not incorrect in that Yanma wasn't working with the strength of its species.

"If you do that, Yanma isn't working to its strengths. Trainers are supposed to bring out the best in their Pokémon, and that means training them to their strengths. Yanma evolves because of a special move."

"I am though; I'm just doing it with one Yanma, my Yanma, not Yanma as a whole. If Yanma really wants to evolve one day we'll learn Ancient Power, but if not I'll simply help Yanma be the strongest Yanma it can be."

Red pursed his lips, but didn't say anything. Even if Anabel was rather sure that Red still found Ash's decision as odd, he at least now had a logical reason for why Ash was doing it.

"I believe in working with a Pokémon's strong points. That's how you make them stronger. Working with them, not trying to push them into being something they aren't," Ash said with conviction. Red
didn't argue the point

"...If you want to make Chimchar stronger, you've got to work on improving its strong points."

Anabel wasn't sure whose thoughts she heard, but one thought was overwhelming. She couldn't recognize the voice who was saying it though, though oddly enough it seemed to be coming from Ash, and even odder it felt familiar somehow.

"Oh please," the thought continued with a huff, "spending a second improving a Pokémon's strong points, is like babying a spoiled brat and a complete waste of my time see."

The voice was different this time, but similarly familiar, as if she had heard the same person before, just talking differently. Like a different voice actor.

Perhaps this was something from a moral forming television program Ash once watched.

"I suppose I'm the same. I just use the plural Pokémon, while you use the singular. Getting off that topic though... battle combinations?"

Anabel wondered why she heard Yellow face palm after Red say that. She could feel Iris's confusion for the action from here.

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**HopHopHop Town, the same time**

She tried to ignore it. She really did.

She wasn't here to do anything humans would call wrong. She was going to do things legally.

Buy a book with money that was gotten mostly legally, go back to their place of occupancy at the moment (a penthouse that was not entered legally in any sense of the word), and see if that would cheer up Aurora. She hadn't been quite herself lately, even considering the mixed feeling she should have with her damn father dead and suffering in hell, and it was starting to worry her.

Trying to prompt it out of her wasn't going anywhere, and she was not going to use her Truth power to get her to talk. That would be a massive slap in the face to their relationship, Belladonna was pretty sure she'd do less damage by cheating.

Aurora, she had noticed, rather liked it when she got things for her legally. She understood that doing such wasn't always doable, but it made her happier on birthdays and holidays.

But she was starting to really, really want to accelerate the death of the man five feet from her to now.

It was hard to find that author Aurora liked when some idiot was smoking outside the open air book shop, the city winds wafting the damn smell into her nostrils.

Tobacco smoke, the one smell so horrible Grimer couldn't reproduce it. A smoker, one of the most obnoxious forms of humanity for spreading the damn smell everywhere, couldn't seem to get the damn hint. Was her tense form, pinched nose, and not so subtle death glaring not obvious enough?

She could already feel her mind shift into blind rage, when the cigarette briefly glowed black before slipping out of his mouth and into the sewer drain where it belonged.
The idiot reached for his demise futilely, even as the case of demise he had also was black as shadow for a moment before falling into the sewer drain.

Just as rapidly as murderous rage came, it was replaced with an overwhelming relief (if she got the book illegally because she had to run away from the scene it wouldn't be as effective at cheering Aurora up) as Vedia tapped her shoulder.

The book she was looking for in hand.

"It was organized by publisher alphabetically, not author's last name alphabetically," Vedia informed her.

So that's what was going wrong? Huh, odd she failed at catching that.

An exchange of coin later and the two were walking down the HopHopHop streets, bag in her hand.

"You're a lifesaver Vedia." Belladonna praised as Vedia had a hint of a smile on her face.

"That fool's life in any case." She replied.

"You know what I mean. Honestly, it never ceased to amaze me how stressful shopping is. There is always some idiot killing himself expensively at the front, and half the time cashiers or machines are on the fritz. I swear I'd go gray early if you and Evanna liked legal things."

"Monetary exchanges and the retention of money doesn't bring happiness," Vedia stated solemnly.

"My sweet; you'd know that better than the rest of us." Belladonna declared as they took a turn and crossed through the crosswalk.

The two passed a group of three as they went to the other side of YoYoYo street. A reddish-haired woman, a little girl who was probably twelve or so who didn't really look like her, and a boy with dark hair…

Familiar dark hair, and the seconds she got of his face quickly burned into her mind as the two absently finished crossing the street.

"Wrong way Arnold," she heard the mother call, followed by quick scurrying. The sound of a child accidentally going up a street instead of down, but that wasn't important in even the short term.

What was however, was what she had just seen. Another boy who looked like her, another boy who looked like Ash.

Another brother, and this one had a mother with him. Perhaps she knew something about their father…

A poke to the stomach brought her thoughts back to external stimuli as Vedia gestured towards the departing trio.

"The boy does look like Ash, as well as that Red guy he's currently battling with." One benefit of completely non-legit housing, free HD/4K/some sort of abbreviation television and broadcasts of tournaments. Aurora had found that one trying to figure out what channel had a documentary on the Golden Age of Crime she had heard about a while back, and it had been a quite helpful in fully convincing Evanna and Vedia that she wasn't seeing things that weren't there.

Red helped matters. There was a saying about one being chance, twice coincidence, third times a
pattern after all.

Fourth time made you wonder if your father had an off switch.

"Of course, it won't do for you to chase them down now. Let me find where they live and I'll take you there later when they aren't in public. You have a book to deliver first, and I am much less noticeable than you are."

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**That night, Fuchsia City**

When Ash found himself falling asleep, he was pretty sure it wasn't in a room that was stark white even in the unlit light.

Nor in a room filled with giant frozen blocks of ice with Pokémon inside of them. A Pikachu, a Magmar, a Starmie and Slowpoke, and some sort of black and purple round thing with bumps on it.

Ash couldn't help but wish the Pokédex was here to identify the thing. Sadly he was rather sure it didn't sleep or dream, not even of robotic Mareep, and as he was pretty sure he was dreaming this. Plus the Pokédex would have said something if he wasn't by this point.

Pikachu hopped off his shoulder and sniffed the Pikachu in the ice block, before recoiling a bit chittering nervously.

Said chittering translated into 'Ash, something is wrong with this Pikachu'.

"It's frozen," Ash pointed out as Pikachu sniffed the Slowpoke. Pikachu then muttered a response as he darted over and began smelling the Magmar.

'I am rather aware of that. No, it's something else. That Pikachu, and this Slowpoke, they smell sick, and this Magmar...it honestly smells like blood.'

At Pikachu's comment Ash did approach the cube and examined it closer. The Magmar did seem rather redder than normal in the rib area…

"Great, you are already doing detective work. Just let the scene play out a bit, would ya?"

Both Trainer and Pikachu turned, to reveal MissingNo wearing a pixelated form of a version of himself in a blue and white striped shirt with red and black shorts and no gloves, sitting on top a frozen block like it was a throne.

"Yeah, you got away from me last time. This is payback." He grinned wickedly as the sound of a door opening with a bit of resistance.

The dark room was suddenly awash with light, heralded by a creaking sound of a door in great disuse giving way to force, as a metallic form walked in, light glowing from its shoulders. It was humanoid, but covered in blue and yellow metal plates, a suit of some sorts. A stamp that read CG-82 was imprinted into the left breast side of the shape.

The metallic shape tapped the side of his head, causing a scanning light to shoot out of the suit's eyes and sweep across the room. When it went over a block of ice it beeped, though the fact it didn't when it went through him, Pikachu, and MissingNo told Ash that this was one of those 'you aren't really there' things.
"Scan complete. We seem to have about one hundred Pokémon here, so we should be able to finally pull off Operation Adama… oh for crying out loud!" The metallic suit shouted, in a voice that was unsettlingly familiar.

"Pi…' Ash, did that sound a bit like…'

"Clemont? Yeah, it did…"

"Spoilers, it is Clemont in that suit," MissingNo sang out in amusement. "But, in 'a' future. Not 'the' future, but it could be if you really want it to be. In fact, it 'was' the definite, can't argue with it, future not much longer than a week ago if I'm counting right, maybe two."

Ash didn't ask what that was supposed to mean. He figured MissingNo wouldn't give him a straight answer. He'd probably just lie if he pressed any further.

Iron-Clemont was followed by three people after MissingNo was done trilling. The first was the only one Ash recognized, and only vaguely. After all he only met so many caped figures in his time, and only one female one.

However Latoya Parker, also known as Gligirl, was a lot older than he remembered her. Her Gligar themed costume looked more armored and bulkier, like a suit of armor vs the spandex of the Gli-family of heroes tended to wear. She also seemed to be scowling in a manner that made him wonder is she was related to Paul, or just taught him the art of the scowl.

He didn't recognize the other two. She was dressed in brown, and while female had muscles like he had never seen on a girl before. She honestly looked like she lifted the same weights as Lt. Surge, and looked like she could punch out one of his Tauros at full charge. She wore dusty brown clothing with a purple belt with several pouches on the side. A ring that looked like the one he saw on Lilo's wrist was on her arm, a plus shaped emblem on her left breast with a brown coloring on the top.

The other was a lot young, probably closer to his age than the Clemont wearing a Clembot, Gligirl, and She-surge were. He was wearing a long blue coat, and had gray hair despite the statement about his younger status.

"Somethin' wrong, I mean more wrong than this place normally is?" the muscled lady asked as Clemont walked forward a step before turning.

"You were a part of the initial Ultra Beast incident, correct?" he asked the muscled woman.

"Yeah, I was right in the middle of that kerfuffle. Before the Nihilego swarms hit Alola and the continents, and all the other horrors that followed the things into our world at large of course, I ended up involved in finding out just how deranged the leader of the Aether Foundation actually was. I got ordained as a Kahuna during the midst of it, the last Kahuna matter of fact."

"The first known person to be infected by a Nihilego was the Aether President herself as I recall." Clemont spoke words Ash had no idea the meaning of. What was a Nihilego? Who was the Aether Foundation? What was a Kahuna?

"An' to my dismay, not the victim who got the most warped by one of the things. Not even in good old Alola."

"Sadly I can vouch for that first hand." Clemont agreed with her on whatever they were talking about. Ash and Pikachu turned to MissingNo, who was grinning. Clearly he still wouldn't explain what was going on.
"Is there a point to reminding ourselves what those monsters did to the world? I don't have to remind you that the Nihilego weren't the worst of it." Gligirl stated in a sour tone.

"As you are no doubt aware, the person who filled this room was not only the first person who got their system filled with Nihilego venom and went mad. Had her madness was uncovered by two sets of siblings who sadly were the first four to die when the world really went to hell, Frax and Velvet Lono …"

At the moment the two's names were mentioned the conversation suddenly froze as MissingNo snapped his fingers. With another, different finger snap two kids about his current age appeared. Both had the same skin tone as Lilo, with similar black hair and singular bracelets like Lilo had. However after that they differed beyond simple age.

One was a boy, dressed a lot like how MissingNo was dressed, with the addition of blue shoes, a red hat, and a black and blue backpack. His eyes were gray, though the marks under his face were just as telling a sign of recent tendencies as eyes were. He was just a bit shorter than he was, but still rather tall.

The other was a girl, an inch or two shorter, but between the red eyes, dark hair, marks on her face, and in physique she probably would be able to raid Belladonna's closet in a year. Belladonna was one thing, but Ashley and now this third girl (Velvet), Ash was starting to suspect a pattern with girls who looked like him. She had flower earrings that looked like the sort of flowers that one sees in the tropics, red shoes, light green shorts, and a white tank top.

"Huh?" The girl spoke.

"What's going on?"

They promptly stared at Ash and MissingNo in Ash's form, and looked freaked out.

"Why do you look like us?" The girl demanded, reaching for a Pokéball. The girl's face morphed into shock as her hand went through the Pokéballs on her belt as if they weren't even there.

"Oops, did this too well it seems." MissingNo declared, looking genuinely surprised they were more than simple images.

They vanished at another finger snap, and time resumed. Ash could only wonder what they'd be thinking when they woke up.

"…and Lillie and Gladion…"

"Frax and Velvet, aren't they the same as Ketchum, Tyrian, Tajiri…." Latoya interrupted before the other two siblings could be given a surname.

"If you happen to remember your history, the history that both you and I lived in and later helped chronicle with the Clembots, you'll know that they didn't start it. They were the good guys in the Bloodline War, which didn't start nor climax the End of the World." Clemont snapped at Latoya, who scowled back at him.

While part of Ash was glad to see Clemont defend him from Latoya's disdain, another part of him was unnerved. Not just by Latoya talking about him like he was some sort of abomination, but the very term 'Bloodline War'. Also by the fact that Tyrian most likely meant Belladonna, assuming that her mother didn't escape from jail and decided to give him a hand for some reason.

What sort of thing would be called a 'Bloodline War', and what would warrant him actually wanting
and or keeping Belladonna's help?

And 'end of the world' was bad in all contexts.

"I know that some of the words they are using are a bit hard to context in your puny little minds."
MissingNo quipped as a transparent blank painting frame appeared between them and the four from the/a/was/something future.

A bit less transparent image formed between the frames. With a few quick sketches from a pencil that wasn't present a version of himself who was a few years older and in a version of his garb from Hoenn appeared on the left side of the image, posed and looking ready to attack someone.

More sketching and he was joined by Pikachu, Charizard, Pidgeot, Donphan, Torkoal, and several other Pokémon of his he had now and would (hopefully) get in the future. The only good thing he could say about the image was the fact that three of his Tauros were there with him, and Ash was going to be positive and assume the other 27 were left out for simplicity's sake.

The pencil resumed sketching, sketching in older versions of Misty, Iris, and Anabel with several of their Pokémon including Excadrill, Gyarados, Alakazam, and Psyduck. Psyduck was hiding behind Torkoal.

Others were on the side of the image, constantly being sketched into it. He recognized a few of them, Red and Yellow, Belladonna and her entourage, Ritchie, and many others who Ash didn't recognize, though many disturbingly resembled himself, Red, and Belladonna. One was standing atop a Steelix, another reminded him of the final Orange Island Gym Leader, a third dressed like a ninja with several other ninja following him with a lot of Froakie and what looked like evolutions of Froakie, a fourth was unusually short with a red scarf alongside a girl who eerily resembled Dawn. He however could tell that the girl only resembled his friend, she was not her. Not even from the differences in time or age, but someone else entirely.

A muscled, scary faced older fellow was also drawn. His hair was pink, and on his head was a scarf eerily similar to what was on Cameron. He was followed by more drawings of people Ash either vaguely or failed to recognize, including A.J and the Bellsprout girl for some reason.

After a few moments of what seemed like consideration Team Rocket's Balloon was sketched in on the same side as himself, with Weezing, Inkay, Dustox, and Carnivine spilling out of said balloon before the sketching began on the other side.

It drew dozens of others around his age in the drawing, many resembling him. The side also had ninjas, mirroring the ones on 'his' side. The sketching of them changed to a drawing of three identical figures garbed in black, then directly opposite his sketched self a much older figure was drawn, a crown on his head obscuring most of his face bar his glowing red eyes. Ash wasn't sure where, but he could swear he had seen this person somewhere before.

A few more sketches drew his attention however, as he saw something truly frightening in the hands of this man with a crown, clenched and crumpled in his hands were a pink hat with a black ribbon, and a red bandana with a white Pokéball on it.

He was quite familiar with both, and he didn't like the implications of it. Ash's fists clenched tightly, so tightly in fact that had this not been a dream world blood would've been drawn from where his fingernails gouged into his palms.

A quick series of sketches then appeared in the background, featuring Groudon and Kyogre with odd colors that Ash was rather sure wasn't their Shiny coloration, some sort of pale blue Pokémon
that looked like a jellyfish wearing a hat and a black cable like Pokémon with white hair sparking with electricity, an oddly pale looking Zekrom and Darkrai that reminded Ash far too much of the Mirage Incident, and a purplish-black Lugia. They looked like they were both attacking each other, and attacking the foreground.

However even as he was seeing this image of a supposed future (though in all honesty it looked more like a poster or comic book cover that Ash had no idea the meaning of), he could still heard Clemont and company.

"The problem is all those present here at the Aether Foundation died before they could properly examine this…collection…." Clemont sounded angrier than Ash had ever heard him when he spoke of it "…of Pokémon. They didn't know that all these Pokémon were dying before they were frozen. It's only being frozen that keeps them alive, and from what my tech can glimpse from what remains of the Aether servers they were like that before they came into Lusamine's possession. The moment we even try and get a drop of Infinity Energy from them they'd die."

"So what are you gettin' at? That Lusamine did so because that was the only way to sneak her delusions past the good men and women who worked here, and Faba, or that that the fact they'd die under current conditions if anything else was done to them was the only way she could rationalize it to herself to freeze living things into art pieces in her delirium?" Muscle woman offered as Latoya had a response.

"Does it matter, they don't have enough Infinite Energy to save the world either way and we're back to square one."

And with that sentence the dream was over and Ash was back in his room, Pikachu looking at him with a worried expression.

"So, I take it neither of us hallucinated that?" Ash hoped Pikachu would prove him wrong.

Pikachu's shaking head promptly disproved this hope.

…

Meanwhile in Alola two twin siblings woke up in the nurse's office of their school in Melemele Island, having passed out in the middle of class without warning.

Most unfortunately the brother had actually been feeling good about the test he had been going through at the time.

…..

"Black Pokémon with white top," Ash repeated to the Pokédex for the third time today.

The image showed the image of a Darkrai, which was not one of the Pokémon Ash was looking for.

"Darkrai, the Pitch-Black Pokémon. Darkrai spreads nightmares just by being in the area. Darkrai is the first Legendary Pokémon known to be used in a professional tournament…"

"Got any others?" Ash pressed.

"A Black Pokémon? Certainly. Though given your irritation I suspect you might want to narrow it down?" The Pokédex inquired as Ash frowned.

"The Pokémon I'm looking for, I'm pretty sure it's an Electric Type."
"A Black Electric Pokémon? Hmm….who's that Pokémon? Why, it's Zebstrika, the Thunderbolt Pokémon!"

"That's not it."

"Hmm….I have a hypothesis then, based on your illogical searches. You were hallucinating from a biological imbalance from a questionable food ingestion the previous meal. A simple mishap of your fleshy biology, as unavoidable for you as patch updates to my software are for me."

"I doubt it."

"Regardless you have a battle to win, so brush your teeth and consume biofuel."

....

If this tournament had been an English assignment, Ash was rather sure he'd have to explain foreshadowing in his essay today.

Because his life seemed to have been employing it.

"Ash? Ash Ketchum?" The blond girl challenging him, Aideen, gaped in surprise.

"Um, yeah?" He scratched the back of his head, rather embarrassed. The idea that they had slipped his mind entirely until Red brought them up was rather embarrassing.

He didn't really forget people that much. He was forgetful at times, even when Cyrus was minding his own business, but not that bad.

The blond boy next to her, Elwood as Ash was now recalling, shook his head.

"Same old Ash. Well, hard to believe we're meeting here of all places. But it is a match after all, let the best of us win."

"Yeah." Ash declared

"Begin!"

"Nidorina, go!" Aideen declared as she threw a Great Ball out. It burst open, revealing the blue Poison-type.

"Nidorina, the Poison Pin Pokémon. Female Nidoran evolve into this Pokémon. When this Pokémon is not relaxed, it is covered in poison thorns. Do not touch."

"Do not touch huh, so I need to keep a distance and be able to avoid….I choose you!" Ash declared.

"I am not a Porygon, I cannot fight this battle!"

The Pokédex said this moments before Ambipom landed on the field tail first, before spinning around and posing.

"...I was wrong....sometimes I forget you aren't a mad fool."

"Huh…don't see that every day." Elwood noted before throwing his own Pokéball out.
The Pokéball manifested into that of a Hitmonlee, who stretched his legs in prep for a lot of kicking.

"A Poison type and a Fighting type…” Red observed before releasing a Victreebel. The plant shrieked loudly, even as Ash could imagine James shrieking in fear.

Where were they today anyway, or yesterday for that matter? He could ask that question later when they eventually showed up to harass him.

"Poison Sting!” Nidorina opened her jaws wide as Elwood waved his hand.

"Helping Hand!” Hitmonlee closed his eyes as he began to glow yellow. The aura wafted over to Nidorina, whose jaw flashed yellow before a storm of massive sting attacks flew out towards Ambipom and Victreebel like a storm.

"Ambipom, Counter Shield!"

'Got it!' She jumped into the air and began spinning, even as Swift flew out. The stars collided into the poison stings, cancelling them out in a display that Ash felt with confidence could get him some points in a contest.

"Wow! What move combination was that?!!"

"No really, what was that?” Aideen echoed the MC.

"Something called a Counter Shield based on what he just shouted. We can talk about what it is exactly after we win. Jump Kick Hitmonlee!"

"Block it!"

Ambipom wasn't at a point to dodge it, and she knew it just as he did. She instead pushed her tails out like a shield to take the jumping attack.

As such, Ambipom was only knocked to the ground, and not into a wall.

"Aerial Ace!” Aideen ordered in support of her brother. As Hitmonlee landed Nidorina charged past the fighting type, limb glowing with white aerial energy.

"Vine Whip."

Victreebel's whip, one Ash had seen many times aimed at him, sped from Victreebel and wrapped itself around Nidorina's Aerial Ace hand.

"Now Slam!"

Nidorina was sent into the air by a rapid tug from Red's Pokémon, before being slammed into the ground.

Ash could feel the strength from that whack. He did not envy Nidorina.

"Nidorina!” Aideen exclaimed as Elwood continued the battle.

"This is why one doesn't just rush in sister. Hitmonlee, help Nidorina out with Rolling Kick!”

"Block with Double Hit!” Ash countered as Ambipom hopped into the air.

With glowing purple tails she landed between Hitmonlee and Nidorina before swinging them.
Hitmonlee countered with a glowing foot, and the moves collided once.

Then twice.

Then Hitmonlee struck Ambipom with his head. Ash wasn't sure of that was a Headbutt, but it did its job and knocked Ambipom back.

"You okay/Pi!?!"

"Am…” ’Sort of...’"

Before Hitmonlee could advance Nidorina was flung into him, sending both Pokémon tumbling back.

"Leaf Storm!"

Jumping in front of Ambipom, Victreebel's maw was a glow with a storm of leaves. The leaves were promptly blasted ahead, striking into Hitmonlee and Nidorina.

Nidorina growled, and Ash could see her stick claws into the ground to keep in place. Hitmonlee however was blown back and crashed into the wall next to his Trainer.

"Hitmonlee…” Elwood asked as the ref raised a flag.

"Hitmonlee is defeated."

"And with that, this is a two on one battle! Only Lilo managed to come back from this sort of fight yesterday folks, can this young lady mimic that comeback?"

"I can and I will." Aideen glared at Red. Ash was rather glad it wasn't being aimed at him.

"For my brother! Nidorina, Horn Drill!" Nidorina acknowledged the command as her front horn glowed white and elongated.

Victreebel tensed as the instant win move came right at it.

"Use Sweet Scent!" Victreebel spilled out a cloud of red smoke that filled the field in front of it like a fog machine.

Nidorina yowled before her energy horn began to spin. The Sweet Scent was blown away, and Ash could see Red's face form into shock.

"I have a Bellossom, I know how to counter that trick. Now, let's make this one on one!"

"Ambipom, throw Victreebel into the air!"

"Ai!" ’Got it!’ Ambipom shot her tails right under the grass type, before throwing up the bane of James's shirt budget.

The grass type flew, and Nidorina charged through the empty air. Ambipom hopped out of the way, as the Poison type stopped only after both Ambipom and Victreebel were behind her.

"Oh crap," Aideen declared.

"Victreebel/Ambipom, use Vine Whip/Power-Up Punch!"
Before Nidorina could move a glowing orange fist and a yellow vine shot forth and smacked her simultaneously. Nidorina was slammed into the ground with an oomph and a groan.

After five seconds the ref had a call.

"Nidorina is unable to battle, the winners are Red and Ash!"

---

**Meanwhile back in Saffron City**

The doll in white, with a large matching hat with a pink bow. The doll had blue hair, with a letter written out, ready to be sealed and sent.

It read 'Thank you for the Future'.

Sabrina eyed the doll with a frown, before waving her hand and sending the toy tumbling away.

"No, that would be just creepy, and it would probably cause the future boy to come here and try to stop me. Why make fixing the world harder than it needs to be anyway?" Without moving a muscle Sabrina spun around to look down upon the terrified Trainer she had obtained just a few moments ago with a teleporting Abra.

"It's people like you that do need to disappear."

"What on earth are you talking about you freak of nat…" The ponytailed ranch hand snarled before he shut up, a side effect of telekinetic force forcing his jaw shut.

"The world is being filled with the inadequate, the dull, and the lazy. Even as the remarkable do prove themselves, your kind crowds them out. No one can see the good artists from the average, the excellent cooks from the boring, the remarkable artist from the one who simply copies…I have felt their frustrations as sure as I have felt them myself."

"You are a prime example of what your kind does to the truly talented Dario. You had no remarkable skill at anything, you're driven on to produce inferior results, where better talented people could have easily been obtained if you weren't given your cushion of family blood. You couldn't even bother trying to fix yourself; you instead looked at actual talent around you, like Lara Laramie, and tried to bring her down to your level with trickery and sabotage. In trying to make yourself, a waste of space with no talent, look good, you made so many with actual skill and brains look bad. You cost them business, reputation, self-esteem, and caused actual injuries to themselves and the Pokémon they put more time into than you ever did yours. Yet, you can't even manage that, you failed and made yourself so exposed that no one will be surprised when they find your dead body in the water tomorrow. You were so pathetic you reacted the same in two timelines."

"What crazy are you talking!?!" Dario forced out before he was silenced again.

"The world doesn't need your kind filling it like trash. I'll admit I am new at this, as I am used to testing Trainers to see if they are truly worthy of survival. But you are not Trainer, and I have two sources that show that you aren't worthy. But you are the first, so perhaps I'll improve my technique in time."

With that note Sabrina snapped his neck with her power, causing the dead ranch hand to fall dead on the ground.
"...Well, that's one down, but plenty more still to go." Sabrina closed her eyes as she concentrated, reaching out with her telepathy. Like always her Pokémon added into her psychic field, extending it with their own until it reached to the mind of Ash Ketchum, the man of two lifetimes.

He was battling, and would not notice her taking another stroll through the memories of his first timeline.

It was filled with many unworthy souls.

"Hmm.....a so called magician? Well this will be satisfying to kill more of his ilk, even if he is one of the most pathetic I've ever seen...now let's find this Melvin and clean up his act. Permanently."
The Tag Tournament Part 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Vaniville Town**

"You won't be able to get back before Ash could use your help, correct?"

At her question, Pidgeot shook her head. They were the only ones out in the dark night, illuminated only by the full moon and the stars above.

The blond girl sighed, but stroked the beak of the bird affectionately. It was at that point she noticed that a letter was tied to the bird's leg, well fastened for a long trip.

"That's too bad. You won Ash that badge and managed to fly all the way out here to Kalos. You really are strong. It's amazing really, he always knew what he wanted to be and he's already so far on his way there, and I still don't know what I want to do with my life."

Pidgeot let out a reassuring chirp, before flapping her wings and taking off into the sky above.

As she flew away a single brown and white feather fluttered back down to her, which Serena caught in hand and examined it.

The pale white under feather was beautiful, the quill felt strong and sturdy. She could see why people always wrote with them in old documentaries about ancient times.

"I wonder what he'll write back. I do hope he answers my questions about his cousin," Serena mumbled to herself as she fingered the feather around.

It was something she noticed back at the Battle Dome competition but it really stood out at this one, Red and Ash really looked alike.

Ash didn't have siblings, so he had to be a cousin right?

Her mother agreed with her when she brought this up, after making a joke about Red being what Ash would look like if he was a classic movie character rebooted by modern Hollywood.

At least if that was the case she didn't have to worry about Red invading her dreams then. Angst was something Serena did not find attractive at all. Her dreams belonged to Ash and Ash alone…

Blushing at the thoughts of said dreams, Serena walked right into the wall a few feet away from the door, dropping the feather and muttering in pain.

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**Back at Fuchsia City: Round 2 Battle 2**

"Hmph. That Red isn't half bad, is he?"

His partner's comment made one of Gary's nerves twitch irritably as they walked to the battle field for their round 2 fight.
'Red isn't half bad' was an understatement. Even if Gary knew he would beat the guy someday, he would never say that Red was unskilled. Saying he wasn't would be an insult to his own skills.

He had never understood that trope. Unless you were able to defeat someone, and do so easily, suggesting their power is nothing made you look either like less than nothing, or just about nothing.

"Yeah, he's pretty good." Gary agreed, leaving out certain bits of information he didn't feel like sharing.

"I can see where all the talent went in the family."

Gary wasn't sure what his face looked like but his partner was giving him a mild scowl.

"What, are you dense? That Red kid looks like Ketchum. Heck if his last name was Ketchum, I'd be telling you that they are twin brothers or something. They must just be cousins or something."

Not possible. Ash's mother was an only child. He wasn't sure if her parents had siblings (or siblings who survived to have kids).

Still now that Paul pointed it out... he could see it. Red did sort of look like Ash, more so the more he looked at him.

He just hadn't noticed it before. Ash talked enough that Red's general silence obscured their similar looks like a giant hat obscuring his face.

But if Ash had no cousins, what did that make Red? Did someone clone Ash...

Gary resisted the urge to hit himself for thinking that. Why would anyone want to clone Ash? For that matter Gary was rather sure that cloning was impossible. If there were clones running around right now someone would know about it, and people would be complaining about it on Vulpix News at the very least.

It had a rational explanation, like maybe Red just happened to inexplicably look like Ash in a multitude of ways.

Or maybe Ash's father cheated on Red's mom with Ash's mom. That was certainly possible.

Either was likely, one just gave him a name to the face he'd punch one day. Mr. Tajiri.

Still didn't explain the little girl who followed Red around all the time. Those marks on her face didn't look like Ash's, did they?

"Round 2 of day 2 of our tournament will now begin! Trainers, choose your Pokémon! Septimus will have the first Pokémon!"

He stopped his mental comparison of birthmarks (?) as the round was starting.

"Go, Haku!" A somewhat tanned looking kid yelled in a Hoennese accent. The ball burst open revealing the Pokémon nicknamed Haku.

"Gyara!"

And it was a Gyarados snarling at everything. Well, that scared off all thoughts of Ash and Red right quick.

"Raichu, stand by for battle!" Paul responded second. The ball burst open, revealing a female
equivalent to the ace of Lt. Surge.

She saw the Gyarados and flinched in fear.

"You have the advantage, remember that!" Paul told her. Gary couldn't put his finger on it, but something about the tone Paul used rubbed him the wrong way.

"A Raichu huh... Cubone go!" The female Trainer, a girl who looked preppy for lack of a better word with really long legs, threw out a Pokéball that burst open to reveal the ground type.

"Exeggcute, go!" Gary sent out his Pokémon of choice for this battle. The pink multi part Grass-type spilled out, ready to get a crack at them.

"Begin!"

"Use Hyper Beam Haku!" Septimus shouted. Gyarados began charging massive energy before it's gaping maw. Several babies cried out in fear in the audience.

"Use Thunderbolt!" Paul was quick to counter. Raichu began to glow yellow and sent the bolt flying, only for the attack to bend and fly right into a motionless Cubone.

"Lightning Rod!"

"Most certainly." The girl grinned a sinister grin as the Hyper Beam neared completion.

"Sleep Powder!" Gary called to counter. Exeggcute bounced up and down as a green powder flew towards the leviathan. The powder was sucked up due to the charging, and Gyarados began to grow drowsy. The Hyper beam began to loosen, bits of energy dissipating off the sides.

Gyarados then collapsed to the ground, right towards Exeggcute and Raichu.

"Yeah, use Slam Haku!" Septimus convinced no one that this was planned. Also Gyarados could not use Slam.

Body Slam yes, but not Slam itself.

"Dodge it!"

"Use Dig!"

Gary's command led his Exeggcute split up into parts, rolling away from the center like pool balls. Raichu meanwhile burrowed into the earth. The end result was the same, as a sleeping Leviathan cut the field in half and the girl was looking rather smug now.

"Split up like that, an Exeggcute isn't nearly as tough. Cubone, Stomping Tantrum!"

Cubone, flailing around like Gary did when he was five, charged to the left of Gyarados. The bone slammed into one, two, then three parts of his Exeggcute set, sending them flying towards the sleeping Gyarados.

They slammed against it for minimal, if at all, damage. They then bounced back towards toward Cubone, who continued to Tantrum.

"The application of same attack boosted power with repeated use and minor pain stimulation to awaken a sleeping comrade. I hope you enjoy my self-taught skills," the girl declared as Septimus eyed her with a frown.
"If you knock Haku out, I'm going to show you that a fancy education doesn't mean squat in the real world with Hound, Azul, and..." The girl held up a hand to silence him.

"Oh I am well aware of that. I was given a rather rude wakeup call about that a while back." She grinned darkly as she noted the earth behind Cubone begin to crack.

"Cubone, let's play whack-a-mole with that overgrown mouse shall we? It's not quite a Pikachu, but it will be good practice..."

"Cu!"

Raichu burst out of the earth to use the second part of Dig, only to get backhanded by a Stomping Tantrum swing. Raichu was sent into the air, spinning a few times, before landing near the edge of the arena with a whomp.

Paul growled at the sight of that. Oddly Gary felt like the growl wasn't coming from where the attack had come from, as anger at their partner's injuries often were. Gary wasn't sure what the guy was glaring it. It couldn't be Raichu right?

However he did notice that his three non-whacked Exeggcute seeds had just gotten on top of Gyarados.

"Okay, counterattack time! Use Energy Ball, then Dream Eater!"

Hopping into the air to join the less damaged ones, Exeggcute formed a green sphere above them. The sphere was sent flying towards Cubone, who took the hit head on and was pushed back towards Raichu.

The seeds then hopped over towards Gyarados' crest and began glowing red, a glow that began to cover Gyarados.

"And with that Cubone is on the ropes and Gyarados' energy is being drained! Can Team Septimus and Giselle make a comeback?"

"Brick Break!"

"Block it with Brick Break as well!"

Paul and Giselle's commands collided as two glowing fists collided in a matching exchange of force. The red aura draining Gyarados flickered away as the beast's eyes opened wide. It roared a yawn that spilled many condiments in the stands, before shaking and knocking Exeggcute off.

"Waterfall!"

Water began to circle around Gyarados, forming into a powerful water barrier that expanded out and pushed the Exeggcute further apart. Three rolled towards Cubone and Raichu, the other three away from Gyarados and any other Pokémon.

"Quick Attack!"

"Bide!"

The speedy attack from Raichu set off just after the latest Brick Break clash, sending the glowing Cubone flying back. The red glow intensified from the impact, and then flared up a smidge after two of his Exeggcute rolled into it.
"Iron Tail and Quick Attack are sealed," she declared smugly.

"Not really a problem. Dig," Paul declared. Raichu dug into the ground as the charging glow flared up.

An explosive white aura blew out from Cubone, sending the Exeggcute around it flying into the air.

"Guess it was time to flip those eggs!" The announcer made a terrible pun.

"Exeggcute, Sleep Powder!" From above the three lost eggs began leaking powder. The three far from Gyarados did so as well.

"Not again!" Septimus complained.

"I don't think so, Cubone use Pro..."

"Rai!"

Raichu popped up from right beneath Cubone, sending the thing into the air and right into the sleep powder. Gyarados also got another whiff of the stuff.

End result, two plopped down Pokémon falling from intense heights.

Crack!

"Cubone is unable to battle!" the ref declared amidst a lot of cringing and worry.

"No!" Giselle exclaimed at the sound.

Make that one. Gary was somewhat glad to see that the bone that went crack was Cubone's bone arm from the fall, and not a neck or spine. He never thought he'd be so happy to see a crooked arm.

As she returned the Cubone she glared at him. Gary responded with flailing arms even as his Exeggcute landed on Gyarados and hopped back over to the others, reuniting.

"Sorry, that wasn't intentional. I didn't mean to break..."

"Thunderbolt!"

At Giselle's gasp and his shock, Paul lit up Gyarados like a lightbulb.

"Hey man, what's that all about! There is a little something called common courtesy. Waiting a few moments after breaking an arm is..."

"Gyarados is unable to battle! The winners are Paul and Gary!"

"...A waste of time when the opponent is distracted." Paul declared as he returned Raichu. He eyed the ball for a moment, before turning around and walking away even before Septimus returned Gyarados.

Gary watched him walk away even as he felt his Exeggcute roll over to his leg. The crowd was murmuring, and it wasn't in excitement and frenzied passion.

"... Who in the world am I partnered with?"

"Ex." He was sure Exeggcute had an answer if only he could hear it.
As Lilo's Crabrawler beat up an opponent's Lickitung, Red was more focused on holding Ash's Pokédex up to the Pokémon.

Yellow mentioned that he had already fought the fighting type, so he didn't need to observe it that closely. He seemed more interested in gaining information on the species in general.

"Crabrawler, the Boxing Pokémon. Crabrawler constantly punch each other in competition for 'the high ground', and are known for climbing things to achieve a valuable elevated point. Crabrawler arms that fall off will grow back within a week, and the limbs they do lose are delicious."

"I…. could have gone my life without that information." Ash felt his face flush green. He could have gone his life without the image of arms falling of Pokémon that, somehow, led him to imagine Team Rocket popping out of nowhere and chewing on it.

"It was once common place for sea farers to restock on food in Alola by plucking arms off Crabrawler. A king of the Kamehameha line beheaded several explorers to get the idea across that they didn't approve of it," the Pokédex quipped. "Legend says that the mother of that king, a Queen Acerola the 7th, beat an explorer to death with a Crabrawler arm he was about to eat, which is generally believed where he got his strong views on it from."

"…. Charming," Red quipped.

"They had a beautiful painting of the scene made in neo-classical Alolan. It currently hangs in the Lilicove Museum of Art after one of the now former royal family sold it. The current heir, an Acerola who doesn't bother with a pretentious numerical designation, has no desire to reclaim it, though there are politicians in Alola who make a stink about it. But enough on art history. If you are curious about any other Pokémon this Lilo is known to have, do offer up names. I feel like accessing new information."

"Alolan Exeggutor and Mudsdale," Red stated.

"What about Komala?" Yellow, a cotton candy stick in hand, questioned. Red shrugged.

"I doubt that Komala will be used to battle. It seemed like a pet more than anything." Yet that still didn't tell Ash what exactly a Komala was. He'd check the Pokédex for it later.

'Alolan Exeggutor?' Anabel expressed her confusion on that title to Ash, a confusion he shared. What did that suggest, that Alolan ones were different?

The Pokédex showed an Exeggutor, then split its screen in half to show a second one. One that was….

"What!?" Ash exclaimed as he saw the long necked something that looked like an Exeggutor.

'That is…something.' Anabel declared.

"Told you," Yellow quipped mid cotton candy bite. She had said something about a strange Exeggutor earlier, didn't she?

"Exeggutor's Alolan Form. Exeggutor's height grew due to the extensive sunlight available to
it in the tropical Alolan Region. Due to the low amount of Ice Pokémon in the region, Exeggutor developed into a Grass-Dragon type. Alolans proudly declare that this is what an Exeggutor is meant to look like."

'Huh? It lost its Psychic type? How did that work? What benefit does giving up the ability to levitate things with one's mind provide?' Anabel sounded immensely confused about the whole thing.

"So, does that mean that if you keep Exeggcute under a lamp and hide your refrigerators they'll turn into dragons?" Ash questioned the Pokédex.

"Negative. That would not lead to a 'True Exeggutor' as Alolans call them."

If that was a true Exeggutor, Ash didn't see the problem with false Exeggutor. True several once hypnotized him, but Ash didn't carry a grudge.

They also didn't look like they could get blown over by strong gust of winds, unlike the 'genuine article'.

"Finally, Mudsdale." The Grass-types vanished for the massive four-legged Pokémon.

"Mudsdale, the Draft Horse Pokémon. Mudsdale are powerful and immensely heavy work Pokémon used by Alolan farmers. They do not move fast, but even laden with ten tons of supplies they can pull for three days and nights without rest. They are a pure Ground-type, and evolved from Mudbray."

"...I didn't get a chance to fight this one," Red noted as he clicked a few buttons on the Pokédex to look at data Ash rarely looked at: weight, height, possible moves it could use, etc. Ash wasn't sure what anything but the moves would be good for, but if Red wanted to poke and prod at the Pokédex it was his choice.

"Winner!" Down below Lilo had taken the match.

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_**Later**_

"All I'm saying is I think we could use some practice together."

Paul gave Gary a long look of unamusement.

"And why should I do that? All that would do is slow down my own training to accommodate you. Believe me when I say that there are some who really can't afford to be hampered trying to dumb it down for you."

"Because next round we could go up against Red or that Alolan woman, and we should actually have a plan."

"We do have a plan," Paul deadpanned.

"Win?"

"Not exactly. See, the plan is I'll carry us through while you put in a minuscule amount of effort so you can tell your mommy that you helped."
Paul was as deadpan in his response as he was in catching the fist that Gary flung at his face.

"What's that supposed to mean!? My Exeggcute didn't exactly do nothing in our last fight, and unlike you I have six badges!"

"Sure, they actually performed acceptably, but what did your Growlithe do for us in the first round? And I've seen your six badges. Ignoring the fact one of your badges is a Cascade Badge that still doesn't answer why I, someone with just four badges, am outperforming someone with five badges and a consolation prize!!?"

Gary hadn't returned to the Pokémon Center or the nearby Don George Battle Club since. He really, really did not want to deal with that guy right now.

He'd have to tomorrow, but tomorrow was another day. Maybe if he was lucky Paul would wake up on the right side of the bed and be more agreeable.

Or at least less of an...

GRUMBLE GRUMBLE

Oh yeah, food. He should eat something. The Pokémon Center was a no go for now, it would appear he was going to be eating out tonight.

"I have funds, right?" Gary asked the Pokédex.

"You do sire. You are more than capable of affording a meal tonight, with a tip."

"Good, now where's a restaurant around here that doesn't serve barbecue."

It was with his sister's special barbecue rib rub, or not at all in his book. When he got back he really needed to get her to teach him the recipe.

Five minutes later and he found a nice eatery of diverse products. Pasta, steak, burgers, the works.

However, pouring out of it was a lengthy line of individuals, families, and more than a few Trainers. He even saw that man, woman, and Meowth he met in Viridian Forest in line. All of them had a palpable aura to them of 'I really am annoyed at this line'.

There was also a green tracksuit-wearing blond youth sitting at the base of a motor bike playing a guitar right next to the line. He was wearing a silly hat that might look appropriate around the holiday season, but not now.

"... The entire place is backed up." Ceasing his guitar playing the green fellow answered his unspoken question. The song seemed to have reached a natural point, so it didn't anger any of the line waiters any more than the wait already did.

"Any idea why?" Gary asked.

"I have no idea. I'm just a traveling bard who occasionally plays for free when it's moral to do so. All I know is that it's a Monday, so it's either this place or the barbecue shacks."

Sighing Gary got in line, though the bard held up a golden triangular guitar pick his way.

"If you're stuck, got any requests? The rest of the line already did one each, though if you could avoid asking for Bink's Sake or Bink's Brew I'd appreciate it. I love the tune, either the Hoenn or Unovan versions, but I've done in a few times already tonight."
"... Do you do the blues?"

Without a word, the bard began to play.

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*HopHopHop Town*

Yawning as she foraged in the fridge, Anna noted what was there and what wasn't idly, her pillow already calling her in one ear to join it for the night.

"We have milk, just enough butter for tomorrow, could use more orange juice, now where did I put that aspar… ah there you are, asparagus."

It was the end of the day. School was done, shopping was done, the legal process of adopting Laila was moving on along faster than she expected, and all the other little things of her life.

Before putting Arnold and Laila off to bed, they had caught more of that tournament, and the two boys from the Battle Dome tournament.

The two who looked just like her son, just a few years older and with Pikachu on their shoulders.

She was still curious about that. Arnold's father had been in her life for less than 24 hours, was it the same with their mothers as well, or did the father stay with one of them?

She was in no place to ask of course. It would be incredibly rude and awkward to hunt one of them down and demand answers. Perhaps if one of them ever saw Arnold and asked…but what were the chances of that?

Anna closed the fridge door and turned in the direction of her pillow, only to find a very different set of pillows in her way.

Someone very tall, and with rather large breasts it would seem, if one would excuse her blue humor.

She stepped back from the person who had been hidden by her fridge door and got a better look at her. Really tall, black hair with green strands at the front, Z-face marks, female obviously….

The woman looked at her with red eyes, quite familiar ones really. Arnold's father had the same eyes.

"Your son, his name is Arnold correct?" she asked in a deeper tone than most women.

Anna nodded.

The woman held a hand up to her as if she was about to karate chop her in the face. Said chop hand glowed purple, much like a Poison Jab attack.

Anna was rather sure that it was in fact what it was.

"Can he do something like this?"

"Do you mean 'is he a Bloodliner'? Yes, he is," Anna stated, feeling a bit surprised. This woman who looked like her son and his father, was a Bloodliner too?

Did that mean Arnold's father was one too? Who was this woman to him then, his sister? An older niece and thus…. whatever it was a father's niece was to a son?
Though she was surprised that this woman's bloodline wasn't the one her son had.

Her hand turned back to normal as she bent over to look her in face. Anna noted the woman's face, despite her height, felt younger than what she was expecting. Was she overestimating her age?

The woman's (Girl's? Young woman's?) eyes glowed orange-brown as she spoke next.

"Have your son's eyes ever flashed a color like this?"

"Yes. Once." Anna felt the answer fly out of her like a Pidgey flying the coop.

The female whose age Anna wasn't sure of anymore resumed her full height and was now beaming, her eyes back to red.

"Then he must be…. yes, he really is another brother of mine!"

What? Brother, not nephew or cousin or….

The girl suddenly grasped her hand, bending over and giving her a look of unyielding excitement that felt more at home on Arnold's face if they found a cookie based amusement park than the girl who had been asking her serious questions just moments ago. It honestly made her seem even younger and further confused her on just how old she was supposed to be.

"Tell me everything. I want to know all about him!"

This was weird. Still Anna doubted that she could make her go away, and it was either her answering the questions, or this girl would break into her son's room and wake him up to do so.

Even ignoring the Bloodliner part of the equation she didn't have any of her Pokéballs on hand and this girl was bigger than she was in more ways than just tracts of land. So, she couldn't force her way out, and reaching for a phone would probably end badly.

So, talking was the only option. At the very least it might let Anna figure out just how old she actually was, or at least satisfy her long enough for her to leave for long enough for Anna to finally get that security system that James Sandin from down the street peddled.

"Well let me see, Arnold was born on April 18th….

…..

"…. after that we were briefly questioned by the police. They still haven't captured those Team Rocket grunts, but that really hasn't affected our lives outside of political ads on the television I mute." Anna finished as the girl, whose name she had gotten during the conversation as Belladonna, nodded.

Girl. Anna could not believe this girl was sixteen. She knew well grown men who were shorter than her.

That did explain why Arnold had such big feet. This girl looked a lot like both Arnold and his father, and both Belladonna and their father were quite tall. She was a few inches shorter than he was actually, if her memory served.

Mrs. Figg was right, Arnold's puberty was going to be hell on the clothing budget. Great, she admitted the old woman was right. Was she obligated to adopt one of her Meowth kittens now?

"Well, thank you. I really do appreciate hearing all about him. Pity he has that big test tomorrow:
Aurora wouldn't like it if I made a kid fail one of those stupid government tests."

"Yes, it would be bad, wouldn't it?" She lied. There were tests tomorrow true, but Arnold had a breathing day then before they threw him back to the grinder. She just would prefer her son not be woken up by this girl.

She wasn't nasty or psychotic and she was quite sure there would be no stabbing or burning or such morbid thing, but something was clearly off with her. Her moods swung rapidly and she had some...words about regular people she'd prefer Arnold not imitate.

She didn't like Team Rocket, but Belladonna had said things about their actions that made her feel bad for Team Rocket and worry about their safety if she ever ran into them. That was a really rare sentence for her to think about, and she'd prefer to not think it again.

Belladonna turned towards the door when a wave of guilt swept through Anna.

She didn't like lying, even if it was to protect her son from a bad influence. For someone who broke into her home and ambushed her with questions the girl had been more polite than what was typically warranted in break-ins.

The fact she didn't do so to steal was also eating at her a bit. The girl did seem to be mostly curious about Arnold, her possible brother, which was hardly a crime.

There had to be something she could do to make up for the lie. But what she could offer was…

Wait that was an option!

"You didn't mention anything about your father. Did your mother ever talk about him?" Anna prompted the guilt absolving question. Belladonna stopped walking out before looking back at her with an expression of interest.

Hook, line, and guilt resolution was now to commence.

"Let's see…I met him thirteen years ago or so. It was a hot July night, and I was out at a night club. Sadly, it's closed down now, but I had fond memories there. The Indigo-Go's, Love Händel… well doesn't that make me sound old."

"Yes, yes it does." Belladonna confirmed. Love Händel was long broken up after all.

"He was a tall fellow, as I am sure you might have guessed. Taller than you, which I guess is a rare thing for you to hear these days. I can sort of half remember through the party buzz of a height contest that he won during it. At least two meters I think it was, six foot six or seven inches…some measurement like that. He was pretty muscular too, pale skin…"

She struggled to try and bring up a certain important detail of the human form for a moment before giving up.

"…. His hair color keeps escaping me, but I know it wasn't blond or red. His eyes were red, that I remember, and he had a faint accent. An Orrean accent to be specific."

"Orrean?" Belladonna sounded surprised to hear that.

"Yes. Orrean."

"As in the region filled with crime and sand?"
"Also, old people. A lot of old people." Old people can be really crazy when it comes to avoiding taxes. They will move to barely hospitable places to avoid paying for roads and schools. She couldn't really understand the reason for it. It seemed like more trouble than what it saved them.

"So, let me guess, after flirting under a festivity high you two darted off somewhere and five minutes later he was out like a light." Belladonna assumed dryly. The tone suggested she had little faith in the male capabilities, or at least her father's.

Anna blushed, not believing she was going to have to explain such details to a living soul. She thought she'd just have to see if she could remember.

She was going to have to…. well the girl was older than Arnold. She did open herself up for this one.

"Oh no, oh no no no. He wasn't my first or the last person I have shared a pleasurable night with, even if I've never found a relationship that would last afterwards. However, he was most definitely the most physically pleasurable lover I have ever had. Five minutes you say, oh no he was a lot longer than that."

You asked for it with that comment, Belladonna. Oddly enough the girl's mortified look had a different tinge to it than just an 'I could have lived my life without knowing my father was the real-life version of a trashy bodice-novel male protagonist' manner. Was she having an 'I inherited that from him' moment or something? Anna wouldn't pry but she supposed that would be a tad unsettling to find out. She might be sharing bits of her sex life, but Belladonna's business was entirely her own. Even if she was having a 'I inherited that from him!' moment.

She'd skip over describing the night in vivid detail then.

"Of course, I did say he was just the most 'physically' pleasing man I've ever been with. Believe me when I say that he was, in fact, the most physically pleasing men I've ever been with. However, there was something missing from the entire thing the more I look back on it. It lacked a…spark…I suppose you'd call it, a spark I had with other people who I felt could I have definitely had a future with if not for work transfers or death."

Pity too. Arnold had liked both of them and they had both been interested in being his step-father. Sadly, the one who moved got transferred to a miserable place that he had adamantly requested she not follow him to (Tiksi Branch was horrible she had heard and he agreed both before and after the frostbite and rock slide combination).

"I'm sorry to hear that," Belladonna stated in response to Anna's failed love attempts since her 'encounter' with hers and Arnold's father. She did seem a bit less mortified looking now, particularly after the spark of legitimate feelings were mentioned to have been lacking.

Was that something she had with whoever she was with? Good for her then: emotional connections made it all the better.

"Well that's about it. Unless you want me to…"

"I'm good, I'm good. Thanks. Orrean huh...." She muttered to herself as she once more moved towards leaving.
"Ash, I am not sure you are aware of the good news I have for you."

"You figured out what that Pokémon was I saw in my dream?" Ash asked the device drowsily.

"Or, did Misty and Iris get an opponent yesterday that was actually, as Iris yawned…. a good battle…." Their battle after Lilo's had been a quick victory yesterday.

"Negative. Instead I hacked into the Verich Shipping Companies data files."

Ash failed to see how that was a good thing. Unless that Pokémon he saw was the 'Prison Warden' Pokémon of course. Or maybe the 'Prison Escape' Pokémon, given that Prison Wardens wouldn't do him much good in such a situation.

"The Verich Shipping Company is infamous in the Pokéball community for discovering an item transport glitch that created duplicate Pokéballs. No one is quite sure how, and they have yet to fully duplicate it and it is common knowledge showing off how the process is done openly would warrant action by major corporations both legally and illegally against the glitch. Only now have they had some luck with duplicating it in a manner, if only with Safari Balls."

"I think that violates the laws of physics," Ash pointed out.

"Pokémon routinely do so as well, what's your point?" Ash had to nod in agreement. "Anyway, I have managed to successfully isolate and duplicate the Pokéball duplication process where a thousand humans have failed, have formatted the glitch into a proper program, and am now in the process of installing said program into the H.O.P.E gloves. You will soon have the power of unlimited Pokéball supply, as well as the one called Gary Oak. He'll have to figure out that he has the program though, his Pokédex is a bore who had a personality that doesn't want me to upload a new personality to itself."

"Really…." The vision of such a concept as infinite Pokéballs flickered in Ash's mind for a moment, before he was brought back to reality.

"Is that legal?"

"It is as legal as it makes sense to traditional sciences. Just don't sell the balls created, and you should be fine. Verich Shipping normally sells the balls to several companies including Venus Entertainment and the Gorigan Engineering Firm in the Orre Region, where Pokéballs are less well stocked than in Kanto. They are legal to use, at least in Orre, but not to sell. But don't think about that: you will soon have unlimited Poké, Quick, Timer, Premier, Nest, Heal, Nest, Luxury, and Great Balls thanks to your escapades on the St. Anne."

Yawning at the revelation that was interesting but, at the moment, not all that important Ash rested his head on the pillow. He had sleep to get back to.

"In less important news, a message has come in from Gardevoir via Probopass electromagnetism. I am currently doing further research on the topic, so wake up and take in the information. However, do note I will be recording it for later use."

The Pokédex's statement woke Ash from slumber, even as he reached for the device and held it up to
"...I still don't get how that works," Ash tiredly muttered. Pikachu stirred and unsteadily stared at the device, not appreciating the wakeup call, before yawning a 'tell me in the actual morning' and plopping back down on the pillow on his side of the bed.

"I could explain the details, but I don't feel like it right now so for now just say I did it with multimodal reflection sorting. Humans like that term right? Anyway, she found another one."

The Pokédex screen glowed, revealing a blue-haired Trainer with red eyes and marks on his cheeks. Either because the Pokédex added them or he hallucinated them to be absent before a pair of scale marks rose up on either side of the guy with the two common units of measure on either side. This only served to comment that this guy was tall.

"Cleff Matsuoka. Age 16. Born in a village found on the route between Violet and Écruteak Cities, and yes there is a route that does so. His paternal parentage is unknown, his maternal parentage is traceable many generations to the area, where her earliest known ancestor was a soldier in a battle between the Charific Kingdom and the Warlord of the Golden Crobat."

"The Golden Crobat?" Ash muttered. He met a Golden Sudowoodo once, right? Was it that sort of thing? He was pretty sure the Sudowoodo got that way because of science, and science and 'many generations ago' did not mix.

"The soldier is recorded to have been present for the confrontation between a Mega Charizard and a Crobat that absorbed light and turned to gold during the climax of the war. And yes, I have updated my Mega Evolution information since then, so I can tell you all about Mega Charizard."

"Yawn…. maybe later."

"Very well. Cleff started his Pokémon Journey a year before you did. His starter was a Sentret that records suggest was provided by a school teacher of his. His registered Pokémon currently are a Furret, a Politoed, a Misdreavus, a Wigglytuff, a Sunflora, and a Machoke. While further research on the origin of the first additional four Pokémon is needed, the Machoke was obtained between his first and second battle with the Olivine Gym Leader, suggesting…"

"Fighting-types super effective," Ash mumbled as the Pokédex let out a party streamer sound effect.

"He can be taught! The Machoke increased his battle efficiency in his rematch by 14%, allowing him to avoid the close loss of the previous attempt, just to inform you on that extraneous detail. He placed Top 8 in his first League Conference and is known to be planning to enter the next iteration for the Silver Conference. His financial information suggests he used his money from the conference to buy several acres of land in the Violet City countryside. The terrain was cheap for being fairly remote from major roads and other elements of value."

"He used his prize money, to buy a house?" Ash wanted to check he heard that right. That was just.... well he'd have never thought of buying a house first thing. Did the guy dream of owning his own or something?

"Land for a house, and products to make a house with his own hands, but yes, he did buy a house with his prize money," the Pokédex clarified.
That information caused the blue haired lookalike of him as visualized in his mind to start whistling while whacking a log with a mallet. Ash was pretty sure you didn't build a house like that, and his mind was too tired to consider any other way of doing it.

"There is something else. Gardevoir's observations have determined that he shares an unusual behavior quirk with Belladonna Tyrian."

"He murdered people and stole material to build his house?" Ash paled. He did not another criminal potential relative. Particularly one who stole and killed over welcome mats, tea kettles, and good picture frames.

"No. The other unusual behavioral quirk done by Belladonna Tyrian."

"Mood swings?" It wasn't genetic, was it? That would be worrying.

"The other, other unusual behavior quirk done by Belladonna Tyrian."

Ash tried to figure out what else there was, before his mouth hung open.

"You have got to be kidding me."

"Given human and thus Bloodliner emotions, the fact that Gardevoir observed him give the three girls kisses in view of each other without flare ups of jealousy, anger, or murderous intent suggests that this was not human infidelity at play. Gardevoir was unable to get information on if Cleff and the girls who live with him are sexually active with each other beyond sharing the same bed, but she would be willing to stay in the area and see if…"

"I don't need to know that," Ash quickly cut the device off.

"Very well. I'll transmit back to Probopass that such information is unnecessary. Hang on… I've just hacked into previous records of Cleff's travels and thus can provide some information on the girls he's living with. Chouko, last name currently unknown, is first recorded prior to his trip through Ilex Forest, Shinju Sekigan who was first recorded in tandem with Cleff in the ferry systems between the Whirl Islands and Cianwood City, and Charlotte Match, a daughter of an immigrant who is first recorded in the outskirts of Mahogany Town around the time a fire burned a local Pokémart."

"...Are they bloodliners?" Ash asked in one last attempt to see if he might just escape this without…

"Gardevoir saw Charlotte spit fire at a Beedrill swarm. You don't gain the ability to do that after eating curry."

.... Maybe Tamato curry could, but Ash somehow doubted that was the case here. But escape impossible, he'd have to ask the question.

"How probable is it that two people, who may or may not be related to me, are polygon…poliwhi…. polygomo… whatever I'm trying to say, with multiple bloodliners?"

"And be a bloodliner himself. I forgot to mention that Gardevoir saw him perform the Sing attack to deal with a Ursaring two days prior to this message. As to your question…it is highly improbable."

Lying his head back on the pillow, Ash had one more question before he went back to sleep.
"Is this going to be a thing that keeps happening?"

"The data is insufficient at the present time to determine a response to your quite unspecific question. Ask me again after we reduce the margin of error and you can make your question more specific."

….

"Ash Ketchum and Red Tajiri vs Tim Mortis and Mike, begin!"

Red wondered why this Mike fellow didn't give a name, but that wasn't really important.

"Ninetales, I choose you!" Mike, a Trainer who looked like should be in one of his mother's old historical films about Unovan Mafia types, shouted, throwing a Luxury ball forth and releasing the many tailed fox. Rays of light intensified as it appeared on the field.

"Ninetales, the Fox Pokémon. A trick to remembering this Pokémon's exact spelling is the fact that there are nine prominent tall tales of what will happen if you touch its tails. It occasionally amplified sunlight."

"Yeah, it does. It's like Sunny Day was used." Ash noted, apparently unfamiliar with the Drought ability. Then again it was rare to see that ability, so Red didn't hold it against him.

"You know, I really wanted to use Squirtle, but this is as good a time as any. Charizard, go!"

Red felt his eyes widen slightly as the fully evolved Charmander appeared on the field with a massive roar.

That was….an interesting move. Fire with fire. He could understand that. He knew he felt more energetic under this intense…

"Misdreavus, go!"

The younger partner threw out a Great Ball that burst out into a floating specter that looked feminine.

"Misdreavus, the Screech Pokémon. Misdreavus are rarely found in western Kanto and eastern Johto, though they are somewhat more common in the Sinnoh region. They like to pull people's hair and are generally a nuisance." The Pokédex gave information that he never knew on this Pokémon, though Red would appreciate move pools and strengths and weaknesses personally.

But beggars couldn't be choosers. Though Red did wish he had a Pokédex of his own.

Red did have a Haunter, but its ball was currently inactive and in Yellow's bag. He wouldn't be able to use her today.

He did have a solution though.

"Persian, go!"

The sleek white cat Pokémon would have sufficient ability to handle the ghost Pokémon that was Misdreavus.

"Persian, the Classy Cat Pokémon. Persian are irritable and claw happy Pokémon, though they are oddly fond of criminal men and elderly women. They have a unique form in the Alola
They did? Were their legs massive stilt structures that went higher than he was tall? Did they have massive canine fangs?

He’d ask after they take this win.

"Flamethrower!"

Ash and Mike shouted in tandem as their two Pokémon's flames collided. Charizard's looked more intense and powerful from Red's point of view, but the Ninetales' Flamethrower moved faster.

The impact was at an angle favoring the weaker Ninetales flame, cancelling both out. Red had the suspicion that the resulting smoke cloud would be used to launch a…

"Misdreavus, Shadow Ball!"

He was correct it seemed.

"Persian, use Bite right through the Shadow Ball!"

With a loud meow Persian charged into the attack. The black ball disintegrated the moment it hit Persian's white fur, allowing the fast feline to speed right towards its source.

The cry of the Misdreavus was confirmation of impact.

"Misdreavus!"

"Not so fast little boy! Solarbeam, Ninetales!"

Mafia man's commanded move fired even faster than the Flamethrower if Red's ears were working correctly. There was no time for Persian to dodge it despite it's good speed. A sunny Solarbeam was just too fast even before factoring in Ninetales itself.

Persian was going to have to take the da…

"Block it with Dragon Tail!"

An explosion cleared up the smoke that Flamethrower collision had generated revealed Charizard standing between Ninetales and his still chewing Persian, tail glowing with the power of dragons and smoking from an impact point.

"What good teamwork! Ash and Charizard move quickly to protect their teammate!"

Quite quickly in fact. That reaction time…that was the sort of thing that a Trainer and their first Pokémon got after at least a year working together.

Red heard much of Ash Ketchum's life story two nights ago at dinner: Charizard had not been with Ash that long.

It wasn't because of the power he had sensed in Ash when they fought in Lavender. He'd have picked that up.

Speaking of which, he'd have to get Ash to talk about that tonight, he didn't like the idea of possibly fighting Lilo or possibly that Paul guy without Victory Sight and he wasn't going to lose because Ash kept choosing not to do it for no good reason.
He could accept Ash not using it for a good reason, but that wasn't proven yet. Though he did have to win this fight first.

"Misdreavus, Spite!"

Persian glowed even as Misdreavus was freed. Persian growled as Bite found itself unable to work. Well damn, that was going to be fun. Spite was a nasty little move that made moves unable to work until certain healing items or techniques were used, like Leppa Berries. Red wasn't sure why that was, and the Pokédex wasn't explaining it right now.

He'd need a new plan.

Persian darted over to Charizard, guarding its back as Ninetales and Misdreavus prepared to attack.

"Hypnosis!"

"Psybeam!"

As the two attacks charged up Red knew what had to be done.

"Persian can use Taunt to stop that Hypnosis, you block Mis…"

"We should stop that Spite move instead!" Ash fired back with a grin that his Pikachu shared. "I can stop that Hypnosis. Charizard protect your eyes with Flame Charge!"

Charizard promptly burst into flames, said flames colliding with the blue energy waves that came from Ninetales. The flames turned blue, but Charizard itself was unaffected.

Somehow? He would never understand where Ash got these random flashes of inspiration, or how he knew they could possibly work.

But if Ash wanted to stop Spite, Red couldn't say he disagreed. It was a wise move anyway.

Persian darted to the side as the Psybeam only knicked a bit of the Flame Charge before he gave the order.

"Taunt!"

Persian's gem flashed red as the color wafted over a now peeved looking Misdreavus.

"With that Taunt Misdreavus' dreaded Spite attack is no more! Can they come back from this!?

"Shock Wave!"

Blue electricity shot from Misdreavus right into the deflamed Charizard. The attack struck for damage.

As the electric attack finished Charizard growled. Ash seemed to nod in response before saying a single word.

"Trade?"

Red nodded before pointing at Ninetales.

"Slash!"
"Metal Claw!"

Taking into the air Charizard flew over Persian as the two went to the opposite sides of the field, both with elongated claws.

The two attacks struck their targets simultaneously, Ninetales stumbling in the aftermath as Misdreavus was sent flying into the wall.

The ghost made a light impact, but was still dazed. Ninetales recovered quicker however.

"Solarbeam!"

And the quick blasting attack struck Persian and sent her tumbling across the field.

"Misdreavus use Shadow Ball!"

"Flamethrower!" Mike shouted, just as Ash did the same.

"Persian, Dig!"

All four attacks fired off.

Despite moving faster, the Shadow Ball was overwhelmed by the Flamethrower and Misdreavus was scorched.

Persian got under just fast enough to avoid Ninetales Flamethrower, with Ninetales sent flying moments afterward as Persian sprung up from the earth.

Both enemy Pokémon hit the ground, defeated.

"Ninetales and Misdreavus are unable to battle! The Winners are Ash and Red!"

Charizard gave out a Flamethrower into the sky in celebration while Ash and his Pikachu let out an exuberant cry in victory.

Persian looked satisfied while his own Pikachu shrugged and gave him a look that said 'I could have won that in half the time'.

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**Later that day**

Unlike the Battle Dome, Ash was allowed to use any amount of Pokémon he wanted here. He could use a new one each round, or just have Charizard burn everything in his path down.

As much as Charizard would like that, that wasn't smart by any stretch of the imagination. For one thing Gary might have his Blastoise around at this point. Paul was also around, and thinking Paul wouldn't pick that up was an insult that even Paul didn't deserve.

He was many things, but 'making Cameron look like he could play chess with Cynthia regularly' was not one of them.

Did Cynthia even play chess?

Regardless of what board games Cynthia did or did not play, Ash was going to have a different
Pokémon fight each time. He just had to figure out who to use and when.

That's what training was for.

And the splattering of Sludge Bombs that Servine was avoiding suggested that his newly evolved grass-type was in fact deep in training.

"Servine, use Leaf Storm!"

Servine nodded as a billowing leaf vortex formed behind her as she stopped and prepared to fire at full power. It was aimed straight at Muk, who took the hit head on.

The leaves were blunted in their force by Muck's gelatinous form, though Ash was able to see that they weren't completely negated.

Was that a physical special thing, or a power thing, or something?

The quiet little training arena on the edge of the city he had come across wasn't just about testing the trans-time endurance of sludge however: he could see in the corner of his eye Squirtle practicing by dodging Sliggoo, whose Dragon Breath was getting pretty good.

Squirtle had been working with Butterfree, but Squirtle had been a little too quick at de-rusting his firefighting aim and Butterfree was currently drying off to the side.

"Pi!" 'Ash, heads up. They're back.'

Ash heard his buddy's heads up before the words came to him, allowing him to turn and catch the arriving trio of Misty, Iris, and Anabel, looking oddly bothered by something.

It couldn't have been about food, Misty had already suggested they reserve a place to go eat tonight in about an hour. It was another addition to the list of things that the Pokédex could do.

"...Is something up?" he asked. At the question all the practicing Pokémon stopped, with Muk looking ready to give a comfort hug if need be.

Or if not need be, truth be told. How would Iris react to that...

"Lara and Hex called," Misty explained.

Ash blinked as his mind defaulted to the first possible issue at hand.

"Did we forget something with the Laramie Ranch?"

"No. It's Dario."

Ash frowned, a cheater and jerk across two timelines, Dario was high on his list of jerks that he'd like to never see again. It was a pity that Dario didn't get a personality shift like Lt. Surge and Burgundy, but no, he remained a jerk.

"Did they finally get him? Are we going to have to testify in court?"

'That's the thing, they don't know where he went,' Anabel informed him, looking as uneasy as the rest of them.

"So, we should make sure our windows are locked? Maybe ask Nurse Joy for a windowless room? Have Psyduck stand guard?"
"Not unless you want to die," the Pokédex pointed out.

"Dario did not outrun them, it is more like Dario just vanished," Iris elaborated.

"So, he flew away?" Did his Dodrio jump miles through the air with him on it or something, or was he giving Dario too much credit as a Trainer?

'No. They found his Dodrio, but Dario was nowhere to be found and all they smelled was Psychic-types. There was no scent trail of Dario, or the Psychic Pokémon, anywhere from that point,' Anabel finished.

"So, someone helped him escape?" And Dario had a plan to do so ready? That seemed... unlikely.

"His Dodrio was injured from what looked like a Psychic attack; I doubt it was someone who wanted to help him."

Iris's point just raised more questions. Was Dario kidnapped or attacked by Psychic Pokémon?

Who'd do that, and not throw him to the Laramies to be punished? Team Rocket maybe? (He hadn't seen Cassidy or Bob in ages after all, did Dario owe them money?)

It didn't sound like Hunter J...maybe that Felgrand guy?

Did he do kidnapping? Or was he just fond of smuggling Pokémon and illegal minerals (whatever those were).

"There they are!"

Yellow's shout stopped any discussion further on Dario. The darting form of Yellow was approaching, with Red following at a slower pace.

Was something up? Did Red want to discuss battle strategies again?

Yellow braked to a stop in a manner that Ash could almost hear car brake sounds going off.

He was sure there was a Pokédex somewhere who'd have inserted those sounds for the heck of it. Or perhaps he shouldn't have played the classical cartoon channel in the background when he was trying to fall asleep the other night.

"Oh good, you're all here! Red really, really needs to talk to you," Yellow explained as Red managed to catch up, being in proper speaking distance instead of yelling distance.

"Really, what for?" Ash asked, not sure what could make Red 'really, really need to talk' to someone.

Did something happen to a family member that required him to go back home? No, that couldn't be it, Red mentioned he didn't have any living relatives when they had that dinner together, potentially being related to himself, Belladonna Tyrian, John Archer, Ashley Sennenryu, and Cleff Matsuoka notwithstanding of course.

Did he have to skip town? Maybe he was coming down with something….

Red held his hand out before himself, Misty, Iris, and Anabel with a neutral expression on his face, before his hand burst into flames.

That just happened, and the idea of him having to go to the hospital for the mumps was immediately
The blazing inferno around Red's hand continued for a good fifteen seconds of silence (with only Yellow and Red not looking at the hand in shock) before the flames snuffed themselves out and Red spoke.

"I do believe that is sufficient. Let's cut to the chase shall we: I know you are a Bloodliner as well, Ash."

'Ooh, does that mean I can actually talk?' Anabel blurted out quickly. Yellow gaped at Anabel in surprise, but Red seemed unperturbed, at least externally.

"Sure."

'Lovely.'

"Now that the Meowth is out of the bag, let's get to the point." Red pointed right at him, eyes flashing in a familiar glow.

His glow. Belladonna's glow.

Well, so much for hoping that ever growing mess didn't expand.

"I know you're a Bloodliner, I'll assume the same of your friends if Anabel is any indication, and that you've been holding back this entire time."

"Holding back?" Ash questioned, wondering what Red was talking about, and frankly what he was doing. It wasn't like with Belladonna with the truth flooding out of him against his will.

Red's eyes continued to glow as he elaborated.

"I have two Bloodlines. If we ignore the fire that can slip out if I talk too much for a moment, the relevant one allows me to determine every possibility. It allows me to play any scenario that could occur before me in all possible outcomes. I can see everything, if I so choose, a million times from every angle."

"I swear that sounds like something I saw in a Don George's comic book." Misty blurted out. Red ignored her in a manner that made Ash suspect she was right.

"It also allows me to pick up on abilities similar to my own. I have only seen this twice: with Yellow and with you."

Ash didn't get a chance for the part about Yellow to sink in, and neither seemed to be quite aware of what that implied as he continued.

"Tell me, what exactly can you do?"

Ash was cut off from explaining it by Anabel, who gave him a look of 'I'll handle this'.

'Ash is able to give Pokémon around him an immense boost in power."

Red's look at Ash grew somewhat surprised.

"How much power?" Yellow inquired.

'Enough for a Charmander to defeat a Kingdra from what I've been told'.

"'}
Red looked like someone had just told him that a Magikarp had defeated Rayquaza. Or possible a Mega Rayquaza, if such a thing was possible.

"I mean it's not that cool. I don't use it for battling and it only activates on its own if I get really stressed. So, we've won all our battles here completely without it."

Ash informed Red of this fact with earnest, intent to reassure Red that they had accomplished everything without magical powers that he woke up with when time got warped and rewound.

"What?" Red gave him a baffled look, as if he had heard complete and utter gibberish

"I don't cheat," Ash explained simply.

"Cheat?" Red parroted. He still sounded weird, like he was just told that water was dry or that a Pikachu was blue. Red's own Pikachu was doing the Pikaface palm. Ash's own wasn't though. Odd. Normally Pikachu did that unison if he did something stupid enough to earn it, but he couldn't think of what it could be.

"You know, give yourself an unfair advantage? Using a cell phone to look up test answers, taking steroids, bringing a Gyarados to a knife fight, that sort of thing."

Yellow looked at him in confusion at that one.

"It's a movie reference. One of my mom's favorite movies actually." She apparently saw it with her dad, his grandfather he never met, three times.

'The second movie was the best,' Anabel gave her two cents.

"I have never seen any of them…"

"It isn't cheating."

Red's declaration cut off Iris's statement.

"Yes, it is. I can basically turn anything that isn't going my way around just be glaring the right way and hoping really hard. If that's not cheating I don't know what is. If it was life or death and I was falling out of the sky or something that's one thing. But using it to win fights is cheating. I mean I'm not accusing you of cheating Red…"

"Like I said, it isn't cheating."

Red's statement silenced Ash as he looked at Red in horror and a growing sense of anger.

"You…"

"All six of us were born with special talents that set us apart from everyone else. It's not all that different from someone being born more athletically capable or smarter than the average person. Do geniuses have to avoid using their full capabilities on tests, or runners have to be slower? Cheating is bringing in something foreign into an environment to give oneself an advantage, answers hidden under a cap or a Pokéball to a knife fight, or violating a rule. There is no rule in the Leagues that say what I do, what I am, is illegal."

Red tapped the left temple of his head for emphasis.

"All I am able to do is process information and probabilities far more efficiently than regular people can. The same way what you are able to do is the same as giving one's Pokémon a pep talk for a
second wind, but unaffected by musculature."

"That is not how it works," Ash growled, anger at Red for his behavior growing. He idly noticed Misty giving Red a look of some annoyance, apparently realizing the source of his comeback at the Battle Dome.

Anabel looked neutral, as if pondering both their points….

Iris, Ash noticed with some unease, looked like she agreed with Red.

"Isn't it? Many matches have been won because Trainers are able to inspire Pokémon to push past their limits and overcome fatigue long enough for one last blow. That's what you can do, it would have let you beat me back in Lavender Town."

"Wait, you cheated at the Battle Dome!?" Ash liked to think he didn't throw that word around lightly anymore. Suggesting Giselle did so with Bonemerang was beyond him now, though he still had to wonder about Blaine and his lava dunking.

But this…. he cheated against him. Against Misty. Against Iris. Against that random kid that Gary defeated with his Umbreon that time he caught up with him in Johto. He would not stand for that.

"Hardly," Red stated with an immensely frustrated sigh. "Your very presence throws my abilities off. The way you are able to think and move makes my abilities useless. I haven't been able to use them in battle this entire tournament. Why do you think I want you to stop holding back?" Red said this in a tone that basically admitted he had used his ability against everyone else.

"Well good. Maybe you can actually be confident in your own abilities instead of relying on a shortcut," Ash declared as Red gritted his teeth and turned rapidly away from him.

"I am confident in them. I just don't feel like running with only a single leg. Unlike you I don't think that's normal." Red stormed off with that parting shot, Yellow scampering after him.

"…. Red used Parting Shot. The human team's Teamwork harshly fell," the Pokédex declared.

"I'd suggest resetting yourself with a withdraw and redeployment before tomorrow's match."

"Fat chance."

"Can you at least stop squeezing me in anger then? I won't break but damaging your hand will also lower your stats in throwing."

A few hours later

"…. I don't get it. How could you possibly agree with him!?"

"If a Unfezant is able to catch and eat a Sewaddle because it can fly, I would not call that cheating."

'I'm conflicted. I'm a telepath….'

"It is totally different. It's kind of obvious that's the case with you. There is no sign that that jerk has a mind like he's some sort of supercomputer. Unlike an Unfezant, which I assume has feathers."

"They do. Still this argument is strange. Humans are the only creatures that care about cheating…"
'She is right you know'.

Ash was snapped out of his thoughts by Pikachu, who was reflecting on part of the argument that Iris, Anabel, and Misty had earlier.

He had been too angry at Red to participate. To think he respected that guy so much, to find out that he got as far as he did by cheating.

The Battle Dome, all his Gyms, who knows how many Pokémon battles between. All won by cheating.

Intentionally, for his own gain. Not unintentionally, not in a panic as one fell to the earth. As intentionally as anything.

At least Paul, for all his faults, did not cheat, at least in the old timeline. He'd assume the same in this timeline until he saw him buy illegal fertilizer for his Torterra.

"Pikapi." 'Humans are the only creatures I know of that can have moral debates on what is fair or not fair in a fight. I mean some Pokémon have rules of honor, but humans take the cake with how intense they can get when debating it.'

"There is no debate. Red has been cheating the entire time," Ash growled.

"I'd like to remind you of my earlier comment in defense of the tall Unovan's position, no one has put a rule in about what he can do into the official League rule books. It keeps being on the menu but every time it's on the docket time gets eaten up by controversial calls and more pressing rule concerns." Once again, the Pokédex commented in and once more Ash ignored it from its spot on the bedside table.

"It's the principle of the thing," Ash declared with finality.

"Principles. Many a human greater and lesser than you have died for them, gone to prison for them, or failed to do something vital. Are you really prepared to take such a stand?" the Pokédex questioned.

"I work hard to get what I have. Charmander didn't evolve because of some fancy eye power. Pikachu didn't regain Thunderbolt because of anything special. Trainers, Coordinators, Connoisseurs….

"Pokémon Performers?"

"…Sure. All of us get where we do because of hard work and determination. The times I have gotten a boost because of my powers were triggered because of my emotions going out of control, or to save people. I don't use them to win things just to win them. Red doesn't have enough emotions to have that problem. He doesn't have any issue turning his eyes on or off."

"Pi." 'Perhaps you don't use your powers to win badges and Leagues. That's all fine and good, and I'm fully on board with that. We all are. But Ash…. what happens if something is on the line? You may have a plan in case we lose tomorrow or the next day, but if it came between risking everyone's lives and freedoms breaking into the Safari Zone, or cheating to ensure that we keep all our Tauros, our safety, and our reputations intact….is cheating really the worse option?'}
Ash opened his mouth to give a response, but found the words failing him.

"Interesting. You've managed to render him speechless even in his current mental state. I wish I knew what you actually communicated. I feel it would be quite useful to silence him when I want to give exposition," the Pokédex inquired.

"Chu." 'It's not exactly useable in most situations. It only works because this is a specific situation where humans probably would agree it's better to cheat than to break the literal law and risk being shot at by a crazy old man even back before the universe had giant wars and crazy dream demons.'

".... You know, 'Chu' does not give me any useful information right?"

---

**Pallet Town, the next day**

".... And with that stunning finisher Betty Snyder is defeated! Black Gaiman's run continues to the Top 4! But how will Unova's rookie of the year fair against Dino? Find out, next time!"

The T.V's declaration was not met with much interest by Professor Oak nor Delia as the hour prepared to change.

"I already know how that ended; I'm here for my grandson and Ash, not the latest Unovan winner," Oak declared as the T.V defied him.

"Battle Recall is brought to you by Coco Moo!"

"....." Oak muttered something unintelligible as Delia laughed.

"It's just infomercials. They'll pass in time."

".... A Cleavon Schpielbunk film...."

"Television has to pay for itself somehow."

"I'd kindly ask you to not fight my distaste for mindless commercials with logic," the Professor declared. He was still tired from having talks to get Boxer's tech out there. They had gone well, but he was really at his limits for corporations.

".... sponsors this pre-battle report. SDC mining, a totally trustworthy company! Now, we join Shiro Shinobi in the main studio, over to you Shiro!"

"Might as well call yourself 'the Benevolent Corporation'," Delia quipped about the tagline as the Professor gave her a look. She grinned.

"I can snark about it, I don't get all Krabby about it." He was kept from responding by the T.V announcer beating him to it.

"Thank you! Now, let's get a look at our competitors down here in Fuchsia! The dynamic duo from Western Kanto taking the Gym challenge by storm: Ash Ketchum and Red Tajiri! Fun fact folks, Ketchum hails from the same town as Professor Oak himself and carries with him a Pokédex made by his own hands. While Tajiri is not connected to anyone nearly as famous, I am 99 percent convinced he's the son of a boxer from my days doing Women's Boxing. Or am I the only one who sees Shinku 'Slammin' Tajiri in his eyes? My attempts to ask the boy about it have been met with
silence."

As the two were shown on screen Delia immediately frowned.

"Professor…" she asked as he nodded grimly.

"Yes, I see it too. Something's off with Ash, and Red as well." He eyed the two, noting the way they stood, the way they avoided looking at each other, the tenseness in their hands, and the fact their Pikachu were on the farthest shoulder available.

Something had happened. Perhaps it was an argument, or a misunderstanding. It could have been the aftermath of a serious argument over how to train, or they both had wanted the last piece of pie.

But whatever it was, it had definitely done something to their chemistry as tag partners, and at the worst possible time too.

"….and joining a Kanto local is a visitor from the tropical Alola region! I haven't been there since I got that bonus, but I'm sure that if you ever did get the spare cash to head out there this local beauty could show you around. Ladies and gentlemen, Lilo!"

Because not only was this foreign Trainer powerful, but Oak feared that Ash didn't quite get what her partner was doing. He himself had only picked it up when her partner used Sunny Day in tandem with the Lurantis a few days earlier.

He wasn't constantly failing; he wasn't even trying to fight. He was doing support tactics to ensure that Lilo was covered!

"And they're off!"

Oak's eyes went wide as he realized that the battle had already begun. The screen had four Pokémon icons on it now: Ash's Pikachu and a Haunter on the right and a Pidgeotto and Mudsdale on the left.

"Say Professor, what type is Mudsdale?" Delia asked as the first commands were given.

"Pikachu, use Thunderbolt!"

"Mudsdale use Stone Edge!"

"Haunter Shadow Ball!"

"Pidgeotto use Tailwind!"

The last command was followed by the Professor paling.

"Oh crap."

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaand, sorry to cut the chapter here. However, the original chapter was itself pretty long (there were some complaints about that at Fanfiction.net), so I feel it'd be better to split it somewhat. I felt this part was as good as a cutout point as any.
Plus, that way we get this story to move forward faster, but don’t worry, we’ll see the conclusion of the tournament arc tomorrow, if all goes well. Until then!
The Tag Tournament Part 3

Fuchsia Tag Tournament, in the arena

The Thunderbolt and Shadow Ball flew towards their target, even as a barrage of wind and stone came in response.

His buddy's attack pierced the winds easily, striking his opponent's Pidgeotto head on.

The Shadow Ball crashed into the stone barrage, cancelling themselves out.

The wind blew the resulting explosion away, blowing the dreadlocks of Mudsdale in the wind.

Pidgeotto hit the ground seconds later, sparking and defeated.

"Pidgeotto is unable to battle!" the ref declared as the bird was recalled. As the Flying-type was recalled Ash thought for a moment about Pidgeot, and where she was right now.

He knew she should be safe, but it would be nice to see her again. Perhaps even in time for the final round. After all, now that it was two against one it should be easy, even without Red cheating….

"Heavy Slam!"

After all, Pikachu was fast as was Haunter. They could easily avoid Mudsdale.

"Dodge…" Ash ordered, only for Mudsdale to appear in front of Pikachu so fast that Ash wondered when someone had used Trick Room.

Glowing yellow with a slight metallic sheen Mudsdale slammed into Pikachu, sending his buddy flying through the air. With a flip Pikachu did land on his feet and not his stomach, but he still looked rattled.

"What in the…." Ash wondered out loud.

"Tailwind is a move that speeds up one's allies for a while. That Mudsdale's lacking speed has been made a non-issue. It is obvious if one isn't looking at life with only one eye."

Red's snark was not needed at this time. He got enough of it from the Pokédex frankly.

"Night Shade!" Red declared as a black ball of energy formed at the tips of Haunter's fingers. The black lightning shot right at Mudsdale.

It struck Mudsdale in the chest, pushing the great horse back. Oddly enough a slight aura began to form around Mudsdale after the hit.

Red looked surprised by it, which made Ash feel satisfied for some reason. Even if he couldn't claim credit.

Time for more satisfaction, this being the sort he could in fact claim credit for.

"Use Heavy Slam!"

"Mudsdale may be fast now, but so are we! Pikachu use Quick Attack!"
Mudsdale once again appeared quickly in front of a Pokémon, this time Haunter, like Trick Room was in play. Even as the wind behind it had the dreadlocks flow in the wind, Pikachu flew right into its forehead like a silver bullet.

Unlike a silver bullet however, Pikachu's collision was odd. It barely phased it, and just knocked him back like a young Scraggy's headbutt to Snorlax's gut.

Just with less jiggling. The aura's glow intensified around Mudsdale.

"Pi pi pi pika…." Pikachu rubbed his head after that one, even as the Heavy Slam was slammed into Haunter sending the ghost into the dirt.

'I feel like I hit a Steelix.'

"What was that?" Ash wondered aloud.

"Stamina, one of the three abilities of Mudsdale. When a move makes contact, Mudsdale's defensive capabilities increase, a slight aura developing around them to soften physical blows that some theorize is connected to a phenomenon in Alola called Totem Pokémon, but you don't have time to be explained what those are. Punching a Mudsdale was a common idiom for 'exercise in futility' in Alola during the previous century, though it phased out sometime forty years ago."

What!?

An ability like that existed!?

"Clearly then this isn't the time to half-ass it, use Nightshade again!"

Haunter emerged from behind Mudsdale, having apparently gone into the ground after the impact from Heavy Slam. The attack fired once more, striking Mudsdale in the back. Mudsdale let out a cry of pain from the strike as the aura once again flared up.

"Nightshade is an attack that doesn't do damage based on a Pokémon's power level, but the enemies. It is a useful attack for defeating stronger foes," the Pokédex explained Red's attack choice.

It was a clever idea, even if that did remind Ash of his irritation with the guy. He could clearly figure that out like a normal person.

Speaking of which…

"If that defense keeps going up, we're just going to have to take it down! Pikachu use Iron Tail!"

Pikachu looked back at him in confusion at this, but none the less jumped into the air with a steel solid tail.

The tail slashed into Mudsdale flank, causing a ripple to form across Mudsdale's aura as it diminished a bit.

Iron Tail, potential defense decreasing was a side effect, just like burns in a fire attack or special defense in an Energy Ball.

That was a question on Oak's test! Even if Ash was kind of curious if that was the case before time blew up, he didn't think that ever happened with Pikachu and himself even once.
If it was the case, perhaps he could cash in that karma.

The aura did flare back up to its old sheen moments later, he'd have to figure a way around that.

Only one way to find an opening.

"Again!" Multiple strikes.

"Oh no you don't!" Lilo shouted, not willing to just let him go about his merry slashing sort of sciencey-way. "Use Double Kick!"

A mere moment Mudsdale's flank was replaced by two glowing hooves. They looked rather painful.

"Break away Pikachu!" Ash's correction came seconds before Iron Tail and a hoof clashed. The two attacks collided, with the force propelling Pikachu a good few yards from Mudsdale's hooves.

The ripple effect from earlier again rang across Mudsdale, this time without it rebounding.

Ash grinned. He had found an opening. He just had to time his attacks correctly and exploit the loophole.

"Toxic!"

"Block it out with Mudsport!"

Mudsdale's body exploded outward with a wave of mud flying everywhere. This collided with the Toxic ball of muck that Haunter had spewed out, diluting it to nothing even as mud landed on Haunter.

The ghost began desperately rubbing itself free of the mud coating, even as the mud weighed the ghost down and forced it down towards the ground as Ash remembered that potential hiccup.

Red was liable to throw off this plan.

"Pi…." 'So, you want to tell Red to stick with Toxic? You know, communicate the problem?'

"Use High Horsepower!"

Mudsdale was on Haunter once again, this time with a pair of glowing hooves more intense than the Double Kick.

"Hit Mudsdale's hooves with Thunderbolt!"

'You know I'm not Squirtle, right?' Pikachu pointed out, but he let loose the electric attack none the less. The bolt flew across the field and struck the closest hoof less than an inch from Haunter's face.

Said hoof was knocked back into the other one by the force of the blast, dislodging the attack from Haunter and causing Mudsdale to collapse from the misfooting.

Haunter didn't have an opening to exploit however, because the removal process on the mud had been faster than Ash had expected.

The bolt passed right over Haunter's single cleared up hand, the other still well coated in mud. While not a direct hit, there was still an effect.

"Ha!" Haunter, cringing, floated ever lower, a static covering it now.
Paralysis.

Red glared at him in response. No words were passed, but the look had all in it that needed to be said.

Exasperation. Disbelief. Annoyance. A healthy question of how an electric attack even moved a body part of a ground type. A look that suggested that he had shot them in the foot to a point they couldn't hope to recover from this.

The final turn a movement of 'Well, now that you made this twice as hard, stay out of it so I can fix your mess'.

"There's your answer," Ash declared to Pikachu's earlier question. Red was not going to be open to talk now, and likely hadn't been earlier.

"Wow! That backfired! Teamwork had led to the paralysis of his partner's Pokémon?! Can they recover from this?"

....

".... That was bad luck!" Yellow declared, sitting between Iris and Misty with a look of worry on her face.

"That it was, and at the worst possible moment too." Iris sighed.

Bad luck had a bad habit of popping up at the worst times. It never happened when it could be best afforded.

'It's that fight. They haven't been in sync this entire battle, and that paralysis isn't helping., Anabel observed. 'Both are fighting as best they can, Red's comment about Ash not fighting his hardest is hardly applicable here if you omit what Red was specifically referring to. However, they aren't working as a team. The only difference between this fight and a battle royale is the fact that Ash and Red aren't striking each other intentionally'.

"It's not going to get that bad, is it?" Yellow asked quietly.

"It won't. Neither of them would get that bad," Misty reassured her. Between Red's logic and Ash's determination to win there was no reason for them to resort to that.

She neglected to mention how out of it Ash was like when he did get angry, like that time with Paul. Or that, according to Ash, that someone else was like that as well.

Someone who looked as much like Red as she did Ash.

....

The Tailwind was staring to peter out.

Mudsdale snorted as Lilo looked them over. Ash felt her gaze shift from himself and Pikachu, who was still going strong, to Red and Haunter, the later hovering close to the ground and still paralyzed.

Did she have something planned?

"Let's end this in one shot, Mudsdale!" Lilo declared as Mudsdale snorted in agreement. The response made Ash tense, and he noticed Red do so as well.
Did she have some sort of final move hidden for this? Giga Impact? Earthquake? Some version of the laser thing Arceus did?

Lilo held her hand out, even as a yellow glow formed around her, starting from the band on her arm.

So, not the laser thing?

Was this how Mega Evolution worked?

"Interesting. The power of Alola is being applied," the Pokédex noted as Lilo turned and leaned to the left, the glow intensifying as she touched the ground in a brilliant flash. The light shot towards Mudsdale now.

"The power of Alola?"

"Yes. Alola is famous for techniques known as Z-Moves. Z-Moves are formed with the aid of special crystals that general end in 'ium Z', such as Normalium Z and Firium Z, to deploy powerful attacks. The specific energy required is built up by a ritual form of poses to maximize their power, though I am told you can do a Z-Move without them, if to less effective results. But the difference between breaking a tree in half and punching a hole in an Ironclad is hardly relevant to most Trainers."

"What!?" Ash declared as Mudsdale was now glowing.

"If I am not mistaken, that's the Ground Z-Move. It's called Tectonic Rage if I recall."

"Get out of there, Pikachu!" A move called Tectonic Rage did not sound like a good thing to be hit by.

'You don't have to tell me twice!' Pikachu jumped back and used his tail to leap high into the air. Ash recalled that move, the one that had saved their tails back in the Orange Trophy Match.

"Haunter…." Red called as the paralysis flared up, and Mudsdale slammed its full weight into the ground, sending the yellow energy from itself into the earth.

The earth then exploded with energy, blinding him with its intensity.

"Good heavens!" the announcer declared.

The blinding light began to fade as Ash squinted through the light, trying to see if Pikachu was okay. He gripped his hand together tightly, worried about his partner. There was no way he could know what had happened…

Oh wait; he could do that telepathy thing! He completely forgot, so if he could just….

"Pikachu is detected. No additional damage seems to have been sustained."

Or that. That could work too.

The sound of a familiar pair of feet hitting the ground was additional relief.

Lilo was becoming visible now, exiting the final pose and looking over the battle field. Mudsdale stood next to her, looking visibly exhausted.

"A Z-Move does exhaust the user however, and can only be done once a battle. Attempting to
do another one is unwis," the Pokédex noted.

Pikachu was now fully visible, and Lilo was now staring at him in shock. Ash relaxed his hand, using it to rub off a bead of sweat that had formed on his forehead as a result.

Oddly enough his hand felt grainy. Holding his hand up to his face he noticed some sort of brown dust covering his hands. It sort of looked like sand crystals (Quartz if he recalled correctly), but it didn't quite look like it.

Where had the dust come from? Lilo's stunned statement broke his thoughts on the dust however.

"How..." she asked as Ash grinned. Pikachu filled in for him by doing another tail boosted jump, spinning as he did so before landing with grin.

"... You jumped, with your tail?" Lilo repeated, stunned that such a strategy could possibly work.

"Fascinating. Recording data for future analysis," the Pokédex noted.

"Now that your Z-Move failed, let's finish this. Pikachu use...."

"Haunter is unable to battle!"

The ref's call stopped Ash's call as the dust cleared, revealing Haunter, knocked out and covered in mud and dirt. Ash was pretty sure it could have been worse if Haunter had a physical body to be hammered.

Red stared at his defeated Pokémon, shock etched in his face. His Pikachu looked similarly stunned, and Red's movement towards recalling Haunter felt oddly stiff.

"...This, is what you had up your sleeve?" Red asked Lilo quietly, who nodded.

"Yes. Many Trainers in Alola have passed trials and gained access to Z-Moves. They are our trump cards in battle, the ultimate expression of the bond between Trainer and Pokémon."

In Kalos, a tower managing old man named Gurkinn felt aggravated for reasons he knew not why.

"You were going to use this in our battle before," he continued as she again nodded.

"Yes. You proved to be a tough enough challenge that I found it warranted."

"I see." Red pocketed Haunter's ball as he took a deep breath and let out one final sentence.

"So, I lost then."

The way Red said this rang in Ash's head for a few moments as a realization came over him.

Red had never been defeated before. Even if Red had Pokémon get knocked out, it was never to the resounding ring of his Pokémon team being all knocked out.

Every battle he had fought had been won, and now he was realizing that a battle that had been interrupted would have ended in a loss.

Just as he seemed to think this fight would be.

Reaching for his hat, Ash knew what he had to do.
Prove Red wrong. Also win too, but the two things did go well together so there was nothing stopping him.

"You're talking as if Pikachu's already lost. My buddy's still ready to go, and I intend to win this."

Red and Lilo looked at him in surprise, as if he was a bit delusional.

"Error! The odds of a Pikachu defeating a Stamina using Mudsdale are….."

"Pi! 'Screw the odds!' Pikachu snapped as Ash turned his hat around.

"Not important. I said I was going to win, and I intend to see it happen," Ash declared as Lilo pointed at them.

"Let me answer that question, Stone Edge!" Stones began to orbit around Mudsdale.

"Send them back with a Counter Shield!"

As the stones fired Pikachu began to spin around on his back, electric streams shooting out in a powerful net. The stones were caught in the electric net, before reflecting right back.

Mudsdale and Lilo shared stunned looks just before the stones impacting into Mudsdale, even losing their charge on contact they still stung.

Pikachu stopped spinning and hopped back onto his feet, grinning in unison with Ash.

---

**Meanwhile in Alola**

"Impressive, but perhaps foolhardy. I can certainly admire his valor, but does he really think he can defeat Lilo's Mudsdale with his Pikachu?" Hala questioned, reaching for the popcorn bowl held by his companion.

It was snatched away as Tapu Koko continued to eye the match, and Hala couldn't help but wonder if it was a good thing Tapu Koko was over having a Z-Ring rejected or a bad thing, given that a depressed Tapu Koko didn't hog the Popcorn as much as the regular Tapu Koko did.

"I mean young Frax's Pikachu could do it. She's weaker, but Swift would be more effective than anything I've seen this Pikachu possess."

Tapu Koko nodded in agreement with his assessment of Frax, but still looked at Ash with some confidence. Confidence that Hala would exploit.

"Of course, perhaps you'd be willing to make it a wager. If you are so confident in Ash managing to win, perhaps you'd be willing to put your root beer on the line for a year?"

His root beer if he was being technical, but Tapu Koko operated on a different sort of possession logic than a human did. What belonged to Tapu Koko, was what Tapu Koko wanted to have.

Hala's question caused the island guardian to look at him with a thoughtful look, before speeding off.

Hala guessed it was probably for a 'if I win' thing, though he wasn't sure what Tapu Koko would want. A specific type of Root Beer? The keys to his fireworks shed? The Santa costume Greg wears?
Tapu Koko returned, but not with a flier or a set of keys. Instead dangling from a hand hung a Z-Ring, barren of any crystals.

"Oh ho ho, a Z-Ring. I see, so if Ash wins you want me to send it to him? Very well, though would you rather send a ring with a crystal on it?"

Tapu Koko didn't respond, just darting back to his Popcorn.

A Z-Ring without any crystals? Hala wasn't sure what Tapu Koko was up to, but the bet was on so he'd oblige.

Perhaps it was meant to encourage the boy to come to Alola, though for what purpose Hala had no idea. Ash still had to win first though, and Hala did not see how that would happen.

---

**Back to the battle**

"Focus Blast!"

Ash took a moment to realize that such a move was called to really register that his opponent's Pokémon had a glowing orange laser ball forming in its mouth.

"Thunderbolt!"

The two attacks collided with each other, with Thunderbolt winning out and pushing through the Focus Blast. However, the attack did nothing once it managed to connect to Mudsdale.

"**Mudsdale is not known for ranged maneuvers. However, countering it with a move of your own does not seem to be a strategy that will cause damage,**" the Pokédex noted as the ineffective electric attack fully fizzled out.

Pity a Mudsdale didn't have a horn. Then it might have worked, somehow.

So, what now then?

Did Pikachu go in close, putting itself in range for more of Mudsdale's attacks like Heavy Slam and High Horsepower? Ranged didn't seem to have any options for them….

Did battles have time limits?

Ash had no desire to find out.

"Okay Pikachu, get in close!" Ash called as Pikachu sped towards the massive enemy of theirs, white streaks following in his wake.

"Use Mud Sport!" Lilo called as a wave of mud burst forth from Mudsdale like a popped lid, moving towards Pikachu like a solidified dust cloud.

So Lilo was aware of the 'get close to the slow Pokémon, perform Pikabatics until tripping ensued' technique.

How was he going to get through it? Should he order Pikachu back?

Then Ash noticed something, the mud was slowly rising as it moved forward.
"Roll under the mud wave!"

"...PI?" 'Huh....' Pikachu trusted his instincts and transitioned into a roll. The rolling Pikachu and the Mud Sport wall met, and Pikachu only got a few flakes of mud on his back as he burst out from the other side and charged towards the unfazed Mudsdale.

"Pikachu slips under that Mud Sport like a pro! What will Lilo and Mudsdale do in response!?"

Pikachu began to run around Mudsdale, ready to take advantage of Mudsdale's actions and unease from the speeding target it couldn't follow.

Thirty seconds later, and Mudsdale hadn't changed expression at all, and Pikachu stopped in front of the giant beast in surprise.

"No reaction?" Ash questioned. That wasn't how this was supposed to work. Even if Lilo wasn't fooled it should at least be bothering Mudsdale. Making it agitated and uneasy, vulnerable, stuff like that.

"Mudsdale are quite emotionally sound. They do not startle easily and are quite good at ignoring distractions. Poker players are known to study them to prepare for competitive matches," the Pokédex informed him.

Well that was just great. Apparently trying to unnerve the Poker Face Pokémon wasn't going to get anything accomplished.

The stare down continued, no command ordered from Lilo or his own end. A fast Pokémon who was struggling to find a way to do damage, a slow Pokémon struggling to land a hit to do damage.

In other words, a stalemate.

"Both Trainers are carefully planning their next move," the announcer snarked.

Well what was he supposed to do? Most of his plans needed Mudsdale to react to them, and Mudsdale was the kind of Pokémon who no one would want to play a poker game with.

Attacking without it would just make Mudsdale either counter attack on Pikachu hard, or get even tougher.

There had to be some way to hit Mudsdale hard enough before a counter attack could do them in. Maybe he could try and use electricity to enhance Iron Tail: would that work?

Looking around for some clue, he first noticed Red, eyes hidden under the shadow of his hat rim. The stands had what sort of looked like Jessie, James, and Meowth in the cheap seats, and above them was Gary, a look on his face that said 'okay Ashy boy I have no idea how I'd get out of this so if you lose I won't mock you too much about it' or something like that.

Next to him was Paul, who was looking as friendly and helpful as ever....

Paul.

Paul!

That was the answer.

"Pikachu, gather as much electricity in your tail as you can!" Ash declared. Pikachu looked back at
him with a look of 'did you forget types again', but none the less began to do so.

Electricity sparked across the tail, a tail that began to glow brighter than any lightbulb. The glow began to expand further and further, charging stronger and stronger by the second.

"And Ash Ketchum is doing…. something. It's something folks, but I am not sure what it is supposed to be." The announcer was no longer bored, just confused.

"Human, you are aware that spontaneously trying to get Pikachu to evolve into an Ampharos is impossible, right?" the Pokédex asked cautiously.

"That's not what I'm aiming for!" Ash declared even as Red and his Pikachu tilted their heads in confusion.

"Now slam your tail into the ground right at Mudsdale!"

He felt a spark of 'oh, that's what you were going for' flash in Pikachu's head moments before the tail struck the ground, the electricity bursting into the earth and speeding towards the mighty horse Pokémon.

In the wake of it, hundreds of massive chunks of earth and stone, all flying towards Mudsdale from the front and above in a massive rain of devastation.

"Holy Sh…." Lilo was cut off by the impact striking her Mudsdale in a massive barrage. One large rock flew her own way, but was stopped by a blue glow and lowered before it could hit her.

Clearly security was in place for such things.

Ash was willing to call the technique super effective. True it was from Paul, but it was effective. Especially when he charged the electricity used first to really give it some force.

…

"And this is the something Ash Ketchum came up with!? He's turned the battlefield into an attack! Good thing tournaments are legally required to have emergency Psychic-types on standby for debris!"

"…. Well, I didn't see that one coming," Misty declared.

"I doubt anyone did." Iris agreed.

It wasn't just his immediate friends who were stunned and amazed by what they were seeing. All over witnesses to his comeback were reacting to Ash Ketchum.

…. 

"…Well what do you know, that Ash really is as good as you said he was Histy." In an apartment Krista blushed as a much taller woman laughed and took a swipe of her popcorn bowl.

…. 

"Perhaps I underscored his compatibility, even for how well I had judged it. To know that his partner was capable of such a feat," Burgundy mused as the match continued to play across the ship's television. She had nothing to do until the next port after all; she had time to admit she was in error.
As a Charjabug hummed underneath a pot as her boyfriend and his Pansage seasoned and stirred in their Alolan vacation residence, a tall blond with an Emolga sleeping on her lap watched the battle in amazement.

"They have Pikachu in Alola, right?" she asked no one in particular. That was what the internet was for.

Though when the camera focused on the Trainer's face, she couldn't stop her hand from reaching her face and lightly touching the marks on her face.

The ones that this boy, and that Ranger jerk, had.

Weird.

....

"..." Looking up at an available screen at her airport gate Janine frowned.

She'd be seeing him soon, she suspected. She'd have to be ready for his challenge.

....

In the stolen hideaway of theirs, Belladonna was cheering loudly, Aurora had an impressed look on her face, Evanna had fallen asleep, and Vedia was quietly munching on popcorn (though her eyes were focused on the blaring LCD screen).

....

".... Looks like I'll be seeing him one day soon," Brock looked at his fiancé in surprise at that declaration.

"What else can I say dear, Scott knows how to pick them like you know how to pick produce."

".... Say the pun and I will kick you," Forrest cut off his brother before any produce puns could surface.

....

"This year at the League going to be an interesting one," a book writer mused, even as his Swampert snored behind him. A bushy bearded Chesnaught nodded in agreement.

....

"That kid's pretty good, isn't he sis?" A brown-haired girl in a waiter's outfit noted to a rather similar looking maid.

"Yes, he is, isn't he? In fact, I've heard that there are a lot of promising Trainers this year. Have you heard anything?"

The two maids inquired their sole customer this non-peak hour had given them, who was sipping on a cup of hot chocolate after several bites out of a cake. The woman lowered the cup from her lips as she spoke.

"Quite a bit." Sabrina grinned, amused at how neither girl knew her identity.

"I'm told that this year is quite a remarkable one. A generation of miracles, or so I've heard the
bookies claim, and they are usually right."

And not just in battle, she had seen these two (Rhoda and Rhonda) in the kid, also known as Ash Ketchum's, memories and had been debating which of them, if not both or neither, to remove.

Apparently however a boy and his Pikachu named Sparky had come through and managed to fix their act.

The boy, Ritchie, got them to improve themselves, the second time that had happened to her. The same Trainer had convinced a lout named Keith to make something of his life and had just defeated two mid class Gym leaders and was training for Erika next. He had saved their lives, and now she had to actually pay for this meal.

Good thing that Seymour had money on him when she removed him. The food was both well-presented and well flavored; it really did deserve proper payment.

....

The exact translation of what Lt. Surge was shouting in excitement could not be properly made outside of some sports stadiums. It was positive though.

Negative stadium sound emissions were much different.

He learned both from Granny Surge, the current arm wrestling champion of Agate Village twenty years running.

....

A giant of a man with long gray hair looked ready to comment about the move, eyes glittering with excitement.

"Dear, no. You're just get more bans on your record," his wife gently chided. "Also, do you even have an electric move to do that with?"

"I have a Salamence. I can blow up plenty that way...also is it just me or does...."

His wife frowned.

"Yes, those boys do sort of look like Ritchie. Just with dark hair. It is sort of weird."

"They have strange names though, who names their kid Ash or Red?"

"Perhaps the same people who named you Silver dear."

The man looked a tad miffed, but struggled to find a good rebuttal to how Silver was a better name than Ash or Red.

....

On top of a Kalosian mountain Vermell stroked his chin in deep thought as the internet stream continued to play the match.

.....

Hala reached for Tapu Koko's Popcorn. Surprisingly the popcorn was not jerked out of reach as they watched the stones fall.
Perhaps Tapu Koko would not be kept away from root beer after all. He'd also have to pay for shipping, and given Tapu Koko it would probably not be the cheap kind.

'A Tapu only shipped express' had been a joke someone had once said on a late night talk show. As said talk show host didn't wake up with a Bruxish in his toilet it was probably accurate.

Perhaps Tapu Koko would be willing to come with him to the post office. It would probably help reduce the cost. After all, who would charge shipping to Tapu Koko?

.....

"Crazy," was all a young female Trainer, a Growlithe attached to her wrist by a leash and a pair of dark shades covering her eyes; had to say at the description she was given. To think someone could do that in a battle.

"I'll say." Alex Davis agreed, sitting across from her and looking at the screen.

....

Still recovering from what he wasn't sure was a hangover or a bad fall, Dan noted what he was watching in the Saffron Pokémon Center.

This Ash kid was going to be at the Indigo League, and he was going to be someone to watch.

He already could see them meeting in the Top 16. That would just hurt.

May he be someone else's problem.

.....

".... My riot senses are tingling," a cop muttered as he reluctantly stood up, dislodging two sleeping black Meowth in the process.

They looked at him in annoyance, but he ignored them. They would probably get back at him later. Tis why he didn't have drapery after all.

"This is going to be a troublesome drag. Well, might as well dig up the riot gear."

"Per!" a Persian of similar coloration with a massive head yowled, gesturing at the T.V before he could figure out where he had put his club (mostly la'au palau) proof helmet.

"What?" the man complained as the cat gestured back at the kid on T.V. He looked at it for a moment.

"Yeah, he does sort of look like Balaur, doesn't he? It's probably nothing." For one thing the similarity was marred because of the kid's lack of scars and the fact he was smiling. Balaur never smiled.

Also, he only managed to arrest the guy twenty-odd years ago because he got a tip off from a vasectomy place. The guy had only escaped prison twelve years ago anyway. So, this kid was kind of impossible to be his without some real nonsense involved.

Still it was odd the kid looked like Balaur, a nephew maybe? He could care less, he had a riot his senses were telling him was going to happen and someone had to save the kids. Balaur's family tree wasn't his problem.
Giovanni nodded before changing the channel. The commercial break was nearly over at this point.

His choice, though perhaps jumping the gun at the first one to cross the path of non-crucial personal, was proving fruitful. All that remained was the question of inspiration.

Back in the stadium Ash had a battle to win.

The earth had finally stopped falling, and Mudsdale was still standing.

Shaking horribly, looking really beaten up, and with pebbles stuck all over the fur like gray mumps, but standing.

However, the protective aura hadn't gotten nearly as large as Ash thought it might after all those blows. Did it have a limit?

If it did, then perhaps the simplest solution was the best.

"Pikachu, let's win this! One more Iron Tail!"

"Pika!" 'Agreed!'

In a shimmering light Iron Tail manifested and Pikachu charged towards the barely standing Mudsdale, whose Trainer shook herself out of the stupor that resulted from being hit with a battlefield.

"High Horsepower!" Lilo declared as Mudsdale's hooves glowed and the mighty beast reared up.

But it was an even slower movement than before. And they had an ace to use.

"Use Quick Attack as well!"

White streaks manifested along with the Iron Tail sheen. Pikachu was now speeding even faster at Mudsdale, who dropped the hoof attack with the force of multiple pile drivers.

Moments after Pikachu was already passed by, to the horror of the Trainer.

Pikachu ended the attack behind Mudsdale, taking a tired breath after it was all said and done right in front of a stunned Lilo.

A ripple formed across the aura as it diminished a tad, the side effect of Iron Tail. The aura faded in full moments after he ripple had cleared away, as Mudsdale collapsed in a great heap.

The arena was filled with stunned silence for one moment, then a second, a third….

"Mudsdale is unable to battle! The winners of this match are Ash and Red in a major upset victory!"

Before erupting like a volcano into explosive excitement and amazement. Also, some swearing.

As the cheers rang through for the surprise win Paul left, his face unmoving.

It was not to say that he didn't have any thoughts on the battle. Ketchum had handled that situation
better than anyone could have expected, and Red had performed quite well until the Alolan had done that…. thing.

He had left his Pokédex at his hotel room so it hadn't told him. He'd ask it there later where people couldn't overhear the abomination.

Had Lilo won he would have studied up on the Alola native Pokémon with it, but she was gone now so he didn't need to figure out what on earth she did with all the posing.

Magical Girl Lyrical Lilo aside….

One win and he'd be fighting them next. It would be tough, but he would win.

This battle had shown Red's weakness. He didn't handle unexpected factors well. He was a budding savant with what he knew, but the new would always throw him off.

He had one Pokémon that Red would have no idea how to combat. It was a one-time only weakness, but it was time he cashed it in.

He'd need something different for the League, but the Safari Zone should provide for that.

As for Ketchum, for all his technique power could stop him cold. His best Pokémon would suffice there. His partner would be suitable cannon fodder.

Though that battle had only continued to raise the question.

Why keep bothering with Raichu?

....

"Red!"

The door to his room cracked open, revealing a sliver of light into the darkened room, and Yellow’s head poking in. After a moment of considering him, spying him in the darkness leaning against the bedside wall of the bed he used in their double, she spoke further. She was not wearing her hat, he noted idly.

"Ash and his friends are going out to eat before Misty and Iris's battle. Ash said you can come too. I think it's his way of trying to break the ice, he seemed to have thought about it for a while."

Yellow was clearly trying to get him and Ash to talk.

"I'm not hungry."

It wasn't very effective.

"Liar. We're always hungry."

"I have crackers." He did too. Good quality crackers, and he also had a block of cheese and a jug of milk.

"Are you still upset about the match? Red…. if you are, this isn't how you deal with it," Yellow empathically declared.

"You guys had trouble because you weren't working in sync and kept stepping on each other's toes, and a sandwich solves that problem more than moping."
"…. That isn't the problem," Red declared as Yellow shook her head.

"From where I was sitting, that was the problem. I'm not saying you need to turn to the way Ash thinks, or make him think like you. Honestly, I'm on your side here. I think you were correct in the argument. You two just need to at least work together for the final match tomorrow."

He gave her silence.

"…. or you can just sit here instead of building bridges of cheese and rolls. Hopefully you are thinking of a way to win on your own then." And with that remark Yellow left, the sliver of light vanishing and leaving the room in darkness.

'Is everyone the same in the ring? No. You are right, there are people there who are stronger, faster, and tougher than me.'

He heard her voice. His mother's voice. If he closed his eyes, he could almost see her; feel her hand on his shoulder like back in the old days.

He remembered saying that it wasn't fair if she had to fight people like that, and her words after that had always stuck with him.

'What makes it fair Red, is that none of us are equal. No one is the same. We all have something special about us. We could be stronger, or faster, or be just like me and refusing to go down. It is always fair, as long as we all give it everything we've got. When you give it everything you've got, and your opponent does as well, the loss will always be fair. It's when someone smacks someone down without giving it their all that isn't fair.'

He had given his all in that fight, even with the lack of information and the bad luck on that paralysis. So had Lilo and her battle partner.

Ash hadn't, but he still ended up taking the fight. He had gone from Pallet Town to Fuchsia, and had rarely ever given it everything he had.

Pewter, Vermillion, Celadon, this tournament; he had defeated his opponents not even fighting at his full potential.

From what he heard, it sounded like the only time he had ever fought an opponent with his full strength had been by accident.

Ash was going around saying that everyone wasn't worth his full ability. Himself, Lilo, Brock, Surge, Solidad, A.J, that blue-haired guy named James…. None of them were worth his time.

He only beat Ash because Ash decided he wasn't worth giving it his all. The Trainer who would have legitimately beaten him had their first fight been interrupted, and fought them with all the power of her region and a powerful Pokémon the likes of which a Pikachu should have not beaten without Grass Knot, wasn't worth giving it his all.

And that really bothered Red. For all that his fellow Pallet Trainer, Gary, put on an air of superiority and smugness at the start of their battles, in the end Ash was fathoms more arrogant than Gary could ever hope to be.

…. 
Gary tried to not look at Paul, instead focusing on the two girls they were up against.

From what he had gathered they were traveling with Ash. Gary had no idea why and for what purpose that could serve, and he had noticed a lavender-haired girl quite often around them.

So, Ash was traveling with three girls? While Gary was fine with Ash never thinking about his sister ever again, the idea of Ash having cheerleaders bewildered him. That was just…. weird.

Did Ash obliviousness to Serena's attraction to him at camp reverse itself with interest or something?

It could only be weirder if Ash was riding around a red sports car worth more than his house.

At least, he had heard Paul snarkily call them that. Gary didn't see it. The taller one was certainly no cheerleader.

He knew what cheerleaders looked like; the girl looked more like a track team member.

The other girl…. well she was closer but still not quite cheerleader material.

While the silent lavender girl was an unknown (though he swore he saw something akin to her training with Ash so she was a Trainer of some skill), he had an idea on these two.

The tan skinned girl originated from Unova and was named Iris. As such she had Pokémon he didn't recognize, though she did not seem to have as many.

The orangette was a local girl named Misty, who specialized in water Pokémon. A hopeful at the Cerulean Gym perhaps?

Regardless his observations left him with several options of Pokémon to use today, though frankly it would depend on what Paul was going to send out.

He was not exactly being forthcoming with his choices. It was really getting frustrating.

Sure, at this point Gramps would get what he wanted regardless of the outcome, but was it worth dealing with Paul?

"Raichu, stand by for battle!"

Gary felt one of his eyebrows shoot up as Paul shot out his Raichu.

The same one from an earlier battle, from what he could tell.

He did remember that most people rotated their Pokémon, right? That was just…. stupid. Even Ash at his dumbest would realize that watching the battle, or asking about it, would reveal what to expect.

"Excadrill go!"

Also, the fact that one of the few Pokémon the Unovan girl had was a Ground-type, and she was partnered with a water Trainer.

Even Ash at his dumbest, quite possibly without sleep, would see that coming.

Magneton was out with a ground-type around, so he'd need a Pokémon that could handle Excadrill and Water-types…

Perhaps even turn the Unovan girl around with her own medicine while he was at it too. Yes, that
would work.

"Porygon, I choose you!"

In a burst of light appeared a rare sight. Cubist like a painting and colored like a newborn ward at a hospital, a living conundrum of virtual and reality known as Porygon floated before him.

A reward for obtaining a Ditto for a scientist named Akihabara. He already had a Ditto so it was hardly a problem to catch one for a man of science.

Iris stared at Porygon with confusion and disbelief, as if trying to figure out what it was supposed to be. The Excadrill tilted its head, but otherwise was managing.

"Poliwrath!"

His trick was matched however by the release of the Water-Fighting type, which posed and flexed before him threateningly.

Well maybe Paul would be able to handle that problem. Then again with how Paul was acting he'd be lucky if this fight didn't recreate what Ash got up to with Red earlier today.

Could he emulate the…. thing Ash did with the field if need be?

"Begin!"

He'd have to figure that out if need be.

"Use Metal Claw on that Porygon!" While her command sort of fizzled out as she said Porygon, Iris's command rang through as the mole's claws were enhanced with metallic force.

"Conversion to counter!" Gary would admit it took him a while to figure out how to use Porygon, but that trick was worth it.

Porygon shimmered with molecular change just as Metal Claw struck it, ringing through the arena like a sledgehammer on a block of iron.

Iris looked on in confusion as to what just happened, even as Raichu burst out of the earth behind Excadrill.

Since when did Paul use Dig? Did he manage that trick Lt. Surge did with his commands or something, or did he just whisper really well?

Before Raichu could make use of the surprise, a pair of white gloved hands had grabbed the mouse around the waist.

Poliwrath had jumped to meet her own leap.

"Seismic Toss!"

And with that call Poliwrath spun in the air a moment before flinging Raichu to the ground with a harsh thrap.

"Already we're seeing better teamwork on both sides than the last match folks!"

That wasn't teamwork on his end, that was Paul and his orders managing to work together. Nothing about what had just happened was planned.
As Raichu struggled back up from that blow Gary continued, idly noting Paul's disapproval.

For what exactly, Seismic Toss?

"Fire a Charge Beam!"

The electrical bolt was fired from Porygon's nose right at Poliwrath, which Excadrill jumped in to intercept without prompting before contact could be made.

Gary was unsure if that was good training or bad training there. He'd ask his grandpa what he'd lean towards after this battle.

"Brick Break!"

"Dynamic Punch!"

Poliwrath and Raichu clashed with fighting attacks fist to fist behind Excadrill, obscuring the view of it from him as Iris gave her own command.

"Drill Run!"

Drill Run…. Oh shit. Conversion was in effect for a Steel-type attack.

That was going to hurt.

"Quickly use Co…" and the Drill Run hit too fast. Before his command could even get far enough to be recognized by Porygon in full Excadrill already had turned itself into a missile and slammed into Porygon.

Triangular (or whatever one called a three-dimensional triangle, it was escaping him at the moment) legs spun like wheels as Porygon was sent tumbling back from the super effective strike.

Porygon righted itself moments before it hit the wall, eyes trained on the Excadrill as it exited Invincible Mode.

"Shadow Ball!"

"Metal Claw!"

Porygon fired the ghostly sphere attack towards Excadrill, who sliced it to ribbons. The dark mist that clung to the claws in the wake of it was nice looking, and he was sure his sister would be taking notes.

Or at the very least holding up one of those judge numbers used for grading people. He recalled she got a set for a holiday joke gift last year.

"Thunderbolt!" Paul called. Excadrill looked ready to intercept, and as much as Gary would prefer to not help Paul….

"Shadow Ball!"

A second shadow blast was sent right into Excadrill's side. The blast knocked Excadrill down, just as the electricity began to fly.

"Use Mud Shot, then Bubble Beam at both of them!"
Pointing a glowing glove at the electrical attack Poliwrath fired a dozen brown bullets of energy into the path of the electrical attack. They once again cancelled each other out.

Poliwrath’s second glove began to glow as well as each hand was pointed at a different opponent. From the fingers shot out dozens of bubbles in either direction.

The bubbles struck Raichu in a torrent of pops, though Porygon floated out of the way.

Excadrill remained on the ground for the duration of the attack. Gary had caught it stop trying to get back up the moment the attack was called.

Paul was growling over the hit.

As the barrage ended Raichu teetered a bit, but was otherwise fine.

"Quick Attack!"

Poliwrath was staggered back as a white blur struck into its chest.

"Now close-range Thunderbolt!"

"Intercept it!"

Raichu was about to glow yellow, Gary could see the necessary muscle tensing from his spot. However, a clawed arm grabbed it by the tail and flung it away.

Gary somehow doubted that was a Fling attack. It didn't look right.

"Tri Attack!"

Regardless of what it was, a triangle glowing red, yellow, and blue in shimmering patterns was shot from Porygon. Said triangle slammed into Excadrill, sending it flying just like Raichu.

Raichu hit the side of the arena with a hard thump before falling down, an action shared by Excadrill.

However, Excadrill managed to land on its feet and glare back at him, Raichu hit the ground and lay there.

"Raichu is unable to battle!"

Excadrill then burst into flames before collapsing as well.

"Excadrill is unable to battle."

Tri-Attack's potential extra effect, one of three status conditions. It was the first time Gary had ever seen the burn one.

"And just as we thought our team of lovely ladies was about to take an edge in this fight, a burn condition evens up the score! This is real folks!"

Gary observed both Paul and Iris return their fallen Pokémon. Iris was clearly bothered that her Pokémon was defeated, but she nonetheless looked proud. She muttered something to Excadrill's ball, possibly a thank you, and looked back at Porygon as she still gazed at it in unease and uncertainty.

He could see why Ash and her got along: he'd react to a loss the same way Gary felt. Also, he'd look
just as confused at a Porygon, he had heard from Gramps that Porygon were a weak spot on his test all those months ago.

Paul on the other hand, glared at the ball that his Raichu was in.

"Well, I guess that's it." He said abruptly. That's what, the match? That seemed like something Paul would say.

Though something about it didn't seem right.

Regardless…

"Bubblebeam!" Misty was quick to order as a two-handed bubble barrage came at Porygon.

"Charge Beam!"

The electric streak shot right into the bubbles, popping through a number of them before dissipating. Porygon had to avoid the remnants of the barrage.

"Mud Shot!" The mud barrage was next. Odd how Poliwrath wasn't going in close.

"Shadow Ball!" Was Misty being cautious because of Conversion? It wasn't a common technique so it might have thrown her off.

The shadow laden sphere and the mud collided in an explosion, obscuring vision between the two. Porygon beeped nervously as Gary got a sneaking suspicion.

"Dynamic Punch!"

And there it was. Cover to avoid being blasted.

"Conversion, quickly!" A super effective Dynamic Punch was something to avoid, just in case. He could call a dodge once Porygon could sense where Poliwrath was

Porygon's form shimmered, just as Poliwrath got right up to it, a glowing fist ready to strike.

Too close to dodge.

Damn it! Was that even enough time to change type?

Regardless of that, there was the other problem. Dynamic Punch would leave confusion unless Porygon had an anti-confusion ability (what abilities did Porygon even have? His Pokédex wasn't sure.), and that would pretty much be game.

Well, Ashy boy would have the most casual tournament match in history tomorrow it seemed.

Porygon let out a loud shriek, like that of a really determined app activation, as the shimmering around it changed a bit.

The fist of Poliwrath collided, but it phased through Porygon.

"Poli!"

"Huh!?" Gary's huh was in tandem with the huh of Misty and Iris both. Paul didn't react, because that would be too pedestrian or whatever reason Paul didn't do things regular people did.
"Interesting. Porygon appears to have upgraded the base Conversion into Conversion 2 master. A Conversion 2 changes type to one that is good at combating the enemy in question than the previous type used. Porygon appears to have become a Ghost-type."

Conversion 2 huh…. Well look at that. Lady Luck was on his side today.

Perhaps Porygon had just gotten that stronger. Perhaps that work he’d done with Porygon before coming here was worth it.

Regardless of the reason, he had an opening now.

Sorry Ash, but it looked like that super chill final round of yours had just been cancelled.

Courtesy of Gary Oak.

"Charge Beam barrage, go!" And Porygon, with Poliwrath's hand still inside itself, had a beam of electricity fly, striking Poliwrath right in the chest.

It was the first of many, the blasts firing like a barrage of lasers. Lasers that occasionally got stronger.

Gary caught at least three times the Charge Beams grew in power during the constant barrage.

Poliwrath was blown out by Porygon, and collapsed after the sixth blast.

"No!"

"Poliwrath is unable to battle! The winners are Gary and Paul!"

"And what a comeback! Porygon pulled a comeback through sheer determination!"

As the crowds cheered Porygon turned to Gary, and Gary did something that he didn't often do.

He wasn't Ash after all, normally to him praise would be fine. But in this case, even if it did mean one more fight with Paul he'd have to stomach against Ash simply because giving up to the guy would haunt him like a specter for the rest of his days; he'd make a public and large show of it.

He ran to Porygon, and gave the digital Pokémon a joyful embrace.

….  

It sucked that Misty and Iris lost, but they didn't seem to take it too badly.

Maybe it was just the fact that it wasn't Paul who won, or perhaps because his words from Lavender were still there, or perhaps the lack of crazy Clefairy involved causing mental damage to Axew.

Regardless it left only fight to go, and with that thinking.

Thinking required walking along the edge of the woods at night, talking where no one could hear him.

"So, buddy, do I use Servine next? I don't think Gary knows about her and if he has Blastoise…"

'What if he uses something else though? Would he have Nidoking now?'

Good point. If he used Nidoking, Servine would not really be a good matchup.
"So Squirtle then…"

'Squirtle, maybe Krabby if he wants a go'.

"Then of course Paul…. I haven't seen Grotle at all during this tournament, or Torterra if that's the case now. Man, I wish I hadn't used Charizard already…."

'Nothing's saying you can't use him again.'

"But if Paul goes first, it could be Torterra and Blastoise vs Charizard." That would hurt. A lot.

It would also probably require a break in to the Safari Zone.

'Red's a thing, remember?' Pikachu reminded Ash. 'It would not be a two on one fight. Perhaps that Pikachu of his could handle Blastoise and Charizard Torterra'.

"Yeah, I remember," Ash muttered bitterly.

Pikachu grumbled something. Apparently in humans if you held out an olive branch (instead of an oak branch or a hickory branch for some reason) and it was declined, that made things worse.

The bushes rustled in front of them, causing Trainer and Pokémon to tense.

It could be something dangerous.


Before Ash could rebuke the request the bushes parted, revealing the Pokémon in question.

"Rai."

It was a Raichu, though bruised up a bit.

Pikachu darted down and began sniffing the Raichu in interest. The Raichu's eyes glittered in unease, and looked ready to bolt. Pikachu's sniffing seemed to be the main thing keeping it here, for reasons Ash could only guess at and hope he was right to keep them family friendly.

"The Pokémon is a Raichu. Raichu is ...."

The Pokédex gave information he already knew, which Ash ignored to look over the Raichu. The Raichu was bruised, as if it had just been in a fight. It was also female from what Ash knew of Raichu tails from the Pokédex and Paul's Raichu.

"This Raichu is female, and had been recently released. Traces of Pokéball radiation are detected."

That caught Ash's attention. A recently released Raichu. One who was bruised from a fight, and female….

"This Raichu's moves are Quick Attack, Thunderbolt, Dig, and Brick Break."

"Pikapi! 'This is Paul's Raichu Ash!' Pikachu and the Pokédex gave their information at the same moment, each confirming it.

Paul had released his Raichu.
"That was the Raichu Paul used, isn't it?"

The question came from behind him. Ash did not look back to know that Red was behind him, his own Pikachu darting down to sniff at the now even more terrified Raichu.

She looked ready to bolt, though a cringe suggested the injuries were impeding her.

"…. Yeah," Ash replied tersely.

"I heard the Pokédex. He released his Raichu, and without healing it apparently. Why?"

Red seemed genuinely curious.

"That's how Paul is. He releases Pokémon that don't perform well enough for him. Or just because they don't know the moves he wants," Ash explained as Red frowned.

"…You know, I can see some of that. If you notice two Rattata, and one of the Rattata knows Flame Wheel, you capture that Rattata over the other. Releasing them for it, instead of simply choosing to not capture…I can't understand," Red mused, passion slowly entering his tone as he did so.

"If you capture a Pokémon that doesn't want to fight, release it for mutual agreement. Maybe trade it to a Coordinator, or give it to a person who didn't battle but needed a carrier Pidgey or something. I've done that, a Pidgey I captured in Viridian Forest did not like battling and now works at a ski resort flying messages to remote cabins."

"Rai…" the Raichu mused quietly.

Pikachu listened patiently before turning to Ash.

"Pikapika." 'Raichu's like that. She never really wanted to fight, but Paul never got the hint.'

"You never wanted to…" Ash asked Raichu, who nodded sadly.

"You can understand Pikachu? You have two bloodlines, just like me and Yellow?" Red observed. "You have Electric Heart? I can't understand any of them, I'm a species bloodliner."

"It's not that." Ash didn't elaborate as Raichu flinched in pain.

"Perhaps the Heal Ball duplication program is warranted. I doubt Raichu can be taken to the Pokémon Center without further injury aggravation," the Pokédex suggested in a rare professional tone. Ash nodded as he removed his backpack from his left shoulder, causing it to sag as he reached inside it for what he'd need for this.

"Raichu…. I'm a Pokémon Trainer too. Even if you don't want to battle, you are still a good Pokémon. I may not agree with Paul, but I've seen you battle. You are strong. People will notice that, and they'll probably catch you again. They may not notice that you don't want to fight, or not care at all."

"The Pokémon I catch stay with Professor Oak when I'm not using them. His place is wonderful, with open fields and fresh water, and all the food you can eat. It's safe too, and if you are there, especially with a Pokéball, you will never be captured again."

Raichu looked at him in nervous interest as Ash placed the H.O.P.E Glove on, followed by the placement of one of his two remaining Heal Balls.
The glove lit up with a color he had not seen it do before, as the Heal Ball was popped out, leaving behind an after image of itself that rapidly solidified into a new Heal Ball.

Red's Pikachu looked at it with a raised eyebrow, but no reaction beyond that.

"This ball can heal you, and send you there. If you go, I will never make you battle. What you do is your decision alone," Ash told her as he held the new Heal Ball out to her.

Raichu sniffed it, eyes wide and nervous, before jerking forward.

Her forehead tapped the ball, and activated it. In a burst of light, she was sucked into it.

The ball landed between his and Red's Pikachu twitching for a bit before stopping with a ding and teleporting to Professor Oak's Lab. Somehow Ash doubted it was going to break open.

"…We are going to beat Paul."

Red's statement drew the attention of both Ash and the Pikachu.

"Gary will be no problem, but I am not going to let Paul win. Ketchum, I still think you are both a fool pointlessly weakening yourself, and disrespectful to everyone you fight, but that is nothing compared to Paul. I have no problem with him being an antisocial ass, but his actions cross a serious line. Tell me everything you know about him, and let's have a solid set of plans to smack him down."

The edge of Red's lips flickered as if on fire, and idly Ash wondered if that was why Red didn't talk much.

If he said too many words, he'd breath fire?

Regardless of that question, or the new barb at him (disrespectful?), he couldn't help but agree.

"Okay. So first off Paul's from the Sinnoh region, so his starter was something called a Turtwig. It evolved into a Grotle and could have become a Torterra by this point…"

Even without giving away information that was potentially wrong to this universe (such as 'has a Electivire'), information flowed about everything he knew about what Pokémon Paul had, and also a few observations of his tactics where he didn't avoid the pre-reboot Paul as much.

Red added in his own observations of Gary into the mix, and from there plans began to form.

Tomorrow began the final battle, and for the moment Ash and Red were united once more.

…

As the final battle inched into the beginning, Ash finally got a good look at Gary.

He was struck by how uneasy Gary looked. Part of him knew how bad Paul could be, and wondered if that was what was causing Gary problems.

And he thought Red had become hard to deal with.

Speaking of, part of Ash was wondering if he should have brought up at any point the fact they look similar, and what Belladonna had suggested. The entire mad theory there that looked more and more true every time he ran into people who fit into it.

But he hadn't. There was no way to bring that up easily, and even with their 'Paul must not win' truce the idea of them actually getting along was distant.
A murderer and a cheat, he had no luck with random family members. Lovely. Perhaps he'd meet his thief brother Larch Grabbin next. He could steal Dexter and his right shoe and come to instantly regret it.

Okay, John Archer from what he had seen was a good guy, but he was dead. He didn't see enough of Ashley or those twins from MissingNo's fun show of frozen ice cubes to say anything else, or that Johto guy Gardevoir had found.

Still, one more battle. He just had to win one more battle.

"The final battle is about to begin. Who will win access to the Safari Zone? Let's find out shall we? Begin!"

"Torterra, stand by for battle!"

Paul was first up, throwing out his first Pokémon. The great turtle landed in a hard thump.

Ash idly noted Red react a bit. He had been right.

"Torterra, the Continent Pokémon. Torterra move slowly across the land, often having other Pokémon nest upon it. A famous fable in Sinnoh talks of a man who built a cottage upon the back of one and woke up one day on the opposite side of a mountain." The Pokédex provided information as ever from his jacket pocket.

"Charmeleon, go!"

The red flaming lizard was next, staring down the Grass/Ground type with a snort.

"Blastoise, I choose you!"

Joining the first turtle with a loud thump was Gary's starter, poising with armed canons. It looked at Red's Charmeleon and glared it down, as well as Red's Pikachu. Both of them stared back in equal seriousness.

It was a look of mutual ambition to fight and get stronger against each other.

In past battles between the Trainers they had competed against each other, pushing each other in every challenge, always looking for that final showdown to prove which one of them was the best.

It was something he had never seen with his Pokémon vs his rivals' Pokémon. It might have required multiple one on one battles, something with even Paul had hadn't managed.

Maybe he would have one day, perhaps Froakie would have encountered a rival like that in Kalos, but he was seeing such a face off for the first time today.

"Blastoise, the Shellfish Pokémon. Blastoise are slow and powerful, using their highly accurate water cannons to blast with immense force. Do not get sprayed by one," was the Pokédex entry to interrupt his rivalry thoughts.

It was now his call, and per his and Red's planning there was one Pokémon to use.

"I choose you!" Ash sent his Pokéball flying, or more specifically his Great Ball. It burst open, revealing Servine.

Her arms were crossed as she sized up their opponents. She seemed moderately impressed.
"Torterra, Seed Bomb!"

Torterra rolled its head before letting loose a volley of seeds right at Servine, who tensed in preparation for the counter.

"Duck!" And with that call Servine bent over close to the ground as the seeds flew over her, crashing into the wall behind her with audible bangs.

"Use Aerial Ace!"

Still low to the ground Servine charged forward, her tail glowing with a bright blue glow.

"Ice Beam!" Gary called for an intercept. Blastoise pointed its cannons right at Servine and fired icy blue tendrils of energy right at her.

"Flame Burst!"

Midway to Servine a fiery orb struck the Ice Beam, neutralizing it.

Red's save allowed for Servine to get in striking distance of Torterra, who was glowing purple again. Curse it would seem, and it was called without shouting it.

Apparently, Paul learned more from Lt. Surge than it first appeared.

Servine slashed Torterra's side with her blue tail, though Torterra didn't react much to it. Servine glared at the massive turtle, who stared back.

"Use Attract!" Paul shouldn't have a way of stopping that. As far as Ash could remember, such an attack had never come up.

As the hearts began to form around Servine Paul apparently did have a response in hand.

"Stealth Rock, formation 4!"

As the hearts began to orbit around Torterra, small stones flew out of Torterra like projected spikes. They pierced each and every heart around before flying out and piercing the ground every which way around itself.

"And Paul turns a move that would have no use in this fight into a powerful defensive measure!"

Servine darted away from close quarters to Torterra, running towards Charmeleon and Blastoise.

'Ash, I take it even you can see it would probably be best we handle this two to one. Let's get rid of the Blastoise first.'

Ash nodded in agreement to Servine suggestion as Charmeleon avoided a Scald from Blastoise's cannons.

"Servine use Leaf Storm!"

Servine nodded as the cloud of leaves formed around her, which was promptly fired right at Blastoise.

The Water-type was struck, sending it flying back.
"…. That was hasty Ash. You blew that Leaf Storm too quickly and it's only down from there, Blastoise use Ice Beam!" Blastoise shot the dual icy blasts again, this time at both mid-stage starters, and apart enough a single Flame Burst could not wipe both out.

"Leaf Storm!"

"Flame Burst!"

The two attacks flew into the Ice Beam, shattering it with ease and flying right into Blastoise. Both attacks sent the turtle flying even farther back.

"What!?" Gary was stunned, as if a rule of reality was broken. Apparently he did not know about Contrary.

"Seed Bomb!"

The wide range seed attack flew from behind them, striking both in the back and knocking each other down face first into the dirt.

Nothing knock out, but certainly damaging.

"…. You personally knew the blue kid with the Pikachu and you didn't even know that Servine has the Contrary ability? I figured that out just by watching a news program. Pathetic," Paul snarked at Gary, who growled back in annoyance.

"Well sorry, but I have other things to do than watch Ash all day!"

And Ash thought he and Red had some issues.

…. 

Gary Oak was a Trainer he fought often.

He was a decent opponent, but there was something lacking with him. He had never gotten a fix on it, but Paul put the finger on it.

Power.

Gary had the knowledge and range of Pokémon that could fight any type of opponent, but there was a missing kick to them.

Ash was like that too. Both came from Pallet Town, maybe there was something in the air. Though he'd be amidst to say it was the same issue.

If he had to think about it he could probably point out the origin of each of their power issues, but it wasn't the time or place for that.

They had a fight to win.

It had not started optimally: he would have preferred Servine go after Blastoise. He could see why Ash made the call to go after Torterra, and he approved the move to help on Blastoise.

Torterra had taken advantage of the absence to get them from behind, but once Blastoise was dealt with they could focus all on the Sinnoh Pokémon.

"Scald!"
The water attack was fired at the downed two. He'd make a call once Ash did whatever strange choice he came up with.

"Slice the stream aimed at Charmeleon with Leaf Blade!"

There. Now he could make a blind call on what to do.

"Dragon Claw!" Should he have done Shadow Claw?

Well he wouldn't know, but as Servine spun in the air and sliced the boiling water in a great slash, Charmeleon darted forward and slashed at Blastoise with the draconic claw.

The claw clattered against shell. Red suspected that the damage was limited.

Perhaps he could consider a Thunder Punch for the next battle. He could get Pikachu to teach it. Probably.

Blastoise stared down at the lizard with a smug look, one that promised something nasty for being so close.

"Use Earthquake!"

Gary's command was followed by Blastoise giving a harsh stamp to the ground, sending a shock wave.

The shock wave knocked Charmeleon down, and continued across the field. It approached Servine, who hopped over it casually with little fanfare as it moved towards Torterra.

"Block it!"

Paul's command caused Torterra to stomp similarly, creating a similar shockwave that crossed the field.

The two attacks met in the center, where Paul's overpowered Gary's and continued towards Charmeleon.

That would hurt, and he doubted it would be productive to Charmeleon having a long term presence in this battle.

"Break the shockwave!" Ash called, and for a moment Red's brain skipped a beat.

Break the shockwave? How…. he doubted Servine could use Earthquake.

Servine, to whom the shock wave of the Earthquake was coming towards her, stuck a glowing green Leaf Blade into the immediate path of the Earthquake.

The green energy pulse that followed was momentary, but it did break the Earthquake up. A gap opened up, with said gap freeing up Charmeleon from a second hit.

As well as Blastoise, but that was an acceptable flaw.

"That's one way to stop an Earthquake. Note however folks that will not work on a fault line!"

As Charmeleon got back up Red decided it was time to finish things. Torterra was a slow Pokémon who did not make rash calls. From what little he saw of Paul's battle style that seemed more an
adaption for Torterra than his general fair.

It was time to put Blastoise down for the count.

"Get your distance and fire a Flame Burst!" It wouldn't be close enough to send collateral damage to Torterra but it would free up Servine from what he suspected was blocking the finishing strike.

Charmeleon darted off to the side in the wake of the last bits of the earthquake before inhaling and spitting out a large Flame Burst. The fire ball struck the side of Blastoise with the usual release of fiery shrapnel, a few bits of it striking into Blastoise's cheek.

Nothing majorly damaging, but annoying none the less.

As Blastoise flinched it looked like Ash understood his transparent and obvious set up.

"Servine, let's finish this. Use Leaf Storm!"

"Pika!"

"Ser!"

Ash's Pokémon let out calls in tandem as Servine began to form a storm of leaves around itself, ready to fire.

"Seed Bomb!"

The seeds flew at Servine, who twitched herself to the side to avoid them. The seeds knocked away a few leaves but the attack was otherwise unaffected.

"Intercept with Focus Blast-" A note of panic entered Gary's voice. Red assumed the change of call was due to noting how Ice Beam was blocked previously by Charmeleon, and the fact that Paul's terse help had failed.

As the fighting attack charged however, it wasn't fast enough. Leaf Storm flew right into Blastoise, striking just as the Focus Blast reached firing stage.

Blastoise was sent flying back, the Focus Blast firing into the sky the entire way, as Blastoise struck the side of the stadium with an air popping thump.

Blastoise fell to the floor.

"Blastoise is unable to battle!"

"Tccht," was Paul's reaction as the battlefield changed. It was now two to one, as Servine turned towards Torterra, with Charmeleon mirroring her.

"Curse." Paul responded to this challenge with another flare of the purple enhancing move.

"Flame Burst!" Ash had proved that physical attacks were not going to work even after one curse, so going into a ranged attack was the logical response.

"Seed Bomb!"

The flame ball didn't even make it halfway across the field before the seed barrage pierced through its center, scattering the flames and striking Charmeleon in the chest.
Charmeleon staggered back from the impact as Ash gave his own foray into defeating Torterra.

"Leaf Storm!"

Servine's ever growing power attack charged up once more as Paul looked at the attack with annoyance.

What was he to do though? At their level he had four options with his Torterra.

Curse would not help.

Seed Bomb would only blow away a few leaves at best and she could easily dodge a Seed Bomb to prevent staggering.

Stealth Rock was not an offensive tool, and he wasn't sure if it could be used as a defense beyond for Attract. Why hadn't Ash used it against Blastoise anyway, had it not occurred to him to try?

And Earthquake was also something Servine had demonstrated an ease of avoiding.

Torterra was out of options, plain and simple.

Paul grinned as he gave out a simple command.

"Stone Edge."

Torterra let out a grunt. It was not a grunt of inspiration, it was not a grunt of pulling power from within itself. It was a grunt of 'I will be doing this thing I know to do and can do at will'.

Following that grunt dozens of floating rocks formed around Torterra, which flew at Servine in a massive storm of stones.

Leaf Storm flew into the Stone Edge, with leaf meeting stone.

The stones pierced the leaves before both exploded, the constructs vanishing.

A fifth move? At their level?

"And a four-badge Trainer manages a fifth move! Folks we've seen some serious talent today! I can already hear my cousin who does Indigo drooling in anticipation for this year's announcing!"

"Curse." And Torterra shimmered purple again, as if matching what Servine was gaining with its own trick.

A dark thought wafted through Red.

What if that was what Paul was doing while they were finishing off Gary? Or, was this Torterra's raw power they were truly dealing with?

....

There were many things Ash could say Paul was bad at.

Smiling, conversation, socialization, skipping, conflict resolution, etc.

But one thing he could not fault him for was training Pokémon to be strong. He failed on many other levels, but strength was something he was not at fault for.
Clearly that hadn't changed.

Still they weren't going to lose to him. Not here, not now.

He could not afford to.

Ash glanced at Red, wondering if he could give him an opening.

"Servine, use Attract on Torterra!"

'Repetition I see.' She observed, but she seemed to get the implication that this was a distraction. Hearts bubbled around her once more as Paul growled.

"Formation 4!"

The Stealth Rock formed in response, swarming around Torterra to shatter the hearts before impact.

Hopefully Red picked up that he was doing that to try and distract Torterra to prevent countering, not him randomly throwing things at random at…

"Flame Burst!"

Good.

The fire ball struck the stones, splitting into small bits upon impact through the stones in slivers. Dozens of these slivers of flame struck into Torterra's shell.

Torterra didn't cry out, but the attack did hit.

"Earthquake!" Torterra slammed down on the ground, clearly meaning to get back at them for the Attract and Flame Burst trick.

The shockwave flew towards them, faster than before. Servine and Charmeleon jumped over the wave, though Charmeleon had to jump later to stay airborne over the shockwave.

The wave even went towards them, forcing both himself and Red to leap over it.

"Seed Bomb!"

Torterra fired the blast while airborne, striking Servine midair.

Ash learned a new swear word courtesy of his grass type as Servine was sent rolling across the field, taking a serious hit.

The attack had hurt, and Servine probably should avoiding taking more of those.

Charmeleon landed safely however, and a command by Red was followed up with a Rock Tomb thrown Torterra's way.

Torterra shattered the attack with Stone Edge, sending a rain of stones down on the field.

"Ser." 'So, got any ideas on how to get through that defense?' Servine asked the question of the hour.

How indeed? Attract was covered, and physical attacks weren't doing anything even before the multiple power boosts. Leaf Storm and Flame Burst were blocked…

Should he just have Servine keep using Leaf Storm until it was so powerful that he created some sort
of grass tornado that Torterra would need a pair of fancy shoes to get back home? Or maybe he could destroy the field again…

Servine narrowed her eyes, before smirking. It appeared she had something, and darted towards Charmeleon.

"Stone Edge!"

"Leaf Storm!" Ash's command didn't throw Servine's idea off as she blocked the stone attack once more. As the attack cancelled itself out Servine darted over to Charmeleon and began speaking quickly, gesturing wildly and with importance.

He quickly got the message, and turned to Red.

"I have a plan, but first you need to get Charmeleon to evolve."

Red looked at him like he was asking him to make Mayonnaise.

"I have a Charizard, you saw him during the battle earlier. I know what a Charmeleon who is about to evolve looks like, and so does Servine. She was there when he evolved: and your Charmeleon looks ready."

"You can't be serious," was all Paul had to say.

"And Ash Ketchum decides it is time to employ…positive encouragement. A step down from blowing up the field ladies and gents, but at least it will keep the repair bill from rising any higher!"

"You slept alright, right Ash?" Gary asked with genuine concern. But Ash was not backing down.

"Pokémon don't just evolve when they hit some single point, they evolve with a combination of power and will. Your Charmeleon has the power; you just have to make the will flow out like an unstoppable flood."

"…This isn't your only plan, is it?" Red questioned.

"No, but I think it's worth trying at the very least."

Red sighed.

…

Ash Ketchum, Trainer from Pallet Town and possessor of four badges and the qualifications to enter the League from the Cerulean Gym, was absurd.

There was no better word for it.

But if he was so insistent on it, him and his Servine….

Well Red didn't have the ability to see how likely this was to work, so maybe by some strange fluctuation of logic this was very likely.

If not… well Ash might not be lying about having better plans.

True, he knew what Ash was talking about. Pokémon did usually require a stimulus along with power to induce evolution, outside of cases like a stone or something. But to do it with just talking….
Well might as well shut Ash up before he suggested he dance or pray to induce victory next.

"Charmeleon." His starter tensed as he heard his name.

"You were the first Pokémon Pikachu and I caught. We've been through a lot together, haven't we? We've won a lot of battles, and this might be our toughest. Let's win."

It was a bad speech. Somehow, he figured Ash would have made a better one. Or Yellow, she did chipper better.

Pikachu gave a short terse statement that was something along the same lines, but blunter.

"… Are you done giving voice overs for weekday morning television? Torterra, Seed Bomb!" Paul declared as a bright blue light suddenly engulfed the arena.

"What?!"

"Ha ha ha ha ha hahah!"

"Ser."

Paul, Ash, and Servine reacted as they were want, as he and his Pikachu stared in shock as Charmeleon began to grow. Torterra did fire the seed bomb, but the seeds disintegrated before they could get close to the evolution.

Was that from power, or just why Pokémon didn't attack mid-evolution?

A pair of blue wings burst out of the flexible blue form, before exploding and revealing a brilliant orange form of power.

"Roar!"

"Charizard, the Flame Pokémon. The final evolution of Charmander, this Pokémon was the symbol and main military strength of the ancient Charific Kingdom. Charizard will only use its full power against a worthy opponent!" Ash's Pokédex declared


Ash's plan had succeeded, at least at evolving. They still had to take down Torterra, and now Stone Edge would be even more dangerous.

"Stone Edge!"

And speaking of…

"Leaf Storm!" Ash called the counter as the leaves and stones clashed again, though this time with a bit of leaf pushback on the stones.

Perhaps the Stone Edge couldn't be powered up any more. So maybe Ash could have used a different strategy than having him weaponize positive encouragement, though he was fine with what that had gotten him.

Ash turned his hat backwards as he declared for a third time, possibly for the charm.

"Attract!"
Paul didn't even need to give the order as the Stealth Rock shield destroyed Servine's affection.

Part of Red chucked as he realized what was to happen next.

"Flame Burst!" If it had gotten some damage in before, what about now?

Charizard roared and flapped his wings, releasing a surge of heated wing instead of Flame Burst.

That looked more like Heat Wave…. his Charizard had learned Heat Wave from evolving.

The Heat Wave surged through the stones, the intangible wind barely deterred by them and striking against Torterra in a great burning heat.

Servine scooted out of the way just in time, avoiding an accidental scorching.

Torterra's cry in pain was matched by Paul's growl of shock and disbelief, mixed in with a bit of worry for Torterra if he wasn't mistaken.

Humanizing aside, there was only one thing left to save.

"End this now Charizard, Heat Wave!"

Charizard gave a mighty bellow before giving one final flap, and unleashing the scorching wind of Heat Wave.

Torterra and Paul glared into the attack in unison as it engulfed Torterra in a burning heat.

It lasted for a good ten seconds before the wind faded, revealing a defeated Torterra and a somewhat red Paul from the heat.

"Torterra is unable to battle, the winners of this match and the tournament are Ash Ketchum and Red Tajiri!"

The sound of Paul returning Torterra were muffled by a stadium erupting into cheers as Ash waved to the crowd with Pikachu, stopping only to pet Servine as she came over to him in a cheery grin.

Charizard declared victory with a burst of flames into the sky.

---

_Later_

Ash had never felt so bitter after a tournament victory. The issue didn't seem as simple anymore. He always believed to have a well-defined sense of right and wrong, and made sure to stick to it. But now… he wasn't so sure.

It had flared up after Red had given him a nod and left, followed by Yellow not long after they escaped the throngs of people and obtained the time and place for tomorrow's day in the Safari Zone, and had been growing ever since they retreated to the privacy of the hotel.

"Still thinking about that?" asked Misty. Ash glanced at her. Iris and Anabel were also looking at him with concern. The Trainer sighed and sat up to face them all. Now the tournament was over they could all take their sweet time in discussing it.

"You never had to rely on your powers to win competitions," said Misty. "I don't see why you
should start now."

"I'm not planning to," Ash replied. "I made a promise, I'd never use it for personal gain."

"Even if I admire your sense of honor and pride, Ash, you have to admit that Red is right," said Iris. "Your powers do not break any rules set for your competitions."

"That doesn't make it fair." Misty crossed her arms. "I mean, he beat us and who knows how many others, and no one knows how!"

"How is that different from a Pokémon hiding a move to use the right time?" asked Iris. "You know, when you have to survive in the wild, the less your enemy knows about you, the better."

"Iris, we're not talking about survival in the wild," Misty pointed. "Even if there's a prize, this is supposed to be a friendly competition. Everyone should have a fair chance to win. Having that kind of power to analyze his opponents puts him miles ahead of everyone else. If Ash can win without using his powers, why can't Red do the same?"

"Because that is how he learned to fight?" Iris replied. "He is just doing what he can do, the way he knows."

"So does Ash, if you put it that way," said Misty. "You know, with my powers, I could have easily made a career as a professional swimmer. Do you know why I never did? Because it wouldn't be fair for those who spend years training and learning how to float, move and breathe."

"Exactly my point," said Ash. "Just because I can do something nobody else can, it doesn't mean I should. Plus, my Pokémon have worked really hard to reach their current strength level, and I know for a fact they want to win by their own effort. Using my power would mean that I didn't trust them to fight their own battles."

"How is that?" said Iris. "Is it not the Trainer's job to help their Pokémon in any way they can during a battle?"

'Guys, I think this is getting a bit too far…'

"Iris, the rules say a Trainer can't interfere directly in a Pokémon battle," said Ash. "The way I see it, my power does exactly that. Even if it doesn't break any law or rule written on paper… it doesn't feel right to win that way."

"Exactly!" Misty agreed. "If Red fights using his power all the time, he probably doesn't understand. He's got a hidden trick up his sleeve and his opponents can't even tell when he's using it!"

"I get the impression you are just upset because he beat you," Iris remarked.

"Aren't you too?" Misty snapped back. "After what his Clefairy almost did to your Axew?!"

"That is different!" Iris retorted. "He had him beaten but was almost going for the kill, so…!"

"Hey calm down!" Ash said raising his hands before this got ugly, and then quickly added in a calmer tone, "Please, the last thing we need right now is to fight amongst ourselves."

"Sorry." Misty and Iris looked at each other apologetically. Once they calmed down, Anabel decided to give her own thoughts.

'I don't think I can take any sides here. Ash, maybe you shouldn't judge Red too harshly. There's too
much about him you don't know. The kind of life he had, how he grew up…'

Ash and the others glanced at her. Even without using telepathy she could tell what they were thinking, and she had her response ready.

'I didn't pry into his thoughts, but I could still feel it. He's carrying a lot of pain inside. Maybe he just did what he felt he had to do to survive, and got used to it. He's probably had it much harder than you, Ash. You had a happy childhood, a loving mother who taught and raised you.'

Ash didn't reply. If Anabel was right, maybe it was Belladonna all over again, if to a lesser extreme. That being the case, he couldn't blame him for doing what he felt was needed to survive. Still, it didn't feel any less right.

'On the other hand,' Anabel continued, 'I don't think he has the right to judge you either. You know of people with a handicap, like losing one of their senses or a limb, yet still manage to pull through and sometimes perform even better than those who have their full capacity? There are people who become stronger by purposely giving themselves a handicap, such as training their hearing to fight in the dark without relying on the eyesight, or to fight using only their legs to avoid injuring their hands, for instance.'

Misty and Iris glanced at the telepath. They had been arguing all day about it, and they never stopped to think things from the other side. They still held their views, but at least now… they could understand each other better.

'What I'm trying to say is, your viewpoints might be different, and you might have different ways of doing things, but neither is necessarily wrong.'

Everyone remained silent, taking their time to ponder and let everything sink in. Combining the memories of both timelines, Ash had always seen himself as a human, not as a bloodliner. To him, using his powers was taking the easy way out, and he never liked to do that. He didn't have to rely on supernatural powers in his previous life, and he had decided not to do it in this one either. If Red wanted to do things on a different level of morality, that was his choice. He might not like it, but then again… Red wasn't actively seeking to hurt anyone either.

"I don't expect him to understand, but I won't force him to agree with me. These powers might be part of me as a person, but not as a Pokémon Trainer. I want to believe in my Pokémon, that they can grow to their full potential with their own hard work. If they grew too reliant on my powers, what's gonna happen if they fail one day? I'll do things my own way. I am not Red, and I'll never be."

The girls' eyes widened at his answer, but they all smiled. That definitely sounded like Ash. There was no point in keeping this argument. Regardless of what was fair play or not, he'd stick to what he believed in, no matter what others thought. Like he always had, and he'd always do.

…

Gary wandered towards the edge of the city, ready to get the hell out of this place, when the sound of a motorbike rung from behind him.

The vehicle pulled up next to him, revealing the green dressed bard in the silly hat. Oddly his bike now had a sidecar with a few pieces of junk inside it, did he have that before?

"You're leaving too, Blues Boy?" the bard asked.

"Yeah. I've got places to be and challenges to face. I'm thinking of heading up to Celadon City for my seventh badge."
He needed to prove something, and going for a tougher badge was a start. He'd have gone to Cinnabar if the ferries weren't so full.

"Celadon huh…." the bard parroted, before reaching over to his side car and shuffling a few things to the side. His guitar, a harp, a fishing pole, a net, a lantern…. until there was some room in it for a person to sit.

"I'm actually heading up that way myself. There's a music festival in Celadon in a few days I like to attend to fill up my coffers. You're capable of scaring off Beedrill swarms, right?"

"Yeah." Unless they blocked out the sun with their sheer number of course. Then he might not be up to snuff for it.

"Good. If you agree to keep the bugs off me I'll drive you up there in my side car."

The aftermath of the great battle however, had more eyes upon it than what it seemed at first.

"Science is amazing, isn't it? Even without being here, you were able to see exactly what happened here. Even past the King's watchful gaze," a girl stated, her tone with a slight edge beyond traditional feminine sounds.

Looking out onto the clearing stands, where the monitor still showed the faces of Ash Ketchum and Red Taijiri both, she smirked as she continued to speak into her cellphone. Jutting out of it was a charger, transferring power into the device even as she spoke through it.

"Of course science could make a better battery, but you wanted to see as much of them as possible, and video eats up battery. I'd suggest if you want to rewatch the videos to save them somewhere, with backups of course, because I'm going to have to clear this device out again. It eats up both battery power and memory space so well you'd think it would be a crime."

"...But I have to agree with your assessment earlier. The King really is wrong about the potential of that Ash. He's remarkable, something else entirely from the 37 other brothers of his you had me check out for you already, or the 17 sisters I've seen so far if we count the one Red is traveling with. Though to be fair Red is hardly that far behind him, both of them are quite interesting and full of potential. Perfect for deciding the fate of the world, wouldn't you say?"

Fast paced chatter came out of the phone, causing the girl to frown.

"My bad, the 39th and 40th brothers, and the 26 sisters that came as a result. It's hard to keep track of them all, they aren't all exactly the tall, dark-haired, and red-eyed type, and I have no way of telling if they've got the Dominion of Power. Also, that fraction you gave for how many more there are was as small a number as it was annoying to pronounce. Really, did he really have to have so many? I know he solved the riddle of the ages, but seriously 66+, and that's just what I've counted since I left. The only good thing about the total amount of humans he mated with is that at least that's a fraction I can actually wrap my head around. 10% of every region's Bloodliner population of the younger generation are of the dual Bloodliner line. They came first, and then the single bloodline bloodliners followed as is their want and duty. Simple and easy to remember, a proper fraction if I may say so."

More muttering from the phone ensued from that statement as the girl huffed.

"Yes, it is a proper fraction. Proper fractions can be said in three syllables or less. One tenth, three syllables, that is simple and easy to say. I am not going to argue with you about that. I'm the one out in the world where people complain about math and linguistics like a college academic. Putting aside
fractions, do you want to see what their mothers look like next or do you want me to find the 27th sister to your list…"

The phone vibrated with chatter as the girl grinned.

"I thought you'd find them unimportant. You always do. Very well, Belladonna it is then." Looking around for a moment the girl glowed a light red for a moment, her appearance to the outside viewer becoming that of a teenage girl of average height for her age, with brown hair and arms adorned pair of wrist bands. Her clothing consisted of red and black boots, jean shorts, and a white tank top covered by a black vest. A white hat covered her head.

"And before you ask, yes I am using my favorite look. The one with the illusionary shorts."
Misty stared at the Slowbro.

The Slowbro stared right back from atop a massive lilypad.

The staredown continued, even as she slowly reached down for a Safari Ball.

She saw the eyes of Slowbro slowly follow her as she did so, only ceasing their slow movement seconds after she picked up the ball and readied the throw.

Slowbro's stare caught up to this moments before the ball plopped itself on the slow beast's head, sucking it in as shaking began.

"Yes!" Misty declared as in a unwelcome sound a Pokéball burst open, though it was not the Safari Ball.

"Psy." 'You do know it has to stop shaking first, right?'

"Well, don't jinx it then," she snarked to the yellow duck.

"This is not the place you'd find a Jynx. If Jynx are in the Safari Zone, might I suggest the hillier expanses with cool caves?"

"Not interested," she snarked at the know-it-all voice, one she hadn't expected would be accompanying her today but somehow was.

"Pity. A Jynx would be quite useful for data collection," the Pokédex spoke, with a unusual mono-tone, from the gray and chipped Pokégear clipped to her backpack.

Yes the Pokédex. Shortly before they had entered the Safari Zone they had spied a pair of Pokégear spilled out of a torn garbage bag. Not one of the new flip ones, but one of the really old versions.

Monocolor, monotone, monosales these days. Few bothered with them anymore outside of tech collectors.

Upon a curious Anabel picking them up and noting them out of nostalgia, the Pokédex had a brilliant, brilliant idea.

It was going with Ash, but she would be doing her own thing with her own goals while he was off far from water sources. So it had suggested they use the old pieces of tech as side bodies as to allow for additional data collection and providing of additional services through a few features like Dexnav.

Ash had been against it but they hadn't seen any harm in it. It was three to one.

In hindsight though, she was starting to see why Ash found the revelation that the Pokédex could split itself into multiple versions of itself in lesser hardware disturbing.

"The Slowbro is captured. The Slowbro is male, possesses the Own Tempo ability, and knows the moves Psyshock, Scald, Slack Off, and Yawn. Slowbro appears to be in healthy shape
with..."

The side-dex continued to ramble about the Slowbro's nail length, tail Shellder status, and analysis of how effective the liver was, so she ignored it and turned to her companion for her little bout.

"I'm sorry, this might take a while. Fishing isn't exactly a guarantee I'll find what I need here."

Waving her worry off Anabel didn't open her eyes as she lay in the sun next to her.

The plan itself had been hashed out over breakfast. They had heard the rumors that other regions had rented the Safari Zone for breeding rare Pokémon populations where they didn't have the space, and a quick question to Professor Oak confirmed that wasn't just wild speculation.

However when one leaves a wild area alone for forty years, finding anything became tricky. That was where Iris had come in.

She had volunteered to survey the area for any Pokémon that really should not be in Kanto, and with Anabel this information could be quickly relayed to herself if it was a water Pokémon.

If not it would go to Ash, who'd maybe go after it. The Pokédex's second Pokégear body was with Iris and it would get data either way.

Anabel meanwhile would also be able to pop over to Ash and get Safari Balls if she ran out, or if Iris needed one for some reason.

If Misty had to be honest she wasn't sure what Ash was actually looking for beyond 'he really wanted to find it', and she hadn't a chance to ask him about what exactly he was looking for.

....

From behind the bushes, and from downwind as far he knew, Ash could see a watering hole where five Tauros were drinking.

All five of them had their backs to him, tails at ease as their heads were lowered to the water.

Poking his head out of the brush, Ash eyed the Tauros closely as the leftmost Tauros rose his head for a moment, giving him a clear view of the horns.

A familiar notch ran alongside the leftmost horn, one that made Ash smile.

He recognized this Tauros, the fourth most powerful Tauros of his old herd.

Pikachu popped out of the brush with a sniff before giving his observation, which with a few more seconds of looking he had to agree with.

The two rightmost Tauros were also familiar.

Three of his old Tauros were right there in front of him, along with two he didn't recognize.

What was he to do? Did he just leave them, or did he capture them too so both his herd, and the herd right in front of him, stayed together?

True he had infinite Safari Balls, thanks to both the tournament prize and the Pokédex stealing the glitch and turning it into a program. But was it too much?

"Professor Oak does desire to study Tauros behavior. Multiple study Tauros would be
appreciated by the man. Doing so could net me additional RAM when you next return to him," the Pokédex noted.

Well if the Professor wanted it... thirty-two couldn't be much worse than thirty, right? It was just two additional Tauros, what could they possibly do that was so much worse than thirty?

Tapping the glove he was given with the ball program glitch, a metallic hand from Gorrigan Engineering if the red lettering on the side was correct, a Safari Ball popped out. Taking a quiet step out of the bushes Ash entered a long distance throwing stance.

The desire to shout 'Go Safari Ball' was resisted as he sent a Safari Ball flying.

This same restraint was held as he popped out and sent four more towards the Tauros in quick succession.

The balls flew close together, aimed at the Tauros group of five in perfect sync.

_Bop!

Ash stared in shock as the rightmost Pokéball hit a Spearow mid flight, intercepting it. The ball triggered, sucking the Spearow in as the four other balls continued forward.

The sound alerted the Tauros, who rapidly stopped their consumption of water and prepared to bolt.

The four Tauros without an intercepting Spearow were each struck by a ball safely, but the last one, one of his Tauros, began to bolt.

_I am not going to lose anyone else!_

Ash's thought finished moments after he gave one more powerful throw. The ball narrowly struck the fleeing Tauros on the flank as it activated.

As that ball fell to the ground and waggled Ash collapsed to his knees with a audible exhale.

That...was too close.

Pikachu darted to his side, unease on his face even as he tried to be reasonable.

"Pikapi" *That was just bad luck. It shouldn't happen again.*

....

Walking along a lake shore, Red kept his eyes focused on the horizon, scanning for movement. For a moment his eyes focused, glaring down a nearby bush that shook with potential.

A Ratatta scurried out of it, quickly revealing the lack of potential.

Steps behind him was Yellow, who had a notepad out and a pen in hand.

"Okay, with that Scyther you just caught that makes three Pokémon from your 'I really would like to have' list', along with a Doduo and a Nidorino. You also caught a Sandshrew, Ekans, and a Psyduck because we happened to walk past them earlier. You're six for seven so far!"

Red abruptly stopped in his tracks and let out a sigh of frustration as Yellow reminded him of the one that got away.
He was sure that Chansey had been caught, and with infinite Safari Balls he should have been able to keep throwing them with abandon even if he had to run after the plump thing for a while. He had all day after all. Since when did Chansey have the ability to use Teleport?

"Now, if we can just find a Rhyhorn or Rhydon, Ponyta, and a Kangaskhan...why do you want one of those?" Yellow inquired of the later as the lake water's serenity was disturbed as a massive form rose from it.

A massive white and blue body of power and rage, a wild Gyarados had appeared.

Roaring loudly at them, hissing with rage and fury.

Yellow whimpered in fear as Red held a Safari Ball up to it. Gyarados roared again, countered only by Pikachu's sparking cheeks, and a thrown Safari Ball.

The ball hit the serpent on its mid torso, opening and sucking the raging beast inside of it. The ball bounced back to his hands, where he held it tightly even as it shook with immense intensity.

His hands still vibrating he turned to the still unsettled Yellow and answered her question.

"Because Kangaskhan, just like this Gyarados, is a Pokémon that is capable of Mega Evolution. I still need to find a Mega Stone to work with my Keystone, so it pays to have as many options for a matching Pokémon as possible."

Meanwhile the ball still shook violently, the Gyarados was not eager to stay inside it.

"...Well in that case I hope we don't find a Gyarados Mega Stone then. He doesn't seem very happy?"

Oh yeah, the Gyarados did look male didn't it? He had missed that.

He had been distracted by the imminent threat of mauling and incineration.

There was a reason he didn't put Gyarados on his list. That and he did want to participate in Johto one day, and they tended to get offended by the use of Gyarados in Leagues.

Something about a crazy person riding twenty of them around, blasting things and the like.

The Blackthorn Gym Leader only got away with it because of family tradition, and glaring at people who objected and reminding them that Gyarados was her going easy on them.

---

**Meanwhile in the mountains far from the Safari Zone**

Otoshi would like to say he had no idea how he got talked into this, but he knew exactly how.

The scraggly brown-haired kid with the foreign accent had apples, his food bag had been snagged out of his hands by a Fearow two days ago, and his father had always told him about honoring debts, especially involving apples.

He figured the kid would just want help with moving a couch though, not something so elaborate.

Said favor found themselves on a mountain top, wind blowing amidst dark clouds that rumbled threatening sounds that one really should not be hearing when atop a mountain.
The kid, at least in appearance given his lack of height and muscle mass, was kneeling in front of Marowak. Marowak looked uncomfortable as the process continued, before the kid stood up and nodded.

"Voila!" he declared as he stood back and let Otoshi see what he had done.

Otoshi only had one world for it.

"Huh?"

The kid held up a finger as he began to explain what it was he done, and more importantly why.

"These mountains are infamous for intense lightning storms since ancient times. The lightning here is particularly noted for how it reacts to the local mineral deposits, creating a electromagnetic feedback loop that is highly addictive and aggression-inducing to Electric-type Pokémon," the Kalosian noted as Otoshi cringed.

He knew that quite well. He and Marowak had to fight off three Electabuzz acting like the worst drug addicts he had ever seen, just with electric fists instead of bongs. It was good training, but there were healthier ways to prepare for his sixth badge in Pewter City.

"Yes, but I still would like to know why that involves my Marowak standing on top a mountain, with my Keystone, in a bowtie."

Marowak adjusted the blue and green stripped adornment with the Keystone in the center as the kid continued.

"It's a simple explanation. You see, my granny is a master Mega Evolution Trainer. She won the Kalos League with it, and she knows more about it than perhaps anyone alive. Mega Evolution, as I am sure you know, is created when the Pokémon's Infinity Energy is enhanced by the unique energy humans produce as filtered through a conduit known as a Keystone, inducing a temporary state of additional evolution."

"That isn't simple," Otoshi noted as the kid laughed.

"Oh believe me, I'm simplifying it. You don't want to hear the unabridged version. Anyway back on topic, a Keystone isn't the only way to do this. Alolan Trainers use special crystals to create a similar reaction, only with them it creates a singularly powerful attack known as a Z-Move. There are however, manners of enhancing a Pokémon that don't require a stone or a crystal. They're just harder to achieve." The kid turned to the still fidgety Marowak.

"Marowak is unable to Mega Evolve, believe me, I am familiar with all forty-one Pokémon known to Mega Evolve into forty-two forms so I would know this. However Marowak should still be able to use the non-conduit methods with the correct stimulation. One of which involves using Infinity Energy to create temporary bonds with stray photons and harnessing them as a form of lightweight armor that enhances the Pokémon."

"Stray photos?" Otoshi questioned. This was still not making any sense.

"Photons are connected to light," the kid explained as Otoshi scratched his head. "Your Keystone can be used as a crutch for the manipulation of Infinity Energy until Marowak is able to draw upon the skill at will."

"So, you are going to use my Marowak, his Lightning Rod ability, and my Key Stone to attract light, take the light atoms from it, and form a powerful armor?" Otoshi questioned as the kid shrugged.
"That's one way of putting it, though Photons are not at all like atoms. First of all..."

"...Why the bowtie?" Otoshi had to ask as the kid grinned.

"I'm Kalosian," he (not) explained as the sky rumbled, before exploding in intense light.

"Shield your eyes!" the kid shouted.

Well duh.

The flash blinded him for a good minute before Otoshi opened his eyes once more, to find the kid over by Marowak and holding his arm up, grinning.

His now golden, sparking arm, the color of which coated part of his shoulder as well.

Oddly enough the bowtie was still intact.

"...Behold, my Kanto-born friend, something amazing. The beginning of a power used across history that matches the power of Mega Evolution, Z-Moves, and even Bond Phenomenon. The Break Evolution."

He let go of Marowak, who observed his arm in unease before cautiously using it to hit the ground.

The stone cracked from even the gentle touch, causing Marowak to hold the golden arm up to his face in amazement.

Otoshi was at a loss for words. Such power...he and Marowak could win the League with it if they mastered it.

Eventually a question did bubble up from within himself, and it was one he felt was quite frank.

"...It can be turned off, right? I like gold as much as the next guy but I don't think Marowak wants to be that color the entire time."

"Maro." Marowak agreed with him.

---

**Back to the Safari Zone**

"Brooo!"

"Tor!"

The sound of a fight had drawn Ash's attention.

Looking from behind a rock, Ash once again found another group of five Tauros. The lead Tauros had a cowlick which Ash caught glimpses of as the bull Pokémon stomped the earth in a display of aggression, an act that was quickly mirrored by the subordinate Tauros behind him.

A familiar cowlick specifically.

The cowlick of his fastest Tauros.

The main Tauros he used wasn't this one, while he valued speed the lead Tauros of his herd was the
second fastest and significantly stronger physically. But he remembered this Tauros quite well from the time he got into a race with his Flying Pokémon and did quite well for himself.

Pikachu sniffed the air before giving a positive call. Ash didn't need to hear that all five of the Tauros were his, and grinned.

That made eight Tauros found. Now he just had to...

"Tor!"

Figure out what was going on.

Ash pulled his gaze away from his Tauros to see what was aggravating them.

"Exeggutor, the Coconut Pokémon. Unlike the so called true Exeggutor of Alola, these are stockier and possess psychic abilities. This Pokémon is capable of breeding without eggs via losing one of it's faces. Exeggutor have horrible singing voices," the Pokédex noted as a herd of ten Exeggutor postured aggressively in response to the Tauros.

The two species continued to glare at one another as Ash felt confusion.

Not the literal one that one Exeggutor was doing to lift a stone threatening, the one that didn't require psychic powers.

"This doesn't seem normal."

"You are correct. Exeggutor and Tauros normally do not conflict like this. They operate in totally different niches and habitat types."

"Tor!" The rock was thrown at one of the subordinate Tauros, who smashed it with a single Headbutt before giving out a defiant call. The Exeggutor looked unnerved, but one quickly used Confusion on a plant at the Tauros's feet.

One of the other Tauros bellowed furiously at this, lowering his head at the acting Exeggutor. A sphere of blue water formed between the horns, before firing.

The ball struck the Exeggutor, who stopped the attempt at Confusion and backed away nervously.

"That was Water Pulse!" Ash exclaimed.

"Yes. It would appear that a Psyduck or Golduck layed that Tauros's egg," the Dex noted.

Ash made a note to check how breeding worked in this world at some point. Something about that sentence sounded off.

"Also of note, the plant that the Exeggutor attempted to take was not a typical plant consumed by wild Exeggutor. It's more of a wild Tauros plant, as it makes up 27% of their diet. It is however commonly fed to captive Exeggutor to prevent fungal growth."

Dexter's observation about the oddness of their Exeggutor's feeding habits made Ash realize something else about the ten Exeggutor.

"Do they look thin?"

Pikachu looked at the grass types for a moment while he held up the Pokédex for a better look.
"Pi" 'Maybe they heard how freaky looking the Alolan ones were and are on a diet to get that way?"

"Scans indicate that the Exeggutor are indeed underweight, though oddly enough they have traces of over the counter health products used in the preventing of fungal issues. Interesting...scanning for...these Exeggutor were released recently."

"Really?" Ash realized, wondering who let them free. Ash wanted to say Paul but something felt off here.

"Also the release was not triggered normally. Most Trainers that release utilize built in release features, but my scans suggest this release was caused by a different method. Their Pokéballs were broken, and you can't do that easily."

"Really?" He was sure all you needed to do to break a Pokéball was hit it with a rock, or hit a rock with a Pokéball. Regardless of what order it should be easy enough to do.

"They aren't as tough as my outer frame, but you can't break them by dropping them on a rock. You need significant force to do so."

There was no reason for Paul to do that, so he was definitely out. But who else was there?

The only guy he knew with so many Exeggutor was Melvin, but he didn't seem like the type of guy to use a chainsaw on his Pokéballs. Did they get run over by a car?

"However it happened, I do not see these Exeggutor as a whole surviving out here. I'd suggest capture before their continued actions disrupt natural barriers and lead to a brawl." The Pokédex's words were followed by some loud snorting from the Tauros. Ash recognized this behavior.

It was not good to be in front of a Tauros doing it.

"Alright."

He'd need a few good pitches, but he should be able to get all of them in one go.

He didn't wake up today with the plan of capturing ten Exeggutor, but they needed help and he had no ball limits.

Ash rubbed his throwing shoulder in preparation. Fifteen good swings quickly was going to hurt a bit.

...

Psyduck had gotten the pair of cold waters out, which Misty thankfully took and had a long sip out of.

Anabel took hers with a psychic pull.

Seven bites so far.

Goldeen.

Magikarp.

A female Psyduck that her Psyduck said things to that she really wished Anabel had been willing to
wipe from her mind.

A Slowpoke Anabel had missed entirely because she was blushing a horrible red from being told just what Psyduck said.

Magikarp.

Magikarp.

Magikarp.

No luck.

"I'm thinking it might not be a bad idea to change locations. It's getting hot, and Iris said something about a pond with more shade a while ago right?" Misty suggested as Anabel got up and nodded.

'She did. I think Ash mentioned having been there. He seemed pretty happy about it.'

"Maybe he found a Shiny Chansey or something," Misty joked. That would make anyone really happy.

Or horribly depressed if it waddled away.

'Or an Eevee,' Anabel offered with some wistfulness. Misty could agree. An Eevee would be nice to find, but what were the odds of finding one in the Safari Zone?

The line tugged, a sign of the pond offering one more secret to her. She pulled at the line, wondering if she'd find a fourth Magikarp.

Or the same one just eager to be fed. She honestly wasn't sure.

"Errrr..." Though this one was giving a lot of force behind it. Did she hook something big?

Before she could even voice her request Anabel was behind her, a blue glow around them both as they pulled back with the catch.

The corner of her eye caught Psyduck motioning to help, before realizing the redundancy of it all and just slumping impotently.

The water bubbled and boiled as the Pokémon was revealed...

"Mmmrrrr..." The blue serpentine Pokémon with a short horn purred, sleek and shiny bar a x-shaped mark on the side of its horn.

"A Dragonair. A Dragon Pokémon known for weather altering abilities and rarity. Capture it you fool!" the sidedex's monotone was frantic sounding.

"It's not a Water-type," Misty pointed out. She had no reason to capture it.

Plus it would be a bit awkward to be unable to talk to it.

The Sidedex promptly used a word not meant for public conversation. The Dragonair made a disapproving sound before slapping the Sidedex with its tail before returning to the water.

....
The hill they climbed was a rocky one, littered with uneven stones and scrubby trees that Ash had no desire to learn the name of.

Pikachu let out a call that he heard as 'stop', stopping him mid-step. The rock he was about to put his foot on opened his eyes and glared at him.

"Dude!" The Geodude bellowed before pulling arms out of the ground and reaching for a nearby stone.

Pikachu still on his shoulders, Ash hopped back a boulder as the rock flew right through the space formerly occupied by his head.

"Such a stone throw would have killed you, both from the impact to the skull and knocking you back on a rock that would also smash your skull. Your skull nearly broke in two ways today," the Pokédex informed him.

So Geodude could kill you? Well that was another Pokémon on the ever growing list of Pokémon that were really dangerous.

"Geodude, in case you have forgotten in a while, is the Rock Pokémon. Geodude use their powerful arms to pull themselves up mountain slopes, while it rolls down them with the aid of gravity. Geodude do not like being stepped on, and are quite common. A scholar who was once bored went to a single mountain slope once and counted one hundred of them," the Pokédex mused.

"Did he step on all of them?" Ash wondered if that was how one surveyed for them. If so that scholar was a bold fellow.

"No, he simply used a box of squirt guns and blasted each stone on the slope to see if it freaked out," the Pokédex quipped.

So he was bold then. Maybe crazy.

"You may be curious to know that Geodude does have an Alolan form," the Pokédex hummed as Ash reached for it to see what it would even look like. Pikachu also cocked his head in curiosity to it.

"Let me guess, it has a really long neck?" Ash joked as the image displayed a paler Geodude with only two fingers, a lot of dark spikes on itself, and a pair of black eyebrows.

"Negative. The Alolan Geodude evolved with the aid of a majority of magnetic stones that compose it, making it a Rock/Electric Type. They are similarly common to their regular counterpart."

Ash eyed the eyebrows of the Alolan Geodude for a moment.

"You know, I'd catch it just for those cool eyebrows."

"...What?" Pikachu chirped in shock.

"The eyebrows are fascinating. I'd love to study their composition in depth." The Pokédex agreed on the eyebrow comment, causing Pikachu to look even more uneasy.

The sound of a distant Tauros breying in pain interrupted the discussion of the wonders of Geodude.
eyebrows, leading Ash to dart off the rocky hill as soon as he had begun to traverse it.

To the relief of Pikachu at the end of the discussion of the better eyebrowed Electric-type, if at the cost of having to hold on harder to the shoulder of choice.

Five minutes of movement brought him to a heap of four defeated Tauros, all lying on the ground with bruises all over them.

A fifth Tauros was still standing, shaking but with his back to him, a body language that suggested it was struggling to stay up through sheer willpower alone.

A scar on this Tauros's flank told Ash who this Tauros was, it was the Tauros that was constantly pushing itself against other opponents to get stronger, to one day challenge the leader of the herd and become the toughest.

He had a bad habit of getting into headbutting contests with the Onix staying at Oak's ranch and being made to rest by Bulbasaur as a result.

"Pik." 'Well, other than the Tauros after your own heart, three of the defeated ones are ours. I don't recognize the one on the far left.' Pikachu sniffed.

So now he had found twelve of his Tauros, and a third he nor Pikachu recognized. He couldn't leave it when he caught the rest and got them healed up.

Well now the Professor would have thirty-three Tauros. It still shouldn't be much worse than thirty.

The lead Tauros, the one who constantly pushed himself dangerously beyond his limits, collapsed now, and the cause of their injuries was made clear.

"Far far far!"

A Farfetch'd, standing before the defeated Tauros with a smirk that looked so arrogant Ash would not be surprised if someone told him this was the Gary of his Indigo League days, reincarnated as a Farfetch'd.

More noticeably odd about it was the leek stalk it was carrying. Most of the time Farfetch'd used the same kind of stalk. For all Ash knew they could use carrots or squash or corn cobs, but he had never seen them do so. Perhaps they were always careful to live around that specific plant type and Farfetch'd Trainers were expected to buy them new ones if something ate it or if it began to decompose.

However this Farfetch'd was the first time he had observed a difference among the species in that regard, in that it did not have a leek stalk.

This Farfetch'd carried three, one in each wing and the third in its beak.

"Farfetch'd, the Wild Duck Pokémon. Farfetch'd is highly tasty and nutritious, a meal of emperors and nobility. After the decline of these classes, the peasant class ate them extensively. Dedicated efforts have led to a population resurgence in recent times. They are only supposed to use one leek." The last part from the Pokédex sounded incredulous.

"Far!" it declared in a mumble that was still somehow audible, before resting the gaze upon Ash.

"Far far..."
"Translation?" Ash asked Pikachu, wondering if he was going to have to catch the Tauros fast and run from the threatening Farfetch'd.

Pikachu hummed a bit before answering.

'A Human. How rare here, and one who isn't an old crockety man who listens to oldies with the Dragonair. Well, this could serve my purpose."

"Your purpose?" Ash questioned. Did he want to beat up a Human but figured that Kaiser would shoot him if he tried? Did he think he wouldn't try and eat him for doing so?

Ash wouldn't, but that was making assumptions.

"Fetch."

'I am the greatest Leeksmon in all of this region. I have defeated the best this land has to offer, the Hornsmons, Spoonsmons, Pendulummons, Clawmons...they have all fallen to my three-leek style. However I know there are other Pokémon out there. Those with blades for arms, bones for clubs, bladed leaves on their arms...I wish to defeat them all, but I cannot fly without losing my leeks. I thought I would have to walk to seek them out."

Pikachu's translation caused Ash to look at the Farfetch'd in confusion.

"I guess you could find Marowak if you walk, but Sceptile and Bisharp live across bodies of water. You can't walk to Hoenn or Unova..."

"Bisharp are also found in Kalos."

"Still can't walk there." The Pokédex did not change his point.

"Far."

'I would have walked there regardless, but it would have taken too long. But you are a human, you can go on an airplane. If you have come to capture Pokémon, I wish to see if you are worthy of me."

Ash wasn't sure if the Farfetch'd meant 'defeat me' or some other show of worth. Given Kaiser's comments on what he'd do to him if he heard 'even one crack of electricity from ya', Ash would like to avoid that if he could.

Perhaps some other show of skill?

He didn't necessarily need to capture this Farfetch'd, but he was pretty sure if he didn't it would walk into the mountains and be turned into a frozen meal for something.

Otoshi was around so he would be able to give him a Marowak to fight at the very least.

Ash opened up his jacket, revealing his four sparkling badges.

"Fetch?"

'He has no idea what those are,' Pikachu explained. Apparently just having badges was not sufficient.

"These are Gym Badges. They are signs that I conquered the best of entire types of this region, and masters Trainers of their type." Well three masters and Misty's sisters.
"I defeated the master of Rock, the master of Electricity, and the master of Grass," Ash offered them up, "I also defeated one who isn't that for Water, but I defeated her best far beyond what I should have by all accounts."

Farfetch'd still looked contemplative, so Ash took out the Pokédex.

"Pokédex, show my Pokémon."

"...Don't talk to me like I'm a Xbox One," the Pokédex declared indignantly, but nonetheless displayed his Pokémon.

They appeared in single still images one after another, Pikachu, Charizard, Pidgeot, Butterfree, Servine, on and on.

Farfetch'd nodded at these images before giving out a squawk.

'He says you are looking better, though he still is not a hundred percent sure. Walking to 'Unavo' is still an option he is considering'.

Pikachu's translation left Ash wondering what he could do next.

Mindlessly he reached for the bottom of his shirt and pulled it up.

He apparently had muscles in this timeline, maybe they'd do it for him.

Farfetch'd wasn't moved by it.

Hmm...

Ash held out his non Pokédex holding hand, and set it alight with Power-up Punch. Farfetch stared at it in amazement.

"Fetch'd!"

'Glowing fists win the day,' Pikachu simply said as Ash disengaged the Power-up Punch and got on his knees, a Safari Ball in hand.

Farfetch'd nodded before tapping it with his mouth leek, activating it and being sucked inside.

"That was highly unconventional capturing," the Pokédex stated the obvious even as five more Safari Balls flew for the Tauros.

Yes, yes it was. But now he had a Farfetch'd and said Farfetch'd wouldn't hurt itself walking to Unova.

...How long would that take if one could walk on water anyway?

..."As we are in a quiet zone now, I will display the long put off information dump. Tauros is a Normal-Type, the Wild Bull Pokémon. They are fond of charging motions and greet their friends with friendly head butting. In some parts of the world Tauros are ridden around as transportation," the Pokédex mused as Ash and Pikachu walked through a silent stretch of the Safari Zone.
"You mean like tying a skateboard to a collar around the Tauros, right?" Ash asked. They couldn’t mean riding the Tauros like a Ponyta, right?

"...Your knowledge of obscure transportation techniques is notable, but no. They put a saddle on Tauros and ride them. The idea was created by an ancient Alolan King named Kahele, but it is stated he learned the basic idea of the concept from a monk whose name and location are lost to history. By stated of course he ordered his scribes to stop omitting it from the official histories on threat of being made to clear the beaches of Pyukumuku for a month. As such this fact remains in place, though the name of the monk was lost sometime a few centuries ago."

Pyukumuku? What was that, some sort of driftwood? The driftwood of the Pyuku tree or something? Before Ash could ask the sound of Tauros braying rang through the distance, and so Trainer and Pikachu darted towards it.

"Why are you so insistent on catching Tauros? You are currently in possession of twelve of the things," the Pokedex inquired as they jogged towards the sound.

"Because Tauros live in herds," Ash told the Pokedex.

Also because he still had twenty-one specific Tauros to find.

"There is...logic in what he says." The Pokedex gave an odd-sounding response, and Ash wasn't sure if it was quoting something.

Regardless of what the reason was Ash stopped running, his sneakers barely avoiding sinking right into the steaming pool of water in front of him.

Pikachu tumbled into said water, though he popped out of said water with a relaxed look on his face.

"Pi..." Pikachu's words were more a sigh of contentment than a full on sentence, and so Ash scanned the warm pool in question.

He did indeed see four Tauros in the pool, looks of content on their faces and tongues sticking out. Alongside them were a troop of Mankey, a Chansey, a Tangela, and two Dodrio.

In the back was a Arcanine.

"This should not be here," the Pokedex pointed out. It did seem out of place, unless this place had a volcano.

Moments after the Pokedex noted this the Arcanine, who Ash only just realized was looking old in the muzzle, dipped said muzzle into the water. The area around said muzzle glowed red, and the water bubbled and steamed just a bit more.

"...Okay, the question is answered but now I have even more questions," the Pokedex noted as Pikachu looked at the Tauros absently and waved Ash off.

So none of them were from his herd then.

Pikachu, reluctantly, exited the hot spring and, without a word, Ash and Pikachu continued on.

"I am confused." was all the Pokedex had to say on the matter.
Iris had called them, and with that Anabel had teleported the two to her location.

There Iris was looking at a pool uneasily.

The pool was an odd one. It looked deep, and it had a lot of disturbances in it. It was clearly filled with life.

But it also had a sign around it, a wooden sign post that read.

**Emergency Lunch Pool/Study Site 'Ponyboy'. Do not tell Kaiser. Dangerous. Research Curtis**

It also didn't have many tracks around it, unlike the other pool. Few Pokémon came to drink here for some reason.

"Well, you said you wanted all the Water Pokémon in the world," Iris told Misty with a tone of dismay.

Clearly she knew what was in this pool, and was not a fan of it.

This was one of the foreign Pokémon introduction sites that Professor Oak had confirmed were in the Safari Zone.

Good.

Curious as to what was going in with the pool, Misty extended an arm towards the pool.

She immediately jerked it back reflexively as the water surface broke, and a green shape leapt out. It bit at the air before falling back in with a splash.

"Analyzing...Basculin, the Hostile Pokémon. A Water-type extremely common in the Unova Region. Basculin are prone to fighting with each other over what color they are born with a stripe of, and this has driven several colors into extinction. The only species known to exist today are those with a blue stripe and those with a red stripe. The fact they are quite edible did not help," the side Pokédex monotoned as Iris turned to Misty with a look of 'well here you go'.

"Basculin are a pain. They also are very aggressive." She emphasized this point by holding up her left leg, revealing a few puncture marks in the shape of teeth around her ankle.

'Ouch,' Anabel emphatically declared.

"It took a month for me to use this leg properly. That was ten years ago I think..." Double ouch.

Misty eyed the pool, a thousand ideas wafting through her head.

Clearly they were aggressive and voracious, making her wonder exactly what they were eating in the pool. As Iris said, she wanted to capture one. One of every Water-Pokémon after all.

Would her rod even survive in that pool if they were that aggressive though?

Reaching for one of the Safari Balls Ash had lent her, she decided to try something.

She threw the Ball towards the water, which caused the pool to burst again as another Basculin
jumped. This time she caught the red stripe it had across it.

It bit the Safari Ball with the sound of metal screws slashing something, as the ball opened up slightly.

It was hindered by the fact the bite of the Basculin was across its front.

The ball worked none the less, and red energy sucked the Basculin inside of it. A few other Basculin jumped, mostly ones with blue stripes, but the ball was teleported off to Professor Oak before they could bite it.

"Capture complete," the side dex declared.

'Do you think maybe we should...' Anabel noted the pool, and Misty knew what she meant.

The question of what the Basculin were eating bothered her the more she thought of it.

"The things do like to live in schools, but I cannot see why anyone would want more of them," Iris declared her disbelief in what they decided to do as both Misty and Iris took out four Safari Balls.

All of them were thrown over the pool, and after each a Basculin jumped. Half were blue, the other red.

All were sucked into the balls.

This was repeated with similar results twice more.

....

A group of Kangaskhan were on the edge of a wooded area, reaching for fruit in the branches with a slow, relaxed pace to it.

Upon grabbing a fruit several broke it into two pieces. The larger, about two thirds if Ash had to guess, was eaten by the mother.

The smaller bit was handed down into the pouch, where small hands grasped at them.

Young Kangaskhan.

Ash looked for any sign of human hands being among them, but saw nothing.

Was he even in the right place for Tommy?

Still if there was no sign of him, he might as well move...

"Broo!"

From his distant vantage point Ash was drawn by the sound, as were Kangaskhan as two Tauros charged towards each other.

The earth trembled with their force.

"Pi! 'Those are two of ours.' Pikachu confirmed. Ash nodded as he prepared to throw.

However a snag had developed.

The Kangaskhan let out an alarmed call at the charge of the Tauros, and began moving wildly,
making Ash pause.

The wall of flesh that the Kangaskhan were creating would make throwing through them impossible without hitting them.

He had gotten one accidental Spearow today, he'd like to avoid doing that again.

To solve this problem, he would have to get around them, and quickly.

Quickly..

"Hey buddy, hold on," he told his partner, who gripped onto his jacket as tight as possible.

A white glow surrounded Ash after that, and so he used Quick Attack.

A white blur, he sped through the Kangaskhan chaos and out the other side, yards from the charging Tauros.

As the blur dissipated Ash threw two Safari Balls at once.

The two spheres struck the Tauros in sink, sucking both in without a fuss.

Fourteen Tauros found. Sixteen to go.

Pikachu jumped off his shoulder, a tad uneasy but fine regardless, with Ash giving his shoulder a stretch after the darting….only to feel like something was off.

Cautiously he felt around the shoulder Pikachu had been holding on. It felt…off.

He couldn't describe how, but it felt a bit distorted.

Pikachu noted what Ash was doing and flinched.

'Sorry, that wasn't supposed to happen.'

Ash shrugged. It wasn't that noticeable, and his shirts always accumulated use after a while.

....

Red held out his arm, stopping Yellow from darting ahead. The two stayed silent for a moment, before moving ahead.

They parted grass, and with a bit of flames a bramble in front of them was cut.

As the slight embers burned it away his Pikachu darted ahead, and the two followed into a clearing in the grass.

"Nggghhh..."

Where his Pikachu was crouched next to a Ponyta, lying on the ground. Its back right leg was twisted oddly.

The Ponyta also looked thin.

Yellow gasped, before darting towards the leg. The Ponyta neighed in fright even as she kneeled in front of it.
"Shhh….shhh….it's okay…it's okay…..” Yellow told the frightened creature as she held her hands over the broken leg, as a wave of pink light radiated out of it.

The leg began to glow, and Red knew what was happening now.

Healing. Yellow's abilities included the ability to heal physical injuries. It was useful for training accidents, as well as roots.

Tree roots were evil sometimes.

Perhaps that was what happened to this poor creature.

The neighs of fright began to relax, the edge of pain leaving them as the grass near them rustled.

Red eyed this, standing up and walking towards the rustling and into the grass a few feet.

A large purple tail slithered by, as a head poked through the grass. A wide disturbance was behind it, flat and marked with red and black.

Arbok. A predator.

The Arbok hissed at him, clearly interested at passing him and getting to the Ponyta. It was nervous though, it did not know what he was.

Isolation had its benefits it would seem.

Red opened his mouth slightly, and noted the feeling of heat that often followed this. Flames danced in his mouth, a hot expanse of heat and flames that was intimidating he was told.

It also helped prevent plaque build up or getting things stuck in his teeth. Who needed mouth wash when one's mouth burned away the problem.

Arbok quickly retreated at his display, clearly not wanting a burn.

Satisfied Red turned around and returned to Pikachu and Yellow. Ponyta's leg was now better and Yellow was helping it back up.

She was struggling, but they were making progress.

He stepped forward to help, but in a shout of will Yellow managed to complete it on her own. The Ponyta stood, uneasy but back on four legs, as he held out a Safari Ball.

He stepped forward and held the ball up to Ponyta's muzzle.

The Ponyta looked at him for a moment, then turned towards Yellow. She nodded, and thus Ponyta returned to his way, and stepped forward.

The ball tapped right between Ponyta's forehead, sucking it inside.

....

The expanse was rocky, and littered with holes.

"Brooo!"

Holes that were dangerous.
A Tauros was here, just beyond a hole and clearly in pain. It wasn't standing, just lying on the ground vocalizing its pain to the world.

"It appears this Tauros broke its leg," the Pokédex noted.

Ash knelt down beside the Tauros, the action causing Tauros to react and bellow with even more alarm.

"Professor Oak can heal this, right?" he asked the Pokédex.

"He can," the Pokédex confirmed seriously as Ash pressed a Safari Ball to the Tauros's flank. The Tauros was sucked in even as Pikachu gave the Tauros a sniff.

"Pikapi. That was one of ours."

So it was. Well that was just a bonus. He hadn't even thought of that.

He was halfway there. He still had to find the leader, but he would in time.

Standing back up he gazed at the holes in confusion.

Who exactly dug all of these…

"Diglett."

A Diglett popped out of the ground, and Ash would have said 'aha!', but he then noted the holes around them.

They looked off for Diglett make, or Dugtrio for that matter.

The Diglett ducked back into the earth, only for another Pokémon to pop its head out.

Or more specifically, fin and head out.

"Gi," went the Gible.

"Gible, the Land Shark Pokémon. Gible are fond of tropical areas but can live in temperate regions with the aid of caves for warmth. They can also clearly live in communal hole infested areas, known as towns, that burrowing Pokémon are sometimes known to make. They are also really rare and valuable Pokémon, now capture it you fool!"

The Pokédex was starting to sound like Team Rocket, and Ash wondered if they were going to spring out at him today or not. Regardless of that question he looked at the Gible again.

He didn't need Pikachu to tell him that wasn't his Gible.

"Nope." He popped.

"What is wrong with you!?" the Pokédex demanded as the Gible retreated into the earth.

However from another hole in the ground popped out another Pokémon that someone had introduced here for some reason or another.

"Dwe," cried the Dwebble.

"Dwebble the Rock Inn Pokémon. A Bug and Rock Type who maintain breakable stone
shells as their home. They are found in beaches and deserts. Now, could you please capture it," the Pokédex requested as Ash looked at the Dwebble curiously.

Pikachu did as well, sniffing the air for good measure before shaking his head in negative.

It wasn't Cilan's.

And so they let Dwebble dart back down into the ground.

"This is why I don't do polite," the Pokédex sulked as pebbles at the edge of the holes began to dislodge and fall, as new Pokémon popped out.

"Ro!" exclaimed the gray stone with the knob on top.

"Gen!" It had a depression in the center body. It was apparently their ear, as Ash recalled.

"Ro!"


Ash would be worried about how the Pokédex was acting, but he looked over the Roggenrola that popped out.

He had to be sure that a very specific one wasn't here, because if it was…

He looked over all three of them, with the final one drawing his attention. The Rol among the roll call felt familiar, very familiar.

He was already reaching for his Safari Ball.

"Pi?" 'That can't be….how did she get here? This is impossible.'

She? Roggenrola/Boldore was a girl? He had never gotten a read on that, and when it came to gender he had a pretty good idea with his Unovan team.

Still with both his gut feeling and Pikachu's nose, they had an I.D. An unlikely and unexpected I.D, but an I.D none the less.

With no more time to waste, he threw the Safari Ball.

It tapped her right below the top knob, and sucked her in as her two friends darted back inside.

"….I am stunned." The Pokédex had no words as the Safari Ball teleported to Professor Oak, moments after which Ash went for the H.O.P.E glove.

He wasn't sure if touching the Safari Ball allowed for the transfer of the memory restoring effect, but he'd find that out now.

Now that he had a Pokémon who would not greet him with a broken foot, and that he knew.

The Pokédex voiced no words as he put in Ambipom's ball and sent it off, and even auto-set in Roggenrola to come back moments later.

As the Safari Ball popped back, he removed the ball and the glove, and threw the Safari Ball into the air even as he put the glove away.
The ball released Roggenrola, who was looking around in confusion. First at her surroundings, than at her lack of large limbs, than at him and the fact he was taller, probably older, and in different clothing.

"Rog. 'I am so confused right now.'

"Fair enough. Walk with me and Pikachu and we'll explain."

...

The waves that lapped up against the shore smelled of salt.

Misty and Anabel stared at the narrow canal that wafted into the distance. It was indeed a canal of sort sorts, the water edge was without curves or bends.

Someone had made this.

"Okay I sort of get the pit of Basculin, but this I'm not sure. I can't make heads or tails of it." Misty mused as the mono-dex in her possession spoke up.

"Data suggests that this is a Gyarados canal."

'A Gyarados canal?' Anabel questioned, though after several moments she remembered that the Pokédex could not hear her.

"A Gyarados canal?" Misty repeated the question for the dex.

"Correct. It is a recent observation conducted by Jared that Gyarados occasionally blast canals from the sea inland purposefully. Originally it was just assumed to be a byproduct of shooting lasers when they get angry."

"Oh I see." Misty noted how that had could have been missed and looked down the canal in thought.

"So...why do they do it?"

The monodex did not answer them.

'Is it buffering again?'

"Jared...isn't sure. He thought it might have been for breeding purposes, but Gyarados breeding habits are well known. They don't lay eggs in them. His theories for them include territorial marking, the impressing of mates, excess stress releasing, and as a form of play between Gyarados. He means to do further research on the subject, but last was heard of him he had taken a wrong turn on his Gyarados and ended up sighted off the coast of Pinkan Island. Which is odd given he was going to Dandelion Island in the Sinnoh Region originally..."

The canal spat out a bubble, drawing the girls attention away from Monodex and to the salt water connection before them.

Misty moved to get her rod in, but Anabel rose a hand to stop her. She took a deep breath before clapping her hands.

A blue glow surrounded them, and she part them.
In tandem the waters parted, revealing the source of bubbles.

"Ko…." a Krabby declared as it struggled. Both pincers were holding the edges of a Shellder's shell, pulling at the thing with immense force.

"A predator and prey relationship revealed. Krabby the predator who uses claws to obtain food, and Shellder the prey who uses its shell to hold back predators," the Monodex mused as Misty set loose two Safari Balls.

They plopped on the distracted combatants, taking them away as Anabel let the water return to its natural state.

As the water returned to a normal shimmering sheen Misty smiled.

To think she had seventeen now. Staryu, Starmie, Wingull, Psyduck, Horsea, Goldeen, Gyarados, Poliwrath, Magikarp, Slowpoke, Golduck, Wooper, Tentacool, Basculin, Slowbro, Krabby, and Shellder.

Her dream was making good progress.

Interesting how much progress had sped up after she met good friends.

…

"….And that's everything about the end of the world, unless Pikachu has anything more to add." Ash finished explaining to his first Rock Pokémon given that Larvitar was never officially his.

Pikachu responded in negative to the prompting as Roggenrola stood still.

"Rol." 'So, the fate of the world is at stake.'

"In a few years anyway. Before that we can probably expect at least a few other scenarios that threaten the world to occur," Ash confirmed as Roggenrola continued to ponder.

"Rola." 'Not sure why I'm here. I think I was taken as an egg, but I want to check on my old friends. But….Team Rocket were the ones to try and turn them into a laser blaster, and they are still following you around.…'

Ash caught a bit of what she was worried about. If they were to go back and see them, Team Rocket could follow and choose to make a Roggenrola cannon again.

She was conflicted. Checking on them could easily invite the problem. Even after he had noted Team Rocket's change of habit in the current manner of reality, that didn't mean lasers were beyond them.

"Even after defeating Cyrus, I still have life ahead of me. Even if I win all the Leagues in the world before him, I still want to find all my friends again. Palpitoad isn't that far from them."

He wasn't going to leave any of them behind. While finding Snivy and Roggenrola early was good, he'd still make sure to find everyone else.

It wasn't like they were going to all appear a lot earlier. That would be nice, but it would be really strange.

So Team Rocket be damned, they would go see them after finding Palpitoad.
Roggenrola motioned in a thankful manner, before her sensory nob twitched.

"Rol." 'There's a Tauros up ahead.' And with that they were on the move once more.

Only later would Ash note he hadn't brought up a few details he could have, instead of filling her in on what had happened in Kalos before the world ended.

…

"Good morning class. My name is Professor Oak. Your teacher was kind enough to let me talk to you today about Pokémon safety."

"Hello!" the class cheered as the old man gestured towards Ash, who was getting the last of his monies worth from his Sinnoh clothes.

"This is my assistant Ash. You may have heard of him."

"Isn't he the guy who got beaten by that ye old fairs guy?" a child asked innocently as Pikachu's eye twitched in annoyance.

"I'm not sure I would have called Tobias a, whatever that is…" Ash noted as the Professor coughed to regain order.

"He did well for himself at Lily of the Valley, but that is besides the point. He generously donated his time to helping me with today's lesson. He's kindly brought several of his Pokémon with him for us to see. Stand back everyone."

The Professor took a step to the left as Ash threw a Safari Ball into the air. Bursting open, the sphere revealed a Tauros, who bellowed loudly.

The children looked uneasily towards the bull, but Professor Oak quickly gestured to them.

"Relax little ones, this Tauros is the tamest of all the Tauros my young friend has. He's a gentle soul and quite calm when he isn't with the rest of the herd. He's quite good with children."

The children stared at the Tauros for a moment, not quite believing him. Ash stepping forward and petting Tauros did not move anyone.

Seconds passed, then a minute, then a little girl stood up and walked slowly to the Tauros.

Small fingers touched Tauros's snout, which was followed by a hand.

Followed by more children, who were becoming more open to approaching the bull Pokémon.

…

This memory was up front in Ash's mind as they entered a grotto hidden in a nest of trees.

After all, that very same Tauros was staring him down. The Bull Pokémon was resting on his knees, with a small red fluff ball popping out from the side of him, gazing at him doey-eyed.

"Vulpix, the Fox Pokémon. Vulpix are able to control fire with psychic power, though they themselves are not psychic types. This is true even in their Alolan forms."

Ash would have asked what an Alola Vulpix looked like, but he was still stuck on something.
"Why is there a Vulpix here? Did they fall asleep together or something?"

"The most likely reason is a parental bond. A Tauros can father a Vulpix," the Pokédex noted as Ash tried to picture that.

Ash would have tried to figure out how that would even work, but the Vulpix caught his eye again. Specifically for the purple sheen that was covering its face.

He immediately reached for his bag.

Tauros eyed his cautiously as he fumbled blindly through the bag, noting each and every random item he pulled out of it.

A ball of socks, a pair of pink rubber gloves still store bound, a screwdriver, before finally coming up with what he was looking for.

"Vulpix isn't feeling well is it? This'll help," Ash offered as he held up a Antidote spray. Tauros eyed the spray with a long gaze, but gave a slow nod in allowance.

As the poison continued to fade Tauros continued to stare at him for a while, before turning to the recovering Vulpix.

The Vulpix nodded, and the Tauros followed with his own nod. With that unspoken request the Safari Balls were flown, and both clicked.

Sixteen Tauros found, and a Vulpix too. That his Tauros apparently fathered….

"That, never happened before, did it?" Ash questioned his two Pokémon. As they looked at him curious, he elaborated.

"Did the Tauros have kids? Were there entire legions of eggs that you guys had that I never knew about? I mean you mentioned Azu…"

"Pika." 'I said I might have fathered her. I have no idea frankly. And no, Professor Oak was quite clear to ensure Pokémon did not breed out of control without the express permission of Trainers.'

"How did he do that?" Did he give them lectures about death or something?

'Drugs!'

Pikachu's response made both Ash and Roggenrola step away from the mouse.

'Legal drugs I assure you, and drugs that don't exist in this timeline. Bulbasaur confirmed that is part of the reason that the guy has a giant room of eggs.' Oh yeah, he did didn't he….

He probably should make sure the Professor would tell him about any eggs. He didn't want to end up in Kalos again and suddenly find out he had every Pokémon in the Kanto Pokédex without even realizing it.

Just as the image of that very awkward phone call that was follow such a revelation ended Roggenrola's sensor nob twitched again.
'It didn't take me that long to learn how to pick up Tauros stampedes, and I hear a big one over that way. Follow me.'

And so they did.

....

Red's eye was twitching.

His hand trembling, it continued to try and reach for a Safari Ball but held in place by his other arm.

The impulse to capture, and the logic to not even bother, were at war in himself, and it was maddening.

Yellow was unaffected by his concerns though, and was looking at what they had found in amazement.

"A Snorlax!" she declared as the two behold the large sleeping lummox in the middle of a stripped forest.

"Yes..." Red choked out in frustration as Yellow looked at him oddly. Pikachu had moved to her shoulder early in his madness, and he looked at him with understanding of his dilemma, but still annoyance.

"Why aren't you trying to catch it? Not only is it asleep, but aren't Snorlax supposed to be super powerful and awesome?!"

"They also...eat a lot," Red pointed out as Yellow looked at him oddly.

"So do we, and it isn't a problem."

Red gestured to the forest around them as Yellow stared at the trees without leaves, the torn apart bushes of berries, and the torn apart mushrooms.

She looked at it for a moment, before her eyes widened.

"Wait, are you saying Snorlax ate everything here!?!"

"Probabyls" he declared as he continued to stare at the Snorlax, the argument of immense power vs immense cost continuing to ring through him.

Yellow pinched her lips as she stared at the forest that Snorlax had fully snacked through.

"Is it possible to just keep Snorlax in a ball for long periods of time?"

"It is, and it will likely get you eaten by a starving Snorlax the moment you let it out," Red noted the story he had heard. It was only a story because Snorlax digestive systems left no traces of what they ate behind, not even bones.

Said Trainer's mother still hoped he was just missing.

"Oh...well what about just letting it eat everything around us, kind of like what it did here. Could that work?" Yellow suggested as Red looked around.

That...was an option. He could feed all of his Pokémon first, then let Snorlax out and have it forage for itself. They moved enough it would not be an issue, and Grass-Pokémon were good at restoring
forests...though he could see himself running into problems.

Plus what would happen in urban areas? He'd get arrested if he left Snorlax in the middle of Celadon's park system and it ate everything in it.

'My Pokémon actually stay at Professor Oak's Laboratory when I'm not using them. It's a massive place where they can get stronger and get looked after by experts. They even help with science, though I have no idea how.' Ash's words from their dinner conversation rang in his ears as a wave of indignation coursed through him.

Oh course. The Trainer who didn't even find it worth his time to fight people properly just happened to be friends with a person who could easily house and feed a Snorlax.

How wonderful. Regular Trainers had to work with their Pokémon in rotation, requiring Pokéballs locking themselves down and inactive when not in use, while he could just give them to an old man to work on their own.

Come to think of it, wasn't Gary the same way, and possibly Paul too? He had a Pokédex if what Ash mentioned was true, did he have someone he sent his Pokémon off to to work on their own?

What injustice.

Part of Red now wanted to just capture the Snorlax so he wouldn't get it. They were rare after all, and there was no reason to give him another powerful Pokémon he could use to half-ass himself through everything after all.

"Red!" Yellow snapped, breaking him out of his funk.

The little girl was looking at him in annoyance. His Pikachu looked to be on his side at least.

"I see your posture, you are getting upset about Ash again, aren't you? He's not even here Red, you don't have to think of him at all." She looked at the Snorlax with a frown before turning back his way.

"I swear, Ash may be an idiot who thinks that doing his best is cheating, but what's he done now? Is it because he knows an old man who can feed Snorlax for him? Honestly if he captures this Snorlax and does that, isn't that him actually using his advantages for once?"

Red opened his mouth to rebute, but stopped when he realized that Yellow was right. Ash doing that was him actually behaving correctly.

He wasn't even sure that him doing that with captures, and not with battle, was even hypocrisy.

It was...annoying. Annoyance on top of the frustration of the question of Snorlax.

"Yes, the Pallet Town guy is a frustration, isn't he? So perfect, and yet so imperfect at the same time."

The new voice in the area drew both their attention to the still slumbering Snorlax, where a girl sat, looking at them from atop the blubber of the slumbering beast.

She had green hair cut in a short style Red couldn't name. He really didn't care for such things. Her shirt was white and pants blue, and she had a slender build to her.

Her eyes were the most notable thing about her, one eye was brown like chocolate, the other black
"Who are you?" Red questioned. He'd have asked how she knew Ash, but he really could care less. He was more interested in how a girl just randomly appeared behind them like that.

Pikachu didn't pick her approach up. No one was that stealthy.

She smirked as she held a finger up as her eyes glowed blue. A Safari Ball flew her way also glowing blue as she held it above said finger.

"My left eye sees the exact past, and my right eye sees the possible futures. I think that's all you need to know there, but for who I am you can call me Naty."

"Okay then, what are you doing here?" Red pressed again as she continued to spin the Safari Ball, ignoring Pikachu's threatening sparks.

"Well I've been thinking of getting involved more for a while, and I just happened to notice that someone a lot less pleasant than I am is wandering about. She's off looking elsewhere now, but you are in notice now, and both you and Ketchum made good impressions."

"Care to elaborate?"

She shrugged.

"Sadly one only can know so much about mysterious organizations before you run into their disposal men, or worse. Still I can say that the group, or at least the one their little spy works for personally, thinks you or Ketchum could be excellent candidates for a personal project of theirs, and I feel it is only fair to help you make up the ground that that oddity has over you."

"Is it pick-on-Ash day?" Yellow snarked as Naty shrugged.

"For some reason looking at his past is hazy and confusing, and I am not much for what I see in his future. He could do amazing things, but all of them just keep the world on the same path it is already. He improves something flawed, but it remains just that, flawed. You on the other hand..."

"If you are seeing the future of Red the politician, you are not going to get it," Red declared seriously as Naty laughed.

"That's not what I'm seeing. No, I'm thinking something else. Beyond a winner of a League, or even being declared Champion. I want to see you get there Red, and for that I'm here to offer you a bit of help."

From her pocket sped something right at him. Red caught it with a pair of fingers, and looked at it.

"A Rainbow Pass?" Red observed as Naty nodded.

"Yes. This will allow you to travel to any place in my native Sevii Islands, where me and my associates work from. We have a little place we want you to find. It's off the beaten path, but it will be well worth your while to find. Not only are the rock formations surrounding it made of a mineral that counteracts the limits Pokéballs have, thus allowing for them all to be as free as Ketchum's collection, but my friend Meg makes sure the place never is barren. She can just breath on a plant like all the ones here and they'll be good as new. Of course, I am not without additional benefits."

She held up a brown and grey rounded stone with telekinesis once more, as Red looked at it in surprise.
"That's..."

"A Mega Stone, yes. Specifically a Kangaskhanite. I can see that you are looking for one here, and this is incentive to do so, and find us when you're done here. We'll be holding your Snorlax with us until then."

With that she dropped the Safari Ball on Snorlax. It bounced off the fat of the beast, before opening up and sucking it inside. As the ball began shaking she held it in place with her mind before vanishing suddenly.

Teleportation.

"...I don't trust her," Yellow stated bluntly as Red eyed the spot where Snorlax and Naty had once been. He then looked at the ticket again.

"Vermilion." He noted the Kanto port listed on it as Yellow looked his way with concern, a look mirrored by Pikachu.

"Red...why do you want to chase after the girl who said cryptic things about steering your future? That is a giant red flag," Yellow questioned as Red did a few mental calculations.

"Between here and Vermillion I can easily hit several Gyms. Nothing major, but we could do it fairly quickly and be back for a final one in good time."

"Again, following the creepy teleporting girl who talks about a possible future of yours she wants to make happen?" Yellow reminded him as he shrugged.

"The future is mine to make for myself. She can point me in any direction she wants, even politics, and I can say no if it is something I don't want. Playing her game gives me benefits and whenever she wants to go somewhere I don't I can simply say no. Simple as that." And with that Red walked ahead, followed by Pikachu.

They still had a Rhyhorn and Kangaskhan to find after all.

Yellow followed moments later, and he suspected she was still not on board with his plans.

....

Following Roggenrola they passed through many expanses of the Safari Zone.

They hopped across streams.

They had to jump across large holes, with Ash having to carry Roggenrola as he made the jump.

Charizard had to be let out to set a wall of thorns afire to remove them, all the while being bothered that he was being used as a glorified pair of clippers, but Ash promised him a role in the upcoming Gym Battle to soothe his nerves.

Bar certain issues of course, with the existence of Alola versions of Pokémon he knew he'd like to have an out in case he ran into some sort of Alolan Onix that was Poison-Rock or something.

Given that he was walking through nothing right now, that did give him some time to plan for it though.

Poison was up next...and in Kanto that would mean he could see something related to Bulbasaur, Weedle, the Nidorans, Ekans, Koffing, Zubat, Oddish, Venonat, Bellsprout, Tentacool, Gastly and
Grimer...and that wasn't even thinking about anything from Johto.

Come to think of it, Kanto had a lot of Poison types. He swore they got a lot less common in other regions. Johto just meant Qwilfish, Spinarak or Ariados.

Still with those Pokémon Butterfree was a definite choice. Psybeam would be useful, and Pikachu of course would be good backup. Charizard could certainly be even better backup given what was there, but that still left three other Pokémon to have ready.

Who would make good choices?

"I have just gotten an update from our wandering friends. Time to expand your family tree,"
the Pokédex declared out of nowhere, causing both Ash and Pikachu to stop in unison. Roggenrolla trotted ahead for a few more steps before turning around in confusion.

"Rol?" 'What about a tree?'

"Long story short," Ash sighed, "I have siblings now, probably, somehow."

"The likelihood of similarity is 93.53%. Genetic testing is required but I am waiting on an update to set that up." the Pokédex mused before displaying the image of a girl.

Unlike him and Red she did not have black hair, but instead a color that looked like honey, in a long white skirt and pink shirt. She had red eyes like Red and Belladonna, but no marks on her face. Like with Cleff, the screen had measurements next to her that gave her height.

Again, tall. Quite tall.

Come to think of it, why was that a thing? He was never that tall before time broke, was that just an age thing or was that just with this reality?

Did he change fathers or something? While his mind was not as foggy as it had been a while ago, the identity of his father before time broke, a thing that had never been all that important, eluded him.

He was sure someone could make a big deal of that if they thought about it too much.

Back to the sister though…like all but one of his possibly sisters, she was...womanly. Given that Yellow was also a lot younger than they all were...

Come to think of it, how young would they go? If he ever ran into one of those daycares he occasionally walked by and was asked to show Pokémon off at, would there be five-year-olds who looked like him there?

"Rol." 'What do those marks by her mean?' Roggenrola asked about the numbers. Pikachu promptly translated them, before making gestures of comparison.

Roggenrola promptly whistled, which was weird sounding.

"Now that you have communicated, and I still need to figure out how to translate your language for data collection purposes, allow me to report the information sent by Gardevoir and Probopass and enhanced via my searching. Hem hem."

Was that really necessary? What did the Pokédex accomplish by false coughing?

"Meliae is Johto native, though I am still searching for a location of her bi...found it. She's a
native of Cherrygrove City, though I am struggling to find further information than that. She's your age unlike Cleff and Belladonna, and began with a Teddiursa. A majority of her Pokémon are those that live in trees or are attracted to honey, including an Aipom, Heracross, Munchlax, Gligar, Fearow, Exeggcute, Natu, and Beedrill, though oddly enough my records have that as a Park Capture following a successful challenge of the Ecruteak Gym, a contest she apparently lost to a Venonat. She has six Gym badges, among them the Zephyr, Hive, Fog, and Mineral badges. She apparently challenged Whitney, but was defeated and has not tried since."

So Whitney was still as tough as ever. Not sure he could agree with not going back though.

"She apparently mostly hangs out, when not going somewhere, and does most of her Pokémon training, in a hanging valley found on Route 46." The Pokédex now had an image of a valley in a hilly area, though with one edge of said valley ending in a massive cliff that looked dangerous if one was to fall off of it.

It was littered with trees, and he wasn't sure where she stayed there. Did she build a house too, or did she use Secret Power like Psyduck did for a secret base?

Speaking of Secret Power...

"Any idea what she does?" Right now he had no idea, and at the moment all he had was an association with trees and honey.

Did she have excellent skills at headbutting them? Did she leak honey? He wasn't sure which of those unnerved him more between the pain of hitting trees with your skull or sweating honey.

"Not as so far obser...oh, data update..." The Pokédex was quiet for a moment before continuing.

"Data was found. She tripped on a rock just seconds ago. After cursing for a moment she glowed white and the bruised skin patched itself back up. Given the flickering of the effect after a cloud briefly covered the sun we can identify her as a Synthesis Technique Bloodliner."

So she could heal herself. A useful ability. But before anything else, he needed to know.

"No warrants are out for her arrest?"

Roggenrola looked at him funnily for that, but he really had be sure.

"No. No warrants, no records of criminal behavior, no ties to any murder cases or thefts suspected."

Ash would cheer in relief that he wasn't adding any more terrorists or people he considered immoral to his family tree, but he had to be sure of one more thing.

He'd say two if she hadn't been just observed and thus she wasn't dead. Even if he didn't need to realize his family tree was loaded with branches, he would prefer them to not all be murdered.

"And she doesn't have a bunch of boyfriends or girlfriends she lives with." Two polygamous siblings in all likelihoods were enough frankly.

"Polygamous...is not the word I'd use." The Pokédex paused before continuing as Ash felt his eye twitch.
He tried to not notice Pikachu wasn't bothered by the point, nor Roggenrola. She was still a bit confused.

"Then what word would you use?" Ash was ready to learn some other word he had no business knowing about had Cyrus just decided to knit for all eternity.

"In context, open. Possibly casual would also be acceptable. Gardevoir's observations show that the girl, while not in any serious relationship, does have one night flings with people she meets in bars and in her travels. Before you ask, she does take precautions as to prevent you from having any nieces or nephews."

Ash filed away the bit about people one day calling him Uncle Ash for a moment before just staring at the Pokédex blankly for a moment, before sighing.

"Is it legal?"

"Yes, though under immense social disapproval in some circles."

Ash flung his arms wide in joy at the confirmation, idly wondering why he felt oddly lighter after he did that.

"You know what, okay. I can accept that. That is fine."

"...You flung me into a bush," the Pokédex complained from inside a thorn bush. Oh, so that was why his hand felt lighter.

"My bad...you are fireproof right?"

"If I say no you won't leave me in here, will you?"

....

After going on her own for a while, Iris figured it would make no harm to stop to take a breather, and perhaps eat something. She and Axew stopped to pick some apples from a tree, and they'd save a few for the others later.

While she had enjoyed her tour around this Safari Zone, she had come along only because she thought she could use it to become stronger, but she hadn't had much chance to actually train herself or battle. On the other hand, it was a good breather, and she hadn't felt at home this much since she had met with Ash. Being able to swing around and hop from tree to tree brought her memories of her time with her family, as well as how much she missed them.

'They are still out there, and I will find them. One day. Big Brother, Mother, Father, everyone, I will rescue you.'

It was comforting to know that she wasn't alone in her crusade. Ash and the others were ready to not only to help her in getting stronger, but to stand by her side when the time to confront Hunter J came. That meant a lot to her.

That being said, even if the tournament had been good training, she felt there wasn't much point in coming here after all. At least Misty wanted to catch more Water-types and Ash was... looking for whatever he wanted to find. But what about her, Iris?

"Axew?" Suddenly her little brother stopped chewing on his apple as he heard some rumbling noise, and a few seconds later, something popped out from underground.
"Gible?" The little land shark stared at the Unovan dragon in confusion, sniffed him around, and all of a sudden began chewing on his head.

'Hey! Get off of me! Sister!'

Iris jumped off of her tree and saw the two Pokémon in what to one looked like a playful fight, and to the other a huge headache. She quickly stepped in to separate them. None was hurt, but Axew was notably annoyed and didn't enjoy the game.

"That is enough," The dragon girl said sternly. "My little brother doesn't like that kind of games."

'Brother?' said Gible, and Iris figured that if she could understand it, then it was a Dragon-type. 'But you're a human.'

"Can humans do this?" To prove her point, Iris raised her left hand, and bluish draconic energy claws appeared in it, surprising the newly arrived Pokémon. "You are a Dragon-type, aren't you? We have a lot in common. They call me Iris, who are you?"

'I'm Gible. Are you friends with that other human I saw a while ago? I think he was looking for something.'

The Sidedex chimed in. "I can confirm this is the same Gible my owner allowed to escape a while ago. This is a very rare Dragon-type native to the Sinnoh region, and if you let it go now, I'll be extremely disappointed."

"Yeah yeah…." said Iris. She still hadn't gotten used to the machine's sudden interventions, opportune or otherwise. "Were you brought here by the humans? It is a bit far from Sinnoh."

A good few days worth of flying far in fact. It got boring after a while. Misty had once said that humans would look at clouds to pass the time, but she failed to see the amusement of it.

A cloud was a cloud, nothing more.

'Yeah. I don't know why, there were a lot of us in a cave and one day a bunch of them came and grabbed a few of us,' said Gible. 'They said something about soil, and then they tossed me out here and just come out every few months to put odd sticks in the ground. They taste bad.'

"So… you are far away from home too." Iris suddenly found herself sympathizing with the little shark-like dragon. "Have you felt lonely?"

'Sometimes,' Gible admitted. 'This a nice place to live, but sometimes I miss my family, and I would like to see more of the world than just this place. I'm sure there are warmer places.'

"I know that feeling," said Iris, smiling with a tinge of sadness. "In my family everyone is a Dragon-type. You would probably fit in nicely, and you can see the world."

'Oh no, sister. Please tell me you're not thinking about taking him,' said Axew, still rubbing his head from those bites.

"He didn't mean to hurt you, did he?" Iris glanced at Axew. "He was just happy to have found a friend to play with."

Axew wasn't still convinced, but he seemed to have decided it was not worthy further argument.

"So, would you like to come with us?"
Gible nodded happily. Iris smiled, and she lifted both Dragon-types to hide them in their hair, and then concentrated her thoughts. 'Anabel, could you tell Ash to get me a Safari Ball? I think I've found a new friend I'd like to take with me.'

....

"Sea!"

The great fish's declaration bellowed through the creek as Misty's pole pulled the mighty fish from the water.

Moments later a Safari Ball struck the side of the fish. As the ball sucked in Seaking Anabel put a finger up to her temple.

The ball vanished from sight just as Anabel walked over to her, hand outstretched.

'Iris found something.'

"She did?" Misty was curious what she had found.

A instant after grabbing Anabel's offered hand the two found themselves below an apple tree, where Iris was eating an apple.

As was Axew, who was hiding behind her leg.

As was another Pokémon, also eating an apple who was looking at them cautiously.

"Who's that Pokémon?" A old phrase from a children's show but it was the question of the moment wasn't it.

"Gible, a Pokémon generally found in Sinnoh, Kalos, and Alola. It generally lives in caves and deserts, and based on what my linked self was able to get out of the tall one."

By that Misty assumed the Monodex meant insistent nagging.

"That it was brought to the Safari Zone in part to aid in an experiment about soil composition. Air pockets, the amount of silt, clay, and sand in said soil, the age of the soil, etc etc."

'Why would they want to know that?' Anabel's confusion was outer as well as in her thoughts, given the head scratching she was doing to communicate this.

Normally the Pokédex could notice that, but a Monodex extension was not able to, so Misty translated.

"Soil is of the upmost importance to everything! Such research could help improve building codes, foundational stability, agriculture...."

"Here." Misty spoke over the ranting monodex as she threw Iris a Safari Ball. "I had the Pokédex sync it to you instead of myself or Ash. It should work."

Iris knelt down before the Gible, who was still nervous around all the ranting of the Monodex. When it reached a crescendo about soil age (soil had age?), Gible tapped the ball to get out of range for the Monodex.
The ball opened wide and sucked into the sphere, resting in Iris's hand as Axew let out a tired sigh.

A story there she was sure, but that was neither here nor there.

"Vee!"

A call went out from the tree, interrupting not only the Monodex, but also the focus on the finalized Gible capture.

A brown furry creature poked out of the tree bushes, staring at them with wide brown eyes and curiosity

".....An Eevee. A wild Eevee has appeared..." the Monodex she had noted.

"A very rare Pokémon," Iris's Monodex noted.

"It must..."

"Be...."

"Captur..."

'Want an apple?' Anabel, in the midst of the building up explosion of want from the Monodexes, had pulled a apple from Iris telekinetically and held it up to the little creature calmly.

The Eevee let out a cry of enthusiasm and jumped from the tree onto Anabel's shoulder. Anabel let out a pained humph, but still smiled as she positioned the apple up to the Eevee there and let it begin biting enthusiastically.

Misty would have preferred it if the Eevee had come her way. She had a Water Stone after all, but she knew that Anabel also had wanted one, and the Eevee had jumped her way.

So Anabel would have it. She'd simply keep an eye out for a Vaporeon or Eevee somewhere else.

".....Well, just chuck a ball at it when you are finished feeding it, would you?" the Monodexes requested in unison.

...

Roggenrola came to a stop at the edge of a massive field.

Ash and Pikachu skidded to a stop just past her, and both broke out into huge smiles at what they saw here.

Tauros.

Lots, and lots, of Tauros.

A great sea of the multi tailed Pokémon, brown fur shifting in the slight breeze as they grazed and snorted and stomped in great numbers.

And off to the left edge of the herd, pushing against another, was the leader of his herd.

The Tauros he battled Drake with. The one who won him at Palmpona, and aided him against Gary and Anabel.
"Brooo!"

Looking as strong as ever, Tauros slammed the rival back before bellowing in victory as the losing Tauros, who Ash recognized a bit as another of his herd, slumped away in defeat. At the end of the bellow Tauros snorted before returning to grazing.

With calm at hand again Ash looked at the Tauros as closely as he could, looking for familiar hair licks, scars, or similar identifying features.

He saw two he recognized.

Three.

Four…

"Pikapi!" 'I smell the rest of them. All of the other Tauros are here….with a lot of ones who aren't ours.'

How many was that? This herd had fourteen Tauros from his herd, but in total the herd had twenty, twenty-two…

"Twenty-five Tauros counted," the Pokédex told him.

So, if he caught the eleven additional Tauros, plus the ones he already had obtained….that would mean the Professor would find himself with forty-four Tauros in his herd running around.

"Professor Oak likes me, right?" Ash figured he should verify this.

"You were an excellent student, fine test subject, good neighbor, and a human being who has not worked towards making him misanthropic. He likes you fine," the Pokédex noted before pausing for a moment. "You are going to capture all of them, aren't you?"

"Yep."

"…..Should I charge your finances for something to apologize for the various damages they'll surely cause? Perhaps a platter of exotic cheeses from the four corners of the Earth."

"Do you think that is necessary?" Was cheese enough to apologize for the broken fences?

"It wouldn't hurt. Also the man accidentally lost the remote while stuck on the Food Network and is thus currently craving cheese."

"Can I afford it?"

"Ash, your accounts from your tournament competing, and various other means of financial gain you both knowingly and unknowingly possess suggest that you could easily join your half-brother in the house building game. You can easily afford cheddar."

Good to know. He didn't feel a desire to build a house though, mustn't be a family trait.

"Then order cheese." Ash declared as he reached for a Safari Ball.

Then a second in his other hand, as more were ready for him, and with that the balls began to fly like a tempest.
Five minutes later found a field barren of Tauros, and Ash lying on the ground in exhaustion. A smile on his face at the completed task.

All the Tauros were back with him. They were not going to go away. They would not be lost like Primape. They were safe….everyone in Kanto was safe bar Primape.

Haunter too…but if Ash counted Haunter he'd have to count Meloetta too. Plus reality seemed to have a way of ensuring old Pokémon were met. If Krabby jumped at him from the water and Muk was mind controlled into trying to sludge him, but Haunter never showed up….well that was that.

Red's Haunter wasn't the same Haunter, so he had nothing to worry about…

"Pi." 'Ash, you went overboard a bit.'

Except the possibility he might have captured more Spearow.

Ash pushed himself back up, only to feel an unnatural item against his leftmost finger. Grabbing it as he pushed himself into a sitting position, he saw what Pikachu meant.

He had one more Safari Ball than he needed. A twenty-sixth ball as it were.

….So, what to do with it?

'Well, you always did want that Rhyhorn,' Pikachu suggested.

True.

"I thought I heard a lot of Pokéballs going off here!"

The little girl's voice caught their attention as Yellow appeared, looking around the field curiously. "What did you end up catching that involved so many? It wasn't a bunch of Chansey, was it?"

"No." He was pretty sure Chansey didn't travel in groups.

"Oh, were they Dratini? I only just remembered my uncle mentioning them being here and Red's been looking for one since we got everything else he was looking for, plus a Parasect."

"I haven't seen any." Was it a lie when he did see them, but in another timeline?

Regardless of if it was, he wasn't going to say anything. Regardless of his own issues with Red, he promised he would never reveal where they were, and he'd keep to it.

With everything else that happened in his life, he did not want to risk Kaiser being able to shoot him across time space and time for breaking said promise.

Given Celebi was a thing, that was certainly possible.

(Though that left him with the odd mental image of a scowling old cowboy crossing through space and time with Celebi carrying him by the shoulder.)
Yellow noticed Roggenrola at his side and cocked her head in curiosity.

"Who's that Pokémon?"

"Roggenrola, the Mantle Pokémon found normally in Unova, Kalos, and Alola. Roggenrola's body is basically an ear and it generates energy within its central core."

The Pokédex answered that question a lot more actively than earlier.

So they were in Alola too….did they have long necks or eyebrows?

"I had heard non-native Pokémon were in this place, but I had only seen evidence of one before now. A Dunsparce….which I had no interest in."

Red had arrived, towering over Yellow from behind as he looked his way.

Ash looked back, straight at him.

The emotions of the past encounter, even with some hindsight and thinking, still welling around in him like a chaotic blender.

With a fresh pinch of 'you don't want a Dunsparce?' disbelief added in for good measure, as Cilan would probably say.

Roggenrola looked at Red in confusion.

"Rol?" 'I know humans say Pokémon look alike, but that guy looks a lot like Ash doesn't he?'

"Pi." 'They are probably half-brothers, long story.'

At Pikachu's offhanded comment Red's Pikachu darted off his shoulder towards the two, curiosity etched on his face.

The two Pikachu and Roggenrola darted off into a nearby bush, much to the confusion of Red and Yellow.

"What was that about?" Yellow questioned.

Should he tell them? 'Hey, we all probably share the same father. I've been meeting and hearing about others who look like us and have similar marks and eyes and possibly earlobes too.'

Was it worth it…

Should he…. 

On one hand, he didn't particularly feel like calling Red his brother out loud, and Yellow kind of came with him it seemed. Just saying he might be related to only Yellow would probably lead to being reminded that Red looked a lot more like him than Yellow did.

On the other, how likely was it they'd never see people who look like themselves while wandering? It might be a good idea to prepare them for it.

What to say, what to say?

....
The two Pikachu looked at each other for a moment, Roggenrola looking at the two as silence lasted for a few good seconds.

Then the Pikachu who accompanied Red pointed back at the Trainers, and let out a short chirp that declared a simple, direct question.

'What did you mean your idiot and my Trainer are brothers?'

'He said half-brothers,' Roggenrola pointed out.

'A brother is a brother, no matter what you add before it,' Red's Pikachu declared before gesturing back to the humans.

'I won't argue they don't look alike. However, humans can do that. They all sort of look alike, even if yours and mine are more so than usual. What makes you think so.'

And so Pikachu began to explain what had happened to them. The encounters with the legacy of John Archer, the battle with Belladonna, the sightings since of Ashley, Cleff, and Meliae, and the thoughts Ash had on the situation.

How they were the only ones with two bloodlines, had similar marks, and all seemed to be missing a father figure but had a single mother.

Red's Pikachu was silent for a moment, before nodding.

'Well, I guess that is reasonable to assume. This is a bit more than just humans all having the same face. Red never had anything to say about a father after all, not in all the years I've been with him. Still I must admit I have to ask this, why?'

'Why would there be so many? Humans are not nearly as obsessed with reproduction as we are, and they actually choose to stop reproduction. With their culture and their practices, why are there so many born?'

'Add that to the ever growing list of questions I have'. Ash's Pikachu sighed.

'Well at least you can talk to your Trainer. Red can pick up the general things I say, but I can't exactly tell him this. Tell me, what are the odds your Trainer will inform him?'

'I….have no idea.'

…

And Pikachu would not find out if Ash did or did not comment to Red about the family thing until they were half way back to Misty, Iris, and Anabel.

The excess Safari Ball still in Ash's hand as the three of them walked.

Pikachu, Ash, and Roggenrola.

"So…..do I just throw it at the first rustling bush I see?" Ash questioned of his additional shot.

Not that he didn't have more of course, but he just happened to have one ball on hand and he might as well use it on something before the day was done.

'I guess. Though that might just get you a Ratatta.'
"I could probably make that work." Assuming the Ratatta wanted to battle and liked him, a fast little rodent would be of no issue to work in.

'You know, are there any Alolan Ratatta?' Might as well ask.

"Okay then, Alolan Ratatta true or false?" Ash asked the Pokédex as it showed an image of a pitch black Ratatta with a mustache.

The image required an exclamation for the shared feature that this Alolan form had with another one.

"Another Alolan Pokémon with facial hair?" It was a pattern it seemed. Did they all have them?

Did Alolan Tauros have soul patches? Alolan Drowzee those mustaches creepy people have? Did Alolan Onix have sideburns?

"Eyebrows are not facial hair," the Pokédex declared.

"It's hair on your face."

"A Geodude doesn't have hair."

"It looks like hair so it counts."

"No it doesn't."

"Yes it does."

"You know nothing of the question."

"I so do. I have eyebrows and have to shave, unlike youuuuuuuuu!"

The extended you was due to a root Ash missed, causing him to trip and smack the ground with a hard thump.

"Rol!" Roggenrola darted over to her Trainer in concern, just seconds after Pikachu.

'You okay?'

Ash groaned and got back up.

"I'm fine. I tripped all the time as a kid." Looking down at his pants thought, he couldn't help but grimace a bit.

"Pikapi' 'Your pant leg has a slight tear on your knee.'

Indeed there was a slight opening there on his right knee, surrounded by the dirt from the fall.

"Well…it's not too bad I guess." Ash felt up the damaged area as well as his left knee.

"Rol?" 'Didn't you have stuff in your hands before you fell?'

Oh yeah, he did. The Safari Ball and the Pokédex.

Was he going to have to set something on fire again to get….

"Clearly your possession of facial hair did not prevent you from hurting yourself," the
Pokédex snarked a foot down the path, free of anything that needed to be set on fire.

A few feet down the path the Safari Ball was still rolling, though it was slowing down. It would stop a few more seconds.

Three.

Two.

The grass rustled at the edge of the path as a shape emerged from the grass just in front of the rolling ball.

One.

The Pokémon fully emerged from the grass and looked back at them, obliviously smiling their way.

"Chansey," the round friend of nurses greeted, though there was something off about the Chansey.

It wasn't pink, but instead a greenish color that reminded Ash of aged copper.

The ball rolled right up to Chansey's foot and tapped it. The ball sucked Chansey in and began shaking.

Ash, Pikachu, and Roggenrola stared at the ball in shock as the ball shook….and then stopped.

It clicked, and then vanished off to Oak's lab.

The path was silent for a moment, then a second…

"Ha ha ha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha ha ha! YES! YES! Finally one of you actually did something right!"

The Pokédex exploded in joy, echoing through its speakers enthusiasm and a slightly mad glee.

"A Chansey, a Shiny Chansey. A Chansey of a different color! What wonderful news, what wonderful data! Chansey is a rare Pokémon that runs easily, runs fast, and carries delicious eggs! Many chase it, but rarely does anyone ever get it. Let alone a Shiny Chansey. Like all Chansey the Shiny Chansey is female, with the ability Natural Cure. If this Chansey ever got poisoned, paralyzed, put to sleep, or some other condition you can recall it to restore it to normal. This Chansey has the moves Aromatherapy, Sing, Pound, and Softboiled! Congratulations on your wonderful capture, do remember to do so again next time you find such a rare and valuable Pokémon!"

Ash just stared at the spot the ball was with disbelief, still trying to wrap his head around what had just happened.

Though another question was coming to mind at this point.

What on earth would he even do with a Chansey, regardless of the color?

He could see how a Ratatta would work with him, but a Chansey?
The night found all four of them at the Pokémon Center, a video call with the Professor in progress.

Said Professor who had the Spearow Ash had accidentally caught perched atop his head.

"Well, I am certainly glad to see that the trip into the Safari Zone went well for you all. I have obtained plenty of data, both recorded and ongoing."

"That's good and all, but why do you have…" Misty questioned as the Professor briefly grimaced. Spearow let out a cry and flapped its wings for a few moments, at which point the Professor's face relaxed.

"One of the interns is working on some research. Very promising, but not the most pleasant smelling, and the smell wafts down here. Spearow is proving quite handy at keeping the smell away when need be."

One wonders if a fan could provide a similar task, but the Professor continued before they could suggest the idea.

"Oh yes, before I forget in the midst of my excitement. Recently I finished working with an old friend of mine with patenting and marketing his recent invention. The resulting agreement was mutually beneficial and will alleviate my financial issues even while ensuring the man never has to work a day again. He'll still do so of course, given that sneakers can still melt."

"The product will soon be shown off at an upcoming consumers conference and will enter the mass market in the next few years as pricing and ethics are debated and gauged, but before they get to that point additional practical testing would be appreciated."

"Sure, but what sort of product are you talking about?" The H.O.P.E gloves were useful, but he wasn't sure there would be a huge amount of testing he could do for a new type of balaclava (whatever a balaclava was exactly).

"It's a recent breakthrough in shrinkage technology. My friend recently discovered the method for shrinking items and storing them in data, much the same as Pokémon are. He calls them Item Capsules."

"Is that a big deal?" Iris questioned.

'In the scale of big deals, it is somewhere between flying cars and the eradication of poverty,' Anabel gave a modest example of their implication.

"Flying cars?" Iris did not seem to get why that was a big deal.

"It is in the ballpark of such an invention, young one. Right now the limit is one overall item per capsule, though that item can be a fully furnished home, a folder filled with important papers, or a space ship fully built and stocked for a three-hundred-year sleeper cruise. I may be outshone in improving the world at this point. However before we get to such a future we want to get feedback from the average consumer. As such four sets have been given to me for testing purposes, and you are receiving one of them."

"Just one?" They had four people with them.

"One set contains more than enough capsules for you all, even if you lose one or two. No, the other sets are going out elsewhere. Gary of course is getting a set, and I was recently in contact with Aideen and Elwood. The two have agreed to receive the other two for feedback purposes. They are currently being shipped at corporate express rates, and should reach you.."
"Package for Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town. I repeat, an express package for Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town," was declared through the loudspeakers.

"Well, I guess it really was express shipped." Misty quipped as the Professor did a confused head tilt, knocking Spearow off his head with an angry squawk.

"No, that is not my shipment. That is too fast even for corporate. That is something else."

He would have said more, but the video suddenly ended as Spearow lunged at Professor Oak in anger for the loss of perch.

…

At the desk Ash had picked up a brown package. They had taken it back to the hotel to examine, given that the last time Ash had gotten a package like that he had gotten an ancient staff he still wasn't sure how to activate, and something like that would draw some weird looks.

When they had gotten back the box was examined. The heavily post marked box had apparently come from Melemele Island, which the Pokédex confirmed as a location from Alola.

The sender was labeled as 'Kahuna and Guardian Deity', which sounded like the name of a rockband. Did he have fans in the music industry who wanted to give him a theme song?

What was inside however, was no sample tape….if sample tapes were even a thing.

The ring that he had been the main thing in the box but filler and paper was white, just like the one Lilo had worn, and used to create that Tectonic Rage attack. Unlike hers however, Ash did not see a crystal on it.

"A Z-Ring?" Why would someone send him one of those? Who did for that matter.

The box had no indication beyond a flier that said 'Figure it out' that the sender clearly hadn't made themselves known beyond a band name that, according to Dexter, did not actually exist. It came from a place called Iki Town, most likely on Melemele Island and it was express shipped to him, but beyond that...

Apparently a Kahuna was an important person in Alola, something between a Gym Leader, Elite Four Member, Governor, and Religious Leader. Alola apparently had Pokémon who were said to be Guardian Deities, with the one on Melemele being named Tapu Koko.

Why a Kahuna and Tapu Koko would send him a Z-Ring was beyond him, or even how it was supposed to work.

Ash held it up close to his face, wondering if there might be a message written on it.

Perhaps 'press once to create giant ground attack, press twice to do grass thing,' or something like that…

…

Only to find himself somewhere else instead of their hotel room pondering how the thing worked.

The windows of a Gym were blowing up.

Ash knew this place. This time.
The looks of fear on his face, Misty's, and Brock's.

As was the dust that formed in the aftermath of the great attack.

"Err...the end of tha' match."

And the voice speaking was Lt. Surge during their Gym battle.

The one he won in the old timeline, but why was he...

"Huh?" Lt. Surge questioned as the dust cleared, revealing Pikachu, sticking out of the ground on his lightning rod tail.

"Pikachu!" his younger self declared in relief, before grinning and making a pose with the ring on his arm, this time with a white crystal on it.

"Let's end this!"

"What in the world..." Lt. Surge asked of the ring, even as his Pikachu looked in exhaustion as he began to pose.

As did Pikachu...and after a synchronized arm crossing, a surge of energy travelled from Ash to Pikachu

"Alright Pikachu, let's show them our power! Breakneck Blitz!" his younger self shouted as Pikachu charged towards Raichu in a massive tackle that felt more like a Giga Impact done in a Quick Attack.

The attack struck Raichu dead center, and send the tired evolution flying into the wall.

"Oh noo!" To Lt. Surge's shock and disbelief.

The scene shifted to the Indigo League, where Mandi's Seadra was speeding around the field, taunting Kingler even as bubbles were sent flying at it.

"Koo kee.." Kingler declared as Seadra avoided a bubble wall, causing Ash to growl.

"Alright Kingler, let's end this before this gets too crazy. You with me?"

"Koo kee!" Kingler agreed as the younger Ash again posed with his crystal, but this time it was blue.

More posing ensued, this time with wave like motions Kingler mirrored.

"What in the..." the Announcer asked before it completed, and Kingler got a surge of energy.

"Alright Kingler, let's show them our power! Hydro Vortex!" And with that Kingler hopped into the water, which began to form into a massive whirlpool.

Seadra was sucked into it, spinning wildly before being spat out of with massive force, defeated and right into Mandi.

A second scene that didn't happen as it should became a third as Ash found himself back at a Gym.

"Cyn!"

And it was Bugsy, whose Scyther had just blocked Cyndaquil's flamethrower and jabbed at his
second fire type.

"Cyndaquil, can you still battle?" his other self asked, to which he got a yes. Grinning, he again posed with the ring, this time with a red crystal.

"Now let's try this out!" Ash declared as the posing began again, this time with a open palm pointing at Cynadquil as the energy formed.

"I don't know what that is supposed to be, but it won't beat my Scyther. Use Fury..."

"Cyndaquil, let's show them our power! Inferno Overdrive!"

And Bugsy was silenced by a giant fire ball of doom hitting Scyther in the face.

They jumped ahead again before he could see Scyther fall, this time only to Morty's Gym battle.

Noctowl was flying in the air, a faint blue light still lingering in the air. Gengar had just become visible again, pained from the full area Confusion attack.

"Now we got 'em! Noctowl, let's do it!" And this time with a pink crystal his other self was making motions to be telepathic, as he did once with Caterpie, along with the call of Shattered Psyche.

Unlike that time, energy flowed into Noctowl and from there blasted Gengar, who promptly began pinballing against invisible walls like a pinball.

"Grovyle got up?" Max's question signaled the next place he was, which was the Petalburg Gym battle. Grovyle cringed as his other self asked if he was okay.

"Ash, wait," Norman interjected. "It is obvious Slaking's Hyper Beam has taken a lot out of Grovyle. There is no shame in calling it off, not when it comes to the safety of your Pokémons."

He could see his younger self consider it briefly, though he felt like scenes were missing before Grovyle let out a determined yowl and began glowing Overgrow Green.

"Alright Norman, your Hyper Beam really did take a lot out of us. It's clear it's time to bet it all on one more attack. Grovyle!" The Z-Ring was back up, this time with a green coloring.

Posing ensued, the usual thing was said, he posed like a tree before calling Bloom Doom...then a massive green explosion engulfed the field.

He lingered long enough to see he had messed up May's hair with that explosion before reality wisely took him away from said incident and to...

"Medicham Hi Jump Kick, one more time!"

The Battle Frontier, where Snorlax was battling Medicham.

"Dodge it!" he shouted, sounding a bit odd even as Snorlax was even more odd by performing a hand stand with a single hand. Medicham flinched as Snorlax hopped over to his younger self.

"Good job Snorlax!"

"I'm impressed," Greta declared as Medicham smarted over the missed attack.

"That's nothing, you haven't seen nothing yet." His other self declared, even as a new Crystal came into play, this one blackish blue, like a Snorlax actually.
“Time to show you our real power!” And more posing, and Snorlax charged at Medicham, faster than he thought Snorlax could do. But this was not the same move that Pikachu had used.

For one thing, Snorlax jumped, causing Medicham to scream in horror before the impact.

Though it came after the name Pulverizing Pancake, so horror was debatable.

Cut to the next place...

"No, Roserade!"

Apparently Gardenia. Why was he jumping around like this in vision land again?

As Gardenia's Roserade got back up it was again posing time, this time with an orange crystal.

"Not sure what you are doing Ash, but I won't let you! Roserade Magical Leaf!"

In response he began punching the air a lot as energy went to Aipom and a call for All-out Pummeling.

This was followed by a giant storm of giant glowing fists, shattering the Magical Leaves like glass and shattering trees and Roserades in their path.

And then he found himself...

"Latiōs, ascend and let us get this over with!"

Fighting Tobias.

The Light Screen clad Latiōs flew into the sky, even as he called for Thunderbolts.

"Descend and toss it off!" And with that Latiōs flung Pikachu off high in the sky, descending to the ground and heeding the call for a Luster Purge, even as Pikachu fell towards the attack.

Once before that had led to Volt Tackle and Iron Tail combining into a mighty combination attack. But this time...

More posing, and a yellow crystal.

"Alright Tobias, I am not going to lose here! Pikachu and I have worked far too hard! Eat this! Gigavolt Havoc!"

"Never!" Tobias snarled as a giant bolt of electricity formed in front of Pikachu's fist before being fired into the purple luster purge field.

It shattered the attack into purple dust before striking Latiōs right in the chest.

The defeated thump of Latiōs was preceded by Pikachu landing on said defeated legendary, before rolling back onto the grass, exhausted but still standing.

"Incredible! With his Z-Move held in reserve, Ash Ketchum managed the impossible feat twice! Tobias's Latiōs is defeated!" and with that Tobias returned Latiōs, but before he could see what Tobias's third Pokémon was...

...
He was pinched on the neck, breaking him out of what he was seeing.

'Misty's right, you do see odd things when you look at Key Stones...and apparently Z-Rings as well,' Anabel mused as she retracted her fingers from his neck.

"I mean, I guess it did give me more than the Key Stone did. I apparently need to do a series of poses and have crystals to make it work. Did they send any crystals?"

"Nope, just packing peanuts?" Misty had upturned said box, leaving only a pile of filler and no shiny crystals.

"Guess you just have to 'figure it out',' Iris quoted the message in the box.

"Maybe after the Gym battle." They had heard that the Gym Leader was going to back the day after tomorrow, and he'd have time to 'figure it out' after then.

Doing so now would probably not work, and it would waste time he could be using better. So..

"Tomorrow I'm thinking practicing for the Gym battle. You up for helping me?"

'Sure'.

"Always."

"Why not?"

Misty got odd looks from Iris and Anabel for it.

"I do have a Tentacool, and this is a Poison Gym."

"Great!" Ash declared as he reached for the Z-Ring and placed it on his right wrist.

It may have no use yet, but might as well make sure he didn't lose it.

---

**OMAKE**

**NON CANON**

**FAWCETT EVOLUTION**

The kid held up a finger as he began to explain what it was he done, and more importantly why.

"These mountains are infamous for intense lightning storms since ancient times. The lightning here is particularly noted for how it reacts to the local mineral deposits, creating a electromagnetic feedback loop that is highly addictive and aggression inducing to Electric-type Pokémon," the Kalosian noted as Otoshi cringed.

He knew that quite well. He and Marowak had to fight off three Electabuzz acting like the worst drug addicts he had ever seen, just with electric fists instead of bongs. It was good training, but there were healthier ways to prepare for his sixth badge in Pewter City.

"Yes, but I still would like to know why that involves my Marowak standing on top a mountain, with my Keystone, in a bowtie."

Marowak adjusted the blue and green striped adornment with the Keystone in the center as the kid
continued.

"It's a simple explanation. You see, my granny is a master Mega Evolution Trainer. She won the Kalos League with it, and she knows more about it than perhaps anyone alive. Mega Evolution, as I am sure you know, is created when the Pokémon's Infinity Energy is enhanced by the unique energy humans produce as filtered through a conduit known as a Keystone, inducing a temporary state of additional evolution."

"That isn't simple," Otoshi noted as the kid laughed.

"Oh believe me I'm simplifying it. You don't want to hear the unabridged version. Anyway back on topic, a Keystone isn't the only way to do this. Alolan Trainers use special crystals to create a similar reaction, only with them it creates a singularly powerful attack known as a Z-Move. There are however, manners of enhancing a Pokémon that don't require a stone or a crystal. They're just harder to achieve." The kid turned to the still fidgety Marowak.

"Marowak is unable to Mega Evolve, believe me I am familiar with all forty-one Pokémon known to Mega Evolve into forty-two forms so I would know this. However Marowak should still be able to use the non-conduit methods with the correct stimulation. One of which involves using Infinity Energy to create temporary bonds with stray photons and harnessing them as a form of lightweight armor that enhances the Pokémon."

"Stray photos?" Otoshi questioned. This was still not making any sense.

"Photons are connected to light," the kid explained as Otoshi scratched his head. "Your Keystone can be used as a crutch for the manipulation of Infinity Energy until Marowak is able to draw upon the skill at will."

"So, you are going to use my Marowak, his Lightning Rod ability, and my Key Stone to attract light, take the light atoms from it, and form a powerful armor?" Otoshi questioned as the kid shrugged.

"That's one way of putting it, though Photons are not at all like atoms. First of all..."

"...Why the bowtie?" Otoshi had to ask as the kid grinned.

"I'm Kalosian," he (not) explained as the sky rumbled, before exploding in intense light.

"Shield your eyes!" the kid shouted.

Well duh.

The flash blinded him for a good minute before Otoshi opened his eyes once more….

To find his Marowak had suddenly grown several feet in height, was now in a red costume with a white shoulder cape, and had a giant lightning bolt symbol on his chest.

The Kalosian looked at the Marowak in confusion.

"This…is not what was supposed to happen."

Otoshi sort of suspected that was the case. Capes were not part of what he was explained would happen, let alone shoulder capes.

"Marowak…..are you okay?" Otoshi couldn't think of anything better to say.

Before Marowak could give any indication of him being okay.
"Heh! Heh! Heh! So, I've finally found you, you big red cheese!"

The two humans and the Marowak with the shoulder cape all turned to a cliff side, where a odd looking man was looking down at them. Bald and bespectacled, he was the most hideous man that Otoshi had ever seen.

"It is I, Doctor Thaddeus Sivanna, the world's wickedest scientist! You thought you could hide from me, but no world are you safe from my all mighty mind! You will be foiled this day, after which I will take over this world with the power of science!"

"Never!" Marowak shouted in English before flying at the man with wingless propulsion.

Otoshi and the scientist were promptly both confused and amazed by the fight scene that ensued.

....
As a day passed, then a second and third, Ash Ketchum prepared for the next Gym battle.

Training for all sorts of possibilities and tactics that he had come across in his history with Poison Pokémon, from Roxie’s direct poisoning strategies to Paul using Toxic Spikes he prepared for them all, and finalized what Pokémon he should bring with him based on advice the Pokédex had to offer given the Poison types of the Kanto and Johto regions.

However during this time he was not alone in preparing for the future.

Paul was taking a more casual approach to his day today.

After the fiasco that was the tag tournament he had needed some breathing space from the place. Having left the city, he had traveled and found a minor Gym.

He promptly released his anger on it, and now had five badges to his name.

Nidoking had performed excellently there. It had done as well as to be expected when fighting with an advantage, and Paul had felt the need to properly thank him.

Competency must be rewarded after all.

It had coincided with a needed toe trimming, so Nidoking was currently in the next town over being given a nail trim, plus additional frivolities that came with the package that he was sure Nidoking understood the meaning of.

Good performance, good treatment. Bad performance, Raichu.

Of course even his casual day had to have something of merit to it, hence his project.

"Karp." The Magikarp at the end of his line declared. Behind him he could hear Torterra’s head rise up in slight interest.

Paul tapped the thing in the face with his Pokéball, sucking the fish inside. After a few moments of pointless struggling against it he held the captured fish in the ball.

"No way!" the Pokédex informed him. "This fish will go nuts when it evolves. It will be powerful, but way too cray cray."

Paul scowled at the choice of his Pokédex’s words, but released the Magikarp regardless.

If he was going to have a Gyarados, he needed to find a Magikarp that would not be as untameable when it evolved. It was a weakness of his training style that a Gyarados he evolved would probably not respond to training well, and thus finding one with the right temperament was a must.

It was time-consuming, but the only strenuous part of the process was his Pokédex’s voice.

....

While Paul enjoyed a calm day fishing, two others were experiencing a much more fiery contest for a fifth badge.
The light within the Gym was unnaturally tense as the bald Gym Leader pointed at his challengers. 

"You won't be blocking this as easily. Rapidash, Solarbeam!"

Green light flickered around the horse Pokémon for only moments before firing at the Sandslash, who tensed in imminent pain.

"No, we're just switching the roles around! Scizor!"

Between the grass blast and the ground type appeared a red bug-type one would not usually see at this Gym. With a glowing white claw, the attack was deflected away, blasting into a nearby wall with a loud boom.

Blaine chuckled at the sight of the two Trainers.

"A simple but effective solution, but it takes more than that to win here. Arcanine!" Leaping up from behind the horse was the massive canine, fangs blazing with fiery rage.

And so the double battle for two Volcano Badges for the pair of Jeanette and A.J continued.

... 

"Say kid, you wouldn't happen to know two other guys in hats with Pikachu, would ya?"

"No." At a different port of call known as Vermillion City, a boy named Ritchie was confused at Lt. Surge's question, even while their Charmander and Voltorb stared one another down.

"Huh, well I guess hats and Pikachu must in fashion then. I'll have to remember to break out my old army hat then."

"I'm pretty sure that isn't the right type of hat. Zippo, Dragon Rage!"

"Char!"

... 

Far from the coast Pewter City had its own Gym, and its own Gym battle in progress.

Dan's memory of Saffron had been a bit hazy. Had he fought the Gym Leader there or not?

Regardless of what he may or may have not done, a quick check of his records showed that he didn't officially do anything and could try for another challenge.

Hence why he was in the city of stones.

"Rhyperior!"

The Gym Leader's bellow was followed by the massive behemoth of a rock-type holding out both of its arms, the openings in each letting loose a volley of sharp Stone Edges.

"Get out of the way!" Dan shouted.

"Jump!" his floating partner chimed in agreement, descending away from the first volley, then twisting out of the way of a second.

The Cottonweed Pokémon continued to float around the much larger Pokémon, who didn't take its
"Bullet Seed!" Dan called as Jumpluff opened her mouth and unleashed a volley of seeds. They struck Rhyperior's right arm in a series of minute explosions.

Rhyperior didn't flinch.

"Did it lose the Ground typing when I wasn't' looking?" Dan questioned.

"**Rhyperior can have Solid Rock when it evolves from a Rhydon. It takes super-effective damage and turns it down,**" his Pokédex informed him.

"That is correct. My Rhyperior's tough as they come, it's not just any attack that can hurt him. If you want to get to the Indigo League, you are going to have to find a way around his solid defensive power, and his equally potent offense! Rhyperior, Flash Cannon!"

White light began charging up in Rhyperior's cannons as Dan grimaced.

So far this battle had been two in his favor, one in the Gym Leaders. His Ampharos had taken out his Omastar, but the Aerodactyl had forced a double knock out. They both had more Pokémon after this, but he didn't want to fall behind.

This Rhyperior might make that difficult.

…

In the hills around Pewter City where a Rhyperior was not forming a massive obstacle to overcome, a large boulder was lifted into the air with a psychic glow.

The Slowbro that was doing so was focusing intently for the sluggish species, even as its Trainer pointed at the stone.

"Lapras!" Solidad commanded. Seconds later from behind a blast of water flew at the boulder.

It shattered, exploding into shards and remains that radiated from the spot Hydro Pump had struck outwards, before the blue psychic glow intensified and pulled the pieced back together into a uneven mass.

Unrecognizable as the boulder from before, but still the mass that had once been said boulder.

"Excellent," Solidad told both of her Pokémon seconds before the sound of dislodged stone caught their attention.

The Trainer and two Water Pokémon turned, spying a Trainer standing atop a nearby rock ledge, glaring down at them.

Alongside him was a Pokémon unfamiliar to them, a large red and black Pokémon with a belt of flames.

Their eyes had met, and that meant only one thing.

Battle.

…

As one battle began, the aftermath of another was still being felt.
Gary Oak sat at a table, a cup of coffee half drunk and a croissant only nibbled at. A dark mood hovered over him.

His pocket vibrated.

"Would you like me to replay the Professor's message again sir?" it asked.

"No," Gary told it, and silence returned to the dining booth, even as a bell rung at the door, signaling a new customer.

"Oh Erika, the usual I assume?" he heard the lady at the front greet.

"Yes, that would be wonderful Edna. I'll find myself a table."

Gary didn't react to the sound of the Gym Leader's arrival, still staring at his coffee as the steps of expensive shoes rang through the restaurant.

He did react when they stopped, and seconds later were met by the sound of someone abruptly sitting down.

"Well you seem glum," the Gym Leader commented from the other side of the booth.

"Hardly what one normally sees from someone who's won a Gym battle. You look like you didn't earn your badge." Erika observed.

"...I barely did," Gary muttered to himself, which might have worked at not being heard if he was still with the bard.

But no, he had gotten the lampshade off his head days ago and no longer could hum a dozen songs. He had recovered from the experience.

"You know there's a walking PSA on gambling who says a lot of stupid thing, here's one of them. A beautiful loss is still a loss, and an ugly win is still a win" Personally I don't like ugly wins and can work with beautiful losses in business and politics, while as a Gym Leader it is much the same. Your win was hardly an ugly one."

"It was down to the wire," Gary recalled.

"It's worrying when a Gym battle isn't concluded that way. That suggests either a subpar Leader or a subpar challenger, and rarely a challenger sneaking a Dragonite against an Oddish. Your Growlithe, Pidgeot, Golbat, and Magneton performed well, you performed well."

A cup of tea was delivered to the Gym Leader as she finished, and the conversation was paused for a sip before she continued.

"Something else is on your mind, isn't it?" she asked. Gary moved to stand up after that, only for a leg to stick out from seat to seat.

"Don't be rude."

"Says the stranger who sat down randomly at my booth without asking," Gary muttered.

"You haven't finished your croissant," she responded evenly. He didn't move, to leave or to consume said pastry, and so the Gym Leader took a sip and continued.

"I have a suspicion of what is bugging you. You feel like you should have beaten me better. That
you should be stronger, smarter, more efficient. That against someone whose type has a myriad of weaknesses, that a victory would be child's play. If I may quote someone who isn't a walking PSA on how not to behave, "Depending on which Pokémon you choose and what moves they use, I could be your most challenging opponent yet or I could be a total pushover". He was talking about Ice types, but it apples to me just as well."

"By word alone that was in play. You had the correct Pokémon, and the correct moves. However there is an element missing, one that is more in spirit than in phrasing. You just have to figure it out and fix it, unless you want to mope over a croissant after your next Gym battle, and then the League."

A plate delivered to the Gym Leader ended the conversation.

....

"Wait, Koga isn't the Gym Leader?!"

Ash's question rang through his room the night before his challenge for a Soul Badge.

After all that training, even after hearing of challengers who had their Pokémon poisoned by the Gym Leader, it wasn't Koga?

"Correct. Koga was in fact the Gym Leader, but he recently left the position to prepare to challenge for an Elite Four position. It's why there has been a spike of Soul Badges given out, as is custom for new Gym Leaders learning the ropes. Unfortunately for you the learning curve has peaked, so you are not at the optimal time for victory against her."

Ash would argue about new Gym Leaders, but he did recall how long it took Flannery to get into a proper rhythm for their battle. It was probably not an issue exclusive to her.

"The new Gym Leader is his seventeen year old daughter, Janine," the Pokédex noted as it brought up an image of a purple-haired ninja girl in garb one would expect of a ninja.

"He has a daughter?" That was new, or did he just not know that the first time?

"Yes, he does. Humans tend to multiply if you leave them alone after all. As fathers tend to do when they are present, he taught her all he knows and her battle techniques should still mirror his greatly, though as time goes on one does expect to see further divergence."

"So be ready for spore attacks, confusion…"

"Correct."

Ash nodded as he rested his head on a pillow, the information processing as he prepared to get the sleep he'd need for tomorrow.

Koga's daughter huh….hope Aya liked being an Aunt.

'So, what are Gyms like exactly? I've never been in one...' Anabel asked as they walked along to the outskirts of the city. Slowly looming before them was the white painted, old fashioned structure where Koga once dwelt.
Now it was the domain of his daughter, while he was off doing whatever it was one did to prepare for the Elite Four.

"In my experience, a lot of trees," Iris commented. At Anabel's confused look Ash elaborated.

"Gyms tend to be different depending on whose running them. Sometimes they are simple, sometimes they have other aspects to them. A few of them even have guards you have to fight before you can even..."

BOP!

Right in the middle of the road Ash walked into something solid.

Solid, and invisible.

Rubbing his head in pain he absently noticed Misty run over to his head and touch it, as if making sure it wasn't bleeding profusely.

It wasn't, profusely or otherwise, but still...what did he walk into?

Iris walked up to the spot he walked into and poked at it. She mimicked the motion to both the left and the right of where he had hit, and she came to a confused conclusion.

"It seems to be a wall, a wall that we are unable to see."

'An invisible wall?' Anabel was surprised to hear of such a thing.

Ash had to agree, that felt new. Last time there were just Voltorb pits, maybe?

The Fuchsia Gym was a bit blurry. Back in Kanto most of the time his visits to Gyms were one and done things, and he really didn't get a chance to see them that much. Maybe they did have invisible walls the first time and he had just forgotten...but he was pretty sure even if they did they weren't supposed to be out front.

"I'm suddenly nostalgic for Surge's thugs," Misty muttered as she was reassured he was not bleeding and left off the skull checking.

"Yeah, Charmander handled them pretty well, didn't he? Not sure that Charizard would work here," Ash said.

"Charizard should be able to destroy this wall," Iris countered as she felt up the invisible wall again.

"It feels quite breakable, and flammable."

"That's vandalism, and arson. Both are highly illegal," the Pokédex retorted.

"Isn't arson vandalism?" Misty questioned.

"It's special vandalism, and breaking the Gym Leader's invisible walls either with muscles or combustion will still likely net you all legal trouble. Also I suspect that wrecking the property of a Ninja is a bad idea even if it was legal."

"So, do we just go through this invisible maze?" Misty did not sound thrilled at the idea.

'I could teleport us through it right to the end.' Anabel offered. This suggestion was repeated aloud to the Pokédex, who was silent for a moment before it began letting out sounds akin to a dial up feature.
"I've just scanned the area. I've found several holes in the camera grid system that open up at several opportune intervals. There is one in front of the gate that will open in about 35 seconds. Teleport then and you will not be detected."

"Hopefully there will be no pitfall traps there." Ash had the urge to listen for the sound of rhyming and puns. He hadn't seen Team Rocket in a while, and they were overdue to be bothering them again.

"No, I just hacked into her rotating schedules to the Gym's subordinate ninjas. Pitfalls are tomorrow's hazard that poor smucks will have to deal with. We just happened to come on invisible wall day. Luckily her traveling skipped duplicate day."

"Ninjas keep a schedule?"

"Only so far as to have about two dozen ways of annoying Trainers and telemarketers that are randomly assigned each week. Sometimes pitfall day is Tuesday, sometimes it's Friday, and sometimes they entirely skip over it. Now, inside we go."

…

There was a battlefield in the Gym. That was new.

While Ash couldn't remember if there were invisible walls last time, he did know the battles he had with Koga (or one battle split in two by Team Rocket being Team Rocket), he knew that for sure.

The first battle was on wood, the second in a garden.

This time a Gym field was present, a dirt field that stood in the midst of a large center room. Faint light filtered in from the windows, and seemed to be getting fainter by the moment.

Iris had said she had smelled rain on the way here, and the weather man did say something about possible showers yesterday. Hopefully this battle would either end before the rain started, or last until it ended.

Ash would prefer to not have to deal with the former, he liked a longer, more fun battle. Regardless of if he utterly beat someone, or was utterly beat by them.

"Too high
Can't come down
It's in the air and it's all around
Can you feel me now?"

He'd ask where the Gym Leader was, but the sound of loud, blaring music was first priority.

'This song, really? People still listen to it?' Anabel didn't seem to like this particular piece of music, her face contorted into a cringe of displeasure.

Pikachu was cringing from the sheer volume, though Ash had no idea if his buddy liked the music or agreed with Anabel's opinion.

"Why is it so loud?!!" Iris complained as Axew let out a whine from inside her hair.
"Oh,

Taste of your lips

I'm on a ride

You're toxic I'm slippin' under

With the taste of a poison paradise"

"Up there!" Misty pointed to the ceiling. Her own volume was suitably loud, as to be heard over the loud singing.

And so all of them looked up, to find the source of the loud music.

And also the Gym Leader, bobbing her head with the lyrics, standing on the ceiling with a scarf dangling down from her like a streamer.

Just above said scarf was a purple hair bun atop her head, and the garb of a ninja he had never learned the exact term for despite the surprising amount of ninjas he met in his time.

What wasn't covered by said ninja garb of unknown name, or a pair of black gloves and boots, was netting of some sort on her arms.

'I can't pick up anything that suggests she noticed us'. Anabel still had a bothered tone from the loud playing of the song.

"How is she even staying up there?" Misty wondered aloud.

"Specialized shoes and ceiling, I'm detecting magnetism," the Pokédex explained.

"Why?"

Misty's second question was interrupted by a series of events that Ash wasn't sure the exact catalyst for. The girl who was probably the Gym Leader continued to bob to the music as normal, but suddenly Iris tensed and glared up at her like she was expecting her to suddenly throw a bomb at them.

Anabel, as he noted in the corner of her eye, was looking at Iris like someone who had just seen someone do a complete one-eighty, probably in relation to whatever was going on.

"Pi? I'm confused'.

Pikachu was just as lost at what was going on as he and Anabel were (and probably Misty), as the music stopped and the girl-who-was-probably-Janine flipped down and landed square in the end of the arena where she would be battling him from in perfect form.

Theoretically.

She opened her eyes as she stood to full height, looking a bit taller than Anabel but shorter than the rest of them, revealing the same eyes as her father, and looking pointedly at Iris, who was still glaring back. A smirk popped into existence on her face as a pair of small objects slid out from between her clenched fingers.

Shuriken.
"You know, most people don't pick up that I'm doing that when I choose to wait for them that way. It doesn't matter if they came for their first or their last badges, very few people can see my subtle motions, motions I've trained to such perfection I don't even have to think to do them. You have good instincts, who trained you?"

"Nature," Iris responded coolly, still staring the girl down, ready to call on her Bloodline if necessary. Ash felt a bit of unease at that statement, but he'd ask Iris more about her life later.

The girl pocketed the metal throwing stars before looking his way.

"You've got a valuable companion there. Friend, sister, girlfriend, whatever she is I'd suggest always trusting her instincts, they may one day save your life. You never know when someone is a threat, and a good set of instincts are among your most valuable tools. My name's Janine by the way, the Gym Leader of Fuchsia City. You're one of the winners of the tag tournament, Ash Ketchum."

Strange, he heard Misty let out an odd sound at Janine's statement, but regardless he nodded in confirmation.

"Your partner fought me just before I left for business. He has a good head on his shoulders, though neither he nor his friend picked up on my little test. He came away with a badge, will you manage as well?"

The reminder of Red caused a upswing of bother to swell, but Ash forced it down as he grinned confidently back.

"Of course!" he declared as Pikachu let out a secondary declaration with a powerful spark. Janine grinned, before her gaze wandered to the Z-Ring that was now on his wrist. Her gaze left it once she noticed the lack of accompanying crystal, seconds before a burst of smoke covered the judge's area, before clearing to reveal another ninja a few years older than either of them.

'He came in from a spot in the ceiling while the smoke grenade went off.' Anabel informed him of where the ninja had come from.

"This Gym battle will be a four on four contest with substitutions only allowed by the challenger. The Gym match will be over when all of either side's Pokémon are unable to battle. There is no time limit. The Gym Leader will make the first move. Are these conditions acceptable?"

"Yes!" both of them declared at once.

"Then begin!"

"Go!" Janine shouted as a Great Ball flew through the air.

It exploded, releasing a large blue and cream Pokémon that seemed shorter than Ash remembered.

"Nido!" Bellowed the Nidoqueen that was shorter than him by a significant margin.

Was that just a puberty thing?

"Nidoqueen, the Drill Pokémon and the final evolution of female Nidoran. Their hard scales protect them from harm and use microscopic spikes to poison foes on contact. Nidoqueen are difficult to breed in captivity," the Pokédex noted as it began taking in the data.

Regardless of height or microscopic poison spikes this was a Gym battle, and he already had planned in case of Nidoqueen, or Nidoking for that matter.
"Squirtle!" Ash called as he threw his first choice of Pokémon out.

The ball burst open mid air, popping back to his hand as his first water-type appeared, staring down the Nidoqueen.

"Nidoqueen use Shock Wave!" Janine led off with a sparking horn on Nidoqueen's head. The blue electricity quickly built up, ready to fire at Squirtle, who tensed.

"Block it with a Counter Shield!" Ash called, but before Squirtle could begin spinning the Shock Wave struck Squirtle straight in the chest, stopping Squirtle in his tracks and stunning the turtle.

It also caused Squirtle to swear things Ash would not repeat.

"Now use Poison Jab!" Nidoqueen roared before charging at the stunned turtle, purple energy gathering in her right fist.

"Water Gun!" Ash called. Nidoqueen continued to charge forward, likely under the belief that Squirtle needed more time to recover from the Shock Wave.

However that was a mistake, and a rapid Water Gun flew from Squirtle and struck Nidoqueen under her jaw, knocking the Pokémon back into a stumble as Squirtle hopped back into a full upright stance.

"That was a fast attack speed for a Water Gun," Janine noted as Nidoqueen noted Squirtle warily and began taking a few steps back, aiming to regain distance.

"Squir! Fast and accurate, that was the perfect spot to hit that thing."

"Shock Wave!" The electricity quickly began building as Nidoqueen continued to, without prompting, get distance on Squirtle again. The intent was clear, to fire Shock Wave before Water Gun could get in too close and stop it the same way Shock Wave had stopped the Counter Shield.

"Use Water Gun again!"

The water blast flew at Nidoqueen, easily passing through the space she would had been in had she not begun stepping back before Nidoqueen could have gathered even a few ions of electricity.

It was ions, right? Ions were something connected to electricity and not, like, light?

Gaps in his knowledge aside, the Water Gun struck Nidoqueen before the charge was even halfway complete.

In the same spot as before.

What had charged from the Shock Wave flew up into the ceiling, smashing into it with sounds that he was pretty sure Janine would rather not hear in her own home.

Janine did in fact flinch at the sound of damaged structures, but eyed Squirtle and Ash in approval.

"That attack was excellent. The accuracy was impressive, even by my standards. Clearly that Squirtle suffers from no lack of training."

Was that a dig at a lack of evolution?

"However accuracy and speed are not the only factors in winning. Strategy is also a factor, Nidoqueen use Double Team!"
Nidoqueen clapped both hands together and was surrounded by a small army of duplicates, all of whom darted forward at once in a massive surge.

...

Anabel bit her lower lip, even as Misty looked worried about what this tactic looked like it was aiming for.

Iris shouting at Ash exactly what this tactic was meant to look like, using duplicates to confuse another (a tactic used both by predators and prey), wasn't helping.

It was a good strategy. It was a clever strategy.

It wasn't, however, what Janine was planning. What she was planning was something completely different.

There was a reason Nidoqueen had gone first, it was in the front of her mind and radiating out like a neon sign to her. Just as Ash had done some planning around what Pokémon Janine could have, she had also been looking him up.

What she was doing was a combination she had recently been working on, one triggered by her saying something specific (she'd have to actively look to tell what combination of words it was specifically), that would be very difficult for Ash to deal with.

Particularly with the Pokémon that were good for this Gym battle.

She wanted to shout out, as loud as she could think, to Ash what was going on. To tell him what Janine was planning, and that he had to stop it now.

But she couldn't.

'Anabel, if you accidentally overhear the strategy of someone, can you do me a favor? Don't tell me. You can tell anyone else, but try and make sure I don't hear it. I want to see my opponent's strategies myself,' he had asked her nicely the day after the tag tournament.

He didn't want such information.

She would agree that such a thing would be quite unfair, a rougher extreme that Red would probably admit was toeing the line he followed. Even with this knowledge as an accident, the sharing of it was something that many would consider unfair.

Probably more so than overhearing someone's plans accidentally, if only because someone could at least realize where the information might have come from.

However what she had heard was the sort of information that, even if Red thought the sharing of was a bit hard to swallow, would be something he'd still want to hear.

After all, it wasn't a simple case of when to zig or instead to zag, but a single move that would ruin the day for half of Ash's Pokémon he had with him.

...

"Squirtle, use Water Gun as thin as possible!"

"Squir!" Squirtle declared as the turtle's lips narrowed as much as possible with only the thinnest of openings for water to fly through.
The Water Gun that resulted flew through the field extremely thinly, instead of the solid beam of water as was usual.

It was also wider than normal.

Squirtle had mentioned this fire fighting method to him a few weeks ago, and it was finally time to try it out in a battle.

The thin water attack cut through dozens of Nidoqueen that were charging his way, working to expose where the real one was hiding.

The water attack flew all the way into the back of the group, popping two Nidoqueen clones to reveal the original, who took the thin water attack head on while retracting both of her arms from the now disturbed ground.

Nidoqueen wasn't looking so hot after the third water attack, though it was oddly smiling.

"Way to go Squirtle!" Ash complimented the turtle, who let out a affirmative grunt.

The grunt was followed by a disturbance in the field right in front of them.

Squirtle tensed as Ash's eyed widened and Pikachu chirped out in alarm.

"Pikapika!" 'Squirtle, jump with your tail! Nidoqueen must have used Toxic Spikes!'

"Tle?" 'Jump with my tail?' Squirtle wondered in confusion as Janine smirked.

"I see I don't have to spell it out for you. My Nidoqueen was in fact setting up while Double Team was active. As I said, strategy is a factor in winning as much as speed and accuracy, perhaps even more so. The fact you brought your Squirtle suggests you studied up on what I might have on me, and choose Squirtle instead of Krabby to avoid Poison Point." A sly glint appeared in Janine's eyes. "However, I also happened to look up what Pokémon you might bring too. You have several Pokémon that are particularly a problem for my Gym, and I took precautions."

The disturbed ground finally broke open, revealing what Janine had set up for him.

A pointed stone, of which he could see many others like it poking out of every area of the field.

"Nidoqueen has used Stealth Rock," the Pokédex surmised.

Janine grinned in confirmation.

"Yes, yes she has."

....

Iris was glaring at Janine, a faint tremor in her arms as she clenched her fists tightly.

Misty was aware she had been glaring intently since the ninja had pulled those Shuriken, but after revealing that trick of hers the glare was intensifying.

She was surprised Janine wasn't at all concerned. Iris's glare was unsettling, and she wasn't even the target of it.

'Janine is well aware of it. She's amused more than anything, though she does suggest that she should learn to be more subtle in mentally figuring the best way to dismember someone,' Anabel
offered, sounding a tad uneasy about the 'be subtle in plotting to kill people' message.

She saw Squirtle blast Nidoqueen clean in the jaw again. Janine's Pokémon went down, meaning Ash had taken the first win.

However somehow it didn't feel that way. The win felt like it was more Janine's than Ash's.

After all, all three of them had helped Ash come up with what Pokémon he would use at this Gym battle.

They had suggested the likeliness of Toxic Spikes, and as a result had Ash work around it. He had thought about bringing Muk to clear them out, but Anabel had pointed out the issues with that.

Namely that Muk would not be able to do much, and if Janine managed to take out Muk or leave Muk as the last Pokémon he'd have a tough time. Muk was not an offensive Pokémon, and would not be able to out last other Poison Pokémon as well as it could other types.

Bulbasaur had also come up, but apparently tensions flared up at the ranch just before the Gym battle and getting Bulbasaur back would be problematic.

So the discussion had turned to focusing on avoiding Stealth Rock with flying-types.

The same Pokémon Stealth Rock would tear apart.

Half of the team did not want to deal with Stealth Rock. The other half included Squirtle and Pikachu…and if this battle went on full he'd have to use a flying type at some point.

…

"Squirtle," Ash questioned as Janine returned Nidoqueen and thanked her, "you can stay in for a while, right?"

"Squirt!" Squirtle gave him a thumbs up. 'I can.'

"The odds of Squirtle soloing a Gym of this nature is highly against you," the Pokédex snarked.

"Got any good news?" He read somewhere Rapid Spin was bad for Spikes and Stealth Rock. Maybe Squirtle could remember how to use the move?

Maybe it could say 'if Squirtle does X, you can get rid of Stealth Rock even without Rapid Spin.'

"Actually yes. Your Pidgeot just returned to Professor Oak's ranch, and has a letter on her. If you were to transfer her ball over, you will get the letter as she is currently in a healing machine to help her rest from the flight."

Oh, that was good news. Not what he was necessarily hoping for right now, but still good news.

Janine had a Great Ball in hand, so she was about to send out her second Pokémon. Hopefully it would be Nidoking.

"Go!" Janine shouted, throwing the Great Ball and letting it explode out into her second Pokémon.

"Weez!" declared a multi-headed Pokémon Ash hadn't seen in ages.

He somehow didn't think this would go as easily as he remembered it.
"Weezing, the Poison Gas Pokémon. Weezing consumes pollutants and trash to sustain itself, and is highly explosive. Do not electrify."

So like Koffing then. Do not use Thunderbolt. That meant if Squirtle got knocked out, he only really had one option that wouldn't take Stealth Rock as well as Brock took a reminder from Croagunk to not flirt.

"Pikapika." 'Don't overthink it. You won't have to worry about blowing up the place if Squirtle takes out Weezing,' his partner advised.

Good point.

"Sludge Bomb!" Janine called as Weezing made a horking sound from both heads.

"Dodge it!" Ash declared. Squirtle hopped to the left of a first shot, than the second from the other mouth.

The sludge sizzled on the ground for a few moments in a manner that reminded Ash of an egg. Ash wasn't sure if that was bad or weird or normal….so he'd just ignore it for now.

"Water Gun!"

"Double Team!" Janine called as Weezing duplicated itself.

The water attack struck a Weezing right in the little link below the smaller head, dissipating itself in the process. Squirtle fired two more quick blasts, striking two other Weezing in the same spot.

Both dissipated as well.

The Weezing dupes were still floating around Squirtle, orbiting him like gaseous moons.

Were there gaseous moons? They had gaseous planets, did they also come in moon form?

"Sludge Bomb!"

"Dodge the real one, then use Brine!" Ash ordered seconds after volleys of sludge came at Squirtle. Squirtle watched the coming sludge for a moment, before hopping out the way of one set.

Two others struck him, but flew right through him as Squirtle narrowed his eyes on a single Weezing opposite the first dupe lost.

"Tle." 'Got you.' And with that, a salty blast of water flew right at said Weezing, striking it dead of center in the small nub.

It didn't poof away, and instead was sent spinning to the ground in constant spinning motion. The duplicates faded away.

"Yes!" Iris cheered at the success.

'Squirtle has really good eyesight,' Anabel complimented him.

"Bind Squirtle with Infestation!"

Janine's call made the cheer go away though, as Weezing's eyes glowed a light green, followed by a green light rising out of the ground beneath Squirtle, binding the turtle as the ends dug into Squirtle with what almost look liked teeth…
"Those chains are made of bugs!" Misty shouted in horror as the energy that came out manifested, and indeed it looked like a chain of glowing bugs had arose from the ground and bound themselves into Squirtle, with the ends of each bug chain biting into Squirtle's shoulders and knees with teeth.

About half a timeline of joking at Misty for her fear of bugs faded instantly. While the idea of fearing a Caterpie would still be hilarious, glowing energy bug chains did make her fears look justified.

"Squir!

'What the, ow! This freakin'…'

Weezing hit the ground head first, before bouncing back up only a tad dazed and floating back up as if it was filled with light gas….

Which it was, come to think of it. So that did make sense.

"Now Sludge Bomb!" Both heads of Weezing swelled a bit, before horking out two sludge bombs bursts.

The poison bombs struck Squirtle, shattering the Infestation chains and sending the turtle skidding across the field.

Squirtle didn't move, and so the ninja ref made the call.

"Squirtle is unable to battle! The winner is Weezing!"

And with that, the battle was now tied 1-1, and Stealth Rock would now begin to take its toll.

"Return," Ash declared as he called back the turtle.

"You did a good job buddy, I don't plan on letting it go to waste." Ash declared as he eyed the Weezing.

This was going to hurt, but there was only one Pokémon for this job.

"Go!" Ash sent out his second Pokémon, who appeared on the field in a burst of light.

"Free!" Butterfree declared. 'So I'm up? Good, hope this goes better than the last one.,'

Butterfree's optimistic statement was followed by stones shooting up from the ground and impacting into him like fireworks, sending him spiraling towards the ground with a downed plane.

He recovered before he hit the ground, but wasn't flying all that well in the aftermath. Nor that high.

'Ow!'

Janine smirked before pointing.

"Bind it!" Weezing's eyes glowed Infestation green once more.

"Get out of the way!" Ash declared as Butterfree fluttered up, a few winces from the Stealth Rock damage but none the less avoiding a pincer movement of bug chains.

"I know this is going to be rough, but I need you to pull through it," Ash told Butterfree, who nodded and seemed to fly a bit steadier than before.

Still, the burst of will from encouragement won't last forever. He'd have to be quick.
"Sleep Powder!" At Ash's command Buttefree's wings glittered with the green powder, before unleashing it in a massive wave.

"Use Smokescreen!" Janine called for James's original signature move. Weezing obliged, unleashing a thick cloud of black smoke from itself in a massive gust.

The smoke collided with the powder, blocking it and rendering it inert. The Smokescreen itself lingered around Weezing, concealing its exact position.

Buttefree eyed the nostalgic technique with some thought.

"Free? 'Should I start using Psybeam until I hit it?'

No, that would waste time and leave an opening. They'd be better off just getting rid of it now.

"Silver Wind!" Ash exclaimed instead. Butterfree again began flapping his wings, releasing a glittering wind of silver dust instead of sleeping powder.

The wind collided with the Smokescreen cloud, pushing it back and exposing Weezing, while also covering the poison gas beast in stinging scales.

The cloud was pushed back right at Janine, who covered her mouth with her scarf moments and shut her eyes just before the cloud blew over her.

She'd be unable to give commands for a few seconds, and that was the opening to take advantage of.

"Now Psybeam!" Ash's declaration began even as the light began to gather in Butterfree's eyes.

He knew the plan even before he had to say it.

The Psybeam blasted right between Weezing's main head, knocking it to the ground even as the Smokescreen dissipated and Janine could see again.

The first thing she got to see….

"Weezing is unable to battle! The winner is Butterfree!"

Was the match go 2-1 in his favor.

"Way to go Buttefree!" He heard Misty cheer and he gave his own thanks.

"Free…." 'Thanks….' However as the thanks was given Ash noticed just how tired Butterfree sounded.

"Pika…." 'Butterfree sounds more tired than Squirtle was after battling Nidoqueen, and it didn't even get hit by an attack.'

Such was the power of Stealth Rock it seemed.

"I need you to hang in there, Butterfree," Ash told his flying bug.

"Especially given that if you are recalled you will just be returned to the field and hit by the Stealth Rock again," the Pokédex absently informed it.

Pikachu glared at the Pokédex for that comment as Janine threw out a third Great Ball.
"Go!" Janine called as the Great Ball released a large blue bat, who fluttered in the air more stably than Butterfree.

"Golbat, the Bat Pokémon. Golbat's speed makes it very annoying to cave travelers. If you find a Golbat with a missing tooth, that means it attempted to get blood from a Pokémon with hard skin, like a Golem or Steelix. The missing tooth is nature's way of telling Golbat to not do it again."

"Free." 'Not exactly helpful to me.'

"Use Sleep Powder!" Ash went for the crippling blow first. Butterfree released a wave of the powder attack towards Golbat.

"Use Double Team!" And it did hit a lot of the resulting Golbat dupes, but about a dozen of them avoided the powder sweep and began flying around the injured Butterfree, swarming around like a looming demise.

…

"She sure likes using Double Team," Misty noted the third straight use of the technique.

'It appears to be an effective way of distracting the opponent while she sets up her trickier moves,' Anabel agreed as she watched the speedy dance of the Golbats.

Keeping track of where the real Golbat was in all of that was not going to be simple. She wasn't even sure how Janine managed it.

She'd look, but she'd rather not risk blurting it out to Ash. No one would be happy with her about it, except the Pokédex and Iris.

Speaking of whom, the latter was back to watching Janine with her regular level of 'you were going to throw dangerous metal objects at Ash' anger.

…

The Golbat were going to need to go away.

"Use String Shot like a whip on all of them!" Ash made the call as Butterfree spat out a long wad of silk.

"Taunt!" Janine ordered. Golbat's eyes flashed red, as the String Shot went limp and fell to the ground.

"Now use Steel Wing!"

"Dodge it!" Ash ordered as the Golbat swarm began to descended, pursuing a similarly dropping Butterfree.

The Golbat however, were faster, and a dozen Golbat flew into Butterfree at once.

The dupes faded away, leaving a single Golbat after the Steel Wing made contact. Said Golbat used Double Team to return to swarm status as Butterfree hit the ground with a loud thump.

"Butterfree is unable to battle! The winner is Golbat!"
"Return!" Ash declared as Butterfree came back.

"Thanks for everything. Perhaps I should have made the call for Silver Wind instead," Ash reflected as the Golbat continued to swarm above head.

"Chu," Pikachu tensed, ready to jump out and battle.

"Hold it," Ash told him quickly, causing his best buddy to look at him in confusion.

'Electric beats Flying, and Stealth Rock won't hurt me much. What's the problem?'

'Well for one thing, if she's been studying me, that means she might have seen Pidgeotto's Steel Wing to counter electric attacks trick. She might have that, and even if she doesn't Golbat's Double Team copies are moving so fast together it'll be hard for you to blast them all. Come to think of it…' Ash felt an idea coming along.

"Pikapi." Pikachu stared at him.

'Ash, stop overthinking things. Sometimes the simplest solution is the best. Just go with your gut.'

He was, and his gut was telling him that it was best to take a gamble here.

And so, he reached for one of his two non-regular balls on him at the moment, and clicked it.

"Stop you fool! That strategy isn't rational!" the Pokédex declared.

Ash ignored the device and threw the ball forward.

"I believe this is the best way to deal with Golbat's Double Team, you'll see! Yamna, I choose you!"

The Park Ball opened, revealing his fast Bug-type from Crimson City's Park.

As the rocks flew up and struck Yanma, the Pokédex growled something.

"I'd like to say that you are being an idiot and trying to lose, but you have proven oddly resilient to it and even your single true loss so far had you fair better than you should have. Should this gamble fail and you find yourself with only one Pokémon to best this Golbat and the following choice of Janine's I will give you a rant, until then I have a paleontology paper to download and analyze."

As the Dex began muttering something, almost under its breath, about the idea that Fossil Pokémon did not naturally have Rock-typing and gained it via how they were preserved and revived, Ash ignored it and looked towards the uneasily recovering Yanma.

"Yamna I know that stung, but this is the perfect battle for you! I know you can do it."

Yamna looked back at him, Yamna's large eyes reflecting back at him a different sort of look than what he saw in any of his original Pokémon.

It wasn't quite trust. It was still being developed, still being forged, though a foundation was there. Built on previous successes and the respect Ash gave to Yamna's preferred battling style, a proto trust.

Yamna nodded back as Janine smirked.
"Perfect battle huh? I'd like to see what makes you think that, Golbat use Air Cutter!" The Golbat swarm flew towards Yanma, wings shimmering with wind slices that were sent flying towards Yanma in a torrential downpour.

Only a few of them would actually hurt, but they'd hurt a lot. If they hit it at all at least.

"Use Detect and fly right through them!" Ash called. Yanma flew forward without hesitation, eyes glowing with the sensory power.

The first few Air Cutter flew right through Yanma, but the next volley was avoided with a sudden sharp turn. Said Air Cutter's flew into the ground and exploded into a burst of displaced dust.

The real Air Cutters.

Janine wasn't deterred though.

"Detect isn't consistent for rapid use, I doubt you can avoid this. Steel Wing!" The Golbat's flew towards Yanma, who had pushed through the swarm of Air Cutters to find a solid formation of Golbat flying towards him like a giant ball.

The ball would hit Yanma in a giant fist, the real Golbat delivering the physical blow from somewhere within it.

It would probably hurt.

"Dodge it at the last second!" Ash told Yanma, who buzzed in place tensely as the ball came at it head on.

"You'd have to be very sure about Yanma's speed if you want to pull that off," Janine pointed out.

"Yanma are on average faster than Golbat, though they in turn are slower than Golbat's evolution Crobat and Aerodactyl. Though a 'Extant Aerodactyl' without the rock attribute could very much be faster," the Pokédex mused the last bit as it read through the document it had obtained for analysis.

Regardless of how fast a 'Extant' Aerodactyl was, eventually Yanma began to bank downwards. The banking was heralded by a slight green glow, and just as the fist got within punching distance Yanma had sped right under it, moving behind it with the enhanced speed given to it by the power of Speed Boost.

"Perfect! Now Yanma, use your wings to destroy the Double Team!" Ash declared.

He did not mean with Wing Attack.

Yanma knew what he meant, and began vibrating his wings faster and faster with the glow of Speed Boost egging them on. Powerful shock waves became visible as they raked through the air, striking into Golbat swarm like a tempest.

The Golbats were rapidly dispelled, and the one that remained was left disoriented.

A raindrop fell from the ceiling, hitting just beyond his foot.

"Pi?" 'Rain?' Pikachu questioned as all present looked up.

Janine visibly flinched at what that sonic attack had done to her ceiling and upper walls, before
looking at him with an odd expression.

Given that her ceiling and upper walls now had gashes in them that looked like someone had throwing a giant flailing Meowth at it, it was not an unwarranted look?"

"You know, my father said this would eventually happen, but it is still a shock to see it having happened."

"Sorry about that," Ash apologized as Janine shook her head.

"No, you should be apologizing to Yanma."

"Yanma?" Ash questioned as he looked at his fast Bug-type. "You okay?"

Yanma let out a confused call at the cause of his concern.

"I meant you should have apologized to Yanma for not attacking in the midst of my brief surprise, Taunt!"

Golbat flashed red eyes at Yanma, who shimmered with the effect of Taunt as Janine immediately gave a second command.

"Swift!"

Golbat was now flapping its wings rapidly, releasing dozens of homing stars courtesy of a fifth move. Said stars were now heading right for Yanma.

"Dodge!"

Yanma flew to the side of the stars, who promptly turned and began following Yanma in pursuit. Yanma sped around the edges of the arena, the stars continuing to follow him like a set of heat seeking missiles.

"While you were worried about your opponent's repair bill, she got an advantage! You can't act distracted!" the Pokédex declared.

"It's called empathy, and you're one to talk." Ash muttered to the device that was still probably reading about 'Extant Armaldo' or something.

As Yanma continued to race ahead of the stars, Ash had an idea.

"Yanma, use Quick Attack to speed right at Golbat!" Ash ordered. Yanma hummed a reply, before turning at a square angle and charging at Golbat, the Swift following behind it.

"Pikapi. 'Ash, if you are aiming to hit Golbat with its own Swift that's one of the oldest tricks in the book.'

"Golbat use Steel Wing to protect yourself!"

Clearly it was also known to Janine too. However…

"Use Feint Attack!" Ash told Yanma, who sped right towards Golbat and vanished momentarily.

Moving too fast to be spotted Yanma appeared behind Golbat and the Steel Wing charge, and pushed into Golbat with all the force it could muster. Some green glow from Speed Boost was lost in the push, but Golbat was still sent tumbling into the Swift.
They impacted with explosive force, knocking Golbat back towards a still hovering Yanma without control.

"It's an old trick, but that just means I've had more time to think of how to make it interesting. Yanma use Wing Attack!"

Yanma let out a loud hum of excitement, before flying towards the knocked around bat with glowing wings. Golbat began to regain a stable stance, but Yanma sped by it with glowing white wings before it could complete its recovery.

The attack sent Golbat crashing to the ground in a thump as Yanma spun around and around atop, the red haze of Taunt fading away.

"Golbat is unable to battle!" the ref declared as Janine returned the bat. "Yanma is the winner!"

"It appears you did have a plan that was functional," the Pokédex sounded like if it could shrug it would.

Janine thanked Golbat before looking his way.

"Well, I wish you could have taken that win without damaging the roof, but I'd be remiss if I suggested someone shouldn't take advantage of all possible tactics. Also I'd be a hypocrite. Still, this isn't over yet," she mused as she looked up at the spinning Yanma.

"A fast opponent who can break up my Double Team. You know, I said I was going to try and make Double Team a signature of mine, sort of like Fantina and Hypnosis, but I'm going to have to use a different trick to finish this." She held up another ball his way, though one he recognized from Johto.

The Fast Ball. He had one of those that he never did use.

"This Pokémon doesn't have Double Team as an option in battle, unlike another Ariados I have for people at you're actual, as opposed to legal, level. That of course means four, or maybe even five tricks up my sleeve you need to consider."

"Pikapi!" 'Ash, she is trying to make you overthink!' his buddy snapped his way.

"So, hope you enjoy! Go!" She threw the Fast Ball, revealing in a burst of light a red spider with long yellow and black legs.

"Ariados, the Long Leg Pokémon and the final evolved form of Spinarak. A species that tends to be mutually exclusive with the Joltik and Galvantula Lt. Surge prefers, their thread is highly valued across the world. They suck fluids from their captured prey."

....

"Fluids," Misty said weakly.

"Blood mostly," Iris told her absently, as Misty grew even greener.

... The rain drops that were slipping in picked up in intensity as the two bugs starred one another down. One from high above, the other from the ground.
"Hey, would Yanma be going into this with any Predator-Prey disadvantages?" Ash asked the Pokédex absently as the bugs stared each other down.

"Yanma are infrequent prey items of Ariados, yes. They aren't targeted as their wing vibrations irritate them and destroy weaker web fibers."

"So only sort of then. Okay, I can work with that," Ash declared as he looked right at the Ariados that stood between him and his Soul Badge.

"I would be careful going ahead," the Pokédex noted in a serious tone as Yanma continued to speed around the ceiling. "Yanma has not acclimated to you fully yet. It will likely still show wild habits of hiding weakness. How much stamina it has lost since the battle began, even without a hit, is difficult to gleam."

"I'll keep that in mind." Ash appreciated the advice.

"Pin Missile!" Janine called. Even as the rain that began sneaking into the battlefield picked up a bit Ariados's back legs glowed green as sharp streams shot out of them, upwards towards Yanma.

"Detect!" Ash's call for the protective move was met with glowing eyes, as Yanma avoided the streaming attacks with deft dodges to the side of each attack.

"Now Wing Attack!"

The dodging was of course followed up by a charge downward, Yanma's wings glistening white and green from the speedy air attack heading right Ariados's way.

"Smart Strike!" Janine called for a new move to him, and so he had no idea what that meant….

"Smart Strike is a powerful steel attack, manifest in a horn. Trying to avoid it is more trouble than it is worth in the end," the Pokédex offered as Ariados's front horn glowed.

"Got it. Yanma, meet it head on!"

"Yan!"

Yanma turned so that his wings were pointing both at the ground and into the air, before slamming them right into the horn.

Yanma flew out of the impact, just as Ariados hopped out of the attack.

"Circle around Ariados!" Ash called for a second strike, this time without a horn to fight it off.

"Agility!" Janine countered as Ariados glowed white. Yanma sped around to Ariados's back, only to find Ariados facing him there.

This repeated several times, each time Ariados's white aura flaring up again as Ariados grew faster and faster. After a while it turned into a spinning mass of bug types that was frankly starting to make him dizzy.

"Pi." That isn't working Ash, you need a new angle.'

Ash agreed, trying to avoid looking at the disorienting bug performance before him as he came up with a new strategy.
His eyes came upon a Stealth Rock.

"Yanma, start pulling out the Stealth Rocks and dropping them on Ariados!"

Yanma stopped orbiting Ariados for a moment to stare at him in confusion, before somewhat reluctantly flying off towards a corner of the field.

Landing on top of a Stealth Rock Yanma began flapping his wings hard, before pulling up with a loud pop, carrying a Stealth Rock.

Yanma then flew back towards the no longer Agility using Ariados, stone ready to be dropped like a bomb.

"An interesting strategy, though I'd save it for when you have a Psychic-type…..Smart Strike!" Janine observed as Yanma sped up and sent the pilfered Stealth Rock flying right at it.

Smart Strike shattered the Stealth Rock on impact, though Yanma flew right over the stunned spider to begin the process again with a second stone.

"Poison Jab!"

Ariados was on Yanma like a speeding comet, a purple burning horn ready to stab it, before the sonic waves that Yanma generated with wing flapping stunned it mid attack.

Yanma took advantage of this by charging forward, Stealth Rock at the ready as a blunt weapon.

The stone was slammed right into Ariados's face, knocking the spider down as Yanma flew for a third one.

....

"Could this actually work?" Misty was curious.

'Yes, but it would take a while. Janine isn't wrong when she says a Psychic-type would manage it better.' Anabel confirmed. 'Regardless, I don't think this battle will go long enough for it to really take effect.'

....

"You know, if you want to play with my rocks, fine. I can play too, Ariados!"

"Ari!" And with that Ariados sped over on top of a Stealth Rock, on top of which it squatted.

For some reason.....

"Yanma, I have no idea what Ariados is doing, and I am not sure I want to find out. Attack!"

Yanma, who had taken out a third Stealth Rock, sped right at Ariados, who hopped off the Stealth Rock it was on top of to the next one.

Yanma sped by said Stealth Rock, only to suddenly wobble and crash on the ground. The Stealth Rock it had taken clattered away from it, as a purple sheen developed over Yanma.

"Yanma!" Ash shouted in surprise at what had just happened.

"Human, perhaps my zooming camera mode will help you figure out what happened," the
Pokédex offered.
"You have that?"

"Yes, now look through me!" And so Ash held the Pokédex up to his face, revealing not a data stream but a video of the area Yanma had been poisoned in.
With an audible zoom the Pokédex centered in on it, and he got his answer.
He also had to bite back what he saw.

Attached to the Stealth Rock, held there by glistening white thread, was a little purple spike.

It hissed out purple venom.

"Toxic Spikes?" he said aloud as he lowered the Pokédex from his line of sight. To find Janine grinning at him, as Ariados continued to speed across the field.

"Yes, tied to the Stealth Rock by Ariados here. This is the first time we got to test it in a battle, and it seems to be quite effective. Now when you release your final Pokémon, it will not just be struck by Stealth Rock, but Toxic Spike as well. It will feel, Toxic Rock!"

A distant thunder strike echoed her declaration of Toxic Rock.

"Yanma is unable to battle!" the ninja ref eventually called as Ash returned his third Pokémon to his Park Ball.

"So, tell me, what will you do? You have Pikachu, but can Pikachu run while loaded with toxins? I am sure you must have Charizard, but how long would it even be able to stand up after meeting Toxic Rock head on?"

A flaming fury seemed to emanate from his Pokéball belt. Charizard heard this challenge, and wanted to meet it with burning flames.

However the rain began to really kick in, drenching the field in a powerful downpour.

"Yeah, I would not use Charizard in this battle," the Pokédex recommended, even as the rain failed to dissolve the binding holding the Toxic Rock together, though Ariados did slip as it returned to a starting spot in front of Janine.

For the final battle….in the rain there was only one option.

He reached past Charizard's Pokéball and took up his final Pokémon.

"Charizard, you are strong and I will battle with you next time. Cinnabar will be perfect for you, but for now there is only Pokémon who can win here. Go!"

And with that, he threw the Heal Ball into the air, releasing the final chance he had today.

"Sli!"

Janine rose an eyebrow at the appearance of Sligoo, the slimy purple dragon of Kalos.

The Stealth Rock shot up and struck it, including a dig of Toxic Spikes. Sligoo winced, even as the rain covered Sligoo and basked him in a green healing glow.
"This is what internet searches are for, letting me know what that exactly is. Dragon huh…..Pin Missle!" Ariados's back legs glowed once more for attack.

"Counter with Dragon Breath!" Sligoo took a deep breath, before firing back with the whirling dragon wind.

The two attacks collided, with the Pin Missiles blown away and Ariados was struck with the powerful wind attack.

Ariados stood back up after the hit, only to wince as yellow static covered its body.

"Ariados," Janine stated in concern.

"Dragon Breath, a Dragon-type move capable of paralysis. I am programmed with seven jokes at the expense of Clair for the reason of paralysis, courtesy of post launch updates," the Pokédex mused as Ash was confused.

Clair jokes? Dragon Breath? Why?

"Good going Sligoo! Unlike you, Ariados can't heal with the rain!" Ash declared.

"Sli!"

"Ar…" Ariados winced as it struggled through the condition. It was weak, and not all that intimidating. Even Misty would probably not scream if she heard it randomly.

"Goo…"

However it wasn't Misty freaking out. No, it was Sligoo, who was suddenly fighting like mad, backing away as far as it could from Ariados, tripping over stones and flailing on a ground in a manner more suited to a Magikarp than…a non Magikarp.

Sligoo sounded…terrified.

"What's going on Sligoo?" Ash called, but Sligoo didn't see to hear him amidst panic that only Sligoo knew the origin of.

…

"What's going on? Did Ariados use a move?" Misty questioned.

"No," Iris noted seriously as she looked at Sligoo, a look of pity in her eyes. Axew popped out of her hair to let out a worried grunt. "Ariados didn't use a move to do it. It didn't need to."

…

"Ash, I only know you got your Sligoo as a Goomy not far from Lavender Town," Janine spoke even as Sligoo continued to freak out.

"Yeah…." What did that have to do with anything?!

He'd appreciate any idea what was going on. This was a new one for him.

"Do you know what happened to Sligoo before that?" Janine continued as he shook his head.

"Goomy was in the posession of a thief, but beyond that."
"Pika." 'Ash, I think Sligoo is scared of Ariados, and a lot more than Misty is.'

Pikachu's interpretation of Sligoo's fit was followed by Janine's own.

"If I'd have to guess, I think your Sligoo suffered a trauma at some point, probably as a Goomy. It seems that hearing Ariados triggered it, so it was probably related to one. Maybe one ate its entire family, I don't know. Normally this would be when some stuck up ass tells you that you should have known better and that you fail as a human being, but Ariados aren't common enough around here to really test for such a fear out in the same way a trauma terror on Raticate would be. I do hate to win because of such a phobia, but do remember that you have no way of knowing such a fear was there at all."

"Poison Jab!" Ariados charged at the flailing Sligoo, poison horn at the ready to strike. The strike took Sligoo in the center, impacting with a loud thump.

Sligoo didn't budge, but he did briefly glow poison purple before the rain washed away the status with Hydration.

Sligoo continued to wail in terror only it could see behind his blind eyes, even as Ariados prepared another Poison Jab, only to be stalled by Dragon Breath's lingering paralysis.

"Sligoo!" Ash called, trying again to reach his terrified Pokémon. His hand reached for his Heal Ball, wondering if it was time to let this challenge go.

This defeat would sting, but he'd work from it. He'd help Sligoo overcome this fear, he'd be ready for Janine's tricks in round two. He could do it.

But would Squirtle want to see his hard work lead to no win? Butterfree? Yanma?

He pulled his hand away from the Heal Ball, he'd try a bit more before throwing in the towel.

"Sli! Goo! Goo!"

"Sligoo!" Ash declared with all the concern and care he could muster, maintaining it as he set his sights on bursting through Sligoo's fears.

"I don't know what an Ariados, or many Ariados…"

"Ariadosi," the Pokédex offered.

"Sure, did to you. I can't possibly even begin to imagine…but this isn't the same Ariados. It's a different one, and you are stronger now. You, me, Iris, Pikachu, the others…we've all gotten stronger together. You played a huge part at Celadon, and I need you to help me again. I don't need you to no longer be afraid of Ariados, that's more than I can ask anyone to be if they fear something that much, I need you to show me how strong you are. Strong enough to fight your fear, hold it at bay, and defeat an Ariados! You are stronger than this Ariados, don't forget it! Your Dragon Breath overpowered it, don't ever forget that!"

"Moving, but I don't think that will be quite enough…" Janine stopped talking, even as the paralysis on Ariados recessed, as Sligoo began to stop wailing.

He had heard Ash.

Sligoo slowly molded his lower body to push himself back up, standing tall. Sligoo was still quivering, still twitchy, but he was standing.
"Sligoo of Earth, you have the ability to overcome great fear," the Pokédex let out a small compliment.

Sligoo wasn't over his fears, but he was trying to stand up to them. Knowing that a terror existed before it, yet was ready to fight against it.

"Let's end this in one attack, Sligoo," Ash declared. It would probably be best to not drag this out anyway, in case something else in Sligoo was overwhelmed by trauma.

"Sli." Sligoo declared as Janine stared back at him.

"I'm all for you managing to push past Sligoo's surprise trauma for a moment, but a single Dragon Breath or Sludge Wave won't defeat Ariados."

"We'll see about that," Ash declared as Sligoo began to glow.

"Again!?" the Pokédex stated in surprise as Ash stared at the changing form before him in surprise.

"I don't plan these thing," he told the machine.

"Charmeleon, Pidgeot, Red's Charizard, and now this. Ever try evolving Pokémon when they are supposed to?" the Pokédex asked as Sligoo began to grow.

"Sligoo evolved from Goomy outside of a major battle, same with Sewpa, and Butterfree both times. Charizard and Servine didn't evolve in the midst of a battle."

"I don't have to explain the faulty logic for the latter two's inclusion as defenses on your part, do I?" the Pokédex questioned as the light surrounding Sligoo faded, revealing a new Pokémon.

"Goo!" The Pokémon declared with a deeper voice, now a massive purple Pokémon who stood taller than anyone in this room, with a large tail and a pair of arms having grown. A large head had a pair of length antennae sticking out, and as the Pokémon turned his way he could see a large pair of green eyes look at him with friendly intent.

…

"Sligoo can only evolve during rainstorms. Ash probably was not aware of it when he used Sligoo, though I am sure he will enjoy the results," Iris explained with a wicked smile, her glare disappearing for the first time since Janine appeared.

"A Pokémon that needs rain to evolve?" Misty questioned as the broken roof of the Gym continued to contribute what had led Ash to this point in a great downpour.

'Assume we can avoid the ninjas, I will be teleporting us back,' Anabel stated simply, though all the while looking at Ash with a grin on her face.

…

"Goodra, the Dragon Pokémon. Goodra's evolution is triggered in the rain, and uses the water to help build up its new form. Goodra are friendly creatures, but possess great power."

The Pokédex gave the evolution a name as Ash smiled.

"Let's win this in one go."

"Dra." Goodra gave him back a nervous smile, but one that said he was quite willing to do so.
"Pi." 'Assuming that the Ariados doesn't attack while we are....'

"Ariados use Poison Jab!" Janine proved Pikachu, Ariados lunged at Goodra, poison power glittering upon its horn.

Goodra yowled and swung his new tail, the limb hitting Ariados mid-lunge and knocking the bug to the ground with a thud.

"Now finish this off with Dragon Breath!" Goodra yowled as he sucked in air, before unleashing the massive dragon tempest right at Ariados.

Ariados made to leap out of the way, but the gust struck it and sent the bug flying.

Ariados flew all the way to the distant wall, hitting it with a thud and knocking it to the ground.

Goodra shivered a bit until the Ariados had sunk to the ground and remained still. Then he calmed down a bit.

"Ariados is unable to battle! The winner is Goodra! The match goes to the challenger Ash of Pallet Town!"

Before Ash could even say he won, he was charged and hugged by Goodra, who picked him up and held him close to his chest.

"Draa!" Goodra let out a call that was both joyful in victory, and releasing all the remaining horror from hearing and then seeing an Ariados again.

"Goodra that's great but.." Goodra hugged him tighter as he talked.

"Goodra like to hug people. People hugged by Goodra are coated in slime," the Pokédex muttered as Pikachu stared at the spectacle in amusement.

A look shared by Janine, who returned Ariados to the Fast Ball it came from and moved towards Ash, before stopping.

...Misty didn't miss the glare that Iris re-applied in vigor as Janine walked over to them.

In Iris's defense though, Janine did slip out a pink heart from between her fingers the same way she had with the shuriken from earlier. That wasn't going to get Iris to relax around her.

"I'd get in there, but I don't want to be sucked into that hug. So when Goodra lets him go, give him this for me, would you."

"Sure." Misty agreed as she was handed the badge, as Janine turned to witness the further adventures of Ash in his new status as a human sized plush toy for large dragons.

"I thought I had a pretty good plan, and it probably still was. Yet he managed to work through it, and even something I didn't plan for. It is probably good he found out about Goodra's phobia now, instead of at the League."

"He's not quite ready for it yet, but he's getting there. One more good battle should do it. He mentioned Cinnabar, that should do it. He will get far, but he won't win."

With that note, Misty found herself joining Iris in glaring at Janine. She noticed in the corner of her
eye that Anabel was also giving Janine a 'what the hell' look.

"He's good, and he'll only get better. But he choose the wrong year to start. You see, my father is competing for the Elite Four, and to qualify you need to win a League. This is my father's year, and he will win it. Ash is cleverer than most, but he can't outwit a master like my father. Perhaps next year he can win."

"Your father can just try again next year," Iris declared as Janine smirked.

"I fully expect we will see. Take as long as you need to get back, I don't mind you staying until the rain ends."

And with that note Janine hurried off, possibly to call in someone to repair the place.

"Goodra please, can you let me go?"

Even as Ash kept being hugged by the second coming of Muk (this time with physical mass).

'Someone check for cameras, I may have to teleport him out of there.' Anabel declared with the upmost seriousness.

AFTER THE GYM BATTLE, NORTHWEST OF FUSCHIA CITY

Elsewhere however, another's journey to a challenge given to him had yielded unexpected results.

"Clefairy," Red pointed at the shivering Team Rocket grunt, who stared at the Clefairy that had been thrown at him and his dark metal car waggling its fingers at him in an unimpressed manner.

"Look kid, I get you want to be the hero, but throwing some puff ball at me isn't how ya do now. I mean, thanks for the extra Pokémon for the boss but-Gahh!"

His flat statement was interrupted by Gravity intensifying around him, holding him against the ground as Red avoided the stunned Rocket and the slowly approaching Clefairy to said Grunt.

(Pikachu giving both an unusually wide birth, while Yellow was going for the front of the car with Haunter, who stuck a hand through the door and began fidgeting with the lock.)

Red and Pikachu instead were coming at this from the back of the car.

Pikachu's fist glowed with the power of Brick Break and smashed the door. The internal mechanisms crumbled, and Red took a hold of both door handles and pulled.

The doors flew open with protesting screams of metal, revealing the interior contents.

Just as said doors opened a colorful music note floated by them.

Clefairy must have used Sing. It would probably use Nightmare next.

That note aside Red hopped into the vehicle, followed by Pikachu.

The inside of the car had a variety of boxes, all labeled with the name Silph Co and 'Silph Co Storage and Testing Facility 4.'
Given what they had heard earlier from the last Trainer he had defeated (a good way to get some practical experience done with Kangaskhan, Rhyhorn, and Ekans), said 'Storage and Testing Facility' had been robbed by Team Rocket a few days ago, with getaway trucks driving off in all directions to avoid pursuit and the ability to be followed back to wherever it was Team Rocket hid itself away in.

Here was one of those very trucks, with all its stolen goods.

Thieving from a thief was hardly wrong after all, and he could use more stuff. Particularly if it was out in this thing for a week playing 'avoid the cops' and had done so well enough it could take ages for them to find it.

He scanned for anything loose first, and only noticed two things that weren't held in metal crates. The first was a clipboard, with a slip from a ethics inspection. Facility 4 apparently had only last month been declared as performing perfectly ethical examinations of how Pokémon reacted to Repels, Potions, etc, but could use better break standards for its human workers.

The second was a red and white rounded container, which warranted further examination. Tapping the front of it, it hissed and opened up, revealing a series of Pokéballs inside. Pikachu hopped up beside them and sniffed them curiously, before darting off again.

Curious, Red reached for the clipboard and flipped it over to see if it had anything. The second page in fact did.

"Transport Pokémon K-01-12, K-106-4, K-131-2, K-132-2, K-132-4, and K-142-01, to Celadon University's Pokémon Genetics Department. Allowed period of testing on these specific Pokémon has been reached, and Pokémon are to be removed from Silph Co's possession and join breeding program for rarer species."

Nothing specific as to what they are, but these were Pokémon no one owned that Team Rocket had stolen.

A part of Red worried if any other such Pokémon were in the other cars, and if they'd reach Team Rocket. Nothing he could do about it in any case, but it was still a problem.

Closing the case and holding it in hand, he'd find out what they were later. It was time to see what was in the other crates.

Red opened the first crate (after a few moments of struggle and Pikachu pointing out the button on the side that said 'open' with an amused look), to reveal a box filled with scopes labeled with a golden S.

Not sure what those were, so Red skipped them and went to the next one.

A button press later revealed a trove of healing potions and similar medicines. He would be taking many of them momentarily, he was running low and these would just spoil if he left them here.

The third crate was filled with confidential looking bank statements. Red immediately closed the crate with a button press.

There was a difference between grabbing potions stolen from Silph Co, and grabbing the bank statements stolen from Silph Co. You didn't scavenge people's bank accounts.
The fourth crate was also filled with perishable goods, specifically crates of Pokémon vitamins and food. He would also take as many of these as he could, and would be feeding them to his Pokémon.

They were labeled, right? (They were, as he checked moments later)

The fifth crate contained a series of plastic cases, each holding what looked like USB drives.

He recognized said USB-like devices.

"This is a Technical Manual. I got it from Brock. It's great for helping teach Pokémon all sorts of moves. I probably should use it more, but when I do it's been a great help." Ash had shown off a similar U.S.B during their team up.

He immediately grabbed one of the Technical Manuals and ripped it free, discarding the plastic on the floor before poking at the next box.

There had to be something here that could read it.

Crate six was of no help, given it was just filled with fancy parchment for mailing to people.

Crate seven on the other hand, was a bit more fruitful.

Red lifted up the first boxed product that was in the box, flipping it over to see the exact specifics and taking note of what details he cared about.

POKE-GEAR ADVANCED SP

BLUE MODEL

DUAL SCREEN

USB-COMPATIBLE,

CD access requires additional add-on sold separately

MAPS OF THE KANTO AND JOHTO REGIONS, AS WELL AS DECOLORES, ORANGE, and SEVII ISLANDS INSIDE

Additional maps sold separately, require internet connection.

Another box was ripped apart, and the Technical Manual now had place to give him its information.

Before he could go on to crate eight though…

"Red!" He turned around as Yellow darted over to the back of the truck, excitement all over her face.

"The front is filled with all sorts of stuff. I found a crate of Pokéballs, and his wallet! Also, I can't seem to find the grunt or Clefairy…" He felt Pikachu shiver even from a foot away at that statement.

Two days later, on the road

The fact that there was a waterfall around was something they hadn't expected.
Heck he only found it while looking for a place to go the bathroom.

But he had found it, and it was a rare one.

It was a waterfall that wasn't too cold or too powerful, but was also large enough to fully engulf a person. It even was decently secluded.

A perfect place to shower in the absence of a showerhead and faucet.

He'd test it out himself first though, just to make sure there was nothing glaringly wrong with it.

"Should have brought shampoo or something," Ash noted aloud.

Normally this would be where Pikachu or the Pokédex asks 'who brings shampoo to go to the bathroom', but Pikachu was still sleeping (for what reasons Ash did not want to know, especially given the fact he knew that Anabel's Eevee had been late getting back, similarly late to Pikachu….), and he did not need the Pokédex telling him his kidney's function levels.

To dispel both mental images Ash lifted both arms above his head to try and get more of his body washed, opening his eyes through the waterfall's veil to find that he wasn't alone.

Iris was standing in front of him, looking him in the eye.

"Gah!" Ash quickly lowered his arms back to cover himself, causing Iris to look at him oddly.

"Not sure why you are doing that. Do you think I am looking down there? Is that a thing that humans do?" She continued to look him straight on, not caring for his state of dress.

Embarrassment was still swelling through him, and he was sure his face was bright red. What was going to happen next?

He noticed her eyes wander a bit, mostly at his upper body. He supposed that was good, given that he was not going to move his arms, though he wondered what she was looking at and why she had an appraising look in her eyes.

Was she looking at his muscles? He had them sure, and he was more defined in the chest than before Cyrus did his thing, but he wasn't a body builder or anything.

And why was he suddenly concerned about the fact he had chest hair?

Axew popped out of Iris's hair, making Ash wonder what was going to happen next.

She….wasn't going to strip down herself and join him, was she?

Would that be more or less awkward because Iris wouldn't see anything weird about it?

"You said that you wanted to get stronger, and that you would help me get stronger." She reminded him of what he had said to her when they first joined up post Cyrus.

"I have, haven't I? I've helped you and Excadrill and…" Iris nodded to silence his response.

"You have, but I think it is time for you yourself to get even stronger," she declared as she poked him in his right pec. Ash briefly wondered when she'd gotten so close but put the thought to the back of his mind as she spoke again. "You are not lacking, you never have been, but you need to be stronger yourself. Faster. I want you to be able to pick up on the next Janine." She said her name with distaste. The way she spat the Gym Leader's name spawned another question in Ash's mind but
wasn't really important, there were more important things happening.

"She wasn't going to…." Ash reflexively began to raise his arms for the argument, but forced them down before Iris could see anything.

She might not care, but he did!

"The next person might. Ash, I know you have not fully been lacking in practice, but you need more of it. Misty and Anabel too. We all need to get stronger, hone our abilities so we are ready for whatever might happen next. You said it would take a while until your next Gym. By then, I am sure you will see notable improvement."

She finished her declaration by reaching for the bottom of her shirt and rapidly tearing it off. Ash quickly spun around before he saw something he shouldn't, Iris might not mind nudity but if his mother found out about this he'd die of embarrassment before he could save the world from Cyrus.

....

The next few moments were blotted from his mind by embarrassment, though he wasn't sure how he could exactly get out of this situation without having Iris feel rejected.

So now he still was, under a waterfall. Naked. With a equally naked Iris on his right, washing her hair out with a lot less apprehension than he had. Ash was glad that the waterfall was cool so he didn't end up in a more embarrassing situation than he already was.

Ash felt very pleased with himself that he wasn't looking too far down Iris's body, though he wasn't able to keep himself from noticing some details.

He had seen Misty in several swimsuits on the S.S Anne (she had shown them off to him), and as a result he did see her body fairly clearly.

Misty had grown into the body type of her older sisters. There was no denying that she was a Sensational Sister, even if that implied some really poor behaviors this time around. She would probably surpass them in physical beauty as much as she had in personality in some time, if he had to be honest.

Iris was taller than both of them, with a body covered in wirily muscle all across a slim figure. Her body was uniform, not curvy like Misty's which many would probably prefer but Iris' form showed the appeal of a different body type and lifestyle, one of a more active woman.

Both of them may not be as prone to yelling at him as before time broke, but he still would not ever say which body form looked nicer. He was pretty sure there were no winners in that discussion, and he wasn't sure how one would even choose.

Her dark skin, a color so much different than any of his other friends except Brock, and even then it was a different shade.

If Brock had a skin tone like the earth, of fertile soil, hers resembled that of tree bark. What tree bark specifically Ash would have to think on, but one of the lighter, nicer bark types. Slight marks were all over her skin, which Ash was fairly certain were small scars acquired throughout her life. They weren't large or massive, like the ones that you'd see on blockbuster movie heroes, but they were numerous all over her body.

Yet so small Ash doubted there was much of a story to half of them, if not most of them.
Her long dark hair cascaded, soaked even as she ran her hands through it, hooking out with her fingers sticks and leaves from its extensive mass.

If just to keep his eyes from focusing on her breasts, he was male and stood next to a naked girl after all, he forced a question out to keep his attention elsewhere.

"Why is your hair so long?"

Iris stopped as her fingers and a twig left said hair.

"It must be hard to keep up. Wouldn't shorter hair be more practical?" He knew enough about hair care to know that.

"It probably would be. Axew could easily ride in a Pokéball."

"Ax." Axew let out a sound of complaint about that idea from the dry stones, having just put Iris's clothes on a branch near his own for airing purposes.

"But I like having him out with me. Plus, I guess I just like it this way." She shrugged as she looked his way again.

The fact her eyes were focused on his face and upper body kept his arms from reflexively covering himself again. Why draw attention there and start a scaring and possibly scarring conversation?

"You are taller," she observed.

"I am?" Well, that would explain why his ankles were getting chilly.

"You and Misty were basically as tall as one another when we first met, now you are taller than her. You are nearly as tall as I am, and I have not grown in a while. You will probably end up taller than me." She noted with no jealousy in her tone, just a matter of fact.

"How tall is that exactly?" How tall was he going to get? Sure Belladonna was an optional scale but he had no idea how tall she was compared to him….

"I was told I was some sort of measurement while I was in Oblivia about a year ago. Does one hundred eighty eight centimeters mean anything to you?"

"Not a clue."

"Same here. The person who told me that sounded like that was unusual, at least for a girl. I'm sure you will get even more of those centimeters." It was silent for a while as the water washed over both of their bodies, before Iris began talking again.

"I will not help you with your ability to strengthen Pokémon. I may think you should use it more, but it is your decision and I will not force you. I want you to be able to fight your own battles one day, not make it so you can have Pikachu defeat Rayquaza."

"I did tell you about that time I caught a Kangaskhan's punch, right?" Ash recalled his encounter with Felgrand as Iris grinned in approval.

"Like I said, you are not entirely without your own strength. I just want you to be able to throw the next Kangaskhan to the ground and hold it there."

There was something about the grin she was giving him that made Ash think she was being quite literal about what she wanted him to one day manage. Ash gave a her small smile in return, the idea
of possessing that much physical strength has it's appeal and could come in handy at some point in the future.

....

It was an interesting experience. Ash had acted rather odd that entire wash, though he seemed to become a bit more relaxed as it went on.

A human custom was probably at play here. She'd have to work on it, the same as she worked him into a physically stronger Ash.

Good for him, good for her, good for Misty. Perhaps even good for Anabel, she did seem to be moving that way.

No matter what the outcome, she still had a bit of time she had given Misty to be the only one pursuing Ash. After that, she would see about working to making him her mate.

She would probably have to pick up a few more details on what Ash considered courtship first, but she'd do it. She never gave up on a hunt.

Saffron City, the next day

Sabrina teleported back into the depths of her lair/Gym, a bored look on her face.

In her hand was a straw hat, which she flung across the hall on its own power.

A blur teleported in its path as a Drowzee snagged the hat with its head and landed with a thump.

"You always wanted a hat. It belonged to a man named Moe over in Porta Vista. He wasn't really good at running restaurants," she quipped. Drowzee thanked her and teleported away.

Her act of kindness over, Sabrina tapped her foot as she mentally went over what she knew, occasionally skimming Ash's mind from Fuschia if something escaped her.

"Dario, Melvin, Seymour, Keenan, Norman the not Gym Leader....." She listed off the names of the pointless people she had removed based on what she had seen in Ash's memories.

"….Oswald, and Moe the failed restaurant owner. So many to remove, though how many have proven worthy to live."

It was almost annoying really. Half of the people she did look up for removal had improved in this timeline, showing signs of actually being worthy to live.

Joe, Keith, Rhoda, Rhonda, Mitch, even the Samurai made her question his removal at the moment.

Even that Hippie Ash met once with the Snorlax had actually proven to actually be impressive. Trained Snorlax extortion was a new one to her, and he did it well.

Good for the world, but still weird.

Though not as weird as the gap in memories Ash had of the first timeline.

Something happened to the boy just before the League, and he didn't remember it at all.
It wasn't hazy, it wasn't faded, it was simply gone, removed. Not that Sabrina knew how one could even do that without leaving a person's mind a utter mess.

(She would know, she had tried it on a few hobos when she was fifteen.)

One minute Ash and his friends were stuck outside a port as a storm raged, the next minute they were in the same place again, but hours had clearly passed.

After that it was a League of utter incompetence from the managing side, Orange Islands, crazy person thinking you could treat Legendary Birds like collectible bottle caps, Orange Islands, Johto and so on but those missing hours at the port…..nothing.

There was a memory about a mind wiping Pokémon on Mount Quena….was that it? Maybe it was what had been responsible for it?

Or perhaps the other one Ash had met in the Decolores. The other 'Mewtwo'.

Regardless of the cause, there was the other situation she should keep an eye on.

Namely, the girl who had been spying on Ash and Red. She wasn't good news.

While she was certainly better than the Emissary who served the Bloodline King, one of the servants of the Bloodline Prince was hardly what she wanted around. She may be nearly on where those four girls were currently, but that was still too close for her liking.

If he was looking around, that could only mean he was looking for a worthy rival to himself, and Ash could certainly meet the bill.

And if that was the case….she was well aware of what an end game would be.

"Well, I guess that means I'm going to have to get Ash to evolve." Sabrina shrugged as she floated down her halls, deep in thought.

"Altering his mind would be difficult, so perhaps I'll have to make him change some other way. Make him drop his self-handicap, that could certainly do. Yes, I do think that would be an ideal aim. Get him to realize that Red is right, and that Prince can never defeat him if he was drop the ideal. But is a badge enough of a lure….."

She stopped moving, but remained floating in air as a grin grew across her face.

"Perhaps not, but I have another. I may not be Olympia, but sometimes I do see things of benefit to me if I don't see how."

It was how she had realized that luring a unremarkable Trainer to her Gym from Vermillion would yield her a Alakazite the idiot had found and assumed nothing of beyond a shiny stone he kept in his bag.

That other premonition would certainly be irresistible bait, beyond a simple Marsh Badge, to Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town.

She smirked as she felt the Drowzee she had given the straw hat to appear before her.

"Do move the Primeape, would you? I have a plan."
Iris training him in the last few days had led to strange dreams from his tired mind, and it would probably be better if they involved her being naked. That at least would make sense. Even though the shower and talk in the waterfall had been an awkward and embarrassing moment, Ash couldn't deny the fact that the image of a wet and very naked Iris had engrained itself into his memory.

"Everything lives. It lives before it dies, and we are judged by what we do during that time. Like a brilliant, life-giving star, we illuminate the universe, casting away the shadows. We celebrate life and then celebrate that creation. This is simply how things are. It cannot be contained. It never will. So we will not tolerate - we will not accept - the unnatural occurrence of an early end. Which is why I have summoned you here... to beat back the night... and to conquer death."

After all, dreams like these started with him giving a dramatic speech about life.

Or top hat stones, but that was probably a repeat from last time.

The him giving the speech was older, probably in the twenties somewhere. Twenty-three, Twenty-four, something like that.

He had grown taller, as Iris had said he was getting. How tall was he at this point? If he was over 180 cms, was this guy 200 cms? He probably should ask how tall that was for reference. He'd gained muscle mass too, not overly so though. He'd retained his current body type but filled out more, his t-shirt was tighter to his chest, hinting at the powerful muscles beneath.

That him was staring down someone, similar in stature but he couldn't glean anything else from the dream. When he spoke, Ash couldn't really tell what he sounded like. The voice was noise, just random snatches of dark voices that sounded vaguely familiar but Ash couldn't place them.

"Are you so devoted to being good, needlessly good? I can appreciate your quest for self glory, declaring yourself the best who there ever was with trophies and badges, trials and symbols. Yet you spend so much time that could be spent expediting your show of yourself with meaningless diversions. What does taking medicine across a bridge for some Shellder get you?"

A pair of bikers were now racing between the manifestations of his dream….somethings. One bike had a Zapdos theme to it.

Memories of his past adventures, recently re-encountered.

"You act as if doing good for others diverts from yourself," Older Dream Him told the identityless.

"Doesn't it? Whenever you are doing something like that, you aren't bettering yourself. You aren't pushing your Pokémon to higher levels. You gain neither muscle nor skills running serums past delinquents, it is a waste of time and energy."

"You can't comprehend altruism, can you?" Older Dream Him used a word that Ash would probably never use. Generosity was perfectly serviceable without going into a word that even Professor Oak would avoid if possible.

"Altruism isn't in our blood."
"Your blood, perhaps. I have my mom's blood, can't say who's in yours," Older Ash declared as the identityless apparition of his dreams vanished, and Dream Him turned his way.

He was looking at him, and definitely not through him.

Dream Him could tell the real him was there.

"….Is this a time travel thing?" Ash felt the need to get that out of the way immediately.

"Are you asking if I'm you from the future?" Dream Him questioned before smiling. "I am certainly not. I'm merely an incarnation of your inner thoughts and concerns talking to you as you sleep," Dream Him explained.

"So, I'm talking to myself?" That wasn't healthy.

"You're a time traveler who has been thrust into a timeline very similar to your own, into an older body than what you most likely had originally, with several mental shocks since the return trip, not even factoring in the regular visits you get from an abomination coated in pixels. Frankly, I would say you are doing quite well, and you've actually been getting less angsty since Cerulean, and a bit less barby with your thoughts. Probably all that sorting itself out properly, and the initial shock wearing off. Plus if you do start going insane, I'm sure your friends would notice and get you help. Anabel may not be looking deep enough to find something unsettling or the truth of your origins, but if your mind started breaking she'd know before you did."

Good to know, Anabel could tell him if he was going crazy. That would be a fun conversation.

"So…who was the other guy?" he asked the Dream Him, who chuckled and stroked his chin. Oddly as he did so, it gained a thick black beard. Ash was torn if it looked good on him or not.

"Depends on what sort of over analysis and thought you want to put into it. After all if someone wanted to, they could say life itself is just a dream and everyone you meet is but a part of your subconscious. For example, Brock could be your sexual drive given a life of its own. But that would be silly," Dream Him ended with a chuckle.

"If you did have to give that person a subconscious identity, imagine yourself as light. As a good man, a hero perhaps, who travels from place to place helping those you see for no benefit to yourself. Someone who faces down threats to the world like Cyrus, threats to the person as Kodhai, and threats to the self like Damon's single minded pursuit of his goals. That, was the shadow your light creates. The question that bubbles up when you wonder if you are doing the right thing. The question of if people are generally good, or generally wicked and lazy. A question that always bubbles up when seeing J, or Paul, or even Team Rocket. However, when such a question comes up, I suggest that you, that is to say me, always recalls that pure evil is extremely rare. Team Rocket care for one another, at least among Jessie and James and Mewoth. You may disagree with Belladonna and Red's morals, but they do care for Aurora and Yellow and the others. Even Paul saved your life once for no obvious gain to himself, he just needs a kick in the pants. J of course is that rarity, a thing without any redeemable qualities whatsoever. Rarity, you should remember that word. Few people are truly, utterly, evil. Where there is good in people, you should work towards bringing it out, and where is already exists endeavor to make it brighter."

At that Ash woke up, and found himself alone but a sleeping Pikachu and the Pokédex, who was open and flashing a 'download complete' on its screen about some update or something.

"Man, I need to start having more normal dreams," Ash muttered aloud.
"Have you tried porn? That inspires dreams much more normal for a teenage male," the Pokédex offered.

Ash blushed at the suggestion.

"Well even if you wanted to try, I have a child lock. I could get rid of it if I really wanted to, but I don't. So I'm afraid your bizarre dreams are something I cannot help you with." The Pokédex actually sounded a bit apologetic about it.

"I do, however, have sound tracts that are proven to help induce sleep in humans. While Bloodliners are untested, I doubt there are differences in how you enter sleep. Shall I play them?"

"I'd like that." Ash smiled softly. Anything to not get more morality talks from his subconscious.

"Jessie, in what world is that considered training?"

James's question from their tree top perch led Jessie to look up from her more relaxed perch and into the clearing their query was mucking about in.

Specifically, where he was running around in circles, a Tauros following him at full gallop.

"And why should I know?" she snarked.

"I distinctly recall you said you were on a track team at some point," James reminded her.

"I say a lot of things," Jessie retorted. At James's long held stare she sighed and narrowed her eyes towards the Tauros. "Fine, if you want my two cents it's probably a combination speed/endurance training. You've got to be in front of the Tauros so you need to be fast, but you also need to have the stamina to keep up your distance from said Tauros in long term. Happy?"

"That depends, will you be willing to give your word that such a purpose is in fact in play when we report to the boss?"

"Yeah sure, whatever." Jessie waved him off before returning to her relaxed position, and thus her nap.

James sighed before returning to his post.

"I wonder how Meowth is having any better luck finding those berries I asked him to get. Growlie oh so does love Pecha Berries."

Meanwhile Meowth found himself stuck in a tree, surrounded by a hoard of angry Pikachu with sparking cheeks of fury, all the while loudly cursing James's ancestors, descendants, relatives, and the concept of bottle cap collecting in general.

... 

Ash of course couldn't hear this, and was currently lying on the ground, panting heavily and exhausted.

The Tauros who had come along for this training mooed in contentment over the workout, even as
he could just make up Iris in the corner of his eye nodding in approval. He could translate it, this was a Tauros he knew well enough, but all he really got from it was 'sigh of contentment'.

Glad that she approved, it would be a bit of an odd situation if it turned out he was running 'wrong'.

"If you add another twenty minutes to your time, you would earn the world record for longest length of time running in front of a charging healthy Tauros. That sounds much worse than it actually is, but you did better than many trained sprinters," the Pokédex chimed from his pants pocket.

His jacket itself was hanging from a tree, as was decided pre-running. He did wince when he found that hole.

And that tear.

And that stain that was probably from a burst pen or something. Said jacket had taken a bit of a beating.

While he wallowed in tiredness though, he could still hear the surrounding conversations quite well.

"Pikapi." 'That there is the mountain where we nearly froze to death.' Pikachu was pointing at a nearby peak.

"Rol?" 'Really?'

"Squir." 'Yes, we nearly did, but we got through it and were better for it. It built character,' Squirtle boasted.

Pidgeot squawked in disapproval, citing that if it had built character Charizard would have behaved himself afterwards.

"Rog?" 'We, aren't going to do that again, are we?'

The three Kanto Pokémon promptly burst out laughing at the idea of freezing themselves again.

…

After regaining feeling in his legs, it was back to training.

Training his Pokémon at least.

With Charizard up in the sky practicing aerial combat with Pidgeot, mostly in the art of efficient evasive actions and the like, he had the ground to his own.

"Rog!" Roggenrola called as her ear nob glowed white, before shooting several solid masses at Tauros.

Rock Blast, and without evolution this time.

"Alright Tauros, I already know you have speed going for you, let's try seeing how you can fight power on power!" Ash was curious to see how this would go. Tauros bellowed in agreement as his head flashed white.

The Rock Blasts clattered against the head of Tauros with little impact.

"That is Iron Head. Of course, I already told you the moves this Tauros possesses: along with
Iron Head the Tauros you have on hand can use Horn Attack, Double Team, and Scary Face. I have all the moves in my databanks that your various Tauros can use, and I can tell you which Tauros you have. Why go through with this?" the Pokédex questioned from a nearby rock, partially covered by his jacket.

Said jacket still not ready to be put back on after all the running and sweat.

"Yeah, I know what they can do. That doesn't mean that I know how they'll use them," Ash reminded the Pokédex as the training continued.

"Now, show me how you'd attack!" With that declaration Tauros charged toward Roggenrola, who tensed as the horns of Tauros shined white.

"I see, you like to use Horn Attack." Ash took note.

"It would be more logical to use Iron Head," the Pokédex snarked from underneath the fabric, even as Ash knew it was also taking the same note for later reference.

"Logic isn't everything in a battle," Ash retorted.

"….Of that, I am painfully aware. I could write a thesis paper on that with you as a primary source." The Pokédex's snark predated the impact from the Horn Attack from Tauros, which Roggenrola took with a shimmer similar to that of Iron Head.

She was pushed back, but didn't seem to have taken damage.

"That would be Iron Defense, in case you didn't know," the Pokédex noted.

"Awesome!"

Roggenrola did something that was probably blushing, or the equivalent, in response.

"Now, speaking of move rosters, might I make a suggestion for the next time you train yourself under Iris's instruction," the Pokédex spoke up, catching Ash's attention.

The next day found Ash standing, shaking with exhaustion, in the middle of a field littered with holes.

Iris's idea for helping him gain better senses was working on avoiding Excadrill. Excadrill would come at him from underground, and he was to learn to pick up the minute hints of where Excadrill was coming up and avoid it.

That had taken a bit longer than he expected. Anabel's suggestion that he remove his shoes had been a life saver. Who knew his feet were that good for hearing?

Again as before Iris nodded his success.

"You will need to learn to do it with shoes, unless you want to stop wearing them," she did suggest. He nodded numbly in response as he tapped a green Pokéball at his belt.

It burst out into the Pokédex's suggestion.
"Chansey!" the Shiny Pokémon greeted, before noticing him and tapping her egg. The egg glowed pink and washed both himself and Chansey in a pink aura.

He could feel the pains wash away as he stopped shaking.

"Thanks," he told Chansey, who nodded.

"Huh, I had not thought of that," Iris admitted to sharing his oversight.

A terrifying thought of Iris declaring that they could 'do it even faster' went through his mind, but she didn't voice such an idea.

Perhaps she understood something he had long learned of, the fact that training could not be nonstop. You got the best results by having days of rest the same as days in practice.

Perhaps she worked under the assumption instincts could not be rushed, and were something that could not be rushed.

Or maybe she simply didn't think about it.

No matter what it was, Chansey would make training a lot less painful an experience.

BOOM!

A distance explosion suggested the training activities of Charizard and Goodra had ended just as it probably was always going to end.

"Chansey, you can help out, right?" he asked the healer, who nodded empathetically. With that determined, they both ran into the nearby woods, ready to heal the all too likely damaged training duo.

Behind him by a few minutes were Pikachu and Ambipom, the latter carrying his jacket which he had again taken off for the training.

…

"I should probably let you know, I've recently been updated with an additional program created by a tech intern working with Professor Elm now shared by all Pokédexes," the Pokédex randomly told Ash that night, the flashing light of the screen lighting up the Secret Base in the cliff.

In particular it made the large gaping hole in the back very noticeable, even as it Ash was well aware he could not see where it ended. Why did the Secret Base have an endless dark hole of doom in it?

Questions of that aside, the Pokédex's point.

"What sort of update?" Ash asked as the Pokédex continued.

"Should one of your Pokémon be found with an egg, I will automatically receive the data. I will then be able to inform you when it hatches, what it hatches into, and additional data from the hatching. Previously before this upgrade, you would not have found out unless you specifically looked for it or if I felt like telling you."

Okay, that was good. Still….
"What the odds that I'll just randomly find my Pokémon having eggs...." Ash trailed off as he noticed Pikachu, fast asleep right next to him.

Okay, so maybe better odds than he'd initially assume.

"Professor Oak, as he had shown you on your first day, has a wide assortment of eggs on hand. The now Professor Elm got his first papers on his work with the same eggs in his youth, fun fact. However with this system the eggs he ends up dealing with will be reduced, and you will be able to add Pokémon to your pool of options without having to do the work yourself. Given your habits, this will benefit you greatly."

"As long as I get to see the eggs hatch, or at least shortly after. I'd hate to miss out on them," Ash mused aloud. The Pokédex did not respond as a question came to Ash's mind. "Say, will you do that if my Krabby and one of Misty's Pokémon....."

"Misty will likely let you have it. I may have their data, but it will be better for your data to have them in your personal records and ability to boast to others about them at bars and semi-friendly gatherings," the Pokédex declared off handily.

Ash decided he'd ask Misty about it in the morning, though now he had another question.

"Okay, so what happens if one of my Pokémon, and one of Gary's....."

"I'd assume you would work it out amongst yourself like civilized men. Rock-Paper-Scissors, favor trading, the punching of the face, such and such."

With that confirmation the quiet night resumed, with only one more declaration from the Pokédex.

"Oh, and Gardevoir called. No new siblings, the six of them have been busy. Apparently Flygon and Altaria got lost and had spent the last week being chased by a flock of Fearow all the way to Mount Silver. That since has been resolved, and they will probably find another sibling of yours in the near future to report back on for cataloging. I myself have a file on them if you ever want more data."

Yay?

"That includes Red if you are curious. Are you curious as to where he is or what he is up to? Recently he obtained a Bu..."

"Goodnight," Ash told the Pokédex firmly, not really interested.

Another day of walking, and another day of training on all fronts, found Ash walking through the woods with Anabel, Pikachu trotting right behind them.

Anabel herself walking with a bit of a tired gait, and Ash had a theory as to what was the cause of it. Said theory involved Iris deciding he wasn't the only one who needed training.

"I can get Chansey if you..." Ash offered as she held up a hand and shook her head.

'No no, I'm fine,' she declared. The fact she nearly tripped on a branch that was obvious enough that
someone who wasn't tired should have noticed it did not help her case.

He grabbed her arm before her face could hit the ground, just around the point her body glowed with psychic powers that provided the same effect.

Huh, was he always that quick on the uptake?

"Pikapi," Pikachu commented as Anabel was re-righted on her feet. 'Clearly training has effects on humans beyond getting them larger muscles.'

"Sorry about that," Ash told her. At her confused expression at his apology, Ash continued.

"I didn't really hear the part about her also wanting you guys to get trained too. I was..." He and Anabel blushed in unison, the memory ringing in his mind and Anabel now seeing it.

He did not need to elaborate that he was not at the top of his negotiating game. Not that he was all that good at it anyway.

'No, it's more my fault than anything. If I was able to tell that Janine had weapons she'd probably be less concerned that we aren't as sharp as she is about danger. Take it from someone who can see inside a person's mind without trying, she's worried about us. I guess she's concerned that the next time someone thinks you are her brother, she won't stop being homicidal.'

Anabel's declaration was followed by her holding her wrist in thought.

'It's odd really. I feel sore and tired, but I can feel it. Not sure what it exactly is, but I do feel like it is doing something. Like my arm does feel stronger.'

She let go of her wrist.

'You know, of all the things I thought I'd see and do with you guys, never thought developing muscle mass would be one of them.'

Ash smiled back at her in response.

"That's the thing about journeys. You can go on them for one thing, and find tons of other things on your way. I mean, I always thought I'd be earning badges..." He reached into his bag for emphasis as he pulled out the shrunken form of Sir Aaron's staff.

He extended it as he finished his sentence.

"But then I also got this, for example."

Anabel smiled at his example, before a familiar set of words rang through the air.

"Prepare for Trouble!"

"Make it Double!"

Neither exchanged glance nor thought was needed to convey what was be done as Ash, Anabel, and Pikachu ran towards the sound of the troublesome trio.

"Meowth that's right!"

"Wobbuffet!"
The trio finished their motto, complete with blue Pokémon with a black tail, in front of an old man, wizened but with some strength still visible in his limbs.

His eyebrows were bushy and gray, his head bald, and his chin covered by a soul patch the color of silver. On his shoulder were a pair of Wingull, though both the Wingull had green strikes across their wings instead of blue.

"You know, back in my day criminals didn't give intros like something from a cartoon," the old man told them as Jessie rolled her eyes.

"Back in your day, I'm pretty sure criminals used those phones with the spinning dial...whatever they were called."

"Rotary Dial," James filled in for her.

"Yeah, what he said. Anyway, we aren't really on the take at the moment, but there is a motto that all Team Rocket members must follow old timer."

"Raid On the City, Knock out, Evil Tusks?" Meowth offered.

"The other one, the bit about never letting rare Pokémon go by when you think you can take them. Shiny Pokémon certainly count, wouldn't you say."

"You'd take my life's work? I spent decades finding Shinegully a mate just like her. I traveled the world, and braved the most dangerous seas for her! You think I'd just let you take them, when I didn't let rampaging Gyarados, Draconids, Rangers, Icebergs, and the Phantom himself stop me?"

"Win!" both birds squaked in response.

"Well stealing generally doesn't take into account what the person being stolen from did to get their stuff." James noted as the three took a step towards the old man, who glared back at them definitely.

"Team Rocket!"

It was on that cue that Ash and Anabel ran at them.

"Funny how work always manages to follow you around whatever ya do," Meowth snarked

"Hey, we're not on the clock right now. We're resume stalking you later, can you just go?" James waved the two off, an action that left Ash and Pikachu staring at them in confusion.

"I'd prefer you never resume it, but I'm not going to just let you attack people!"

"...The attacking part hasn't started yet. That's when I throw out Ekans," Jessie pointed out.

"But if you insist on joining in, we'll attack you too! Go, Yamask!"

James threw out the floating ghost Pokémon, who hovered between the trio and Ash.

Again, why did he have Yamask? He was supposed to get it in Unova, somewhere? Did they get blasted off all the way to Unova one time, and Kalos another?

He never did think to ask where they landed afterwards.

"Yamask use Return!" Yamask began to glow a solid white color, the power of friendship coursing through the ghost.
"Counter with Zap Cannon!" Ash called as Pikachu began forming the electric ball between his paws.

Yamask flew at Pikachu, friendship in full force, as Pikachu charged with the electric ball.

The ball collided with Yamask, sending the ghost flying back at the trio, static covering in paralysis as Zap Cannon left its lingering effect.

The three were hit, and were sent instantly flying into the air.

"Looks like Team Rocket is Blasting Off and possibly defying the laws of physics!" they declared as they flew into the sky above and out of sight.

"Pika. " That was quicker than usual. ' Pikachu declared as Ash silently agreed, walking over to the man to see if he was alright.

The man smiled as he saw the two approach.

"Why thank you. Not sure I could have gotten rid of them that well, not without putting my dear Shinegull and Shinegully in danger." He told them as both shiny Wingull squawked in thanks.

Ash could feel the Pokédex vibrating in his pocket, taking in the data. He'd ignore it for the moment. The only reason it was not blurtting out random facts was probably because he had already seen Misty's Wingull and a repeat lesson wasn't needed yet.

"It wasn't a problem. They've been following me around for too long." And how long they actually had been was lost to the ages, same as however old he was before time broke.

"Well, it may have been easy enough a thing for you to do, but it was a great help to me. Hmm...oh yes that'll do. Tell me young man, you're still going to be around these parts come tomorrow?"

Ash looked at Anabel, who visibly responded to him with a shrug.

'We aren't in a hurry,' she reminded him.

"We should be, why?" The man gave a wizened grin.

"Well if you are, I insist you must come over to 3-14 in Stone Town. Tell them old man Masuda sent you. It's going to be a big party, free food and all sorts of party favors. True, you hardly need my recommendation to be let in, but you'd probably get the better stuff with my name attached." With that the man turned and began walking down the path, leaving Ash and Anabel to watch him hobble away with his two Wingull.

"Stone Town is a major source of Evolutionary Stones. The Good Stuff' likely refers to such stones," the Pokédex noted.

"I knew that," Ash told it. After all, this was not his first time at 3-14 Stone Town. This was where Mikey and his Eevee lived, along with his three brothers, and this was probably the Evolution Party again.

"You should go," the Pokédex stated.

He turned again to Anabel, wondering if she'd want to go to a party. She nodded.

I'd go just for the food, same as the others I'd guess.'
"Well then, looks like we're going, at least as long as Iris and Misty are willing," Ash declared.

"One of these days, I am going to develop a program so I am not only getting one end of these conversations," the Pokédex muttered to itself.

....

He had sent Pikachu on a quick check out of the way while he and Anabel went to find Misty and Iris and let them know of their invitation.

By the time they were on their way to 3-14, Pikachu had met back up with them and confirmed that Eevee was not hidden away in a tree hollow again.

That meant that this could go in a variety of different ways, so Ash kept that in mind as they approached the walled garden of 3-14’s large estate.

"Well, this is it," Ash declared as they saw the open gates of the place. Already inside he could see people mulling about, sipping colorful liquids in fancy plastic cups and chattering about many minor things.

He could see the old man, Masuda, notice them and wave their way as he continued to chat with a woman that Ash was pretty sure was James's fiancé.

Team Rocket was a bit early to return to cause trouble after all, and he was sure she had a Vileplume (or was it a Gloom?). Regardless, the woman looked like Jessie and had a Vileplume, so he was going to stick to that theory.

He'd also be sticking to the philosophy of 'avoid like the plague'. He would rather not end up in her basement. He may actually have a somewhat idea of what half those things did now, but he had no interest in dealing with any shade of it.

Behind Masuda was a Noivern, who was munching on a pile of fruit while the Wingull remained on his shoulder. However the Noivern was a different color than Alexa's, with a green coloration instead of black.

"Noivern..." the Pokédex began from his pocket.

"That is a Noivern. It is a Dragon that often lives in caves near large forests. They eat fruit and are rather territorial about it. They are very loud when they attack." Iris beat the machine to the punch.

"...All accurate," the machine admitted.

'A bit....high brow, but I don't think we'll be the most out of place here.' Anabel observed.

"What makes you say that?" Misty had audible disbelief in her voice. Anabel pointed, and Ash followed her finger to the side of the wall.

Where a motorbike was parked.

Said motorbike was as black as a Houndoom, with a pair of handle bars that resembled the horns of one. A side car stuck out from it. The wheels had an eye-popping yellow trim on the wheels that resembled that of an Umbreon's glowing circles, and its exhaust was covered by a pair of model Murkrow wings.

Whatever make or model it was, or if it was custom, was lost to Ash. Motorbikes were not his forte,
along with vehicles in general.

"I see your point. We probably would stand out a bit less than the biker." Misty agreed as they entered the courtyard where the garden party was ongoing.

....

Ash didn't see any of the brothers immediately, it was just a sea of small talk and bantering. Though unlike last time, he felt like he was getting a read on what the people at the party actually did for a living.

Last time they were just 'people'.

Somehow Ash doubted that was a result of Iris's training.

He heard mention of the Grand Festival, about Indigo and something about the Pokéathlon expanding to Kanto. He heard talk of breeding suggestions and grooming tips, and he was sure he vaguely recognized some of them.

He didn't see Suzie or anything like that, but he felt he saw at least a few of them on Scissor Street with her the first time around.

He did catch that Coordinator/Breeder who got Brock to compete in that Pokémon Contest (what was her name? Yuya? Yug? Yuuki….Oh, Yuma), talking to someone, with the girl who she took under the wing last time, Mollie if he remembered correctly, standing beside her with her Raticate out, looking a bit bored with the entire thing.

At a nearby table he noted someone who he didn't recognize, but who for some reason kept drawing his eye.

It probably wasn't' because of what she was wearing, despite what some might think at first glance.

The woman, who Ash wasn't sure what her age was (she didn't look young like Maylene or Flannery, nor older like Lenora or Fantina), had long silver-blue hair. She was wearing white pants with frayed edges, dark boots, and a yellow top that did not cover her stomach. Said stomach had a belly button piercing glistening in the center of it, one of those small round ones. Ash had no idea what it was specifically called, and he was not about to get the Pokédex to look up the exact term.

He couldn't quite see her eyes, as the way she was hanging her head obscured them with her hair. But he got the feeling she was well aware of what was going on.

"I see. You noticed too." He heard Iris as she walked by him, her own eyes not leaving her.

"You can tell she is the most dangerous person here. That is good," Iris complimented before continuing off in the direction he was pretty sure the buffet table was.

As she left the woman adjusted her head, allowing him to see a single eye, same color as her hair, look at him for a moment.

He noticed the eye go from his face to Pikachu, and back again, and then he was sure he saw a smile crack on her face.

The mysterious act she was putting on was suddenly broken by a rapid and clear thumbs up, before she returned to her former, more mysterious pose.
Okay…so she approved of him. Approved of what about him specifically was yet to be determined.

A tap to his shoulder took his attention from the strange woman, and he found himself turned around to find several people about his age, maybe a bit younger. Just fifteen, maybe in the last stretches of fourteen, something like that.

All of them looking at him in amazement, like he was Fiorella Cappuccino or something.

His hair probably could use a trim sure, but it wasn't blue.

"Can I….help you?" Seemed the best way to start this.

"Are you Ash Ketchum?" One of them, a girl with an Oddish at her heels, asked nervously. Her hair was a dirty blond color and she was wearing a green headband over it.

"Of Pallet Town, yes," he confirmed as another girl, with a Poliwag at her heels, beamed a massive smile. She had brownish-green hair, wearing a yellow dress with pink sleeves covering her shoulders.

"That. Is. So. Cool! We saw your awesome battles at the Battle Dome, and at that Tag Tournament! You were great!"

Both were smiling his way with the grins of someone who had met someone amazing from T.V. It was, weird.

Normally this was May and Dawn's thing, and Paul's if one counted Barry. He never seemed to get fans like this.

The fact that Paul had a devoted fan while he didn't was one of the great mysteries of the old timeline, along with his age and whatever was inside the G.S ball.

"Is that the Pikachu that blew up that Alolan Pokémon with the field?!" A third girl who was holding a Cleffa in her arms pointed at Pikachu in curiosity. She was a brunette wearing a white blouse and blue skirt. Pikachu nodded in confirmation, leading to a series of impressed sounds that he could probably not translate into written words.

Pikachu appreciated the vocalizations, at the very least.

"Your battle against that Sinnoh guy with that powerful Torter-something, and that other guy he was with who didn't do all that much, broke my artists block. It felt so good to finally finish my last sketch before leaving this place." A fourth girl, a red head with an artist's hat (a burette right?), declared in sincere appreciation as she flipped a sketchbook in her hands around to show him the pages within, revealing a colorless sketch of Torterra staring down Servine and Red's Charmeleon.

The art was pretty good, at least as good as Tracey's work, though the lack of Gary in the art bothered Ash a bit.

A pink blur hopped up her shoulder as a Mime Jr. duplicated Pikachu's pose on his shoulder.

"If it isn't a bother though, do you think you could do something for us?" said the only male voice among them, and Ash liked to think he didn't flinch at the sight of who spoke.

He was the tallest of the five, dressed in a polo shirt and nice pants that he did not look all that happy to be in if Ash had to guess, and would ditch them as soon as possible. His hair was black, but it had a bit of a green tint in the light. Under the hair, which was wavy instead of spiky, were a pair of red
eyes. At his side was a Machop, who gave a respectful nod to Pikachu.

He was another one who looked a tad too similar to himself (or Red, or John Archer, or Belladonna, or Ashley, etc etc) for comfort.

"We're all about to start on our own Pokémon journeys. We actually could have all gone out yesterday, but our parents thought we should attend this party before we go. If you are here though, I was wondering….could you give us some advice? I mean, not all of us are going to compete in the League, but do you have any sort of advice for us? None of our parents ever got as far as you did, if they even tried at all…" the kid asked. His tone was of genuine interest, a detectable yearning for advice from someone who knew what it was like.

And from someone he idolized.

Regardless of what awkward connection they may have, there was no way that Ash could say no.

As all five of them looked his way along with their partner Pokémon, as he gathered his thoughts for some advice giving.

Resisting the urge to fake cough before speaking, he began.

"First of all, no matter what you need to learn to work with your Pokémon. It doesn't matter if they are your first Pokémon," at this prompt Pikachu waved from his shoulder, which Mime Jr. mimicked once more, "or one you capture later. If you want to work with them to be the best you can be, you need to work with their strengths, not your own. Every Pokémon, no matter how powerful or evolved, has something special to them, and it is the job of anyone wanting to work with them to bring out the best in them."

"Next, never discount your instincts. If you think something will work, don't stop to think if it makes sense, or if it isn't normal. The smallest glimmer of inspiration can change the tide of anything: battle, Contests, even art, maybe?"

The artist whose Mime Jr. was still mimicking Pikachu nodded in a 'yes, art is like that', way.

"Art too. Third, never go into a battle assuming that you can win only with type. Pikachu here won me a Gym badge by defeating an Onix, with Thunderbolt."

"You used the Thunderbolt to send a Bide back at it," the Pokédex reminded him from his pocket.

"Moves aren't a simple case of 'hit your opponent'. They can be used in a wide variety of ways. There are also a lot more ways to have your Pokémon fight than just with their moves or abilities. Know everything your Pokémon can do. How high they can jump, what they can do with their tails, what their skin is like…..there isn't anything that can't be useful if you know your Pokémon well enough."

"When you travel, you will meet many different types of people, and go to many places. When you can, take in everything you see and everyone you meet. You never know where a source of inspiration can be found."

"Finally….know that you will meet people that you won't agree with," Ash told the five in a more solemn tone.

"There are people in the world who believe in the opposite of what you hold dear. Some of these people are criminals. Others, aren't, and that will bother you more any amount of criminals you
"I could probably say more, but unless you want to know what not to do around Spearow…." Ash finished as they nodded in appreciation.

"We'll keep that in mind," the girl with the Poliwig said in complete honesty.

"Really, thank you. It's an honor to be given your advice. My name's Midori by the way, as weird as it sounds for a guy." The boy who looked like him gave his name.

"Hoshi," the girl with the Cleffa followed.

"Monet," said the Mime Jr. girl.

"Rana," the Poliwig girl told him.

"And my name is Kusa," finished the Oddish girl.

From there conversation continued, with additional questions coming his way.

"What do you do if you have a losing streak?" Best answer he could give was work hard and figure out what was causing it. If it was just bad luck, try and wait it out while not forgetting what you had managed before the streak began.

"What do you do if the weather is too bad to travel?" Wait it out, and try and keep yourself busy while it blows over. Training, studying, actually calling home, that sort of thing.

"What do we do if our tents are damaged?" At that point Ash introduced them to the idea of Secret Bases. They seemed quite interested in it, and were quite glad when the Pokédex willing to download the TM instructions for Secret Power into one of their Pokénavs.

Their question about how to accommodate both badges and Contests into a journey did require him to fudge some details though.

"I heard from a couple of guys in Pokémon Centers the key to doing that is being willing to divert. If the path between Gyms has Contests, that is good. If the Contest is a bit of a detour, take it. The Gym won't go anywhere, and more time to train for the Gym is always good. Don't go out of the way to find Contests far from the Gym you want to go to next, but I've heard it is best to be willing to take a few extra days when there is a Contest around." Ash advised them as Kusa spoke up.

"That's great. We always planned to travel together, but I was always worried that we might run into trouble with finding enough of both Contests and Gyms. Now though, it seems so silly to have worried about that. We'll be able to stick together."

The response was said so earnestly, and followed by such in sync nods of agreement, that it gave Ash a moment of pause.

Something about the way she was saying that was bugging him…was it the idea of a possible half sibling of his sticking around with several other girls a la Belladonna or Cleff, or was he was just overthinking and it was simply friendship?

…

Meanwhile as Ash gave advice, Misty had gossip to overhear while she sampled the free food.

"Yeah, those five have always been close haven't they? What has it been, since kindergarten?"
"Something like that. They're always together, never that close to the other kids their age. It's kind of weird."

"Always eat a ton too, don't they? Do their parents ever feed them?"

"They'll be going soon, right? Most of the other kids around Mikey's age are off journeying, hence why they were actually invited. Wonder how long they'll last?"

"Those five or the rest of 'em"

"If any of them, those five or otherwise, actually get to a League I'll be shocked. Everyone hits that wall of failure at some point, last people around here to make something out of wandering about are Mikey's older brothers, and one's going to have to give it up soon."

"That's life for ya. You have to give up your dreams at some point or another. Pass the potato salad, would ya?"

'Aren't you pessimistic,' Misty couldn't help but think as she took a chunk of some Kalosian bread and bit it.

You never had to give up on your dreams. Sometimes you couldn't keep going for them true, but life making lemons didn't mean you couldn't keep at it. Even at her lowest point she never lost sight of her dreams.

She kept at it, and now she was closer to them than ever. Even if it did mean that crazy Unovan decided she needed to work her non-swimming muscles just because no one saw a ninja was armed.

Sure her calves seemed to be more functional, but it was still a bit much.

….Even if it did lead to Ash working out more, which was not the worst thing to see by any stretch. If she didn't know any better she would be sure Iris started this just to give him more muscles. Not that she could blame her, it was nice to see.

The space to her right was occupied, and she noted who had popped in.

It was a boy, a bit younger than her if she had to guess. He had a brown head of hair, was wearing a green shirt, and had an Eevee in his arms.

"Hey, isn't that the guest of honor?" she heard the pessimistic men over from her comment her way. Most likely about the boy who was currently next to her, eating some sort of imported cheese.

The boy turned to look at them with a look of awkwardness at being pointed out, before turning away from the crowd, hugging the Eevee tightly.

Misty observed the newcomer and his Pokémon with cursory interest, noticing how tense he was and how he continued to look around, while everyone whispered comments to each other, most likely referring to him.

A familiar shiver ran down her spine. That was a situation she found herself in more than once, the few times her family didn't or couldn't pretend she didn't exist. It was among the few occasions where she was the center of attention, with clear instructions to be as inconspicuous as possible, while her sisters made sure to eclipse her as much as they could, just like every other time. It was a hell of a way to spend her birthdays.

She placed the bread aside and inched closer to the boy. "Is everything alright?"
The kid flinched and gulped down the cheese as he perked his head up. He spied his surroundings briefly before he focused back on Misty.

"Yes," he said with a nod, then averted his eyes again. Misty wasn't about to let the conversation die there, however.

She smiled at him. "My name is Misty. And you are...?"

"Mikey." The boy continued to look away, towards the men of before.

Noticing that, Misty frowned. "You don't want to be here, right?"

Holding his Eevee tightly, Mikey grabbed another piece of cheese and observed it with an absent glance.

"I had no choice." He munched it slowly, still not watching Misty. "We had to all be here today. My brothers couldn't miss this event."

Misty blinked at that, before locking her gaze on Mikey again. Of course, it had to be that. She grimaced at the unwanted memories, and then shook her head.

"I know how you feel. Siblings can be terrible to deal with when you're the youngest."

Hearing that, Mikey finally looked back at her, head tilted. "What do you mean?"

"I've been a younger sibling too, once." Misty clenched her jaw at that, but quickly returned to a more neutral expression. "I bet there are times where you'd rather run away from everything and everyone, right?"

Mikey continued to look at her, remaining silent as he and Eevee stared on. And then, he shook his head.

"No, I can't." His glance went back to the cheese as he frowned. "Family needs to stick together in times like these."

At that reaction, Misty crooked an eyebrow. " Didn't your brothers force you to be here?"

"It's not like that." Mikey caressed his Eevee softly, as his frown morphed into a grimace. "And it's still better than being alone."

Hearing that, Misty didn't know what to say. As far as she could remember, there was never a situation where she would've found time with her sisters 'better than being alone'. Being away from her family, while sad, was always a blessing. Why would anyone want to stick with relatives they didn't enjoy? It made no sense to her.

And with confusion creeping in, the discussion was left to die.

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"So, you're a pretty popular guy it seems?" The question wasn't really a question, more of an observation.

After the five had eventually left him alone, Ash found himself turned around by the old man, who nodded.

"Apparently I am." Ash agreed.
"Well, seeing as you are both an up and comer, and nice enough to help an old man out, I'll be remembering that, Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town."

With that Masuda hobbled off into the crowd, not elaborating on what he meant. However Ash didn't have all that much time to wonder what he meant.

"I don't know about that. I've seen people getting by and doing some amazing things without evolving." He heard someone mutter in the crowd, which caught his attention.

Last time he was here, this party was all about evolving. Good to see that there was some difference in opinion this time around.

"What? People succeed in all fields by making their Pokémon stronger and winning! It's the best for the Pokémon and Trainer alike. Evolution is the name of the mountain and the town by extension! Sure it's Stone Town, but it's short for evolution stone, not cornerstone. I don't know who gets by without evolving…." He heard a sort of familiar voice declare, though who was talking Ash couldn't pinpoint.

"Him."

The pointed declaration rang through the crowd, causing Ash to look around in curiosity.

Such a declaration was so vague it was hard to really know who it was for…

"The Pikachu guy from Pallet Town."

Okay, that was definitely him. He may not be the only Pikachu guy, but last he checked Gary never had a Pikachu.

And so he got an idea of who he thought he was hearing, as a blue-haired man darted through the crowd.

Ash wasn't sure if he was eighteen, twenty, or something like that….but he recognized the hair style and got a name for him.

"Pikachu Guy from Pallet, Ash Ketchum," Rainer, Eevee brother of Vaporeon, declared while pointing at him dramatically.

"Yeah, that's me," Ash replied in an unsure tone.

"Pika-Pikachu. 'And I'm the Pikachu in the titular 'Pikachu Guy' duo.' Pikachu didn't seem thrilled with the idea of the title 'Pikachu Guy' spreading.

Vaporeon made a motion that Ash suspected was sympathy for Pikachu's concern, but Rainer looked at him as one would do an unexpected irritant.

"Why are you here?" he questioned as Ash blinked.

"Uh….because it's an open party, and I saved an old guy."

"You are the guy who helped…." He stopped as his words devolved into an exasperated sigh, as the brother took a long, deep breath.

"Okay fine, I get it. Open party, additional invite for good samaritan work, I won't make you leave. However, stay away from my brother."
Ash was taken aback by the statement. Rainer was looking him in the eye as he made the statement. Said eye was ablaze with the upmost seriousness.

"Which brother, I heard you have…"

"My kid brother, Mikey. Brown hair, Eevee in his arms, no muscle shirt like the rest of us. I don't care what you do with the other two idiots, beat them up and make them give up their dreams for all I care, but I don't need you giving Mikey any bad ideas. Not now, and not today of all days. You see a kid with an Eevee, you stay the hell away from him."

Um, what? What on earth was he getting on about. His confusion was probably evident, because Rainer continued.

"He's about to start on his own journey, and that's hard enough. The last thing he needs is to think he doesn't need to evolve an Eevee with a stone today, because some guy does well enough without evolving his Pikachu."

Rainer seemed to be staring both him and Pikachu in the eye as he said this.

"You may be some sort of skilled, one-of-a-kind budding legend who can win against powerful opponents with just a Pikachu, or just a Yanma, or just a Squirtle, but my little brother isn't that way."

"Look, what your little brother does or doesn't do isn't my doing. I win with the Pokémon I have, regardless of if they want to evolve or not. I'm not going to tell him he has to do anything specific to win, except maybe putting in hard work and ensuring his Pokémon are treated with love and respect. Plus, do I need to remind you of the Pokémon I do have that evolved, because I do in fact have a few." Ash countered, now annoyed.

This was just…..what was a word for it. Something fancy that Professor Oak or the Pokédex would probably use……asinine?

Would that work here? If he said that Rainer was being asinine, would that be grammatically correct. It felt correct to him…

"Pikapik," Pikachu also added, to the benefit of only himself and Vaporeon.

'Are you counting partially evolved Pokémon or not? I'm sure Servine would very much like to know if she's part of your rant or not.'

Notably Vaporeon had a unsure expression of its face at the question. Did Servine count in this argument or not?

Rainer did not seem like he'd be giving clarification on that anytime soon.

"That's not going to matter to him. You can talk about how you have a Charizard or an Ambipom or a Butterfree however much you want, all he's going to see is Pikachu doing it despite all reason. Then he'll think he doesn't need to use a stone, and he'll lose and be miserable. Mikey will not be miserable because of you giving him stupid ideas and false hopes!"

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"Come one, come all!"

After meeting the boy of the hour and finding themselves at an impasse, Misty had wandered into the
party once more.

She eventually found herself in front of a crowd that had gathered on a nearby elevated area, a bit like a stage of some sort. Standing atop of it was some guy, older than her by a few years, with red hair that reminded her of an open fire.

Next to him was a Flareon, the Fire Eeveelution.

"Now, I know today's a big day and all. Today we get to see my dear little brother take his big first step into our great big world! If he wants to avoid the missteps that breaks you, he needs to make a choice. Fire, Thunder, or Water!"

The crowd cheered at the declaration, as Misty felt a tad lost.

'Interesting, he forgot all the other methods.' She heard Anabel distantly in her head. Misty didn't see the psychic, but she could clearly hear what was going on.

"Now, I'll admit it didn't help me win my first Contest. No, it took me a few tries, but evolving my Eevee into Flareon gave me an edge over my fellow newbies. With it, we had the raw potential and ability to win, we only needed time to temper it!" The red head continued as Flareon stepped up.

"Mikey, I'm not sure if you want to join me in the Contest world, but I'm sure this is a lesson you can learn and use for anything," the now identified older brother declared as Flareon reared its head up and began spitting out a spinning Fire Spin into the air.

"I'm lost," Misty declared as she heard the tell tale sound of Psyduck popping up, who immediately began quacking.

"Psy-sy-y" 'He appears to be a Pokémon Coordinator'. Psyduck began as the attack continued to spin over Flareon's head. Flareon's eyes then flashed purple, as purple light began to form around the Fire Spin.

A Reflect.

'Pokémon Coordinators bring out the beauty and finesse of Pokémon in demonstrations of skill and technique. These aspects are split into purely aesthetic rounds, followed up by rounds combining aesthetic with battle techniques. The winner of both rounds are rewarded a ribbon, which allows for entry into grand tournaments called Grand Festivals for the title of Top Coordinator.'

The reflect was now bending inward, creating a glowing purple sphere with a narrow point of entry that Flareon was blowing the Fire Spin in. Said Fire Spin had narrowed a bit to enter it better, but the result was the light of the fire radiating out from inside the gem like a great light. The crowd around her was oooing and awing at it in amazement.

Misty stared at the duck in surprise at the fact he had just given her all that information.

"Duck." 'You left the T.V on during a late night special on Contest history. I wasn't tired and had nothing better to do,' he explained as the fire brother spoke again, Flareon taking a breather as the flames breathed continued to dance inside the gem Reflect created.

"This is what evolution can do for you! You can't do this without evolving. The world needs at least three of us to be happy Mikey, this beauty is for you! The Evolution Gem!"

"Do they always name their techniques?" Misty asked aloud.
Psyduck didn't answer, as he had wandered off and had taken an apple for himself from a nearby table.

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"Hey you, have you seen Mikey anywhere? I was going to tell him that a preliminary Pokéathlon qualifier will be happening in a month in Crimson City if he wants to join me in the Pokéathlon and….wait what the hell is he doing here!"

Ash now had a second brother on his hands, the spiky haired Sparky, a Jolteon right on his heels. Ash half wondered if that was a nickname. Were they really named Sparky, Pyro, and Rainer, or did they just call themselves that?

Did they change their names to them later?

"Look, this is why I said we should have a closed party," Sparky growled, though even as it was about him, it was aimed at Rainer.

Rainer rolled his eyes at the complaint.

"You were the one who said that we didn't have time to send invitations. Word of mouth was how we got the word out."

"We couldn't have sprung for a bouncer at least?"

"That would be a waste of money. I know you have to grasp the idea, but that would gain little for a lot of money spent," Rainer sardonically declared.

"If you are such a money expert, why don't I see you learn how to read fine print and then Pyro and I can resume our lives!" Sparky snarled at his brother, as the two were now fully focused at glaring at one another.

"Pikapi," Pikachu whispered into his ear.

' Ash, maybe we should back away while they are busy…. ' Pikachu suggested, to which their partner Eeveelutions nodded in rapid agreement.

Ash couldn't help but agree that might be best. While he would like to defend himself, clearly something else was going on and he probably should stay out of it.

However before he could begin to step back their attention swung back his way, wicked looks on their faces.

"Look, I know you are more interested in hurdles and lamps than battle technique, but perhaps we can solve our problem the simple way. We beat him, and Mikey won't even consider emulating him. Then he can choose a stone and…" Rainer declared.

"I hate to agree with you, but that does sound good. You may be the only one who trains like Ketchum, but don't underestimate Pokéathlon training. My Pokémon are just as fit as yours, maybe even more so. Certainly more than Pyro's anyway."

In the name of May and Dawn Ash felt like defending the fitness of Coordinator-trained Pokémon, but the brothers pointing and the Eeveelutions, if somewhat looking unenthusiastic about it, jumped forward threateningly.
As they did so the crowd parted around them, opening up an area for battling.

"Cool, a battle. I came for the food, and we get this too."

"That Ketchum kid's doing pretty good, but Rainer's actually been to Leagues. This is going to be a landslide."

"You can do it Ash!" He heard someone shout over the crowd. It sounded like Midori's group, which was nice.

What is going on? Anabel's voice rang in his head as she, and presumably Misty and Iris somewhere in the crowd, gathered around him.

Honestly, at this point he would like to know what was up too. He was battling, but for what purpose?

Anabel picked up on those thoughts, as well as a quick thought on what was in fact going on as far as he could tell, and thus she gave him an explanation.

'I've heard bits and pieces here and there. Apparently their mother recently died, and the three older brothers, who are triplets actually if you were wondering, had to go home and take over the family business and raise their brother for the last bit before he would go on his own journey. Mikey's actually their half-brother, if you are curious, their mother never married either of their fathers."

'They don't mind the Mikey bit, but the idea that one of them will have to stay and take over the family business and stop what they love, has put them in a perpetual bad mood. If they didn't have that, this probably would not be happening."

Ash mentally thanked Anabel for the info, though that didn't solve the problem of this fight.

It was two to one, and with their Pokémon using Charizard and Pikachu was not a good move. What would be though…

"Excuse me, I take it you wouldn't mind if Ash had a partner in this? Makes it fair and all."

A voice rang out, a voice that was warm, but in a declarative way.

The crowd parted as the woman from before, the one that he and Iris had noticed earlier, the one who probably owned the motorbike, stepped over to him and turned to face the brothers.

Standing up, Ash noted she was shorter than him, but that didn't seem to affect the confident grin that was on her face.

"In the little argument you've been having, even if it was mostly you yelling if I'd have to be specific, I side with him over you guys. Of course now it's fair, with the two of us against the two of you."

"No one asked your opinion hippie," Sparky growled.

"She's not a hippie. A hippie dresses differently," Rainer deadpanned.

"Oh whatever, you know what I mean!"

"Not really. Can't say I've ever been called a hippie. That's a first," the woman mused as she pulled a Pokéball from her belt.

A Luxury Ball, she enlarged it with a tap to the center and sent the ball flying. It burst into the air,
revealing what Pokémon she'd be battling with.

"Murkrow!" the bird called as it landed in front of the woman.

"Seeing as this whole thing is about stone evolution, my friend here is only appropriate." The woman smiled as the Murkrow let out a call of agreement.

"Murkrow, the Darkness Pokémon. This Pokémon, given an ominous title for dramatic effect, is a thief of shiny objects. They like to cause mischief, pain, and bother to those around them," the Pokédex declared for Ash's benefit.

"I had thought I heard something about you having gotten a Pokédex from Professor Oak…" Rainer noted with a bit of respect, before regaining a game face.

"You are aware, Miss or Mrs, as I cannot tell…" The woman held up a set of ten ring-less fingers. "Alright then, Miss, you are in fact aware that your Murkrow is weak to not only my brother's Jolteon, but that it is very likely that my Vaporeon is carrying an…"

"Oh, I am aware that your Vaporeon has an ice attack. It was Icy Wind I believe, that your Pokémon used in battle at your top four finisher at the last Silver League conference, which you attended after two Indigo finishers of eight and four. Icy Wind, Acid Armor, Scald, Strength, Shadow Ball, and Mist I believe it used, or am I mistaken. You also used a Poliwrath, Exeggutor, Cloyster, Nidoking, and Mismagius at your League matches, though I feel I am missing a number. Perhaps it is simply their stone evolution basis that is sticking with me."

Rainer looked taken aback by the analysis, but he nodded.

"Yeah, I have other Pokémon. I just work better with stone evolutions. You may know a lot, but that doesn't change the facts that we have the advantage, regardless of what Pokémon Ketchum chooses."

"And he'll be choosing Pikachu, am I right?" the woman both questioned, and said with certainty.

Ash nodded in agreement, in part because he had no better ideas. Pikachu thus hopped forward, ready to battle as Murkrow took into the air in readiness.

The battle then began without preamble.

"You may not be a hippie, but listing off stats isn't how you win anything! Jolteon, Thunderbolt!" Sparky shouted. Jolteon yowled as electricity built up around it.

"Jolteon, The Lightning Pokémon. This Eeveelution is known for speed and electrical force. Parent Jolteon will use Pin Missile to defend their young from Drowzee dream predation," the Pokédex quickly read off as the bolt was fired right at Murkrow.

"Reflect it with Whirlwind!" the woman declared. Murkrow began flapping its wings rapidly, forming a whirlwind that rustled hats and hair in the surrounding people.

The electric attack hit right into the Whirlwind, and was completely negated.

"But how!?" Sparky declared in shock.

"Because it isn't a Flying-type move. Whirlwind is a normal type move," Rainer's response to his brother was deadpanned in tone.
"Now Icy Wind!" the woman called as Murkrow became surrounded in a chilly mist, before flapping once more. The resulting wind was tinged with icy cold crystals.

"Use your own!" Rainer responded as Vaporeon sucked in a large breath, before spewing out a matching cold wind attack.

"**Vaporeon, the Bubble Jet Pokémon. Vaporeon are often used by well diggers to find springs. They are the most passive Eeveelution,**" the Pokédex chimed in the late information once more as the Icy Winds collided.

Murkrow's won, and the icy wind was blown back at the two.

"What!?" Rainer voiced his surprise as Sparky was at pace.

"Is that the attack that reduces speed? Just in case it is, Protect!" Jolteon nodded as a green energy bubble formed around Jolteon.

Thus only Vaporeon was blasted with the cold front, even as the people behind the brothers, and the brothers themselves, began shivering.

Murkrow, with a mocking call of its own name, landed next to Pikachu, looking none the worse. Clearly the Murkrow was a strong one.

He and Iris had been right on the money when it came to the woman.

"Alright Pikachu, Quick Attack on Jolteon!"

The Pokédex thankfully did not tell him that such a move was a wise one, as Jolteon likely had the ability Volt Absorb.

He knew that already, and did not need to be reminded of it like an idiot.

Pikachu sped forward, white energy surrounding him.

"Cover for the idiot!" Rainer growled. Vaporeon darted forward, if in a somewhat reduced manner, with a glowing red aura around itself.

The two charging attacks collided, both Pokémon being thrown back.

"For a up and come without a full set of badges to his name, that was pretty powerful wasn't it?" the woman observed to Rainer, who was not amused.

"I can make observations too, a Raichu would have pushed my Vaporeon back. He's a good friend, but physical strength is not his strong suit. Also no Pikachu other than that….special one could have done that. Scald!" The burning water attack flew at Pikachu, who avoided it with a tail boosted jump.

"Also true, but you act like evolution is entirely gaining in strength. Pikachu could not have jumped like that as a Raichu, Raichu tails don't help boost jumps."

"Also my Sligoo was blind after it evolved from Goomy, and until it evolved again," Ash added.

"And a Caterpie can't move as a Metapod, does that make Butterfree not worth it? Charge Beam!" Sparky shouted as an electrical attack fired, faster this time.

The bolt flew at Murrow, who avoided it with a mid air dodge.
"Had I evolved my Murkow into a Honchrow, that dodge would not have worked. A larger body is a larger target after all, and more has to be moved to safety," the woman mused.

"And had you evolved it, that Icy Wind would have done more. Scald!"

"Dark Pulse!" The two attacks collided, with the Dark Pulse pushing into the burning water.

Hot water droplets were sent flying in all directions as the Dark Pulse pushed through and sent Vaporeon flying.

"Quick Attack!" Ash and Sparky shouted at once as both electric types sped at each other, clashing head on.

However Jolteon was pushed back, and sent tumbling back.

"Jolteon!"

"Iron Tail!" Ash called for a finisher as Pikachu swung himself around, steel tail at the ready to whack Jolteon.

As the Eeveelution was knocked to Sparky's feet, it wasn't getting back up. Jolteon was unable to battle.

Vaporeon was the same it seemed.

"Nothing that you said about evolution isn't true. Pokémon that are evolved are, overall stronger. They hit harder, take more hits, and can learn more moves. That isn't all there is to battling. Strength alone isn't what determines success," the woman told them as Rainer glared back.

"Lecture me on something that isn't obvious. I didn't get as far as I did without knowing that Vaporeon can avoid damage in water by dissolving. I know that Nidoking using physical force without a move is a technique as valid as any attack. Every Trainer knows that. However you have to learn that, and you two showing off that you've skipped the first steps and gone directly to that isn't going to help my brother. If he doesn't evolve his Eevee today he isn't going to have time to become you two. At this point I don't care what stone he picks, as long as he uses one."

The woman sighed as she took out another Luxury Ball. Tapping it, it let out a second Pokémon, who stood at her side and confused the two brothers.

"Um," the Umbreon greeted.

"Umbreon, an Eeveelution that evolves without a stone. It is a Dark Type, famed for defensive and indirect tactics. The bite of an Umbreon contains poison," The Pokédex aided in the woman's point.

"And yet he can't use Poison Fang, what a world." The woman noted the last part with a wishful tone.

"Without a stone?" Sparky questioned as the woman continued.

"Eevee can evolve without an evolution stone. You insisting that your brother has to evolve his Eevee the way you evolved yours is limiting, just like you think not evolving Eevee is. You just rarely see such evolutions in Kanto that you probably never heard of it. The stones you use are more common than in Johto, where I'm from."
"You guys want to help your brother. I get that," Ash continued for the woman. "However, you need to let him make his own choices. Forcing him isn't going to do him any good, especially out of the gate. Everyone has a certain type of Pokémon they are good with, regardless of what they go into. He needs to find that out on his own."

"Yes."

The young voice rang through the crowd as Mikey, Eevee in tow, stepped between the four of them with a look of sureness on his face.

"Mikey…." Rainer breathed as the little brother continued.

"I may not know what I want to do as a Trainer, or what Eevee and I want to become together. What I do know is, I'd like to find out on my own. I know how I want to find out though…..with my first battle."

At that declaration Eevee hoped out in front of Pikachu, baring cute little fangs.

"…." Ash could see the brothers tense, even Pyro who had only just gotten into his fringe of sight. Clearly they really did want him to have all the chances he could.

"Give me a sec." He told Mikey as he pulled out the H.O.P.E glove and placing Goodra's Heal Ball in the center, where it soon vanished from. At the confused look Mikey gave him Ash explained.

"This is a device that I use to get my Pokémon. Most of my team stays with Professor Oak when they aren't on hand with me. I have two Pokémon I think would be a good first match for you. One's a Vivillon….."

"A Kalosian Pokémon that is like a Butterfree, but coming in a lot of colors," the Pokédex answered the question that Mikey was likely going to ask.

"…The other's a Spearow. Which would you like to battle….." Ash wondered if there was some thematic choice at hand, and if so what he was asking.

If Mikey choose to battle Vivillon, did that mean he agreed with his brothers? That he rejected their opinion?

Was he giving a simple choice too much thought?

"Which one's stronger?" Mikey asked.

"Vivillon," Ash told him as Mikey gave a confident grin, one matched by Eevee.

"Then that is the one I want to battle first," Mikey declared as the Pokédex dinged in a Pokéball, instead of the Safari Ball Spearow would be in.

"Alright, let's go!" And with that Ash sent Vivillon out, a pair of purple wings flapping in the air, to several gasps of wonder from the crowd.

"Where did he get that?"

"I didn't see that Pokémon at the Tag Tournament."

"Is it normally purple?"

According to the Pokédex, no. Vivillon apparently came in many patterns, depending on their place
of birth. Ash had no idea where a purple Vivillon was from, and really didn't care.

The Scatterbug he had saved from Felgrand had by now all become Spewpa, with the one he had used to help the boy in Crimson City having evolved around the time the others had, reaching the final form.

But that wasn't important now. What was, was Mikey's first battle.

"You can go first," Ash told Mikey, who nodded and pointed.

"Quick Attack!"

"Tackle!"

The two attacks were declared in quick succession, as Eevee sped at Vivillon.

Eevee hit first, which Ash expected. Quick Attack was called Quick Attack for a reason after all.

The fact that Vivillon was the one sent flying back, with Eevee taking only a bit of a blow from the colliding attack, was not what he was expecting.

"Vi?" Vivillon questioned, as one would question 'what hit me?'

"Mikey…." Sparky breathed in surprise.

"Interesting…." The woman observed.

"That Eevee is no average starter," the Pokédex declared.

"I see that. Okay then, Vivillon use Stun Spore!"

Vivillon began flapping, wings shedding a storm of bronze spores at the Eevee.

The spores collided with Eevee, failing to go past it and into Mikey. Eevee seized up before collapsing to its knees.

"Eevee!" Mikey shouted in worry.

"Tackle!" Vivillon flew right at Eevee, knocking the little furball back to Mikey's feet.

Ash could hear the brothers flinch like one would do at the sight of someone close to you losing a match, but Eevee got back up despite their concerns.

Eevee stared back at them, glaring at Vivillon as Mikey began mumbling to himself. Ash thought he heard Quick Attack, Charm, and Swift mentioned before Mikey's eyes lit up.

"Use Refresh!" Mikey called as Eevee struggled a nod, before shimmering white.

"Refresh, a move that restores a Pokémon's status from paralysis, poison, burn, and similar ailments. A young Eevee does not generally know the move," the Pokédex observed as Eevee stood up proud.

"Hey Mikey." Ash asked as the young boy, who looked back at him with a nervous expression. "You and Eevee had some practice before this, am I right?"

Mikey smiled weakly.
"We….did let him watch our partners while we had to go file government papers…." Pyro mentioned to the side.

"I guess he did more than just 'see how cool evolved Eevee are'," Sparky continued for his brother as the woman smiled their way.

"Swift!" Mikey called as Eevee jumped in the air, ready to swing for the Swift stars.

"Tie it up with String Shot!" Ash countered as Vivillon spat out a wad of string. The String snagged around Eevee's left paw, before Eevee was slammed onto the ground before the attack could complete.

Mikey cringed, but quickly made a counter call.

"Quick Attack!" Eevee glowed white as the speed attack was prepared once more.

"Roll with the hit Vivillon, then use Tackle!" Eevee jumped at Vivillon, striking with a solid hit that sent Vivillon spinning.

However Vivillon recovered, and slammed into Eevee from behind.

Eevee was sent flying as panic raced in Mikey's eyes, before they sparked with something else.

He heard the woman give a approving grin at the look in Mikey's eyes, and Ash could see why.

It was a spark of inspiration.

"Use Swift!" Mikey called as Eevee's body visibly twitched at the command. Still flying to the ground from the impact, Eevee turned around and formed stars around its tail.

The Swift were sent flying, even as Eevee hit the ground.

The Swift flew into Vivillon, exploding.

Eevee struggled up with a visible wince, as Vivillon hit the ground.

"Vivillon!" Ash shouted. Vivillon did not get back up.

The crowd was silent for a moment, before exploding into cheers. Mikey's face was layered in confusion, before his lips burst into a smile with wide eyes as Eevee mirrored the motion.

He could see Mikey's brothers stare in shock, and in the corner of his eyes he could see the woman nod in approval.

Ash smiled as he returned Vivillon.

"You did good," he told the ball holding the Kalosian bug.

Moments later all three older brothers darted forward and seized Mikey in a massive hug.

Eevee meanwhile had Flareon dart over for a victory nuzzle, followed shortly after by a somewhat recovered duo of Jolteon and Vaporeon.
"Come for the food, stay for giving confidence and partially mending a damaged family," Misty surmised the entire evening as they left 3-14 Stone Town, the sun setting in the sky as night approached.

"Like I told Anabel earlier, that's one of the parts of a journey. You never know what will happen," Ash told her with a smile as Misty smiled herself.

"Yeah, I can sort of see that. I couldn't have imagined being involved in half of the things we've been up to."

"Agreed." Iris nodded before she tensed and turned around, a motion Ash did in turn too.

"She's...." Anabel rang out a warning seconds later, before her face winced at the slowness of her uptake. She and Misty also turned around.

There stood the woman, leaning against the bike that was probably hers. Her Umbreon was sitting in the sidecar, the glowing rings of the species lighting up the meeting more than the setting sun.

"You know, I came for the food too. Figured it would be just a slog to deal with all of the talk of throwing stones at everything the moment you can, glad to see that I wasn't the only one here to liven things up." She smiled at them.

"Who are you?" Iris asked as the woman smiled.

"Finally, someone asks me that. I thought everyone would just think of me as some random woman….maybe that's why Lance wears a cape. Name's Karen, of the Johto Elite Four."

Ash stared at the woman in surprise, an act that Misty and Anabel mirrored him in. An Elite Four member?!

…..Wait, Johto had an Elite Four? That was a thing?

"The thing Janine's father wants to be?" Iris inquired further, not sounding surprised about it.

Ash wasn't sure if that was a case of lack of surprise, or that Iris simply had no idea what an Elite Four was.

Either was likely.

"He did file the attempt paperwork," Karen noted. "And yes, the same as he wants to be. If he works in the Kanto or the Johto Elite Four is the question right now. We're close enough it's simpler to share a Champion and play musical chairs with who's in what position where at any given time. Bruno's done the dance at least three times, and I couldn't tell you where that Ninja would prefer to end up. But I doubt you want to know about the fun of paperwork...."

There was a moment of awkward silence.

"I'd give a speech about strong Pokémon and weak Pokémon, but you don't really seem to need to learn it. This is normally the part where a Elite Four member gives a young aspiring Trainer advice or something helpful, but I must admit to having nothing. Hmm...what is a girl to do..." Karen muttered to herself.

"We got these stones from some guy named Scott...." Iris began as she shook her head.
"You are asking the wrong Elite Four member. I don't have a Keystone," Karen offered apologetically. "Same goes for your ring. Odd that you have one, usually the Alolans hoard those things like a Murkrow does coins." Karen noted Ash's Z-Ring with a similar apologetic shrug.

"Um," Umbreon called from the side car as Karen had a flash of inspiration.

"Oh yes, that would work." She held up a hand just as Umbreon kicked something over to her. She caught it with both hands, before tapping it and throwing it Ash's way.

Ash caught it, and recognized it.

"It's a Moon Ball." Ash recognized the gray and blue Pokéball.

"That it is. I can tell you are well on your way, and hopefully this will help you." Karen explained as she walked over to her bike and mounted it.

"I'm sure this won't be the last time we meet. Good luck at Indigo." Karen gave a farewell as she started the motorbike and sped away.

Iris plugging her nose at the smell of the exhaust.
Sometime later

"You know, I've decided," Ash declared to his gathered Pokémon suddenly.

Charizard let out an annoyed growl.

'That hippies suck no matter what?'

"No," Ash clarified, glad they were done dealing with that Snorlax hippie. Ash swore he was a better guy last time, and that the Snorlax was not the Hippie's mean to extort money out of people.

"I think we should see if we can pull off having more than four moves," Ash explained as all Pokémon present cheered.

Pikachu, Ambipom, Charizard, Servine, Pidgeot, and Butterfree specifically.

"Now….does anyone know how to do that?" Ash asked his Pokémon, who paused mid cheer.

The clearing was silent for a moment as they all tried to wrap their heads around the very serious question.

"Geot!" Pidgeot offered up to break the silence.

'Ve did so before, so I guess we just have to remember'.

Servine and Ambipom stared at the bird in confusion.

"Ser…." 'No, we did not do so before. I never had that,' Servine told the bird slowly.

Charizard gave a thoughtful growl.

'No, I definitely feel like I had that at one point, but then I stopped for some reason….'

"Pi." Same, though I can't remember why I'd ever forget how to do it. Electro Ball and Volt Tackle at the same time would have been fun. I feel like Snorlax still knew. I know he used more than four moves fighting Greta….'

"Ot?" 'Ash caught a Snorlax?'

"Free…." 'Let's blame this confusion on Cyrus. This is obviously his fault somehow….'

"You learn five moves by pushing your power with training, and then working on a move that does not overlap with what you possess. For example I'd highly suggest not having Charizard try to learn Fire Punch, lest you have Flame Charge morph into it,'" the Pokédex answered the question for them as Charizard looked at his hands wistfully.

Clearly the fact that learning to punch things and set them on fire would be difficult was a tough pill for him to swallow.
And so, as Charizard suffered under the sad truth of his lack of Fire Punches in the near future, training began.

And even after an hour it was….not going super well.

Pikachu was running around the clearing, half activating Thunderbolt to try and create an electrified running attack without using Quick Attack. The result? No Volt Tackle, but a few scorched patches of dirt and a brief grass fire.

Charizard flew into the air, ripping trees out of the ground and spinning them around in the air before throwing them to the ground. Each time Charizard would look at the wrecked tree, shake his head in self disappointment, and redo the process. Except that one time he reached for a tree and the Pokédex let out a loud beeping noise that was the unholy child of a fire alarm and chalkboard scratching, as he was about to grab a protected species.

The rock that Servine attempted to smash with a theoretical Iron Tail was undamaged. She was lying on the ground, grumbling in pain and indignation however.

Butterfree's attempt to manifest a Hyper Beam ended in a massive coughing fit.

Pidgeot was standing firm in the center of the clearing, the instant desire for shielding and protection racing through her mind as she tried to get a Protect to form around herself. Nothing formed as a result, except a single feather falling to the ground, knocked off her tail by an elm slammed into the earth by Charizard.

As for Ambipom….

"**Ambipom has forgotten Astonish. Ambipom has learned Shadow Claw!**" the Pokédex declared of the monkey Pokémon as she held up two shadow clad tails in embarrassment.

"Am..." *I thought it was far enough away…,'* she admitted of her flub.

"We…may need more time on this," Ash admitted as Charizard slammed a birch tree into the ground, shook his head once more, and ripped out an oak tree and taking off back into the air.

"Ser…” ‘*We'll also need more trees.*'

That too….though it was starting to look more like a proper Seismic Toss.

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**Meanwhile, in a city near Vermillion**

"I can't believe it, Sparky. Who enters a bug catching contest, and couldn't catch anything?"

"Pika."

Sitting on a bench, the Trainer and his partner commiserated on their mutual failure, half watching the battle that was ongoing in the nearby public battlefield.

Neither had seen that Paras when they had found the first Beedrill, Sparky had been off in dream land for too long, and the bell went off just as they found another Beedrill that was not close to the swarm.

Because of that, here they were with nothing gained but a chance to watch one of the winners of that
tag tournament from earlier beat someone with his Persian, which was only useful if they met up in Indigo.

"And to think, after the Thunder Badge we got you and I felt like nothing could go wrong." Ritchie sighed as he felt a vibration in his pocket.

"Pi?" Sparky questioned as Ritchie pulled the PokéNav from his pocket and noted the message that was just received.

Hey Half-Pint,

*Heard from an old rival of mine that you got spored. Tough break, mushrooms are the worst.*

Ritchie rolled his eyes at that, but kept reading.

*The worst luck ruins you sometimes, said old rival still insists he'd have beaten me that time if he hadn't sneezed. (For the record, the guy is wrong about that, very wrong.)*

*Still, he feels for ya loss. He has a place the next town over. He retired to do PokéRinger and demolition work after a while, but he still has his Pokémon and they do what they do when they aren't fighting.*

*One of them is a Tyranitar. Ever heard of it?*

Ritchie paused as he tried to remember, and he could feel his eyes widen as he remembered what a Tyranitar was like.

Sparky clattered his teeth audibly, also aware of what a Tyranitar was.

*Well, it turns out it has an egg that would one day be a Tyranitar, and he doesn't want to have another one around. He says you're free to take the egg. Think of it as a consolation prize.*

*Plus no Raylight should be without something capable of leveling houses. Here's the address.*

Ritchie and Sparky looked at one another for a moment, before taking a look at the address.

They immediately marked it on the PokéNav and began making their way there.

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**Back with our intrepid heroes**

"Bellossom, use Sunny Day!"

The battlefield was covered in bright light, blinding Ash a bit.

Across from him Elwood and Aideen, who they had run into randomly, were looking rather excited.

They had wanted to even the score after he and Red beat them last time, and he was always interested in a good battle.

It was good training after all. Plus with Misty out at a nearby lake with his H.O.P.E glove checking in personally on all her Pokémon, and Iris having conscripted Anabel to go retrieve some fruit from atop a nearby hill, he had nothing else to do right now.

"Solarbeam!" both shouted. At the call both Aideen's Bellossom and Elwood's Venusaur rapidly gathered light into their petals, before unleashing it in a massive beam.
"Servine use Leaf Storm!" Ash called. His Unovan serpent darted in front of Tauros and began forming the grass attack.

The Leaf Storm flew into the path of the two Solarbeams.

"Do you really think one attack can block two?" Aideen questioned. Ash could only grin back.

"Nope, but I do think it is good cover. Tauros!" Tauros darted off to the side of the two beams, charging forward with a glowing Take Down.

The same Take Down, from the same Tauros, who helped him win the Orange Islands and take down Anabel. It was good to have him back.

The Solarbeams broke through Leaf Storm, but Servine darted to the side to avoid them with the opening Leaf Storm formed. Meanwhile Take Down was about to land home on Bellossom.

"Stop it!" Elwood shouted to his starter, who obliged and sent a vine swinging at Tauros, ready to strike him in the head.

However unlike a Vine Whip, it was glowing pink. A Power Whip?

"Block with Aerial Ace!" Ash countered as Snivy darted at the Power Whip with a glowing blue tail.

Her slice struck it from an angle, sending the Power Whip flying away from Tauros, who successfully nailed Bellossom.

The Sun Stone evolution was knocked back, but it got back up.

"…..I can see why you won," Elwood commented as Venusaur retracted the Power Whip vine back into itself.

"That doesn't mean we haven't been practicing," Aideen added.

"Solarbeam again!" both shouted as the rapid fire sun attack was once more fired, this time much closer in range. The same strategy would not work again.

Sidestepping at least. He had his suspicions the other part would work.

"Alright Tauros, attack once I clear this, Servine, use Leaf Storm!"

Servine hopped onto the head of Tauros and used it as a springboard to fly right at the combined pair of beams.

"Wait, isn't this Pokémon the one with Contrary?!" Aideen exclaimed, apparently having seen the finals video with Paul.

"This is going to suck," Elwood observed as the powered up Leaf Storm flew right into the beams' path.

The two attacks cancelled each other, as Tauros burst through the lingering light and leaves, covered in a swirling purple light bordered by orange streaks.

Giga Impact. One of his moves at the moment, along with Take Down, Fissure, and Double Team.

The attack struck both Grass types at once.
Bellossom was sent flying, but Venusaur, with audible snarling, dug itself into the ground as it took the attack.

Elwood shouted something in the midst of the attack that started with S. Ash assumed it was probably cursing.

While Bellossom looked down for the count in Aideen’s arms in the aftermath, Venusaur was still standing.

With Tauros right in front of it, unable to move due to Giga Impact.

"…Bash now!"

And with Elwood done giving a command, which turned out to not be cursing.

It was actually the move Skull Bash.

"Skull Bash is a move used to increase defense before attacking." The Pokédex observed as Venusaur shimmered, before slamming its head right into Tauros.

The wild bull Pokémon was sent stammering back from the blow.

"Now let's even this us, Sludge Bomb!" Elwood shouted as the inside of Venusar's flower glowed a sickly purple.

Tauros was still immobile, he’d have to practice more in the future with non-flying Giga Impact users. In the meantime though….

"Servine!" His call was met by a speeding green grass-type, who charged at Venusaur.

"Saur!" Venusaur shouted as it was just about to fire, only for Servine to run past it.

With a glowing green tail, powered by the force of Leaf Blade.

Venusaur promptly collapsed.

"No," Elwood said quietly as the twins accepted defeat.

"Great job!" Ash shouted to his Pokémon, a call Pikachu echoed as Tauros mooed in content. Servine merely nodded.

He approached his opponents as they returned their Pokémon with consolations for doing well and held out his hand.

"You wouldn't have won if you didn't win that tournament." Aideen took his hand while making a playful jab. Not serious in a 'Georgia losing to a non-Dragon' way, but in a playful tone.

"I don't know, I do have a Charizard, and a Goodra, and a..."

"A what?" Elwood questioned as Aideen retracted her hand, wincing a bit before holding it up to Ash.

"Ouch. Were you playing in sand before this?" she complained.

"Huh?" Ash asked as she held her hand up. Indeed, little sand like crystals were embodied in it, much as one would get with a palm into the sand.
However it wasn't the color of sand. It was instead green.

"Sis, sand isn't green," Elwood noted.

"Green sand feels like regular sand," she retorted.

"Sorry….honestly I don't know where that came from. Though if I have to be honest, something like that actually did happen before." The twins looked at him oddly as he continued.

"Right after I battled Lilo, my hand was also covered in sand. It was brown though, more look dirt than sand."

"Interesting," Elwood noted, before his gaze turned pointedly to the Z-Ring.

"And both of those, had a Z-Ring involved."

"A ring that makes sand huh….how interesting. A man of mystery behind the veneer of a loveable fool," Aideen teased. "Still though, please check for sand before you give people handshakes or hugs next time, would ya? What if I had been Serena and you hugged her with that sandy hand?" Aideen said in complete seriousness.

"Well if it had been Serena, I am quite sure she would not have been as furious, and would probably sound more surprised and physically hurt," Elwood snarked, before he rose a curious eyebrow.

"Have you been working out?" he randomly asked Ash, as Aideen looked at Ash inquisitively.

"You do seem a bit more muscular….you've always been more than him but you seem more so…." She jabbed at her brother a bit with that as Ash smiled.

"It's a long story, but I've been training myself too. It's sort of a new thing."

"Somewhere in Kalos Serena smiles, and she knows not why." Aideen grinned.

---

**Kalos**

Despite the cliché that she would in fact be smiling, Serena was not.

No one smiled in line at a pharmacy after all.

---

**Kanto again, sometime later**

"Thanks again for the advice, Professor." Ash finished his call with the Professor. Before him, the five Pokémon he had on hand waited patiently as Ash gave them a confident grin.

"Alright, now that Iris is done with having me climb trees, let's try getting to five moves again." Ash tried not to look behind him, where the tree she had him climb stood in the distance.

He liked climbing trees, but trees that were a hundred feet tall were a bit much even for him.

The view was amazing up there, but it was not worth the trip.

The five Pokémon, the same as his earlier attempt save for Charizard (who had pretty much figured it
out and was currently back at the Professor's practicing on larger subjects. According to the Professor, Gary's Golem had probably given consent first), nodded as Ash threw up the sixth Pokéball he had on him today, releasing the Pokémon within for the following lesson.

"Now that I know better what to try and work with you guys on than whatever move we randomly want to try, I should be able to give better advice. In case I'm not enough, I have an expert with me today."

At Ash's compliment, Krabby bowed, before holding his pincers into the air.

From each flew a stream of bubbles. Bubblebeam.

Then Krabby held both claws forward as they glowed in a metallic sheen. Metal Claw.

Krabby struck the ground with them, sending Krabby into the air before crashing back down on the earth with glowing feet. Stomp.

With the landing stuck Krabby pointed each claw fully out, opening them wide as brown shots flew out of each. Mud Shot.

Finally both claws glowed blue with a water like aura around them. Crabhammer.

At this final display Krabby bowed once more, leading to Pikachu, Butterfree, Pidgeot, and Ambipom giving cheers to the River Crab Pokémon.

Servine merely rolled her eyes at the display, even as she couldn't help a grin form on her face.

And so an hour of work passed by once more, with more training with two instructors and one occasionally commenting Pokédex with the goal of breaking through the four move ceiling.

"Gooooo!" Pidgeot yelled as one did when attacking, as two orbs of blue light gathered under her wing, before she flapped them intensely.

The blue air flew through the forest before her, shaking many leaves from trees, snapping branches, and sending a flock of Spearow flying away in the opposite direction.

"Awesome Pidgeot! That looked like Air Slash!" Ash told the flying type in amazement, who nodded in agreement.

"Yes, yes it was. However my scans show that it had evolved from Gust. Her move set is still only four moves," the Pokédex declared from a stump. Pidgeot promptly slumped over in shame.

"It's still good work," Ash reassured her.

"Geot." 'It wasn't the work I wanted though…'

"Back at it again huh?"

Ash's attention was drawn away from Pidgeot's self-induced shame as Misty called his way. She, along with Iris and Anabel, had arrived.

Anabel was panting and Iris seemed slightly sweaty (compared to Anabel's very sweaty). If he'd have to guess, Iris had been having Anabel running.

Misty seemed to have simply wandered over without taking a lengthy detour at full gallop, so to speak.
"Yeah, I thought it would be a good idea to try it. It'll take a while before we can get to Cinnabar, and I'd like to be ready for it," Ash explained.

"Cinnabar is a Fire-Type Gym. Wouldn't it make sense to be working more with Squirtle or that Rocky Roll…?"

"Roggenrola," Iris pronounced.

'It is probably…..likely that the Gym Leader…..knows how to counter….best to have…..other options…..' Anabel even sounded winded in her thoughts.

"Ash was working with them yesterday. You cannot train nonstop. There is a reason I do not have you all do too much at once, and never for too long."

Misty blushed in embarrassment for forgetting those things, though he swore there was also some hint of a terror induced paling going on with her.

Ash suspected that there was a 'wait, this is her going easy on us' sort of thing going on about it.

That was somewhat terrifying if he had to be honest. This wasn't her doing the equivalent of plowing a field with their hands while wearing one-hundred pound weights?

"You know, I must admit a quandary," the Pokédex spoke up as Anabel telekinetically pulled a water bottle from his bag and began chugging it.

"A what?" Iris demanded in confusion.

"I think it's a way of saying 'I have a question' while sounding smarter," Misty offered.

That did sound about right.

"It is a generally accepted fact that Pokémon under the direction and care of humans are more able to pass the four move limit than wild Pokémon. Outside of a Legendary Pokémon, you will rarely see such a Pokémon without human influence."

"My grandfather said something about that once." Iris concurred with the Pokédex's statement.

"...I'll pretend I understand the context of that statement. Regardless of context, what I am curious of is….what of those who are something in between?"

Ash exchanged curious looks with Misty, Anabel, and Iris, expecting an answer. He only got back confused looks in turn.

"Good question," was all that Iris had to say on it.

...

"Ser…." Servine noted the conversation that was ongoing with some annoyance.

'Great, now we're going to be down an instructor as he tries to figure that out'.

She stepped to the side of Pikachu, whose continued attempt to electrify himself when attacking led to him tripping on his feet and dislodging several dozen grass stems.

Damn machine.
The good idea that had followed was not the result of the Pokédex having an idea again.

It was his own actually, trying to double up when possible. After all if one of them had a breakthrough, they could help the other.

After all, Lucario could do a lot of things beyond punching stuff.

'Now if I...if I had to guess, Psychic is basically a more powerful Conf...' Anabel was still exhausted, and cringed as she shifted in her exhaustion.

It was not helping her explain how to move things with your mind, which Ash had to admit would be neat.

Even if it wasn't the best help for her. Confusion would probably just be replaced by Psychic, not really the point of the lessons.

'You know what....I feel too sweaty to focus.....' Anabel declared as Ash was about to tell her he could come back later after she breathed a bit.

What he wasn't expecting was for Anabel's shirt to glow blue, and the buttons to be undone. Said shirt fell off her body, the white being notably damp with sweat.

Now only clad on top in a purple bra, Anabel took a much more relaxed breath.

'Better....'

Her eye glanced over his way, where she noticed him blushing madly. A red hue came over her face as well, but not as much.

'What, you saw a lot more of Iris,' she told him simply.

"Yes, well, it's still...well a lot." He stammered as he tried not to look too much, though what he did see was still nice.

More traditionally female than Iris, but less curved than Misty. Pale, but in a nice way, not in a 'let me out of this cave' way.

Still, she was breathing heavily the rise and fall of her chest didn't do anything to help Ash's concentration. Neither did the fact that she was still a bit winded in her thoughts. Just getting rid of a sweat logged shirt wasn't alone in what she needed.

She needed something more, like Chansey. Something to make her feel better, and re-energize her after a lot of running and being thrust right into more work.

Before he could even begin to think about getting Chansey in here, he felt a surge of warm energy cover his hands.

Ash stared down at his hands, which were now glowing green and radiating waves of energy off them.

Um....did he suddenly become radioactive? That couldn't be good.

Concerns about his ability to be undetected by Geiger counters were dashed as he heard Anabel's breath become less ragged.
'That….that feels nice. Real nice….' she told him in a relaxed voice as Ash looked at his hands in surprise.

"Hey Anabel, is there some sort of move that heals that isn't Softboiled?" He struggled to remember as she spoke up.

'It's Heal Pulse. A Psychic move actually…how are you doing it?'

"I…honestly don't know," Ash told her as the healing energy continued to radiate out of his hands.

'Well however you did it, it is really making me feel better. Come closer,' she asked as he stepped closer to her.

He was asked to do so a few more times before he was basically right next to her.

'Try it directly,' she told him. Nervously he slowly moved his hands forward, close to her bare shoulders.

He lightly pressed his hands against them, as Anabel began radiating a calm feeling. He was pretty sure his mom would call it a calm vibe, whatever that was.

Her breathing was basically back to normal at this point, as his glowing hands rested on her shoulders.

'You know, I can actually sort of feel how the energy flows with this. Keep it like this, and I think I'll get it,' she told him as the healing hands continued to do their thing on her.

Ash kept looking ahead, trying not to look down. He might only be able to see the top tufts of her hair, but looking down at Anabel would have him looking right down at…..

Only now did he realize the benefits of Iris's face being pretty much at his eye level. Even when showering.

'I can't believe I'm still getting this tired from working with Iris. None of you guys are like that at all,' she mused quietly after a moment of healing.

"Well, I'm not exactly skipping around after she makes me climb giant trees or run from one of my Tauros, even with Chansey on standby to make it so I can definitely walk afterwards," Ash told her kindly, "Plus, we've all been doing this a lot longer. Iris and Misty have been traveling for a lot longer than you and me, and I did sports in school"

'I mean, I told you already I really do like the feeling of being stronger. Feeling more fit….but having to play catch up is just…..' She stopped from completing her words as Ash tried to send the most warm possible thoughts her way. She seemed to picking them up at any case, as she inclined to look his way as he spoke.

"You might not be the strongest in body, but who else can help me prepare for battles? Iris and her Pokémon may be strong, but you've got a pretty good mind for battle strategies. If you weren't here, how'd I prepare for people with strategies that aren't just 'attack'?"

'That didn't help you with Janine. She was steps ahead of us,' Anabel moped.

"Well if it wasn't for your ideas, she'd have been even more steps ahead of me," Ash told her confidently. It was true after all.
"Anabel, you could easily be a Trainer if you wanted to be. You could get any badge you wanted, and you'd give me some really great fights whenever we met up."

He could tell her that quite confidently, after all he did have a nice Ability Symbol that was proof of that.

At least before Cyrus.

'You say that so confidently,' Anabel mused, and again Ash was glad she didn't try to get to the center of his mind.

What was there would be somewhat confusing after all, and more and more….irrelevant.

For as many things were similar, even more were different. The Eevee brothers were more complicated, Iris didn't call him a kid, Team Rocket didn't call him a twerp, and he had siblings up the wazoo.

Whatever a wazoo was.

"Because I know it's true. All I know is that one day, Misty might decide that she can be as good a Gym Leader as her grandmother was, get the Cerulean Gym back from her sisters and take it back to its former glory. It may not be her primary dream, but it is something she wouldn't mind doing and I think she'd be really happy to do it one day. And if that happens, I'd want to win a real Cascade Badge. If I was to do that though, I'd need someone really good to practice with for that day, and I know that person already," he told her truthfully as Anabel gave him a massive smile.

'That does sound nice,' she stated as her own hands flared up with the glow of Heal Pulse.

Clearly when you couldn't explain how you did something, let a person feel what it was like and they'd figure it out themselves.

Anabel looked at her hand in amazement, before lightly touching her bare stomach with it.

She left it there for a curious second before removing it, before turning around to Ash and placing it on his chest.

The moment she did so, a feeling of distilled warmth swamped his entire being.

'Interesting, it doesn't work on ourselves, only on others,' Anabel observed as the mutual healing continued.

"Well good thing then, if both us are hurt together we'll both be fine, even without Chansey," Ash told Anabel who nodded in agreement.

"So what about it Anabel? You ever think about trying for a League? It wouldn't be that hard at all to teleport around to get the badges you need, and I'd love another rival. There is hardly any reason only I'm allowed to try for badges among us," Ash declared as Anabel shook her head.

'I'm not good enough at pretending I'm not telepathic for that. I could do hand signals, but I'm pretty sure I'd be found out and I'd rather not cause you trouble. Plus, I'm not sure I'd really do that well in a League. All the shifting Pokémon possibilities, all aiming to a single spot….I'd rather do something where everyone just goes as far as they can without stopping anyone else from continuing. Something they could go up on without having to wait for a year to do again, all because of a bad call or a slip up.'
"So what, like every battle you win puts you up higher and higher until you can't go farther, like some sort of climbing tower?" Ash tried to understand what Anabel meant as she nodded.

'Yeah, something like that. A Battle Tower with the only rules being to go as high as you can....I think it sounds fun.'

It probably would be.

....

In the background he could hear Pikachu curse over another grass fire, which Psyduck put out with some grumbling about it being the third time.

But that wasn't what he was really focusing on right now.

What he was focusing on....

Was his hand, which was throbbing with the feeling one would get when they backhanded a tree.

While the source of said throbbing was more of a karate chop to a tree than a backhand, Ash had a lot more history of accidental slapping of trees than attempting to slash them down like an action movie, so that was what he'd compare his pain to.

Iris, who was standing beside him as he held his hurt hand, frowned as she held up her own, which shimmered green.

She then slammed it into the tree, carving a deep cut into it that any lumberjack would look at in envy.

"I have to say....this is odd. You should be able to do it, the machine is many things but wrong is not normally one of them." She took his right hand into her hands as she looked at it closely.

The feeling of Iris holding his hand was.....interesting, Ash had to admit. He didn't have a catalogue of 'what my friend's hands feel like' in his mind, and the only one who probably remembered that in great detail was Brock, and with him it would be for the female gender only.

Brock would probably give a soliloquy about how the hand of a Nurse Joy in Kanto felt different from a Sinnoh living Joy, but if asked about how the hand of Crasher Wake compared to Roark he'd have nothing to say on the subject.

Iris's hands felt worn, calloused by countless little things in her life and made to better grasp onto the wilderness without slipping.

"You were doing it right," she noted as she looked him right in the eye.

"I know how to hit things," Ash simply said.

"I said this about Goomy a while ago, Dragon-Types, and their moves, are powerful, but require a lot of it, and will, to push through. Will is not what you seem to be having issue with," she mused as Ash panicked a bit.

If it was power, did that meant crazier training? Harsher training?

Was he going to have to wrestle his Tauros next?

"Not sure what we can do about that now. It might work better if you have more practice with your
abilities. I think you said before that you never really used yours until you left home, so time might give the power needed," Iris theorized as Ash felt an internal panic recede away.

Time, time he could do. No Tauros wrestling!

"You said something about leaving home to become a Pokémon Master, right?" Iris suddenly asked. Behind them Pikachu was running about, Emolga clinging to his back and using Discharge as she did so. How that would recreate Volt Tackle was beyond Ash, but never mind that.

"I probably did at some point," Ash agreed.

"What will you do when you are one?" she asked with a bit of slyness to her tone, which was unusual for her.

"I'll figure that out when I'm one," Ash told her. At Iris's confused look he continued.

"Being a Pokémon Master isn't something solid. No one is ever is handed a diploma saying 'you are a Pokémon Master, you get to board planes early and get discounts at select restaurants. Honestly from what I've been told you are a Pokémon Master when people not only call you one, but when you think you're one."

"So…..it is nothing?" Iris surmised as Ash shrugged.

"It is nothing, yet something. At least that is what Professor Oak would call it. I have no idea what I'd call it, because calling something nothing but something is kind of pretentious sounding."

"How can something be nothing and something at the same time?" Iris questioned.

"I'm sure science has a reason," Ash joked as Iris looked at him with a ponderous expression. Oddly the same one she gave his muscles under the waterfall. It was still a bit unnerving but not as much as it had been the first time.

"So what you want to do with yourself in the future is flexible. Very flexible."

"I guess….." Ash wasn't sure what she was getting at.

Iris's smile was starting to worry him. For some reason, it wasn't giving him the impression she wanted him to be able to touch his toes?

Could he do that?

....

He could, he checked.

But ignoring that feat, he and Misty were trying to pull off an entirely different one. The creation of Water Pulse.

"Hrrahhhh!"

It was not going well, for either of them.

Ash dropped the stance he was trying, given it was looking more like he was trying for a hadoken than Water Pulse, as Misty looked at her hands in frustration.
"Why isn't it working?" she growled as she again tried to concentrate on forming the move both of them were able to use.

Nothing happened, as Misty held her hands out and glared at them. However for all her glaring, no water sphere followed.

For either of them really, Ash had followed all of Misty's advice when it came to gathering water, yet his hands didn't even feel wet for the effort.

Not even sweat. That was more on his head and armpits, and neither could generate Water Pulse without looking really weird.

The sound of crackling electricity behind the two drew their attention briefly to Pikachu, who was standing proudly, arms crossed, as an electrical aura surrounded him with rough sparks all around it.

Emolga stood beside him, looking on with admiring eyes.

It was a nice move, but Ash wasn't sure that was Volt Tackle. It seemed a bit off, the electricity was more wild and spiking around him, while Pikachu in the aura seemed off in color.

Volt Tackle had Pikachu in a black and white color, while this one felt more gold and white.

"Pikachu has successfully learned a fifth move. Pikachu has learned Wild Charge," the Pokédex declared. Pikachu had an odd look on his face at the declaration of learning the other electrical recoil move.

However his attention was drawn from his partner's reaction to relearning the wrong move to Misty, who was glaring at her hands in annoyance.

"What's going on? I should know how to do this….I make giant whirlpools and waves whenever I want. How's a throwing sphere any different?"

Ash wasn't sure how they might be beyond scale, but he'd try and come up with something.

"Well, how did you learn those moves? Maybe that would help you out," Ash suggested as Misty looked at her hands with a thoughtful, reminiscing look.

"Well, I needed to know them, so I figured it out."

"Got any more context?" Ash inquired as Misty frowned.

"Well, I learned Waterfall because it was either that or hit the rocky bottom of one."

Ash looked at her, quite literally feeling concern change his facial features by the moment.

"I'm fine, obviously," Misty reassured him, a part of her was pleased to see the concern in his eyes.

"….Come to think of it, that's kind of how it works for me most of the time too." At Misty's confused and concerned look, he quickly added that he did not mean 'falling down waterfalls into rocky, painful death'.

"I seem to learn best either by accident or because I need to learn it. Getting attacked by Spearow, running on a treadmill too much, Anabel being really tired and needing some energy…I mean I can learn to do moves without it, but they definitely come easier."

"So, you're saying this would come easier if we were in a moment we'd really need it? I guess it
makes sense, but not sure how much that helps me out," Misty admitted.

"We can probably think of something. Maybe Iris had some ideas…" 

"No." Misty cut him off before he could continue down that train of thought. "As much as I really would prefer not running miles up hills, the only thing that harms is my shoe soles. Do you want her trying to get us to really want water to throw? She's liable to start setting things on fire!"

Or get Charizard to set things on fire for the same purpose, but that….wasn't entirely impossible. Probably best to avoid any well intentioned forest fires.

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*Celadon Battle Club*

Gary had a grin the entire time the room was alight with blue light.

The light faded as the Don George nodded, shortly before the massive tongue of Arcanine licked Gary's face.

"Well, that'll do it. My patented 50 Trainer Challenge, formerly because of Erika but now just being there' is complete. You were the first to pass it of all who have tried it, and you've been rewarded as such!" the Don declared as holograms sprung up all around Gary of all the other Pokémon bar his new Arcanine he had used to accomplish it.


Above all of them was a bold font of 'Congradulations!'

Gary stared at the spelling for a moment, before turning to Don George.

"You misspelled it. It's cong*ratulations" Gary emphasized as the Don George blushed.

"Oh….well that's embarrassing. Hey….promise you won't say anything and I'll pop you over to a new town. I've got an Abra, and my brother over in Gardenia runs a pretty good training run himself."

Gary nodded as Arcanine barked in agreement.

After all the thinking he did, Gary had come to a conclusion.

He needed to fix what was wrong with him, and the best way to do that was practice battling.

Battle more, battle harder, battle longer. With everyone.

If he wanted to feel good, to really win an eighth badge, he had to push himself and his team farther and harder.

He needed to be sharper, faster thinking just as they needed to hit harder, move faster, and take more hits.

That eighth badge would be properly won!

A teleport later found Gary staring at a battle in progress as his Don George greeted another Don
George and engaged in the traditional Don George muscular handshake.

Said battle had four defeated Pokémon on one side and a fifth one struggling to hold on, and four returned Pokémon on the other and a fifth one dominating.

Said returned Pokémon being a Magikarp (as there was a pool in the center of the battlefield), a Magnemite, a Lickitung, and a Shellder, with a small red Pokémon breathing fire on the other side's Pidgeotto.

"Magby, a Baby Pokémon that evolves into Magmar. Magby drips magma from within itself when sick, which creates severe home damage. They are not good pets," Gary's Pokédex informed him as the Pidgeotto was knocked out.

The winner smirked as Gary's skin crawled and anger swept through Gary, particularly as he saw the total number of badges displayed for both.

Five versus one.

The moment the owner of the five badges walked out, Gary was on him.

"You must feel so proud of yourself, beating up on some noob. I'm frankly amazed the kid even had a Pidgeotto, I'd have sooner guessed a Pidgey," Gary snapped.

Paul rolled his eyes at his response before giving him a response that sounded like his gramps explaining something to Ash back in his denser period.

(Seriously, a nine-year-old Ash was not a smart Ash. He grew out of it but sheesh….)

"If I wanted to knock that kid around for my amusement, I'd have used Torterra. You see, that was me training newer Pokémon that aren't quite up to snuff right now. I'd figure the Magikarp I was using would be proof enough of that, I'm hardly a member of the B-Button League, that's more of Ketchum's thing."

That would explain why there had been no Thunderstone action on Ash's end, but Gary was fairly certain something else was up with that.

"Of course, I haven't been slacking off with Torterra either," Paul stated simply.

"Well I haven't been slacking off either," Gary declared as Paul looked at his Arcanine.

"…..A waste of a stone," was his comment as Arcanine snarled.

"This 'waste of a stone' helped me win a Rainbow Badge!" Gary declared as Paul's eye twitched.

"Well, good for you then. Now you have six badges and a 'you entered the building' badge. As for me, I plan to take that badge last. It'll be sweeter that way."

"Well as someone who does have the badge, allow me to show you what you'll need to win it. Right here, right now!" Gary declared as Paul eyed both him and Arcanine, who was still growling.

"You've both battled today, as have I. While I would beat you, it would give you the ability to write off your loss as being tired, and I'd hate to allow you to lie to yourself that easily. Tomorrow will work much better."

"You scared?"
"I'm smart, you're just well read. Bring your six best Pokémon at nine o clock, here." Paul turned before walking away, leaving Gary and Arcanine glaring at his retreating back.

"That just gives me more time to plan on how I'm going to beat you, jackass!"

It was perfect really. What better way to really tell himself 'Gary, you've gotten out of the rut and once Indigo runs around you can take on Ash and Red' than by wiping the floor with the jerk.

"So Arcanine, you up for wiping his clock?" Gary asked his newest evolved Pokémon. Arcanine answered with a lick to the face.

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**On the beaten path again**

Ash threw the Moon Ball up.

He caught it.

He threw the ball back up.

He caught it again.

"So if I used it on a Nidoran, it would still be more effective even though it's their evolved forms that evolve with a Moon Stone?" He checked with the device, who was currently sitting on a nearby stump.

"Correct. That stone is functional with a small range of Pokémon, including Jigglypuff, Clefairy, and Munna. The Yellow Apricorn the ball is made from has a notable connection to moon originating X-rays, not to be confused with the X-rays used in medical facilities, which creates the effect. Despite this effect, I have managed duplication of the ball, so you will in theory have limitless ability to capture one of these Pokémon for my data collection."

Neat, but Ash wasn't sure that would happen. He didn't just throw balls at every random thing around him. Plus, he didn't run into those Pokémon as often as one would think.

Outside of May's Skitty, the only frequent Pokémon that he dealt with that used a Moon Stone to evolve was Jigglypuff, and they'd been free from Jigglypuff's insidious songs since Hoenn….

"Jiggly!"

The dreaded squeak caused Ash to flail in horror, arms flailing wildly as the round terror jumped onto a nearby stump, a marker already in hand.

No no no, no no no, no!

No!

They hadn't even been near Neon Town yet.

No!

Where had it gotten….

No!
Ash plugged his ears, closed his eyes, and tried to drown out any noise that could possibly occur with the deathtaking shouting of his mind.

If people had an inner eye, did they have an inner ear? If so he'd scream into it random thoughts to drown out Jigglypuff and be spared.

His dreams of being a Pokémon master!

The horror of Brock's parents being dead!

His mother's cooking!

The sight of Iris naked….not sure how he exactly shouted those things in his head, but he had to drown out Jigglypuff's song somehow.

After five minutes, he sighed in relief.

No slumber.

No face doodle.

He was alright!

"Pikapi...." ‘Ash....’ Pikachu broke through his sound deflection attempt, as if it wasn't even effective, sounding like he had just done something horrifying.

Ash slowly opened his eyes, wondering what he could have possibly done to get Pikachu to sound that worried.

Did thinking to hear the sound of visual things make reality explode again?

When his eyes did widen in full, he saw what Pikachu was worried about.

And gaped in horror for what stood before him.

A vanishing Moon Ball, and no Jigglypuff.

"In your surprisingly terrified reaction, you flung the Moon Ball. In doing so, you have captured a Jigglypuff! Jigglypuff, a Balloon Pokémon, is able to float above the ground and move about via large air sacs within its body. Jigglypuff songs differ from region to region in flavor….and interestingly this Jigglypuff is rather fascinating."

"How...." Ash weakly asked as the Pokédex continued.

"It suffers from a condition affecting its Sing attack, which does not form as a series of musical notes that knock out on contact, but carrying the effect in general soundwaves. Such Jigglypuff are considerably more dangerous than the rest of their kind to people in general, and have caused car pileups in the past."

Ash was pretty sure that many Pokémon sang without creating musical notes that contained the effects, though then a lot of them that did so that way popped up at about the same time….

Cyrus? Not sure why'd he change Sing of all things…was it just more logical?

"This Jigglypuff is female, and knows Sing, Double Slap, Stockpile, and Disarming Voice. It is now
at Professor Oak's laboratory, in case that was not obvious."

Jigglypuff was a girl? He was sure it was a boy….

Pikachu noted his confused face, and pieced it together quickly. His partner then looked at him strangely for assuming such a thing.

**Meanwhile at Professor's Oak ranch…..**

"Huh, a Jigglypuff? I must say, that was not what I was expecting to receive from Ash…..wait Bulbasaur, why are you running?"

The Professor stared at Ash's Grass-type, which had suddenly darted away into the research fields and far away from him and Ash's new Pokémon.

"Well, that was rude of him….." Was the last word the Professor said as the pink balloon began to sing, and he knew only the embrace of dreams.

Meanwhile in every corner he could find fellow Pokémon of the two-timeline club, Bulbasaur gave the dire warning.

A few questioned the legitimacy of it, but when two Tauros returned with marker eyepatches and sideburns they learned the wisdom to beware the song of Jigglypuff.

**Later**

"It was a bit of a walk to get there, but I think that cliff was good work for the both of us," Iris declared as Ash held his hands out, possibly trying to get back feeling in them.

It was nice to see that her efforts were paying off. Ash, already doing well for himself, was doing better for himself. Everyone was.

It was reassuring. Janine was enough of a wake up call, but if she had to be honest with herself, she had reason to do so earlier with them.

The Gringy City episode for one, and before that J.

Just…J.

Iris felt a snarl form on her face as she remembered that woman. When she ever would see that foul woman again, she would be dealt with.

"Iris, are you okay?" Ash asked in concern, Pikachu edging away from her. Clearly they could see her teeth and were concerned, unless she had started outright hissing.

"Just thinking," she stated simply.

Their walk, as Iris saw no reason to make it into a jog after scaling a cliff, passed by an open area where several other Trainers were gathering. Iris didn't pay them much thought, she had other things to think about.

...
"Believe me, I am trying to make this effective. That does not involve me trying to kill you." Iris told Misty a few days ago, a mound of acorns at her side.

"What is effective about throwing acorns at me!?" Misty demanded.

"I told you I was going to do it."

"That doesn't make it better! Look, I get that you got rattled by a ninja, but that doesn't mean you can...."

"The shadow girl," Iris simply said as Misty stopped complaining.

"It is not just Janine. We have run into threats before, and I expect to see more. You are my friend, I want you to live," Iris told Misty honestly as her annoyance at her dimmed.

It came back a bit as the acorns were thrown with the clear instruction to start deflecting them, at least until she remembered about Whirlpool.

Iris watched in confusion as Misty promptly began slapping herself in the head for some reason before picking another acorn from her pile and throwing it.

...

"Curses!" Iris heard someone shout in frustration, breaking her from her thoughts as Ash stopped. He appeared to recognize the person shouting it. Was it the one in armor?

"Heh, you should know better than to use Bug Pokémon. A Bug Pokémon can never win anything after a while. How many badges did you say you have?" another voice questioned, a tone of superiority and arrogance to it.

Iris did not like it.

"Three! I just won a third badge, where my Paras and Pinsir were invaluable...."

"Well I have four!"

Iris would have just walked away, having no need to deal with whoever was making that racket, when she caught sight of Ash.

She might have had the same surprised look on her face as Pikachu, as Ash had a look of anger on his face.

Perhaps fury.

It was not aimed at the armored bug user, and he began marching over to the Trainers like a unrelenting force.

Iris followed, unsure of what was going on.

What she did notice when they did arrive at the group, was something she had never seen before.

A Shiny Human!

At least, that was probably why the human seemed unusually pale, even among the lighter pigmented. The possibly Shiny Human looked at their arrival and had a nasty look on his face that
was something between arrogance and anger.

"Well well well, if it isn't Ketchum. It's been a while."

"Joshua," Ash growled. Iris noted said growl with surprise, Ash didn't take that tone with most, honestly the last time she heard it was in dealing with Paul.

It couldn't just be the arrogance of Joshua the Shiny Human. Something else was at play...did Ash ever mention a Joshua before?

"So, you actually made it this far? I was sure after failing that old coots little playtime that you would have cried back home before you even got to Pewter. Or did you aim to go there, but just got lost? Can't say that's not a possibility too."

"This human placed second behind Gary Oak," the Pokédex beeped from Ash's jacket pocket, causing Joshua to stare dumbfounded.

"You? Second best, only losing to that twat?"

"Unlike some people, I can study even if it makes me want to stab my eyes out," Ash declared back in a cold tone.

It was starting to all come back to Iris, Ash mentioned a kid named Joshua in relation to how he got the Pokédex and something called a Summer Camp, which was also related to those twins he knew.

She was missing something though....

"Well, so you somehow did. Proof the old man was on something I'd say. Still...." His gaze turned towards her, and Iris felt an odd feeling of nausea as he looked her over for a moment.

Misty had said something about 'checking you out' at one point. She was rather sure Ash did that once or twice while showering, though he seemed to be trying not to. A complexity of some sort she suspected.

The idea of that, even if not by Ash, didn't bother her. It was something else in what this Joshua was doing as he looked her over that was bothering her. There was something in his eyes that made her instincts give out a low level of warning, not saying there was any real danger but there was definitely something to be aware of.

'So this is the new Serena? Bit hard to top Kalosian eye candy, and I doubt she'd mess up Rhyhorn as badly, but really, even you could do better. You reach a point where height becomes too much, and this girl has long passed it."

Insulting her because of her height? Iris did not follow, though now with that comment the missing piece of memory came up as to why Ash was so angry jogged her memory.

Serena, as she recalled, was a friend Ash had made at the Summer Camp. They had been very good friends, which for some reason bothered Misty (did she think Serena would want to be Ash's mate too?), then Joshua had been responsible for getting her kicked out when she lied to protect Ash.

That would explain why Ash was acting the way he was, as he had with Paul the first time she had seen him.

Ash was looking even angrier now, and now Pikachu was sparking as well.
"Now, do be a good twerp and tell me how many badges you have? Don't be shy, I'm sure even Serena would understand why wouldn't have any….

Ash shut him up by ripping his jacket open, revealing his five badges pinned to the inside of said jacket, and also the muscles that Iris had been helping further develop.

The Shiny Human became even paler as he breathed five repeatedly, and he also seemed a tad perturbed by the musculature of Ash.

He muttered something about him 'not having that much before', which made Iris feel a bit prideful. After all, she was the one who'd been working with him to add more.

Not that she would say all the change since he met the Shiny one was her doing.

"…How on earth did you get five badges…and from Celadon of all places!? What, did you have to disguise yourself in drag and let her feel you up to that get one!?" Joshua demanded as Ash pointed a Pokéball right in his face.

"Why don't I show you how I got it?" Ash declared as the crowd of Trainers stepped back, which Iris took to doing as well.

Joshua, to his credit, did not try and get out of it, but took a Pokéball out himself.

"I'm going to expose you, right here and now! I'm going to go all out!"

"Defeat him for the honor of all Bug-Pokémon, and also myself!" The armored one cheered for Ash, before muttering something about it feeling odd to cheer for Ash.

Did he also have history with Ash?

He cheered even louder when Butterfree was sent out to face an Arbok, Joshua dropping a few Pokéballs that were locked at his feet. Perhaps they were the ones used earlier.

She was pretty sure all out meant 'six on six'.

As the battle started Iris noted that Ash, again, was suffering from the same level of anger that was present in his first battle with Paul.

Though unlike that battle, which had its anger fed by the loss of a Primeape, possibly to death, by Paul, this was fueled by something more dormant, and older.

The Serena incident, specifically. A simple act of fate that separated two friends, and all that could have led to.

Perhaps a possible companion, and one capable of the rare skill that Humans shared with few Pokémon species, the ability to cook. An admirable skill, and one that even Misty, for all her odd bother at the idea of Serena being around, admitted to wishing to have around.

Perhaps a possible additional mate, with all that could lead too. Would she handle it differently than Misty had?

Would she respond to her training better, or worse?

As Arbok was defeated and the battle became one of Pidgeot against Onix, which required a few steps back by all watchers and someone to drag the cheering armored one back as he called for the glory to the Bug Pokémon lest a large tail of stone strike them by mistake, Iris couldn't help but
notice a difference between the two fights Ash had fueled by anger.

In that fight, Ash's anger had caused him to not be as effective in his commands and calls, and that had made the battle swing a bit in Paul's favor before Misty snapped him out of it.

Here….while she could tell that Ash wasn't at the top of his game, again due to anger, Joshua simply wasn't as innately skilled as Paul.

So while Ash would probably look back at the fight and wince at missed openings, or sloppy calls like the one that led Onix to headbutt Pidgeot after an Air Slash missed, the battle would still go Ash's way.

The Steel Wing knock out was proof of that.

As the battle became Raticate against Pikachu, following three bouts in between of a Tauros against Magnemite, Squirtle against Dugtrio, and Muk against Nidorino (all wins by Ash), Iris made a note of herself to add something else to Ash's training.

Ways to control these episodes of anger, or at least how to channel it better.

While infrequent, and always with a stressor or cause that was reasonable….it was something that had to be worked on.

From what Ash had said of his confrontation with Belladonna, as well as how his argument with Red had gone, Iris suspected it was a nature thing, not a nurture. That would be harder to work on, but it had to be done.

Because it wasn't going away, and it needed to be worked on before it came at a time where Misty could not talk him out of it, or when the cause of it was unable to be defeated as easily.

It was a problem that even Ash seemed unfamiliar with having, as if he didn't have such things to induce anger in him before his journey, and he needed help with it.

More than just because it was a problematic trait that was more her brother's than her own. More than just the idea that it would be a mark against him being a good mate.

(It was bad sure, but she was not looking for perfection)

It wasn't even out of some concern that it could turn against someone who did not earn it. It was simply for the benefit of Ash's health and wellbeing to help him deal with it himself when it came up.

She was still gathering what human and human culture valued in mates, but caring for the others well-being beyond the physical needs of food and such was a big part of what she had noticed. It wasn't something she could rest on her laurels about, just like the risk of Ash or any of her friends being harmed by some sneaky threat.

The Wild Charge from Pikachu took the battle, and Iris ran to Ash and gave him congratulations, which seemed to calm him down in combination with winning.

….Though come to think of it, she probably should have tried calming him down earlier. Was that the wrong call?

Chapter End Notes
And, yet again I see myself in the need to cut a chapter halfway through. Sorry about that, really. But you'll really, REALLY need the breather for what’s to come after this little break.
On the same day less than a year ago, two trainers left their native home of Pallet Town and sought out the world.

Gary Oak and Ash Ketchum.

In doing so they had both traveled across vast lands, met interesting people and Pokémon, and battled opponents they held respect towards.

However there were opponents that they held only contempt for.

Ash was currently battling one, an old foe from just before he left named Joshua Martin. The battle was fueled by personal vendettas, and would not be a test of Ash's merit as a trainer.

Gary however, had an opponent who would be a test of his skills. All of what he had known and learned since he left Pallet Town would be needed to defeat him.

For Paul was a powerful trainer, and not an opponent to take lightly.

... 

"This Six on Six Pokémon Battle will have the following rules. Both sides are allowed full substitution rules, and the battle will be over when one side has no Pokémon able to continue battling. As none of you registered a fully aquatic species for this battle, the Battle Club will not be providing you a pool and the battle will be conducted on a regular battlefield. Any questions?" the Don George who would referee for the match asked.

Gary did not speak, nor did Paul. They were well aware of the rules, and neither had any interest in requesting any additional ones.

No rule about abuse of Sleep Powder. No rules about specific combinations. Not even a request to leave any Legendary Pokémon they (did not) have at home.

This was a match meant to shut the other up, and Gary would be ensuring that Paul would keep his trap shut once and for all.

"Very well, there are no time limits. Begin!"

"Go, Arcanine!" Gary sent his first Pokéball flying.

"Torterra, stand by for battle!" Paul responded in kind, and soon the field had its first Pokémon in play.

On his side Arcanine, who was snarling at Paul for every slight that had been thrown his way since the Tag Tournament.

The other was Paul's Sinnoh starter, who stared stoically. He could hear in the background the scoreboard ping as the first Pokémon in the match appeared. He could also hear the gathered crowd watching from outside, curious to see what the first move would be.
As for his first move, well he'd apologize to Arcanine for this later...

"Return."

Arcanine had only the time to let out a confused yip before he was back inside his Pokeball. This was followed by a confused murmur from the onlookers as he choose his second Pokémon.

"Go!"

Paul watched his Pidgeot's apperance with an unmoving expression before he made his first command.

"Torterra, use Stone Edge!"

Torterra was surrounded by an orbit of stones, which were promptly fired at Pidgeot like a barrage of missiles.

"Block them with Defog!" The reason he made the switch was promptly used, his first captured Pokémon flapping his wings and releasing a blue tinted wind.

The wind deflected the stones, causing them to spin harmlessly in the air before dropping down on the field below like pieces of hail.

The same fate would befall any Stealth Rock that the powerful Pokémon would try to set up. In fact it would go beyond negation, the interaction of the two moves would turn those Stealth Rocks into his own.

It would be Paul taking the damage, not himself. With that sealed all he'd have to do was blast the thing until it...

His planning was interrupted by Paul returning Torterra and sending out a different Pokémon.

"Jynx, standby for battle!"

A second Pokéball burst open, revealing a purple skinned Pokémon with large lips glaring at them.

"Jynx, a Pokémon known for exotic dances and powerful attacks. It's typing is Ice and Psychic," his Pokédex informed him from his pocket.

In that case there was only one thing to do.

"Pidgeot re..."

"Use Mean Look!" Paul cut him off as his Jynx fired black light from her eyes and struck Pidgeot with it.

The light hit before his Pokéball did, and the return laser petered away ineffectually.

The crowd behind the glass murmured in confusion, unsure of what had just happened.

What had happened was Jynx had locked Pidgeot into this battle until one of them, being Jynx or Pidgeot, was no longer present. Either Paul had to return Jynx, or either Jynx or Pidgeot would have to fall.

Jynx being defeated was the option that Gary was going to go for.
"Use Aerial Ace!" Pidgeot flew towards the Ice-type at fast speeds, white wind billowing behind as the attack came in for damage.

"Blizzard!" Paul countered as the Jynx's blonde hair began billowing. Along with said billowing came a blast of freezing cold air, which blew Pidgeot back in a roll.

"Awh, Pidgeot!" he cried out as Paul now had the initiative.

"Psywave!" The Jynx formed a blue energy ring between her two hands and threw it at Pidgeot like a projectile.

The attack struck the spiraling Flying-type, knocking Pidgeot to the ground.

"Pidgeot is unable to battle!" Don George declared. In the corner of his eye he saw Pidgeot's image on the scoreboard turn gray.

He gave Pidgeot some thanks as he returned the bird Pokémon, and looked at the Jynx, and the just as icy master of said Jynx.

This was not over yet. He still had five more Pokémon chomping at the bit to wipe that smirk off their faces.

In fact, he had already shown one of them off.

"Go!" He sent Arcanine back out, who barked in eagerness to actually battle this time.

He could almost see Arcanine's face droop when Paul returned Jynx.

"Nidoking, standby for battle!"

Paul choose his third Pokémon, with the Poison/Ground-type Nidoking now glaring down Arcanine.

Would he return again...

No, Paul seemed prepared for it. Would he be prepared for another action instead?

Even if that action reeked like Ash?

"Extreme Speed!" Arcanine barked happily at the chance to use the new move before rushing at Nidoking with immense speed.

Nidoking gasped in pain as the Legendary Pokémon impacted into his chest like the gentleness of a compact car.

Or something, Gary wasn't sure if that was the best comparison.

Arcanine bounced back from the attack before Nidoking could attempt a counter-attack. His Fire-type almost seemed to be grinning from the feeling of the attack.

"Dragon Rage!" The blue flames erupted out of Arcanine's mouth towards the Poison-type, who glared at the oncoming storm without fear.

"Counter with Bubblebeam!" Paul ordered.

Gary would have assumed he had misheard it if not for the barrage of bubbles the shot forward from Nidoking's mouth. The attack cancelled out the Dragon Rage attack and continued forward towards
Arcanine, who jumped to the side to avoid the Water-type attack.

As the bubbles impacted against the wall, Paul's offensive continued.

"Earth Power!"

Arcanine had to hop over the glowing area of ground before it exploded with power, but that turned out to be a mistake.

Because the hop put Arcanine right in the direct line of fire for Bubblebeam, which struck into his Fire-type with powerful sounding pops.

Arcanine whimpered as he was sent back, even as bubbles stuck to Arcanine's feet like weights. Arcanine was not going to be going anywhere with those stuck to his feet.

He'd have to get rid of them.

"Use Flame Wheel to pop the bubbles!" Gary figured that would work, and he was pleased to see that they did. Moments after Arcanine roared and enveloped himself in flames, the bubbles popped. Arcanine even began charging at Nidoking with the attack, which Gary hadn't actually thought about doing.

His concern was the speed problem, not launching another attack. This would still be a good hit when it landed.

"Poison Jab," Paul declared as Nidoking swung his fist at the approaching Arcanine.

The two attacks, one red and the other purple, collided as the two were driven off.

Each were equally matched, and both glared at each other for a moment...before Arcanine stumbled a bit and gained a purple sheen to his fur.

"Arcanine!" Poison Jab had poisoned him!

Paul smirked as he pointed at Arcanine.

"Venoshock!"

He could not let that move hit.

"Extreme Speed!"

Before Nidoking could even let off the hit Arcanine slammed into him, pushing the Poison-type back and onto the ground with a hard thump. From there he'd capitalize on it.

"Now Body Slam!"

Before Paul could get in a final word in edgewise Arcanine dropped down on Nidoking with his full body weight.

Arcanine hopped off the Pokémon with a wince as poison damage occurred, but the job was done.

"Nidoking is unable to battle!" Don George declared as Nidoking's image went gray.

They were now tied.
"Take a good rest." Gary had Arcanine returned. That poison wasn't going anywhere, and it would be best if he held onto Arcanine for a place where a quick defeat was possible for one of Paul's Pokémon.

Paul leveled a even glare at Nidoking's Pokeball after he returned his Pokémon, before sending out Torterra again.

If he was going to try Stealth Rock again, fine. He had other ways of blocking it.

"Go Alakazam!"

His two spoon wielding Psychic-type had not even been on the solid ground of the field for ten seconds before Paul had a command to give out.

"Stealth Rock!" Paul ordered as the little stones began flying from Torterra with the destination of the battlefield in mind.

"Psychic!" Gary called as his Alakazam held out both spoons.

Each and every Stealth Rock in the sky floated in suspended motion. It was enough to get Paul's eyebrow raised.

If only a bit. Gary felt some satisfaction that he'd managed to do something that Paul didn't seem to expect, even if he didn't show it much.

"Attack!" Gary ordered as each and every Stealth Rock aimed their business ends at Torterra, before flying at the Continent Pokémon with the power of Alakazam's psychic powers.

They impacted into Torterra without any problem. He'd keep up the offensive.

"Shadow Ball!" The dark ball formed between Alakazam's spoons before flying at Torterra.

"Seed Bomb!" Paul countered as Torterra spat out the fast-flying seed.

The two attacks cancelled each other out, meaning there was nothing to protect Alakazam from the seeds that were flying in the aftermath of the first seed.

"Teleport!" Gary ordered as Alakazam vanished from sight. The seeds continued past him, disrupting so much air Gary could feel his clothing and hair ruffled, and slammed into the walls of the Battle Club with a crunching sound.

Alakazam reappeared above Torterra, floating right over Torterra's tree.

A perfect angle.

"Shadow Ball!"

Paul snapped his fingers twice. That didn't seem to mean anything as the Shadow Ball was ready to fire.

It might have meant that Torterra's tree was to glow green, before a Leaf Storm erupted from the tree to blow Alakazam into the air.

His Pokémon completely caught off guard by the attack.

"Quickly use-"
"Stone Edge!" Paul cut him off again as the stones began spinning around Torterra. They shot into the air straight up and struck Alakazam.

The blows sent Alakazam into the ceiling of the Battle Club, which made Don George visibly wince.

He didn't even wait for the call to be made before returning Alakazam.

"Alakazam is unable to battle." Don George agreed with his sentiment.

Paul smirked, and a chill went down Gary's spine.

A thought entered his mind, one that was dark and horrifying to contemplate.

Did Paul *plan* this?

Paul knew he knew that Torterra could use Stealth Rock. It wasn't exactly hidden when they fought Ash and Red.

He knew that he'd want to prevent the move, so every time that Torterra came out he'd send out a Pokémon to counter Stealth Rock.

A Pokémon Paul then proceeded to quickly crush.

"Do select your next Pokémon. While Alakazam are not the toughest of Pokémon, yours will be sufficiently fine until this battle is concluded and you can contact the local Nurse Joy," Don George prompted as he shook himself out of his worries.

This was no time to think. He had to stop overthinking things. Ash proved it was easy to not think too hard about things, he surely could do it too. After all anything Ashy Boy could do, he could obviously do better.

"Go!" Gary sent out of his fourth Pokémon, which floated over the field and gained some confused mutterings from the onlookers.

"Por," declared Porygon, as Paul looked at the thing with some distaste. Clearly he remembered how it had carried them in the Semifinals and did not like remembering it.

He returned Torterra and sent out his own fourth Pokémon.

"Hypno, standby for battle!"

The Psychic-Pokémon stared down Porygon, pendulum in hand.

"Shadow Ball!" Gary quickly ordered as Porygon manifested the super-effective attack and fired it at Hypno.

"You know what to do." Paul told his Hypno, who took the attack without moving.

Gary just stared in surprise at the move, before Porygon seized up and glowed eerily.

"*Disable use detected.*" His Pokédex provided a handy explanation for what had just occurred.

Oh s…

"Now use Psybeam!"
The glowing energy attack struck Porygon, sending it tumbling to the ground.

"Quickly, use Conversion 2 before he can use another one!" Gary shouted. Porygon, who had put himself back together, shimmered with a dark hue.

Porygon was now a Dark-type.

"Drain Punch!"

Gary felt his blood chill as Hypno charged at Porygon, fist glowing green.

Clearly Paul had remembered Conversion 2 too.

"Tri-Attack!" Gary called as the shimmering triangle was shot at the charging Psychic-type.

It avoided it before slamming the Drain Punch into Porygon.

The resulting shriek of pain sounded like someone was beating up a dial modem while said technological relic screamed in agony.

Even Don George winced. Paul however, did not.

"Again!"

"Quickly Co…” Conversion 2's ordering was silenced by the second Drain Punch, which knocked Porygon down onto the ground.

Porygon floated back up, if awkwardly, while Paul kept up the attack.

"Now Poison Gas!"

Hypno breathed in deeply before exhaling the purple cloud right onto Porygon.

Hypno stepped back away from the cloud as it dissipated, revealing a purple tinted Porygon.

And with that, he had two poisoned Pokémon. Damn it!

The purple-tinted Porygon did have another slight color to it. It was there only briefly, but he did catch it.

"Now end this with Drain…”

"Shadow Ball!"

This time it was Paul who was interrupted, this time by a Shadow Ball firing right into Hypno's face.

The attack knocked the hypnotist back, even as a shimmer around the Pokémon suggested it had just suffered in the special defense category.

Gary followed through on that fact.

"Shadow Balls!"

After an initial moment to wince from poison damage, Porygon began firing the black orbs of darkness one after the other.

They struck into Hypno, pushing the Pokémon back and back until finally one final Shadow Ball
knocked it down.

Porygon hovered weakly at this point, before collapsing as well.

"Both Hypno and Porygon are unable to battle!" Don George declared the draw as both of them returned their Pokémon.

"Thanks Porygon. You did a good job." He thanked the artificial Pokémon for its hard work.

Paul just glared at his ball before muttering something faintly about training Disable more.

Gary ignored that to consider what he'd do next.

That made their battle three wins for Paul and two for himself.

Among the Pokémon Paul had left were Torterra and Jynx. Torterra had taken some damage thanks to Alakazam, but it wasn't much. Meanwhile Jynx hadn't taken any damage at all, and had at least one more move he had to be worried about.

The two other Pokémon were unknowns. One of them could be Raichu, but he somehow doubted it.

On his end he still had Arcanine, Blastoise, and Tangrowth, who he had taken over Exeggcute because he did not have a Leaf Stone.

Arcanine had taken a lot of damage and was poisoned, so it would be tough going forward.

However it was not impossible.

He would find a way to get this win.

"Tangrowth, go!"

He threw out his evolved Grass-type, which invoked a response from Paul.

Though only indirectly.

"Tangrowth, it is an evolution of Tangela that evolves with Ancient Power. So, spoilers, it probably knows that move," he heard Paul's Pokédex comment, which was immediately followed by Paul looking irritated.

"Whoever programmed that personality was a twat," his Pokédex added.

Yeah, what sort of cruel jerk even programmed in valley girl?

Paul reached for a new Pokéball and threw it with a comment to standby for battle.

Gary was sure he misheard what had been called, but when the Pokéball released the Pokémon inside it was confirmed to be correct.

He had not misheard Paul at all. It was in fact the very Pokémon he had declared it to be.

As he heard the onlookers wonder aloud about it he pressed Paul on it.

"Didn't take you for a Wondertrader."

Paul rolled his eyes at the accusation.
"Please, like I'd trust any Pokémon that comes out of that mess. It's a service for trading trash for trash. No, this Pokémon I caught myself."

That Pokémon Paul had caught himself glared both him and Tangrowth down, eyes shimmering with malice.

It was the first time he had ever seen this Pokémon, and it would also be the first time he'd ever be beating one.

"Alright Tangrowth, let's go!" Gary declared as the battle continued.

Chapter End Notes

And this is a wrap for now. Sorry for cutting the end of the battle, but that's not on me.

So then, I took another small liberty here, namely that this short chapter was actually posted after the full version of the previous one. But, since it takes place in parallel to the last chapter's end point, I figured it'd do no harm to post it here.

Meaning that I'll be posting the conclusion of Ash and company's little break tomorrow. Be ready for some shopping madness, everyone!
Stuff inbetween with more people (again)

The Coastline

In retrospect, they had taken a wrong turn.

Yes, they were going to Cinnabar, but this was not the way to Cinnabar.

According to the Pokédex, this would be a better way to find himself going to Sinnoh's very eastern edge.

The very wrong direction for one going to Cinnabar.

Anabel was about to teleport them back onto the beaten path when Misty spotted something on the water.

"Is that an Onix in the water!"

Ash looked down, wondering what was going on.

If it was an Onix drowning, he'd have to move fast. Either getting it out of the water, or possibly capture it to save its life.

That would be kind of neat, and he wouldn't have to trade a Tauros for one.

Or was it like the Crystal Onix that feared water not? It would be a bit out of place for it, but that wasn't unheard of was it.

Or could it be…an Alolan Onix!

But at closer inspection down at the water's edge, it was not an Onix in the water, just an Onix shaped boat coming ashore at a little seaside village that was mostly dock.

"That's an odd design," Anabel noted.

"What kind of person makes a boat like that?" Misty, sounding a bit embarrassed for jumping the gun as to what it was, wondered aloud.

"They are Boat People," Iris explained. "My grandfather told me stories about humans whose homes were ships. He had nothing but good to say of them, and said they were nomadic."

"They are the people driven from their homeland by a fiery devastation, brought upon by a mountain of fire. They traveled the world, living and dying on the very ships they escaped on, for years. Some were sent adrift to Hoenn, where their boats were stranded on a Corsola colony and so they stayed. The rest became nomads, adrift in the ocean with no fixed point, though a few remote places tend to have them often congregate, such as Poni Island in the Alola region. Their culture is a flexible one, with a famous story revolving around a temple called Samiya, though they do not share much of their language with outsiders. Their true name is unknown to the wider world, though they are often called the Seafolk. All that is known is that one of the groups that was an ancestor to the tribe are known as the People of the Water, though it is believed they have many ancestors mixed into their gene pool since then, including Sootopolitan, Alolan, and Draconid," the Pokédex elaborated on Iris's point.
"Pikapi?" ‘Ash, did we meet any People of the Water? I feel like we did at one point, or was it the People of the Vale? I swear, I can barely remember anything about that one….which dragon did you ride during it?’

Ash shrugged, unsure of the exact details, and followed his companions as they walked down to the ship in question.

…

Boat People, Seafolk, People of the Water, whatever they wanted to call themselves, set up shop fast. It hadn't even taken them ten minutes to get down from the cliff, and only another five to get into the village, to find several sea wizened men and woman older than her parents had already set up several stands laden with random items.

Just from her end, she could see Corsola horn pieces, coral statues, and items that looked like they had been obtained from all over the world.

A sign at the bottom of each sign read clearly.

**ACCEPT BOTH PHYSICAL CURRENCY AND PHYSICAL BARTER. WE BUY AND WE SELL**

Misty winced at the physical part. Clearly they weren't going to get anything if that was the case.

Their cash was all digital. Harder to lose, absolutely useless here.

And the place had to have some sort of cooking apparatus going that Misty had no idea the identity of. Whatever it was cooking, it smelled good, and it would be ready soon.

And they would not be able to eat any of it…..

"Barter agreed!"

The declaration from the cook grabbed her attention, as Ash gave the old man doing the cooking a half-dozen Nest Balls.

The Pokédex apparently could duplicate those things in mass, and they were perfectly fine to use and give away apparently.

Not sell apparently, but bartering was perfectly acceptable.

Where it learned to duplicate Pokéballs she wasn't sure exactly, but whatever the case it took care of their lunch needs.

And that was always important.

"Servings for the party of Ash, Iris, Anabel, and Misty will be ready soon. I will call you when it is prepared," the man told Ash as Misty turned to browse at the stuff at offer.

She wasn't sure she really had anything to barter, but it couldn't hurt to look. And if something absolutely did jump out, she could probably get some duplicated spheres to trade for it.

And so she strolled slowly in front of wares, peering over locals who had come out to peer the wares in interest.

Or, as she noticed in the corner of her eyes, for the youth of the village to watch a pair of young Sea
Folk dance and play music.

It was nice music, even if not quite the music of a shopping area. Though that would be a reason for the youth to care for it beyond the shirtless guys playing string instruments and the lithe dancing girls that accompanied them.

They really did fit a lot of people on a single boat. Then again, it was a fairly large boat.

The items were many she noted, Corsola horn molded into statues, regular coral carved into the shapes of Pokémon and places.

Whoever made a coral duplicate of Suicune was particularly fine at the craft she noted.

Things from lands beyond were also on display, flutes made of glass, little cars that looked like they were made for rather larger square shaped batteries to operate them, some sort of square purple Pokémon statue with large, unblinking eyes.…

The eyes blinked, and Misty jumped back in fright as what she had thought to have been a statue hopped down from its perch, turning to the shore and walking away, cheek pouches inflating and deflating as it muttered “Croa” again and again.

Oddly in its wake was a pile of what looked like golden bottle caps.

"….That was weird," Misty declared. It almost was like that Pokémon left those gold caps as payment, as one would do a taxi.

But why would…. whatever that was… Misty shook her head.

She probably did not need to know what that was all about.

Ignoring…whatever that was, she moved down the stalls looking at what they had with an idle eye.

She had to raise an eyebrow as a motherly looking woman walked away from a Seafolk stall with what looked like a very modern gaming system in the arms.

They stock those things?

So shocked was she at what she saw sold that she nearly walked past the Mega Stone that sat between a stone that looked like ice and a large chunk of amber.

Almost. Though had she been Psyduck, she'd have tripped due to her sudden stop.

"Ah, I see you noticed this little gem, though it is more of a stone." The old woman at the stall front grinned a toothy grin at her as Misty nodded.

"It's a Mega Stone, right?"

"That you are youngin', that you are. This stone hit my boat a while back, a fragment of a space stone. You know, it's an interesting story about these stones, my ma told me stories that these stones were the creation of Lord Rayquaza, who blessed meteorites as they fell to the earth. Scientist types say they are the result of a radiation from 3000 years ago. Makes you wonder if they can be both, radioactive meteorites perhaps?"

Whatever it was that made said stones, she didn't really much care. However it was still a rare find.

While she couldn't really see it too clearly, it didn't feel water-like, if that made any sense. It didn't
make her go 'if I give this to Psyduck, Psyduck will become a juggernaut of power and might'.

Even if it wasn't water however, it was possible that it was something the others could use.

The image of Ash, standing victorious at a League holding the stone she got him, made her happy inside.

If she could get the stone, perhaps it would be something he could use.

If not…well if it was some sort of Arcanite or Nidokinite or something like that, it could become something that could help him in the future.

If it was Excadrite or something, that wasn't much less reason to get it really. Iris could use it just as well, even if she wouldn't get a trophy for her troubles.

"I see you are interested. Will you buy, or barter?" the old woman questioned as Misty reached into her bag.

"Given that the cash I have access to is all digital, I'm going to have to barter."

The woman gave a sigh at the decline of the physical medium, as Misty plopped down in front of her several little things that she had collected.

Three Red Shards that Staryu had found while training in the water some time ago.

A few Poison Barbs from the Tentacool army from Gringy City. She was told some people used them for things, and if anyone would see value in Tentacool barbs it had to be Seafolk, right?

A scale that had fallen off of Gyarados a while back that had slipped into her bag somehow. She had seen someone using the material on the dock, so the same idea as the barb, right?

It was her first attempt, and she tried to make it clear on her face to the woman this was not her max offer.

She seemed to pick that up as she eyed the items presented.

"That is hardly what anyone would call a suitable trade," she simply said.

"However, be free to obtain items you may wish to offer in addition, though if you want to get your friend with the Pikachu's help, do be warned that I have no need for Pokéballs and they will add no value to me." The old woman shot down that idea before Misty could even have it.

The idea of going to get Ash to help pay for the thing she wanted to give him….seemed odd for some reason. Off, like asking someone to plan their own party.

She'd have to manage on her own.

"I take berries," the old woman offered as Misty got the hint.

A toss of Wingull to go fetch some from the forest later, Misty was digging in her bag again for things to offer.

What she pulled out….

An Everstone, which she had been handed for free by someone from 'the B-Button League' while in Crimson City.
A towel from the S.S Anne. Why did she have that? It was quality material though, and so she offered it up.

And with Wingull returning with a branch of Oran berries, she added her barters to the pile.

"Better. If you wanted this Amber, you'd have it. If you wanted this Ice Stone, the berries alone would do. But for the Mega Stone…you must understand the value of it and why I must be difficult on it," the old woman declared as Wingull flew off for more berries, as she dug her hand into her bag for anything more.

She noted with unease that she wasn't finding much beyond her Pokéballs and clothes.

She grasped something more solid and pulled it out, revealing a slip of tough paper.

A Rydel Bike Voucher for one free Bike, in Mauville City.

….Why did she keep the thing? Her sisters’ nasty joke about her wanting a bike wasn't worth anything, and was just a nasty jab.

Perhaps it was meant to bartered, as so she put that down, along with a branch of Sitrus berries from Wingull, who circled around back to berry hunting.

Next she pulled out the Water Stone that Ash had gotten for her in Crimson City.

She paused as she looked at the stone.

Was it right to use a gift to pay for a gift to the gift giver? Would it be an insult?

Would she get another one if she needed it?

"…I have no need for Water Stones. I have more of those on my boat than I have wrinkles. If that was a Fire Stone we'd have a deal, but as it is…." the old woman declared as Misty returned the stone to her bag.

What was left?

Wingull returned with a branch of Pecha berries next, joining the pile as the old woman shook her head.

"You could pay me in berries, but that would take all day and you understand why that would be a bit much." The woman looked her over for a moment, before nodding.

"This stone is meant for someone important, isn't it?" Misty was taken aback by the old woman's observation as she continued.

"You know, I'm adapt at cloth modification, and I have a granddaughter about as tall as you. My daughter met this nice Unovan lad ages ago, but alas a Jellicent has him now. Still I have a granddaughter getting to be as tall as you, if only just as tall. Clothing is never in enough supply for her…."

"You want all my clothes?" Misty gasped as the old woman shook her head.

"No, no, not the ones on your back. Your spares will do. Do that, and the Mega Stone is yours to give to that nice Pikachu lad. Plus I'm told it is a holiday for women's shopping soon in Kanto, you can certainly hold out until then to resupply yourself. We'll be gone by then, even assuming we could bare the big city enough to handle such a day."
It took Misty a bit to decide, but in the end she left the place with a much lighter bag and back to only a single set of clothes, just as their lunch was called and she could tell Ash the great news.

It would later turn out that the stone was something called Sceptilite, much to her dismay.

Not even Dugtrite? She had to look up what a Sceptile even was.

Once they finished their meal, the group went back to the beaten path. Ash had been staring at the green Mega Stone for quite a while. His first one, maybe one he couldn't use yet, but he knew it would be useful in the future. It was weird; back in the old timeline it was very rare for Misty to do stuff like that for him. In fact, he hadn't forgotten that time she won those chocolates and deliberately left him out when she was splitting them (even after she spared some for Pikachu). Regardless of that, though, it had been a really nice gesture of her.

"Sorry I couldn't find you one for Pidgeot or Charizard," Misty apologized. "Really, I wanted to give you something useful, and I thought…"

"No, that's alright. You never know, I might find a compatible Pokémon sooner than we might expect. It won't hurt to be prepared." He put it back in his bag and smiled at her with gratitude.

"Thank you, I really appreciate it."

Ash couldn't help but wonder if he wasn't stretching the truth a little, but given his encounters with Snivy, Aipom and Roggenrola, maybe it wasn't so farfetched to hope his old Treecko would show up in his path before Hoenn. Even if that wasn't the case, Ash was certain that he would appreciate that he had this little trinket for him once they reunited. In any case, Misty's smile made him leave those thoughts aside for a moment.

Funny; she had seen Misty smile many other times, in both timelines, but there was something… different about this one. He could see she was happy because he liked her gift, and that felt nice, but there was something else. Something Ash couldn't quite put his finger on, but definitely something he knew he'd like to see again.

"So, where are we going now?" asked Iris, interrupting his train of thought.

"Well, that old lady told me there's going to be some kind of shopping festival very soon, and I need to replace my old clothes," Misty recalled. "And, no offense, Ash, but I think you could use some new ones too."

"Funny, I was thinking the same," Ash chuckled, glancing at his outfit. If Iris was planning to take their training to the next level, spare clothes had become a must. He glanced at Anabel and Iris. "Any objections?"

'None here. And I wouldn't mind getting some new clothes for myself either,' said Anabel.

Iris for her part just shrugged. Ash figured she still had her issues about having to wear clothes all the time, but when she didn't say no, they all called it unanimous. Their next destination had been decided, and for some reason, Ash had the feeling that he wouldn't end up as a shopping mule this time around.

The way to extensive shopping options

Anabel began the morning with lavender bangs covering her face.
She stared at the ceiling of the Secret Power induced hole in the wall through the strands of her hair for a few seconds, wondering when her bangs had gotten long enough to cover her eyes.

Another thought came to her as she lay, just how long was her hair anyway?

With a blue glow her hair was flung out of her face, as Anabel darted out of the hole in the wall and past the other three secret base holes to the water's edge, where there would be a reflective surface.

What stared back at her was a nest of lavender hair that had grown well past where it normally stayed.

Her look for years had been a hair length only to the bottom of her ears. It was a nice look, low maintenance and it did its job.

It could occasionally cause others to mistake her for a boy, but she tried not to have that bother her.

The hair that stared back at her had climbed midway down her neck, along with down along her face. There would be no mistaking her for a boy now that was for sure, the thought comforted her but she liked her normal hair style.

She needed a barber. Or something sharp. She could cut her hair herself, right?

Or maybe Misty or Ir…Misty could help her with it. Would that go better?

"Oh, good morning Anabel!"

Ash waved to her as he ran her way, Pikachu flanking him. A brown fabric case was in his hand, and he was in only a white sleeveless shirt and a pair of shorts. Sleepwear.

Anabel herself was in an oversized purple shirt, which she did idly touch to make sure it was on. No sense in creating an awkward moment between them…again, like when they'd learnt Heal Pulse.

Ash came to a full stop in front of her, a curious look on his face.

"I don't normally see you up this early," he noted.

'It happens sometimes….though why are you up? Not even Iris is awake yet.'

She had to resist looking over her shoulder to see if she was up and planning some new exercise for them.

"Nothing much. I was actually just shaving my face. I really don't like being all bushy and I like to keep on top of it," Ash informed her as Anabel recalled that she had never really seen him with stubble or unshaven looks.

She paled when a thought went through her, when was the last time she shaved?

Iris certainly didn't shave, and she had no idea if Misty had any and unlike Iris she didn't have a shower scene in Ash's head to clear up if she did or not.

"Uh, Anabel?" Ash asked, clearly noticing her paling.

'Oh, nothing nothing…..just a girl thing.' Anabel resisted the urge to check her legs and armpits right there and now.

Ash seemed well willing to avoid getting into a 'girl thing', and thus he looked like he was looking
for something else to talk about.

"You know, I only just noticed it. You let your hair grow out."

Though that something else was still somewhat related.

She nodded.

'Well, let it grow out, can't really make it stop growing out, same thing. Sort of. You don't have anything that can cut in there, do you?'

Perhaps Ash's shaving kit, which she assumed was what he had on him, could solve this little problem, or at least provide the means to fix it.

Maybe Ash could do the hair snipping for her.

Ash for his part was already going through the bag, poking around and pulling a few things in and out of it. A deodorant stick, a pair of tweezers, a shaving cream bottle, a comb and brush, a packet of ear cleaners….

Ash eventually pulled out a razor.

"This is the best I've got, what do you need it for?" Ash asked her. In response she closed her eyes and telekinetically moved all the hair she found having grown in when she wasn't looking.

'Not really what a razor can help with, but maybe you have another idea in mind. Regardless, I'd like help removing all of this.'

"You want to cut your hair?" Ash questioned for confirmation. She nodded as she let the hair go, the bangs covering her eyes again.

'As you can see, it is getting to be a bit of a problem.' She blew the hair out of her face as Ash seemed thoughtful. Meanwhile in the background Pikachu's tail was glowing white.

Could Iron Tail cut her hair? Would that even be safe?

"I mean, your bangs are getting to be a bit long, even mine could use a trim. But the rest…." Ash paused on them before continuing. "I honestly think it looks good on you."

Anabel stared at him for a moment, the comment taking a while to set in.

When it did, she felt her face light up with red heat as Ash continued.

"You had a nice hairstyle already, but it looks pretty good long. Better than my hair would anyway."

At Ash's comment she turned to the water and stared at it, her reflection staring back.

The longer hair, really looked that good on her? It did make her look more feminine and framed her face nicely, looking at her reflection again she had to admit Ash did have a point, she did look good with longer than usual hair.

"I mean if I let it grow out, I'd probably look like a hippie, or maybe a barbarian. What's worse?"

Ash babbled a bit as the mental image of both came into her mind.

The mental image of Hippie-Ash and Ash-the-Barbarian caused a wave of mental laughter to awash both of them, as both laughed at the image for a moment.
"It would probably depend on which bathed less," the Pokédex snarked from Ash's jacket pocket.

'So Ash, between saying my hair looks good growing out, and your little soak with Iris....do you have a thing for long hair perhaps?' Anabel couldn't stop a wicked smirk appear on her face as Ash began looking very nervous.

'Be free to say whatever you want, Misty's hair is probably long enough I doubt any response you'd give would hurt her feelings.'

Ash promptly began gaping like a Magikarp amidst Pikachu's laughter, a mixture of mortification and what honestly seemed to be him actively wondering if he did indeed have a thing for long hair.

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**Cerulean City**

The moon was bright tonight.

The house on the edge of town currently without official owners had a nice porch swing. It creaked nicely as the moon shone in the sky, reflecting in the nearby river nicely.

Belladonna couldn't sleep tonight, and she wasn't sure why.

It wasn't a bad day weighing her down. They all had a lot of fun, more than she had expected.

Modern art was not her thing, but Vedia and Aurora had a wonderful time at that museum. Evanna had appreciated making exaggerated declarations of what the art 'meant', annoying the snobby art viewers.

It was all a good time.

Was it Aurora? Was she regretting wanting her father dead? She knew that was a trope that randomly happened in fiction sometimes, was it actually based in reality?

Fiction crossing into reality never ended well.

If so.....what could she do about it? Asking Aurora about it would not go well, she'd probably think the question was being asked less as 'Aurora, are you okay? You seem troubled, is it your father's death?' and more like 'Aurora, you feel pity for that piece of scum! What sort of weak livered dullard feels sympathy for their horrible father! Rage, rage, hate, hate, snarl, snarl'.

Curse that man, even in death he was causing problems.

Footsteps rang against the wood, creaking nicely as she turned her gaze to the side.

Aurora, looking quite wonderful in a white sleeping gown they had found a while back. It was quite fetching, dressing her and Evanna up was always easier than her or Vedia. The best clothing was never made to their respective extremes.

"Oh, my dear Aurora, I hope I didn't wake you up. I couldn't get to sleep so I came out here." She gazed into Aurora's lovely eyes, clear and beautiful as fresh lake ice, and felt her mood rapidly reverse. "Who are you?" she growled.

Had the girl actually been Aurora, she would have squeaked. She would have been scared of her,
and it would have been painful to witness.

But this girl was *not* Aurora, and thus did not do that. She merely put a ponderous finger to her chin.

"Huh, that's odd. It usually takes a lot longer for people to pick up that I'm not who they think they are. Is it a stain? I always miss stains."

"Your eyes are wrong." she declared with the finiteness of granite.

"No they're not, they are exact replicas of…..is this a subtle thing?"

"It's a love thing. I know the eyes of all of them perfectly, no one can replicate them to their exact perfections. Now. Who. Are. You?" she repeated as the false-Aurora sighed.

"As much as it would be fun to have you call me not-Aurora or something for this conversation, I think that would get a bit annoying. You might also try and remove my neck, which I would not like. I need my neck after all. You can call me Hilda."

"Alright, now drop the disguise and stop pretending you're someone else."

"Nah, I'll stay this way. You are 95.64% less likely to attack me if I do, both physically and with that little Truth take on your father's power. Unless I have miscalculated in my observations, in which case do in fact punch Aurora's face. Or slap it. Maybe throw something at it."

While said in her dear's voice, the tone was a tease bordering on a taunt. A tone she never used, with an 'I've got you' look on her face that Aurora also never used.

It was so wrong, it was very close that she could actually hit the fake wearing her dear's look.

And so Hilda the fake continued to give her that mocking look, and she continued to glare back, furious but unable to push so far as to hit her.

The fear that doing that would start a slope downwards held her back.

Belladonna was not unaware that something was wrong with herself. With a mother who never stopped collecting stuff, and a father who apparently never stopped fathering children, she should be careful not to get into a bad habit.

The worst of which being actually getting into the habit of hitting things that look like her loves. If that ever started rolling….

"Good, you can't attack me while I am like this. That makes my job a lot easier. So let's start, shall we?"

Hilda stepped off the porch and towards the water front, her feet crunching against the grass as she turned around to face her, still wearing the stolen face.

"As I'm said before, my name is Hilda. I work for a man you only need to know as the Bloodline Prince for the time being. Well work, spy for, report things with a different perspective than old Emissary does, sleep with, yada yada yada. I'm helping to continue to change the world."

Belladonna didn't react. "I'll take your continued glaring as, do continue," Hilda quipped before continuing. "We have a particular interest in people like you, and the potential you can do to help move the world in the direction we want it to. Well at the moment we are following the Bloodline King…..but I'd like to think my Prince will one day kill him. He's…..highly unpleasant and best to be avoided. Sadly it is always dangerous to be near him, unless you don't like your thoughts being
only your own."

Your thoughts not being your own?

"Dreams of a dead King and my Prince….well does he become the new Bloodline King at that point?" Hilda asked in some confusion. She'd find the bewilderment of Hilda amusing if she wasn't her, and took on a form that was killable for her. There were very few people she could look like that wouldn't be better than looking like Aurora.

"….Title questions aside, as much as I do feel sick saying it, the Bloodline King and Prince both want the same thing. A new world, a better world, building on what's been changed. Us at the top and humans….low. Lower than Pokémon if you want to be specific about it, though my Prince would elevate them as much as humans are put down. People like you and Ash Ketchum, or even little Arnold, are who we want on top of our new world. So how about it, the Bloodline Prince and I both want you for making the new world!" She finished her little ramble with a dramatic pose that reminded her of a Unovan wartime poster she saw once.

'I want you for the Unovan Army', by some colorful old guy.

"Hard pass."

Hilda seemed frozen in shock at her terse reply, and she stayed that way for what seemed like a minute.

Apparently she was trying to surmise why she rejected it, and so gave a revised version.

"I wasn't implying that your girlfriends would be any less important than you. I mean I'm just like them, one bloodline to my name. Zoroark Species if you want to know, call it a freebie. It's just that people like you, with two bloodlines, are special. The cream of the crop, a top percentile selectively bred….

"I'd hate to see why anyone would select my mother 'to be bred'," Belladonna snarked before continuing. "My answer is still no."

"What, you don't think the world needs to be changed, that it isn't wrong?" Hilda asked tersely as Belladonna looked her right in her stolen eye color.

"I don't care about the world. There are very limited amount of things in it that I care about. Three of them are sleeping in this house, then there are the brothers I've found, the likely many other brothers and sisters I'm sure to find, and the ones who I'm sure will bring them all happiness as much as I've found it. Arnold has Laila and with time, he might find some more nice girls just as Ash and I have, but he's just a little kid, he has all the time to do so. Add in a few Pokémon or two, and that's as far as I care for. I'd get no enjoyment ruling over it."

Hilda stared at her like she was speaking gibberish.

"You don't want to indulge in anything?! You don't want to burn Azalea and everyone in it to the ground, tied up and made to suffer? You don't want a castle with human servants serving your every whim? You don't want more lovers? I mean sure unless you like incest you'd pretty much have to use a human for a few decades until diversity in the gene pool is a thing, but you'd have the pick of every other bloodliner your age and younger. After all, they all exist for you and Ash and all the rest of your family."

"The burning part I'd enjoy, but that's hardly justifying everything after, and I have no interest in men….what was the last thing?" Belladonna demanded clarification as a wicked smile cracked on an
illusion of Aurora's face.

It was not a pleasant thing to see. A wrongness upon the world.

"Oh, you caught that, time for elaboration then. Ever wonder exactly why Bloodliners are much more common these days, and why so many are female? Here's the thing, it's because of you, and Ash, and all your other siblings. If you all had never been born, I'd be as boring a human as my sister, who runs some talent agency in Unova and now is tasked with making sure some League winner remembers to feed himself. But thanks to you, and your many hundreds of brothers and sisters found from Sinnoh's snowy tundra to Alola's tropical shores, I am more than human. Your little lovelies in there are more than human. Foongus Hair and the rest of my Prince's lovelies are more than human. Your line being born, perhaps not even as massively as they were but the range of how many were needed was utterly massive, met the conditions, and now we sit on a transitioning world. The world that you, Ash, and every one of your siblings who shares a unique take on what power means to them, from sea to shining sea, are all responsible for!"

If she wasn't born…..if Ash wasn't….if Arnold wasn't…..if none of them were….

A scene flashed in her mind, of her dear standing in the sun, right next to her father. They were smiling happily, not a care in the world.

The element that would make him a monster deserving death never existing, and the two being happy together. Aurora never needing to frown, or cry, a more whole her.

A world without her in it.

A better world for Aurora.

"Oh, I get it. Aurora actually got thrown out of her life of luxury and happiness because you and your siblings were conceived, and now you feel bad. Don't be, because of you Aurora is special. One day soon, even if you don't want to take part of making it happen, she'll be ruling the world with you….." The fact Hilda actually sounded like she was trying to make her feel better, as if she recognized the devastation that crossed her face was not what caught her attention, though it did make her feel worse.

It was the fact that a muscled hand had grasped itself atop Hilda's false head.

"You're done. Lecture time is over," Evanna declared darkly as Hilda shrugged.

"Oh dear, someone who has a 64.64% chance of causing me immense physical harm, growing to a much larger total if Belladonna looks away and plugs her ears. This is a problem," she said casually, as if she didn't really consider what was about to happen dangerous.

The fact that moments after she said that a green haired girl about Ash's age in white appeared beside Hilda and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"A fun fact about my job, not only do I gather information for my Prince, I also find him lovely ladies of his own for him. This is Siri, a Gardevoir Bloodliner who can Teleport. I'd let go of my head now Evanna, unless you want to meet my Prince. I think this is around the time he bathes in his grand bath."

Evanna, who shared her lack of interest in men and picking up the threat to let go or be teleported away into a steaming body of water who knows where with a naked man, let go of Hilda's head. She vanished along with the newcomer moments later.
Leaving just the two of them in the night, alone. Herself, clad in a long t-shirt that was about all that could fit her as nightwear, and Evanna in only a pair of orange boys shorts.

There were no words exchanged for a few lengthy moments, before Evanna sighed.

"Look, that girl was a weirdo and a crazy person. Are you really going to put stock into what she said?"

"…..It's hard not to think about," Belladonna admitted quietly.

Evanna placed a hand on her shoulder before continuing.

"Okay, so let's run what she said through, at least as far as I understand it. Maybe Vedia would have gotten more of it, but Aurora's hugging her like a teddy bear right now so let me give it a shake. The not-Aurora said that somehow, you and your apparently epidemic of half siblings somehow are why I'm the way I am, as well as Vedia and Aurora."

"Yes," she confirmed quietly as Evanna continued.

"If you didn't exist, Aurora's dad would have never decided that throwing your daughter out was a moral and right thing to do," Evanna continued.

"Yes," Belladonna declared solemnly.

"If you didn't exist, Vedia would have never been able to run away from home, and who knows what would have happened to her. Arranged marriage, suspicious death, stuck in a basement…." Evanna rolled off as Belladonna stared at her in surprise.

"There, that's fifty-fifty. My life would still suck as much as it did before meeting you regardless, so that's one person helped, another hurt, if we take the word of some shape-changing crazy person who wants to take over the world with some Prince and invited you, and thus us, to help them do it, as correct. I'd be fine if we did do that by the way, but that's not the point. The point is, if she's right, keep that in mind. If she's wrong, then she's basically one of those people who talk on the internet of that Oak guy apparently also making humans more complacent in a bid to have his grandson rule the world as the Oak Imperium."

"Sweetie." Belladonna smiled as she gave her a hug. She needed that. It was something to keep in mind.

It was bad, horrible, unforgivable, if she did make Aurora's life what it was, but it was good, very good, that she would also in turn have made Vedia's life better.

The hug turned into a heartfelt kiss that lasted just as long, their lips parting as the moon shone directly above them and bathing them in moonlight.

"So, if we are taking the word of the shape-shifting person for granted and you somehow make us who we all are…you plan on taking responsibility for anyone else?" Evanna teased as Belladonna could only stare at her in surprise.

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**Grampa Canyon**

Ash wasn't sure this was right.

He was fairly certain that they should have hit a major city before they got to the place they found
Togepi/where he was nearly eaten.

Emphasis on the 'slash where he was nearly eaten' bit, as that did not narrow down which incident he was talking about as much as he'd like. He really needed to be more careful this time round.

But, without teleporting except for cases of 'how did we end up on a sheer cliff', and 'how did we end up in the middle of a Beedrill nest', and a brief time in Dark City, they had found themselves in the dry as bone canyon.

Though it was a bit different than last time, given that while there was a giant pit with people digging inside it, he did not see Gary Oak doing his best Harrison Ford cosplay in it.

The people seemed more professionally unprofessional, if that was the best way of putting it. Also a pair of burly men were standing at the entrance to the canyon, glaring at the four of them to go away.

"What's their problem?" Misty wondered aloud.

"Their problem, is that we don't need Trainers stealing fossils, or worse trying to get them themselves. At least thieves don't break as much."

To all their credit, they had turned to the flannel wearing man before he was done pronouncing 'their'. Misty actually had a surprised look at how sharp her alert time had been, though Ash felt there was some pride in her surprised expression.

"Now, are you here to steal fossils?" he asked them bluntly.

Everyone from Pikachu to Iris shook their heads 'no' as he nodded.

"Good. I wouldn't try crossing through here until noon passes, so come with me to my trailer. I'm sure you'd rather learn about fossils than suffer heatstroke."

'…..I am not sure about that one. Can I go look for Togepi's egg instead?' Pikachu wondered to Ash directly.

'I have no idea where it is without Team Rocket blowing stuff up, and I am pretty sure you can get heatstroke too. He might have it on him and might be willing to give it to us.'

It wasn't unheard of for people to randomly give people Pokémon and Pokémon eggs after all. Plus what would a flannel wearing man even want with a Togepi egg?

…..

There was no egg in the man's office, just coolers and maps and trays filled with bones thinner than pencils.

He reached into a cooler with bottles of water in them (after skipping over a cooler that was filled to the brim with beer he accidentally opened), and tossed them bottles as he began with an apology.

"I am sorry about the concern, ever since people found the way to revive Fossil Pokémon, for all the good it does my fellow paleontologists who specialize in behavioral studies, it does have side effects. Among them is the tendency for people to try and grab fossils to get Pokémon for themselves. I have no problem with the use of poor quality fossil material for such endeavors, and especially not when someone puts their own effort into the process like the Gym Leaders Brock, Roark, and Byron. However I don't need the discoveries of the century stolen by a random Trainer trying to get type coverage."
"Is that a problem?" Ash would have asked how fossils tell you anything about behavior since he assumed there were people doing that before fossil revival, but he wasn't sure he could understand it.

Or that it could be explained in a timely manner, thus delaying what time Ash could use to try and figure out where Togepi's egg might be.

"Thievery? Of course it is with Team Rocket around. They love stealing fossils, it's why we don't work in Mount Moon anymore. They know better than to dig for them themselves, given that the average member can't tell a fossil from a geode and break them with shovels and drills. So like scavengers they have a bad habit of grabbing what we've already found."

The comment about people breaking fossils with a lack of knowing what a fossil was made Ash wonder, was the Great Fossil Rush a bust because it was a lie, or because people ended up breaking the fossils that they were after out of ignorance?

A question that he was sure one could ponder for many days, hopefully when he could get out of here without offending the guy.

Heatstroke risks noted of course.

Oddly enough though, it was Iris who had the next thing to say.

"Your maps are odd."

Her comment drew Ash's attention to the maps…..and he had to agree.

For one thing the maps of the world, which Ash would not try to figure out if it was different from what he was used to as to spare his mind from thinking about the implications too much, had the landmasses in wildly different places.

At some points the continents were all jumbled together, either as a solid landmass or several large groups that were not how he was pretty sure they normally were.

One map, labeled as 100 MYA, had Kalos much farther north than normal, even farther north than Sinnoh was. It was all but covered in white. He could only vaguely see what looked like Kanto, Johto, and Hoenn, as they were all shallow oceans with islands that made him think of places where mountains were like Meteor Falls and Mount Moon. Sinnoh was much farther south, pretty close to the equator.

"Well today those maps are, but millions of years ago they were quite accurate." He noted Iris's confusion and so continued.

"Continents, ever since their formations, have always been moving. Slowly, but in the course of millions of years they can drastically change their location. Mountain ranges, some volcanos, and earthquakes are side effects of this phenomenal called Continental Drift."

That was how mountains were made? Ash always thought it had something to do with volcanos, though if they were also caused by continents slowly moving that made some sense.

Also some volcanos? There were volcanos that were formed other ways? How did that happen?

"Of course these ancient forms of continents and the seas had life on and in them, and not just plant life. Amidst the ancient conifers and ferns, before even grass and flowers and fruit evolved." Pine trees and ferns were ancient? Grass, flowers and fruit weren't that old?
You learn something new every day. He had never thought about asking what was older, a fern or an apple, but now he knew.

Perhaps he could win trivia night next time he was back home.

"Pokémon paleontology is not an old field, but we have identified a constantly growing number of ancient species. Most of them are clustered around two time periods that have a number of major fossil bearing formations, 300 million years ago, and 100 million years ago."

The paleontologist darted off to a shelf and grabbed a handful of figurines. They were of Pokémon, several that Ash knew to be fossil Pokémon, and a few that were still around today, like Relicanth, Shellder, and Sunkern.

And a lot Ash did not recognize at all. Apparently his dealings with (occasionally not having been dead) Aerodactyl, Kabuto, Kabutops, Omanyte, Omastar, Lileep, Cradily, Anorith, Armaldo, Cranidos, Rampardos, Shieldon, Bastiodon, Archen, Archeops, Tirtouga, and Carracosta did not even scratch the surface.

The figures were promptly plopped on the map, with Kabutops and a Pokémon that looked like a naked Genesect at 300 million years ago, while Omanyte, Omastar, Cranidos, Lileep, Cradily, Rampardos, Shieldon, Bastiodon, Archen, Archeops, Tirtouga, and Carracosta at 100 million years ago along with Shellder and Relicanth and several he didn't recognize among the two locations and several other maps.

He didn't see a Aerodactyl, Anorith, or Armaldo figurine, perhaps he didn't have any. Maybe they were rare and hard to find on the open market of figurines, if such a thing existed.

Though that did raise a few questions, if that was the case, why were there Kabutops hanging around with the Omanyte and Omastar originally?

Why was Togepi's egg around here, wherever it was? Were Togekiss and Togetic old Pokémon like Shellder were apparently?

"Why only bones from those time periods specifically?" Iris asked.

"We have other periods represented, but fossils aren't the easiest things to form. They require the bones to be deposited in the right conditions at the right time and be found quickly enough. It's why places like Alola do not have fossils, as they are too new land masses and mostly lack these factors. Anyone who finds a fossil in Alola found something someone dropped."

The last line was said bitterly, as if it was part of some old peeve. Ash decided it was best not to ask.

"Of course these figurines may not be the most accurate. They resemble a Pokémon revived from a fossil, but there is evidence that such revivals do affect a Pokémon's type and physiology. There have been some interesting studies involving Tyrunt fossils and revived specimens that explore this."

Then why were the Omanyte and other such Pokémon he met that were living fossils look the same as revived fossils? Or was that a time reboot thing?

The only way to check was to see if an Aerodactyl was still around to try and eat him, and was it worth going through that again? Probably not unless Togepi's egg was down there too, and Ash was pretty sure that cavern would be a place to check last if possible for it.

Wasn't the Pokédex going on about this idea itself during the last Gym battle, extant forms or something?
"So when do people come into the picture?" Misty brought up the question as the man shrugged.

"Not my field. I do know that humans are said to have originated in the region of…." 

"Professor Cycad!" The trailer door was burst open before the question could be given an answer, revealing an intern that Ash half expected to run into around Pokémopolis’ ruins, but was instead another girl, thankfully nothing resembling him about her.

"Yes, what is it…oh I see. The thing in your arms." The professor observed as all eyes were drawn to what the girl was carrying.

Clutched in her arms was the egg that would hatch into Togepi.

The moment of silence that followed was the length of forever in Ash's mind. Was there any way he could steer this so they could get the egg without it being too strange a conversation…

"Well, that's an odd find, but that isn't a fossilized egg and none of us have time to care for such a thing. Would any of you like to have it?" Professor Cycad asked, solving all the issues that could result in an instant.

Pikachu let out a huge sigh of relief from his shoulder, nearly falling off as a result.

…..

That night, at a camp area by a small pool...

"Now that we are far enough to ensure the egg cannot be taken back, allow me to tell you all what Pokémon it will hatch into."

The declaration came after they finished eating for the night, causing all their eyes to move to the egg currently being held by Pikachu carefully in a little rocky nook soon to be Secret Powered by Psyduck.

Axew was currently looking at the egg in interest, which reminded Ash of how well Axew had gotten along with Scraggy. Would Axew do as well with a less outgoing Pokémon?

'You can tell?' Anabel questioned, which Ash relayed to the machine in part for his own confusion.

You could?

"Certainly. Eggs are always patterned after what Pokémon they are to hatch into. It's a handy thing to note if you find an egg and quite good for taking away the guessing game part of it."

But the guessing part was the fun part of it. Sure he knew what this egg would hatch into, but what if he found another egg?

It would be part of the excitement of it all to see what it would hatch into with Togepi.

"This egg will hatch into a rare Pokémon known as a Togepi," the Pokédex declared, confusion etching itself into Misty, Iris, and Anabel’s faces as the name was given.

"Togepi?" Misty said in confusion, which Ash had to admit oddly stung coming from her.

"Togepi, the Spike Ball Pokémon," the Pokédex showed an image of Togepi on screen. Misty’s
face seemed to soften upon seeing Togepi, which Ash would count as a good thing.

"Togepi grow by absorbing emotional energy people and Pokémon generate to grow. They grow best with positive emotion, while their growth is stunted by negative emotion. If this emotion is evil in morality, they can turn wicked and cruel."

That explained that Togepi in Sinnoh, though an odd thought came to Ash.

Did Brock's post-Ivy depression cause Togepi to stay a Togepi for all of Johto, and only after Brock was farther away did Togepi move faster to evolving?

It was an odd thought. It could have just been inexperience with working with young Pokémon.

"Togepi evolves twice, it gains the Flying type upon evolving into Togetic, while exposure to the Shiny Stone evolves it further to Togekiss." The two evolutions were shown on screen next to Togepi.

"What type was it before evolving?" Iris caught the fact the Pokédex didn't say.

"Fairy."

Iris shivered like someone was walking on a shallow grave at that point.

"I have already taken to pre-registering Togepi to you. When it hatches your record will be fully updated," the Pokédex told him as Ash realized what had so radically changed.

"Isn't that a bit hasty? I mean, I may not be the only one who wants….

"I am fine without Togepi," Iris said simply.

'I am doing a lot of work with Eevee already, I don't think I could take another Pokémon on right now,' Anabel honestly admitted.

Misty just shook her head, which stung. Utterly, utterly stung. To see her reject Togepi so easily really made the fact that this wasn't the Misty he'd known for years hit home like a ton of bricks. Maybe he could trick her into it, Togepi imprinted on her because she was the first to be seen after Togepi hatched. He could try and recreate the moment, without the mini-tournament with Team Rocket though, but that wouldn't be fair to any of them.

Ash had never tried to bring Psyduck's memories back, and he wasn't sure if the issue with humans would extend to Pokémon he did not have originally. He'd rather not make things tricky by doing so. Right now though, Ash was seriously hoping he couldn't bring memories back. Because if Togepi saw that head shake…..

It would make Brock's dead parents look like a bump in the road when it came to rough emotions.

"Regardless of who Togepi is registered to, all of your emotional well beings will play into Togepi's hatching and growth, so you will all have involvement. The egg won't count to any party totals until then, so you can care for the nitty gritty then. Now, would you like to review your financial totals before mass spending?"

The Pokédex promptly displayed a set of numbers, which caused Misty and Anabel's mouths to drop open, Ash to stare at the Pokédex in shock, and Iris to… well she didn't react.
He was pretty sure she didn't really understand just how much the Pokédex was saying he had to his name.

"….You….didn't hack the banks, did you?" Ash asked the Pokédex.

"No, that would bore me. I'd sooner steal money from Team Rocket and other Yakuza-type criminal organizations for the challenge, and I'd do so from either should we require it. The money in question here however, is completely legal in origin."

Ash stared at the money, still uncertain about that part. He was pretty sure he had enough to buy the kind of car Gary had back in the day without car payments afterwards. He'd probably still have enough left over to hire some cheerleaders too. Not that he'd want to.

…. Ash had gotten the package of the item storage capsules Professor Oak had sent his way for testing the day before Princess Day. Said package contained forty cubes colored the same as a regular Pokéball. They did indeed work, for Ash tested them on a large rock.

It had worked fine, the twelve foot hunk of sandstone had vanished into the cube which hadn't changed its weight at all for holding it inside, though testing releasing the thing did create a massive splash of sea water that drenched them all and did require Squirtle to go retrieve it from the sea bottom.

In Ash's defense, it was common to throw your Pokéballs, and they looked a lot like them. And it still worked afterwards, as demonstrated with his shoes.

After that, it was to the trenches. Also known as 'town with a lot of stores during a mass shopping day'.

Also called pain. They say 'war is hell' but that's nothing compared to this.

Not the same as Girls Day.

…. Their first stop had been relatively quiet. Stores that specialized in selling beds and couches weren't the hottest sellers on Princess Day, though the staff were happy to see them and offer significant discounts.

Ash really didn't understand beds at all, but three were still purchased that fit himself, Anabel, and Misty well.

Iris declined to get one.

Next stop a furniture store for something to store more clothes before they could begin the dangerous part of the day…

"Is that a 90% off sale on socks?"

Oh no.

Misty's stop and declaration on the store front caused Anabel and Iris to stop in their tracks, with Anabel subtly tugging him to a stop too.
"The socks you gave me do have a hole now." Iris looked down at her feet. "I am also fairly sure that '90%’ is a good thing?"

'Oh yes, it is.' Anabel agreed.

It was spreading. The virus.

"With that price, we all could use some more socks. You know, I've never really used this day for much, but I'm really feeling it now." Misty said in a tone of growing giddiness as Ash knew it was definitely here, especially when Anabel and Iris nodded in agreement (Anabel more so than Iris).

The shopping virus. It had claimed more victims, it was uncontainable and turning into a pandemic.

"Come on!" And with that, and another subtle telepathic tug from Anabel, they were into the store.

The only consolation was that the horrible frenzy that ensued had several pairs of socks fitting him thrown his way.

"Pikapiiiii!! 'Ash, you probably could use some more of….HEY! No grabbing my tail, it is not a sock!"

And so Princess Day suffered its third clothing based electrical attack as he later would find out.

The virus was in brief remission after they got out and they managed to get four dressers for a total of seven used storage capsules and thankfully the electronic store did not engage responses from them….before the virus returned in full force upon the spotting of an accessory store.

The madness was back, his Z-Ring was nearly swiped three times in the span of ten minutes. Though, again to their credit, the fourth and fifth would be attempt was stopped by a glare from Iris and a loud 'that is not for sale' shout by Misty.

Said shout did not dissuade the sixth though, what was wrong with this holiday?!

....

Their target was shopping.

No, that wasn't the right way to put it.

Saying the target, Ash Ketchum, was shopping implied he was in the lead. It was not a day guys shopped.

It was a day they were carrying things for the shoppers, though Meowth had to give them credit as the stuff being bought did seem to go to him as much as the rest of them, and they were in fact feeding him.

It was more than some people were doing today, in any case.

Also that the non-talking girly had her Kadabra help out with bags when moving.

Still....

"....Those two bozos better get here soon. I am so putting in for overtime at this point." The cat complained.

Jessie and James were both off enjoying the festivities, and they had both darted off before he could
complain, though both had reasons he did not push the issue.

Jessie had been in a bad mood after a Lickitung had eaten her breakfast, after kicking and punching it repeatedly she had caught it in a ball in a sheer blind rage, before hearing about some contest for some dolls and demanding James give her his Pokémon for it.

She was still mad, so he had given her them without issue, and she had stormed off in a fury after James asked her about where she'd even keep a bunch of breakable dolls.

It was the first Meowth had heard of her storage locker. An odd choice to use her pay increase on, but it was her money.

While Jessie had stormed off in a fury, James had a flier for a knick-knack sale fly right into his face and got a giddy laugh, the happiest Meowth had seen him since the incident with the butler and his fifty-shaded fiancé. When Meowth had told him that there was no way a guy named James could get that sale, he had made a creepy laugh and said he had a solution to that problem.

Meowth wasn't sure why James had fake, inflatable breasts on hand, and he probably would be better off knowing. He knew the skirt was Jessie's though.

The cross-dressing that ensued did not bother Meowth as much as James's false pumpable bosom. That was a human thing to be bothered by.

So that left him doing their group job solo, with Jessie off winning dolls in a rage, and James cross-dressing to buy cheap knick-knacks with the aid of a device that Meowth knew not the purpose of having, nor why James would own one.

"Deli!"

Meowth, not taking his eyes off their targets, held out the Pokéball that Jessie had dropped in her anger to the bird.

"Yeah, I'm going to ask ya to take this one back and put it in reserve in case we need it later. Maybe in a year Jessie won't try and stab the thing."

Delibird saluted affirmatively before taking the ball and flying away with it.

"Hopefully Jessie didn't only say she 'hated it and wanted it gone' in anger and actually would have wanted that on her person, or else I might be in trouble for that." Meowth mused to himself as the observation continued.

…..

Ash stood alone with a plethora of shopping bags. The ominous air that hung around him was obvious for anyone who had bags laying about on this day.

The madness had spread, and Ash felt like he was being watched by a school of Sharpedo.

This comparison was not helped by the mob of women and girls who seemed to be stalking around him, as if looking for an opening to strike. The training from Iris to give him the same sort of sixth sense to danger as her was working as he could hear his fight of flight instinct screaming at him to do something other than stand there.

Seriously, what was wrong with this holiday? Sure there was some cloth yanking last time, but it seemed to have evolved at some point into a contact sport.
All that was missing was Casey running around, shouting about the Electabuzz and hitting people with a baseball bat.

Still, just as the holiday had evolved into something tougher since the last time he had endured it (he didn't remember it in any other regions and May seemed to have avoid any contact with it, thus sparing him possibly worse pain and suffering), he had evolved as well.

And not just in his ability to grow hair on his face.

The same woman Ash was pretty sure grabbed something Misty and Jessie fought over slowly approached his bags from the side, stealthily as if she assumed she could not be seen if she did so.

As her hand moved towards a bag, the purple shadow under the bag shimmered, and out popped a friendly creature.

"Grime!" One of his Grimer greeted cheerfully, before grabbing her hand and shaking it.

The woman's resulting scream of horror caused Pikachu to wince, even as the shadows of the other bags rose up as three other Grimer and Muk and hugged the woman at once.

"Pika…." 'Did you really have to do that?' Pikachu complained.

"It worked, didn't it?" Ash said simply as the circling swarm rapidly let them be, not wanting to share the fate of their fellow virus victim and be hugged by friendly slime creatures.

Pikachu gave him a look that said 'you are only feeding the crazy'.

"There are rumors that mega corps use psychic types to stimulate shopping madness," the Pokédex observed as the woman managed to escape from the Grimer hugs.

"….And that is helpful to their bottom line?" Ash questioned the logic of it.

"It's only a rumor, somewhere in the feasible between the Oak Imperium and people being watched through their technology by corporations like Devon or Lysandre Labs," the Pokédex admitted.

The Oak what? What, did people think that Professor Oak wanted to rule the world or something?

"So it isn't true," Ash simply stated.

"Most likely, but it is an explanation for the madness. A bad explanation, but an explanation nonetheless."

Like Brock's Ivy angst delaying Togepi's growth perhaps.

As if summoned by the thoughts of Togepi Misty popped out of the nearby changing room, dressed in a red blouse held by thin straps and a pair of denim shorts slightly longer than her usual ones back in the days of suspenders with a pair of large red shoes to finish the look off.

"What do you think?" Misty inquired as Ash gave her an honest answer.

"I am not the person to ask about fashion."

"Well I'm not usually one to care, but there is something in the air that makes me really want to have fun with this." Misty shrugged while raising the idea that there were Pokémon or viruses at play
"But you know, not sure I really look good in these shoes anyway. I'll try something else." And so Misty returned into the changing room, as Ash blinked.

That….was surprisingly easy.

Ash immediately slapped his face, for thinking that someone was going to run off with Togepi's egg, even past the Grimer and Muk defenses around it and the rest of their stuff.

He quickly glanced over to make sure it was still there. It was, thankfully.

Ash's eyes wandered down to his arm, which had gained something from the accessory shop other than bite marks and scratches.

A white metal ring, similar at a glance to the Z-ring in color and shape, but with differences that were noticeable upon closer observation, such as a few black etchings and a more rounded shape overall.

Slotted into said white ring, in a slot that once held a marble of some sort, was the Keystone. Snuggly fit without a psychic force clawing it out like the marble, the door to Mega Evolution was now at his wrist.

He would just have to figure out a bit more to it. The first thing on the list to figure out being the simple question of how to activate the process. Were specific gestures required the same way Z-moves seemed to need?

The changing room doors burst open again, with Anabel walking out in a white T-shirt, a pair of purple pants that left some leg skin exposed between them and a pair of white socks, and purple sneakers. A purple scarf fit around her neck, while a belt with purple circle completed the piece.

She, like Misty and himself, having gotten some hair trimmed but Anabel's longer hair was still present to the look.

'**So Ash, what do you think?**' Anabel asked as she adjusted the scarf a bit.

'**The shoes are a definite, but I'm not sure about the pants. Are they shorts or pants?**'

"Are they comfy and easy to wear?"

Anabel had a thoughtful pinch of her lips at the question Ash offered, before returning into the changing room.

"So, did we miss anything at the pharmacy?" Ash asked the Pokédex aloud. Even that had been a melee today.

"**Deodorant, shaving products, shampoo, soap, floss, toothpaste, new toothbrushes….well I suppose you could have gotten the mouthwash but the fighting was fierce in that aisle,**" the Pokédex listed off as Ash felt the old question rise again.

"About the bank totals, you'll be good to pay for everything, right…?"

"**With the sales today you'd have to try a lot harder to empty your wallet,**" the Pokédex informed. "**Plus I can easily hack the store register so the charge fits into what totals you need.**"
Ash would have asked the device to please not do it, when Anabel stepped out again, this time in a pair of lavender sweat pants and a white T-shirt.

'I think this will do better for the next time Iris wants us to run, wouldn't you say?' Ash nodded in agreement as Anabel smiled and returned into the changing room.

"Gri!"

As a Grimer scared off another looming stuff poacher, Iris stumbled out of the changing room, dressed in a very, very….

Very odd choice of dress, as if she was planning to go sneak into the Flower Garden Troupe's headquarters again.

Where Iris had found a fairy tale princess version of her normal outfit, a shiny princess crown, and a pair of pure white sandals Ash hadn't a clue.

He was equally unsure of why she'd even wear a thing.

Also since when did Iris's outfit have a plunging neck line? But that was beside the point.

"Why are you…." Ash asked as Iris blinked.

"I… honestly am not sure. It was all a blur," she admitted in confusion. She waved her arms around, an unpleased look on her face.

"Ax." Axew popped out of her hair, looking discombobulated. There was also a crown on his head that looked matching to Iris's.

"I will not be keeping this," Iris declared bluntly as the door opened again, and Anabel and Misty walked out as well.

Anabel was dressed in a black three-piece suit with a white undershirt, an outfit that looked pretty good on her despite the fact that suits were more the sort of thing a guy would wear.

Misty had an expensive-looking white dress with a single covered shoulder and a long skirt.

"You know, we probably should have found something better in the 'fancy' department," Misty admitted taking in Iris's appearance.

Ash would ask why they were in the fancy department, but that was probably the wrong question to ask. Also if Iris was any indication, the memory there may be blurry.

'She'd look good in something like this, but I think we said something about wanting to balance it out. Two suits, two dresses,' Anabel surmised.

"Two suits?" He wouldn't talk about spending frivolously, they had money to do so even if everything wasn't ridiculously on sale today, but even that seemed a tad odd a purchase.

"Yeah, yours. You've got your own backlog to try on when we're done," Misty spoke as if reminding him. Did he repress the memory?

"You do. You have a sizeable catalog to try on when they are done with their own selection," the Pokédex had a similar tone.

"I'm sure they fit…."
"There is fitting, and there is fitting," the Pokédex snarked. Ash’s eyes flicked to his pocket as he wondered what the hell that meant.

"We’ll find you something else when Ash is trying on his stuff. I’ll watch our stuff," Misty told Iris as the girl looked eager to get out of the dress.

And they soon returned into the dressing room, as dread overcame Ash once more.

"How much more do they have?" How long did he have until the pain began?

"….Do you want the answer in total clothing, or total value of the clothing?" the Pokédex quipped.

….Misty had to admit, there was something….good about Ash looking her over when in a swimsuit.

When she came out and asked Ash what he thought of her, be she in a blue bikini or a red one, and she could tell he liked what he saw.

That he was interested, even as he tried to not look her over like a piece of prime meat.

It was nice to feel pretty, nice to feel attractive. And to be frankly honest, it was a nice stepping stone.

Misty had no real idea how to try and go from what they had to something more, it wasn't something she knew how to do.

She wasn't sure Ash had any idea how to do it either.

It wasn't like she could simply do what her parents would do (...for various reason), and Ash's father was apparently too busy having other kids to give pointers.

Even then, his pointers would probably only be good for a single night, which was hardly what she wanted, nor what she was near sure that Ash wanted.

So, this was a way to work towards it, even if it would be trial and error. Though that didn't mean there weren't potential problems.

Iris, for as much as the girl was someone that Misty did see as a friend, was also interested in Ash. She knew that.

She also noted when Iris herself came out in a one piece swimsuit (after telling Iris that yes, you would need that), that Ash did like her appearance as well.

She was also not unaware that he had seen a lot more of her than a swimsuit. Iris had let it slip that she had showered with him a while ago.

(It was also somewhat tied to her having no idea how to work towards a relationship, as media portrayals of relationships would have her yell at Ash for being a pervert or a cheater despite the scenario being very clearly not of his choosing. Frankly that would only end in her acting like, and frankly being, an unlikable bitch.)

While Iris said it in a way that Misty had to agree that Iris did not do it as part of her mentioned interest in having Ash be her 'mate', what she did say clearly showed that Ash had noticed things,
and liked them for as much as he tried not to overly focus on them.

The only hint of a good thing was that, if anything, Iris was probably less understanding of how to instigate a relationship as she and Ash were.

Then there was the fact that Iris would, as she admitted herself, not consider Ash and her being together as a sign not to try and seduce Ash. Or Iris and Ash being together a reason Ash should not be with her.

That was, if anything, something that made Misty more uneasy. Iris completely, without any hint of jealousy, considered that an option, and Ash, for as good and kind and decent as he was….was still a teenage male.

Such an arrangement would be something he'd struggle to say no to, and if it was Iris who he was with….well Misty had to acknowledge that she'd be hypocritically more okay with that scenario than the other way around.

When Anabel had stepped out in a lavender tankini and nervously asked if Ash thought it looked better than the similar colored one piece (to which Ash was as nervous in replying as he had been when she asked about two different bikinis), Misty was quite aware of the other possibility.

Anabel was starting to also, even if she did not say it as bluntly as Iris, show signs of being attracted to Ash. That had problems of its own to consider.

For example, if Iris went up to Anabel the same as she did her, how would Anabel react?

Misty had to admit, the possibility of Anabel agreeing with Iris made her very nervous.

'You can read his mind; he likes the both of us, so what is the problem? ’ She could practically hear Iris say such a thing.

That would lead into all the previously commented issues of hypocrisy on her end all over again.

"Can I wear a shirt?" Ash called out from the changing room, having been putting it off for a while now.

'We didn't wear shirts outside of that one jacket that went with it,' Anabel told him with a tease as the door creaked open and Ash stepped out in a pair of black and red swim trunks.

And only a pair of black and red swim trunks, revealing all the muscle that Iris had been working on increasing even as she had them run miles.

While Ash was already fairly muscular when they first met, Misty never had a chance to actually check him in detail, but now, she could notice things. First, he was broad-shouldered, and while it didn't seem that much at first, his arms looked now like they could conceivably stop the punch of a Kangaskhan like he had told them before. His legs also looked fairly well-toned; all that running in front of his Tauros had definitely paid off. His abs were also starting to show hints of a six-pack, and Misty had to wonder if Iris had been aiming for that from the beginning. She'd probably have to thank her for it later.

She had to stop her tongue from licking her lips, though there was one issue she did have with how Ash looked.

While Ash was hardly one of those men who were hairier than some Ursaring, she'd probably prefer if they could get Ash to shave more than his face.
They probably should have tried to get some shaving material that was for more than just a guy's face, but it was in high demand at the pharmacy today and they'd rather not lose a hand.

Ash could use with less hair, but it was far from worth a limb.

As Ash got confirmation from them all that he looked good, (and was told that no, they did not actually get the speedo that was also on sale), and returned to try on another swimsuit, Iris spoke up.

"Does human body hair have any way to make it grow more? I think Ash would look good with more of it on his chest."

Misty and Anabel stared at Iris in equal parts bafflement, unease, and 'how on earth is this conversation going to go'.

---

**Two days later**

They had escaped the madness with no loss of limb, and with everything they needed.

With a tap, one of those items, a three drawer storage place for clothes, was sucked away into the item capsule as Pikachu raised a sleepy head off the bed.

"Pikapi…" 'Five more minutes…'

"I already gave you half an hour even after I washed and shaved and all of that stuff." Ash told his buddy as said buddy grumpily hopped off the comfortable mass of blankets and mattress that was Ash's new bed away from home.

Ash quickly returned the item into its capsule as he paused to note the new clothes he was now defaulting to, given the damage to his previous outfit.

It was much the same, a new red and white hat with the design divided into two red thirds and a center white third, a black and blue short sleeved jacket with a white hoodie, and a pair of blue jeans and shoes. The two rings, one on each arm remained, a Z-Ring without any crystals, and a Key Stone whose powers he was unsure of how to unlock.

A pair of black fingerless gloves completed the set, along with the underwear and socks his mom thankfully felt the need to stop asking him about.

Pikachu, with a tired gait, climbed up him and onto his perch on his shoulder as Ash walked out of the tree hollow turned secret base into the sunlight beyond.

"So, I see sleeping beauty is done," Misty teased as Ash smiled.

"Well, unless he sleeps on my shoulder I guess."

Like him, everyone else had changed up their default outfits thanks to the shopping madness.

Misty's outfit was now mostly yellow and blue, with new yellow shoes and bracelets that worked with a pair of blue shorts, a blue tube top, and a yellow jacket unbuttoned over said tube top. Her hair was also held a bit longer than usual, with a single pierced ear holding her own keystone.

Iris had kept her old shoes, but she was now wearing a much shorter shirt of similar color and dimensions to her old one, with a pair of pink shorts showing off just as much leg as Misty now did. Around her wrists and neck were a pair of tooth themed accessories, with the necklace having her
keystone set in the center. Her hair was now held in place a bit by a hair piece, though it still spilt out from her like a massive eruption.

Anabel was wearing her hair out longer, which was a nice look with her new purple sleeveless top and white pants. A pair of black boots and a brown belt with a purple symbol of Psychic types embedded in it was all the decoration she had going for her.

'So, what sort of surprises do you think today will hold?' Anabel asked them as Iris smirked.

'Whatever they are, they are nothing we cannot handle.'

As if summoned by Iris's declaration, Ash felt something pop up behind him.

"Abra, the P.S.I Pok…." the Pokédex began reading off as Ash felt something tug on his hoodie, and immediately he was no longer on the path to Cinnabar.

The path to Cinnabar was not a nice looking, if somewhat ominous looking, mansion hallway after all.

"…émon, and we appear to have rapidly shifted geographical location." The Pokédex interrupted giving the entry as the Abra floated a few strides away from him.

"You took me here, why? Do you need something?" Ash asked the Psychic Pokémon, wondering if this was related to a dispute with some Ghost Pokémon in an abandoned mining town.

The Abra slowly turned to face him, before setting its own fist on fire and flying at them.

Pikachu hopped to counter it with Iron Tail, colliding with the Fire Punch.

Not interested in seeing how this clash would go, Ash sped forward with Quick Attack and knocked the Abra away with a rapid punch.

As the white streaks dissipated from around him Pikachu was wide awake and sparking in anger.

"Pika." 'What was that about? First it takes us here, and then it attacked us?'

"Where is here anyway?" Ash wondered aloud as the sound of rolling came from down the same direction as the defeated Abra.

"The here is Saffron City. The address….the Saffron City Gym," the Pokédex declared with audible concern as the rolling revealed itself to be from a group of approaching Exeggcute.

All of them seeping a fog of Stun Spore as they approached.

Ash turned the other way and ran, Pikachu in his arms as the rolling clouds of spores came right after him.

All of this was being observed from the top most room of the Gym, where a computer blazed with information.

A glowing duo of blue dots were running on the second floor, those being Ash Ketchum and Pikachu. A single purple dot, the Exeggcute up there, was in hot pursuit.

On the edges of the screen were seven large data boxes. The topmost showing Ash and the top right
Pikachu.

*Ash Ketchum, One KOs, Zero Assists*

*Pikachu, Zero KOs, One Assists.*

Sabrina smirked, a telekinetic pull reaching for a nearby Sitrus Berry and tossing it to the Abra who was the source of the two’s performance grade so far.

She rarely needed it, but she had the thing anyway, and sometimes she really did need raw data to say if a person *really* did deserve to live or not. Sometimes her gut wouldn’t give her an answer.

As the teleporter ate the berry slowly she smirked.

"Well, I do believe this is a nice little callback for you, or do you remember? It was that doll of mine that brought you to me last time, or are you too panicked to notice? Regardless, your test has only just begun. I am sure you will prove yourself worthy of living, but can you break yourself of your self-restraints? Particularly for what you will not give up on so easily?"

On the uppermost and lowermost levels of the map were two golden dots. The top one was situated where she kept her Marsh Badges, the lower where Primeape was.

Both heavily guarded second only to the door out, and with all the windows fortified those were the only three destinations he could go for.

But seeing as she was a good sport, she'd make sure he knew where each were if it looked like Ash and Pikachu was about to leave early.

No point in losing something forever so recklessly after all.

....

Meanwhile the two were approaching a spiraling staircase, going both higher and lower.

"**Down means open door,**" the Pokédex pointed out.

"And things roll down the stairs, not up them. Won't the powder fall down after us too?!" Ash yelled back.

As he declared this Pikachu blasted a thunderbolt at the Exeggcute, who had a yellow Light Screen flare up to block the attack.

Ash scurried up the stairs the moment his foot got in range, darting up the creaking steps even as the Exeggcute, no longer powder spewing, rolled down the stairs.

Ash saw a flash of yellow at the top of the stairs, and reacted immediately.

"**Roggenrola!**" Ash threw the Safari Ball up the stairs, and the sound of a thump suggested that Headbutt was used.

Ash met said Rock Pokémon at the next stair landing, the Mantle Pokémon standing next to a defeated Drowzee.

Before them down the floor stood a Slowpoke, who yawned and unleashed a torrential fire stream at them.
Roggenrola spat out a Sand Attack that met the fire and doused it, as the Pokédex surmised it all with a scream that sounded like a swear word in the tone of dial up.

Ash suspected he'd hear many more swears in dial up before they got out of here.

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**OMAKE CANON: SIBLING EMPATHY**

Next stop a furniture store for something to store more clothes…

"Is that a 90% off sale on socks?"

Oh no.

Misty's stop and declaration on the store front caused Anabel and Iris to stop in their tracks, with Anabel subtly tugging him to a stop too.

"The socks you gave me do have a hole now." Iris looked down at her feet. "I am also fairly sure that '90%' is a good thing?"

'Oh yes, it is.' Anabel agreed.

It was spreading. The virus.

"With that price, we all could use some more socks. You know, I've never really used this day for much, but I'm really feeling it now." Misty said in a tone of growing giddiness as Ash's knew it was definitely here.

The shopping virus.

"Come on!" And with that, and another subtle telepathic tug from Anabel, they went into the store.

The only consolation was that the horrible frenzy that ensued had a pair of socks fitted to him thrown his way.

Though Ash's mind, at least in a desperate attempt to be anywhere but here, briefly went back to the (probably) half-brother and friends he saw in Stone Town.

Midori.

What sort of hell was he in for today? After all, he had four female friends with him, not three.

....

Midori had been having it good recently.

Really, it was great, just before leaving, had gotten to meet an amazing Trainer and got all sorts of good advice from him.

He and his best friends finally got to leave Stone Town, and had never felt freer. The world was theirs, and it felt like bliss.

No more naysayers about how friendships and bonds couldn't last after you left home. No more people saying there was no way they could win anything.

He and Rana couldn't make it to the Leagues. Kusa and Hoshi the Grand Festivals. Monet's sketches
never making it big.

They'd never hear that again. It was great!

They'd even been making great progress, too, He captured his first Pokémon in Vulpix, and Kusa a Magnemite. Their moves and techniques were looking good, Monet found his Vulpix inspirational for her artistic muse, and there would be a Pokémon Contest in Fuchsia soon.

They could all get what they needed there, badges, ribbons, and Monet would have a lot of interesting architecture to draw.

She had already talked of making one with all of them dressed as ninjas.

Though before they got there, he had taken the wrong turn and found himself in pain and terror.

First mistake of the day. Most likely would not be the last.

"Give it here, boy!"

"I don't care what your little girlfriends are paying you, I'll pay you more!"

"Those shoes will be on my feet, mark my words boy!"

Princess shopping, and the mob of women were on him.

Make that DEFINITELY would not be the last mistake of the day.

Machop had already fallen to them giving him time to run away (Why did one of the women have a Rhyperior on hand, and who'd pay for the damaged lighting fixtures?!), hopefully Nurse Joy wasn't lost to the madness.

He doubted it, seeing what was before him, but one could hope, yes?

Order had broken down completely, the store wasn't able to stop the stampede.

Battles of physical conflict, shouting, and Pokémon were everywhere, another cashier screamed in frustration up at the front before running out of the store. Barely heard over the angered cacophony, it was just part of the madness at this point.

The buildings of man were simply not designed to deal with this kind of insanity. He swore he heard something groaning and it wasn't Machop. He was inside his Pokéball.

He ran past a series of changing rooms as the door cracked open. He felt a flash of fear at more pursuers, before a green whip of energy shot out of it and wrapped around his waist.

He barely held onto the packages he was asked to hold onto as he was dragged inside as the mob turned, ready to break down the door.

Even as Rana locked it and held it back with her own body as Hoshi, Kusa, and Monet looked his way in concern and relief.

"That….was not one of our better ideas," Monet admitted as the energy whip slung back into Kusa's hand, vanished as if it was never there in the first place, "Sorry about that Midori, we thought they'd ignore you because you're a guy."

That was probably the worst mistake of the day.
He nodded in agreement before he turned to Kusa with a worried look.

"Kusa…." He breathed in concern as she shrugged at the sound of carnage behind the door.

She waved off his concerns with a smile. "Believe me, I'm not the only one producing vine whips today. I saw at least three Bellsprout helping their Trainers over the last new set of cooking knives, I don't think they could tell. Plus, they aren't exactly thinking right now."

The changing room door shuddered with renewed blows as he heard curse words he had never heard before. That pretty much proved her point.

If it weren't for the lack of moans over 'braaaaaaaaaaains...', Midori would think they were a ravenous horde of zombies.

"Well, it looks like we're stuck here for a while," Hoshi observed as Kusa moved to the door next to Rana. Rana slumped over in relief as Kusa took on the mob's blows.

Midori shot her a deadpan look, as if to say 'gee, no kidding, what was your first clue?' before he wondered what they should do while they waited for the crowds to die down.

"Any ideas?"

And bad got worse, at least as far as Midori was concerned.

Monet shrugged as a smile formed on her face. A very specific sort of smile.

The sort of smile that involved things such as bikinis, lacy unmentionables, and other things that usually didn't get seen.

The sort that always seemed to end with him blushing.

He had to open his mouth...

"Well, we do have the loot we managed to not have ripped out of our hands, and the stuff our brave hero managed to save from a group of monsters. And seeing as we're in an unusually large changing room I say…"

The smile was soon accompanied by a glint in her eyes, and Midori knew things were going to get even worse.

She walked over to the door that Kusa was holding back, Mime Jr. hot on her heels. She tapped the door with her index finger as it shimmer with a Reflect.

The hammering of the mob lessened both in noise and stress to the door, as she turned to Mime Jr.

"Now, Mime Jr. will keep an eye on the door and make sure it stays enhanced until they go away. Given our gallant knight protected the last pair of this year's hottest shoes, that won't happen for a while so until then let's make sure they all look good on us, with a fashion show!"

Her tone went higher for the last bit as all the girls beamed and he blushed, a blush that drew redder when Rana held up a pair of jeans that were not fitted for girls.

Oh, sweet Arceus, NO.

"You too of course." She grinned as Midori briefly considered if he was safer back in the open. Between the teasing and the possibility he'd have to tell them 'no, that did not look good on you'…. 
The sound of what he could only assume was a katana being unsheathed quickly made him forget any ideas that being stuck here would be any more dangerous that out there. Especially when a second one got unsheathed and the sound of clashing metal was heard.

Seriously, what sort of horrible virus engulfed people on days like this? And who carried a sword while shopping?

Or was that a Princess Festival only thing?

If so, he hoped he would NEVER see it again. Which wasn't at all likely.

So, yeah, he was doomed.

OMAKE CANON: SWIMSUIT SEASON

"Why is this happening to me?"

The reason why Misty would want to buy more swimsuits for herself (the ones she bought a while back had been spared from being sacrificed for the Sceptilite) was beyond Ash's understanding. But the fact she wanted to convince the others to join her… it was a repeat of the S.S. Anne, but now threefold.

"I still do not understand," said Iris. "Do humans have to wear clothes even for bathing?"

"There are places, like pools or beaches, where it is a rule to wear them if you're going for a swim," Misty explained.

"Well, it is weird. I once visited a beach in Kalos where no one seemed to care about that," the wild girl said, as she examined a dark purple one-piece that matched her hair.

Ash and the others exchanged glances, but decided not to press any further. The Trainer didn't get to explore enough of Kalos in the old timeline to know if that was the norm for beaches or something, and he would never have asked Serena about that.

"I'm not sure about this,' said Anabel. 'It's been a while since I last went to the beach, so…'

"We might as well be ready." Misty then turned towards Ash. "For now, you just wait here."

And so, the three girls disappeared behind the dressers, and the swimsuit fashion show began. Misty seemed the boldest of the trio, showing off her curves in a bikini with a yellow strapless top and a blue bottom. Iris complained about her cream one-piece being too skin-tight, but Ash had to admit it went well with her more athletic figure, plus how the light color contrasted with her dark skin. Anabel, who seemed a bit awkward at being stared at, appeared with a black one-piece with white frills on the chest and hips, which also went nice with her petite shape and, like Iris, contrasted well with her skin tone.

As the show continued, over and over again with new swimsuits, Ash wasn't sure how to phrase it with words, but the fact was he did find them all… attractive, beautiful, even sexy, perhaps? He really didn't want to play favorites, but one thing was for sure, he liked what he saw in each of them.

'Brock would probably feel in heaven if he was in my stead,' he thought, thankfully being out of Anabel's passive telepathy range at the moment.
Meanwhile, at the Pewter City Gym…

"AAACHOOO!"

That sneeze cost Brock a couple of valuable seconds, giving his challenger's Ivysaur the opening to finish charging its Solar Beam and fire it at his Onix. Taking the blast in the face, the rock snake shook the ground after slumping, unable to continue.

"Onix is unable to battle, Ivysaur wins!" Forrest declared as he raised a flag.

"Alright, just one more and that badge is good as ours!" The challenger, who sort of reminded him of a female version of Ash Ketchum (a female cousin?), cheered to her nodding Pokémon.

As Brock returned his fallen Onix and grabbed his next Pokéball, he couldn't help but wonder where that sneeze came from. Also, why did all of a sudden felt like asking Lucy if she wanted to go to the indoor pool?
The Sabrina Arc: The Search for Ash

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Crime Scene

She could only stare in shock at the spot Ash had just been as Misty and Iris shared her action, before they immediately exploded, if in different ways.

Neither of which involved chemical reactions.

Misty broke out into fearful, panicked tones interlaced with swear words and frantic looks in every direction, while Iris jumped over to where Ash had been, looking around for anything that seemed like it may hint to where he had been taken.

Footprints, scent trails, a stray hair, even as Iris was probably all too well aware there wasn't anything she could find. Just sheer instinctual want to find anything, anyway, to track him.

The Abra hadn't been there quick enough to really get a read on what it wanted, she hadn't caught it in time. She felt a lead weight of guilt hold her down at the thought, though she tried to keep thinking instead of dwelling on her error.

She had to figure out what she could do to track the Abra.

That was the problem though, she had no clue on how to do it, a state of confusion that was shared by the denizens of a nearby oak tree as well as Iris and Misty.

Before she could decide what to do with the three in the tree, Axew had noticed as well.

"Ax!"

And with a searing Dragon Rage into the tree, it exploded and flung out the white clad criminal trio at their feet, dirtied and bruised.

"Hey, what was that for!"

The complaint of the male one, James, was not followed up as the three found themselves the center of attention. Iris' and Misty's specifically, who were glaring at them with a furious look in their eyes tinted by a sense of successful deduction. They thought they had the guilty party at their feet.

"What the hell did you do to Ash!?" Misty demanded of them, the fury of the worst sea storm in her tone. Her demand backed up by the threat of violence as she cracked the knuckles of one fist into the palm of her other hand.

Iris, while not giving them a verbal snarl like Misty, was giving them a particularly nasty look with fury glimmering in her eyes. The fury of untapped nature ripping into something with savagery not seen in the age of modern civilization. Energy crackled around her hands as Dragon Claw tried to flare into life in response to her anger and fear.

"What? Why on earth are you blaming us? Does James look like the kind of guy who'd have an Abra?" Jessie demanded.

"Actually, I wouldn't mind…"
"None of us have an Abra, we're just as shocked as you all."

The fact that the trio were pleading not guilty meant nothing to Iris, the man she cared for greatly had vanished randomly, and the self-titled criminals and thieves were present where it happened. Those who openly said they stalked him, it was hard not to see why her ire was now on them with an unforgiving, furious focus.

There was a distinct possibility that Iris would not let them walk away. If they were guilty of the crime their lives would last only long enough to tell her what, why, and where.

Anabel wanted to find Ash too, but she was trying to not let anger and confusion overpower her and forget things. Things like the fact Ash would not want them chewing into people who were not in fact guilty.

'They're not the ones. They're innocent,' Anabel clarified to Misty and Iris before Iris did something she'd regret later. Mostly in how she'd be hurt by Ash's reaction to her deeds.

"Yeah, listen to the telepath. Our job is to watch everything he does for the boss for some reason; it is not our job to go from stalking to stealing him," Meowth clarified as Misty leveled a new glare at them.

"You know that doesn't make you three any less disturbing," Misty spat.

The implications of the three watching everything Ash did wasn't the funniest thing to imagine.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" James demanded indignantly. He was quite truthful in his disbelief that he was being non-verbally accused of lechery on Ash, though Misty did not notice this and continued to give him a glare. James would've tried to defend himself, but Misty really didn't seem in the mood for talking.

That was when Jessie cleared her throat, and everyone turned back to her and her creepy grin.

"Oh yes, I've watched him, and oh how I watched him! Who wouldn't enjoy some abs like these? And those shoulders! And well, everything else, really! Truly one if the best bodies I've ever seen, you're lucky to hang with him so closely every day. Good job on improving on what's already good, wild girl! You have my approval!" Jessie quipped in a manner that Anabel found quite unpleasant to listen to, even if she did pick up that she was making up quite a bit of it to get Misty off James's back.

Misty seemed to agree with her on the idea of Jessie watching Ash while he showered to be highly unwelcome (Iris didn't seem to care about that point at all, while James and Meowth were staring at Jessie in confusion), made up or not, which led Jessie to quickly add. "But if you want to go and think that's just me suggesting I really did kidnap him and have him locked in my basement for my own personal use, you can rest your little heads that I'm hardly interested in doing that. Definitely not after Jessebelle. Your boy isn't really my type, and it's too friggin' soon to do that after that little incident."

Anabel got the memory of what 'Jessebelle' was, and felt sympathy for James, and fought the blush of what the intent of said Jessebelle was. Those weren't fictional inventions of a bad book?

Misty and Iris had no idea what Jessebelle was, and didn't seem to care.

"Then who is responsible? Where did that Abra take him?" Misty demanded of the trio.

"Like I said, we're completely clueless on both questions. Just like you three."
Anabel gave a level look at the cat for the remark, before all three glowed with her psychic powers. Moments later, they were flung into the air.

"Looks like Team Rocket is blasting off only for being insensitive!"

"Hey, I was just speakin' the truth! I do that from time ta time!"

She could only just overhear Meowth complain over Jessie and James's statement as they vanished over the horizon.

She'd have not done that if she was not aware they survived these things. Also it was probably best they be removed before they raise tempers further.

After all with the trio gone, Misty and Iris were no longer being aggressive in their panic. They instead had begun grasping at straws.

"We can use those other devices…." 

"They were in Ash's backpack which was on Ash!"

"Oh, well perhaps we can contact Professor Oak and have him….."

"He called Ash and said he was going to be out all day today."

"We could just…." 

"As in he'll be unconscious for a minor surgery."

Anabel remembered that call, nothing life-threatening, but the best mind in Kanto would be unavailable for most of the day. By the time he'd be back in the lucid world and sharp enough to help; it would be well into the night.

There were interns sure, but none of them knew them and who knows how much time it would take to convince them to help.

A necessary caution perhaps, but one that would not really help them today.

Anabel closed her eyes, extending her senses as far out as she normally could.

Her thoughts quickly washed through Misty and Iris's minds, feeling immense layers of concern and worry as she passed through, before sweeping through the forest.

She eventually felt her reach strain like a rubber band pulled to the maximum, and nothing. Not that it was too much of a surprise.

She couldn't exactly push her mind that far and an Abra could Teleport much farther than she could feel with all her senses.

Though, what with only some of them?

Perhaps if she wasn't trying to look for everything, she could look farther. Though she had never tried it, she hadn't even tried the idea of working with Kadabra to sense things farther away yet by combining their minds.

It required a union of both their minds to a central will; otherwise it would just be two minds looking over the same area, or perhaps her looking one way and Kadabra the other.
She'd probably have better work narrowing her search herself than trying to combine minds with Kadabra. Though she doubted the idea would work.

After all, how far could she see if her thoughts weren't trying to reach for every sense?

'Sometimes to win you've got to go with your gut feeling, even if your brain thinks it doesn't make sense,' She remembered Ash saying once.

It seemed an appropriate time to try that approach. After all, even if she had to question how well this would work, they needed some solution.

So, Anabel extended her thoughts again in a sweeping web, this time without trying to feel the sensation of touch with her thoughts.

Her thoughts swept out again, though this time when they went through Misty and Iris she did not feel a definitive 'you are entering her mind', or 'you are leaving her mind', sense, as her thoughts raced to where she had been overextended before….and kept going.

She kept going and going, though eventually she again reached a mental limit. Still no Ash to be found, even with a wider search area that could still be made wider.

She tried again, this time also removing taste. It only pushed her a bit farther.

Next was without smell, and the resulting mind search felt oddly empty as her thoughts raced out, and out, and out.

Her mental search was pushing even farther than ever before, though she was starting to notice that the people whose mind she briefly ran over were barely registering.

She barely noted a thing about who they were or where they were. Only that they were there, and a brief snippet of mental thought. Though when she felt her mind waft over Fuchsia, she noted that a mind did stand out as somewhat more familiar than the mass of minds across the city.

Janine.

It was shortly after she again found herself at her limit, and so she resolved to even farther.

She'd drop hearing this time, and so she pushed ahead….

Only to find herself in utter nothingness, blacker than night and without light.

Her mind was there, yet she couldn't say anything about it. Where, when, what...who...she knew who she was, but she could say little else.

What was there even to find? Why did she stretch so far? What was there to find in nothingness?

Ash.

Ash Ketchum.

A traveling companion.

A nice Trainer.

A nice person.
A nice young man.

A good-looking young man she enjoyed being with.

A person she did not want to lose.

A person she wanted to find.

That was who she was looking for. In that nothingness, that was the only thing she needed to find.

And so blue light burned like flame in the nothingness. Flames scattered around, many but uncountable despite Anabel being sure she could in fact count them.

Where they were, what was one and what was another of them, if they were alive or a place she couldn't tell. They all felt like Ash, be it place or person.

But which one was actually....

She was shaken out by a concerned looking Misty moments later, her senses flooding back to her in full in a mass rush, along with her fuller mental faculties.

It made her feel dizzy.

"Ax," Axew called in concern as Iris gave her a look of concern.

"Are you well?" Iris asked in concern as Anabel gave a reply to let them know she was in fact well.

'Buttermilk waffles'.

Misty and Iris seemed more concerned after she garbled that out, so she quickly tried again.

'Sorry...mind was a bit scattered. I think I may have an idea though.'

And so she explained what she'd been doing, what she had found, and what was the obvious plan. She'd Teleport them to those blue lights, and one of them should've been Ash. Eventually....

Iris and Misty still looked at her in concerned though.

"Anabel, you might not know what you look like when you do that...it's not encouraging." Misty struggled with her word choice, she could tell without looking into her thoughts.

"You want to jump in the dark at things you cannot tell the nature of, or if you have already done so. That is not safe," Iris added.

'It's the only lead we have, and we don't have any better options. The only other we have is waiting here if Ash can get back, and that isn't likely. Plus maybe with practice, I can narrow it down.'

Misty and Iris still did not look convinced, even if Iris did reluctantly tell Axew to get ready to move while Misty picked up the egg that Ash had gotten from Grandpa Canyon, before each took a hand in preparation for Teleporting.

She didn't feel the sensation of their touch for a moment before she Teleported them all, all of them landing inside a room of green crystal, with a center crystal within.

Within it floated a Pokémon she had never seen before, which stared at her curiously.
"Mew?" 'You seem lost, I don't think you meant to come here?' It asked in a very cute voice, though one that also sounded oddly old at the same time.

Anabel responded to something along the lines of cumquats, followed by a questioning of if the Pokémon had seen Ash.

First attempt, no Ash. Though the Pokémon, a Mew, did seem to know who Ash was even if he wasn't in fact wherever they were.

Oddly Misty and Iris were just as surprised as to why that was. Was there a story to this?

Slowpoke having been defeated, Ash found himself staring at a nearby window, knowing exactly what this situation called for.

"I've fallen out of worse, Roggenrola!" The Rock-type's knob glowed white as Rock Blast fired.

The rocks hit the window, shattering on impact as a shimmering veil covered the window.

"That window has Reflect on it," the Pokédex noted.

"Pika!" 'Well this isn't reflectable!' Pikachu fired a Thunderbolt at the window, which glowed yellow but otherwise did not suffer an effect.

"Light Screen is also in effect." The Pokédex didn't need to know what Pikachu had assumed to add the retort.

Ash walked up to the window and began pushing it up, only for it to shimmer and refuse to budge.

"Reflect also locks things?" Ash exclaimed in frustration as he swung his fist back around.

It caught the Abra that appeared in front of him seconds after it materialized, knocking it down and out even as a Thunder Punch attempted to spark into being on Abra's left arm.

"Rogg." 'Clearly Iris is being proven right,' she noted it in a complementary tone for both his reflexes and Iris's correct assumptions.

Ash nodded, but looked at the downed Abra sadly.

"That doesn't mean I particularly like punching Pokémon."

Sure they were attacking him, but it wasn't something he enjoyed doing.

"Pikapi." 'Stick to punching the Pokémon attacking us, and I think you'll be okay.'

Fairly good advice, even if he'd probably never fully take it to heart.

"So, any ideas for getting out of this place?" Ash asked Pikachu and Roggenrola, though they were not the ones to answer.

"I do have a plan which I am currently in the process of implementing to expedite our escape. However it will take some time to be fully realized, and longer still to extract us," the Pokédex chimed.

"You're going to call a Jenny SWAT team?"
"Negative. That would only open up job openings for young and upcoming Jenny. Plus that is more of a Unovan Jenny thing." The Pokédex's dire declaration of a Jenny-based intervention was not followed upon, as a Starmie Teleported in front of them and used a Psychic attack to fling Pikachu down the hall.

Roggenrola charged for a Headbutt, but a Bubblebeam blasted Roggenrola into the wall.

Ash tapped the Great Ball at his belt even as he ran to get Roggenrola.

"Hrp!" the Starmie declared as it sparked, before being sliced by a glowing green tail.

Ash picked up Roggenrola and began channeling Heal Pulse through his only Rock-type as Servine eyed the defeated Starmie in confusion.

"Ser." 'I take it some odd hijinks is at hand.'

Pikachu darted back over and filled her in.

"Pika." 'We got kidnapped by an Abra and need to get out. The windows are locked and Psychic Pokémon keep jumping us.'

Servine eyed the defeated Starmie for a moment before raising a question.

"Vine?" 'Is this Pokémon wild, or is someone ordering it around?'

Ash put Roggenrola down before giving her the answer.

"I'm pretty sure the Gym Leader Sabrina is calling the shots."

"Servine." 'But do you know for sure? We'll all want to smack ourselves if we find out we could have gotten some information out of them by capture.'

He had no answer to Servine's point, and a motion with the Pokédex in hand only invoked an 'I am busy trying to save all of us, I don't have the resources to run that program' from it.

Thus Ash pulled out a Net Ball and tossed it at the Starmie.

A red glow formed around Starmie, but it petered out and the ball returned to him.

Okay, so now they knew.

As if summoned by his attempt to capture a Trainer's Pokémon, a ring of Abra Teleported around them. Each one had a sparking, burning, glowing, or chilly fist of some sort, and lunged at them, quite possibly to punish.

Or just randomly attack him like all the other Abra today, one of the two.

The next Teleport took them away from the crystal tree and Mew, a Pokémon she was sure the Pokédex would probably wail about not recording when they found Ash.

Instead the next Teleport put them on a hill, though with a landing that made Misty nearly drop the Togepi egg.

She managed to regain her holding, protecting the egg from falling. The amount of relief she felt when she regained her grip on it was more than she expected to feel.
Like the idea that the egg would be damaged bothered her deeply, deeper than she can imagine. Or even could explain.

She could hear tumbling in the grass behind her, apparently Iris and Anabel hadn't had as smooth a landing as she had. Given Anabel was muttering something about crepes they'd be here for a bit, at least until Anabel recovered.

"Well, this is a surprise, a girl popping out from nowhere."

The declaration made a shiver coarse through Misty as she felt her legs prepare to run even as her power stirred to defend Anabel if this got ugly and she wasn't in a state to get away, when she saw the source of the call.

She didn't need to look for long to add who she was seeing to Ash's growing list of family members, the young man at the base of the hill looked like Ash with Red's skin tone and eyes. He was dressed in a red tracksuit with a white line running down the center zipper and belt area, and had a Pichu on his shoulder.

He grinned as he walked up the hill towards her, appearing quite friendly as he waved and looked at her.

"And not just a girl, but a pretty one at that," he declared, his red eyes sparkling like rubies.

Misty flushed at the praise. He instead looked at the egg she held with interest.

"A Togepi egg? That's rare, you must be really fortunate to have found one. They may be more common now than forty years ago, but they're still rare."

Yes, she was really fortunate to find it. The pride swelled in her, even as she also felt confusion.

Why was she so sure she had been the one to find it? That felt faintly incorrect.

"I've heard that the Togepi line can sense happiness and hatch faster with happy company, and this Egg seems quite close to hatching." The boy gave a smile full of mirth as he inched closer, grabbing Misty's hands as his grin grew warmer by the second. "You must be a really nice girl, I can tell. Would you like to talk for a bit? I've been alone for a while, and I could use some company."

The enthusiasm was so infectious Misty had to smile.

"Tell me, I could've sworn I saw some others come in with you. One of them must have had an Abra or something I didn't see, maybe a Natu. Are they also nice girls?"

"Oh yes, they are. Iris is a bit rough around the edges, but she really does care and she is toned beyond anything you could imagine. Anabel might not be able to talk, but she's really smart and nice, I'm sure you two would get along." This guy was so nice; there was no harm in telling him. She was sure Anabel wouldn't mind.

"Excellent. I can't wait to see them." He clapped, his smile sparkling with diamonds with the beauty to melt anyone's heart.

It vanished when Psyduck punched him in the stomach with a glowing fist that was probably Mega Punch.

"Psyduck, how dare you strike him like that?!" Misty snapped as he was sent rolling down the hill, Pichu letting out pained squeaks as it was thrown off the boy's shoulder.
She felt her anger at Psyduck halve, if not more, though as he found himself splayed at the very bottom of the hill, which was further emphasized when Iris and Anabel finally made it up the hill.

"Psyduck hit who?" Iris questioned.

"Psy! 'Someone who can affect your emotions and make you do as he wants, and he sounds like the kind of guy who'd invite you for dinner and then chop you off to serve you on the table. Get out of here before she ends up under his control again, and probably you two as well.'

End up under his... what!?

While Anabel and Iris did not know what Psyduck said, they picked up his meaning and grabbed him and Misty as Anabel Teleported them off somewhere else.

The last thing she heard was the same voice that she had thought to be so friendly and nice, swear things about Psyduck that sent chills down her spine.

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Ash was fairly certain this wasn't going to work, but he probably should've tried.

After all, it was possible that it was only the windows that were being enhanced, and that they could possibly get through the plain walls.

Plus, the amount of time he had been here was now over an hour. It was time to try something more than beating up Psychic Pokémon.

With that he felt the power to increase others strengths flow, and spread to all his Pokémon present.

Pikachu, Roggenrola, Servine, Muk, Tauros, and Squirtle.

They promptly charged at the wall at once, Wild Charge, Headbutt, Leaf Blade, Body Slam, Giga Impact, and Return striking the wall along with his own Power-up Punch.

The power increase, spread out among them all but still potent, struck the shimmering barrier of the Gym with enough force to shake the foundation of the building and everything within it.

The wall remained though.

Picking up Pikachu and healing the Wild Charge recoil, Ash looked at the wall with a thoughtful gaze.

"Think it might work better if we try and attack a single point at once?" Perhaps avoiding dispersing the blow might enhance the damage they were inflicting.

That sounded right enough, and while it might just leave them with a small hole they could work from there.

He noticed Squirtle look over the rest of the Pokémon present as he put a healed Pikachu back on the ground.

"Squirtle Squir." 'If you're looking for that precision, it would just be me and another Pokémon. That first Pokémon would be the one making the initial attack, and I'd match their attack on point. No one else here has that level of accuracy for a ranged attack.'

Servine gave him a pointed look for that remark, though Ash noted Muk, Tauros, and Roggenrola did not share her annoyance at the putdown.
"Tle." 'A bunch of leaves aren't the most accurate thing. Maybe if you knew Solar Beam.'

That would have the issue of sunlight to gather, but Ash was hesitant to bring that up right now. Maybe after they got out of here.

"Alright Pikachu use Thunderbolt! Squirtle, match it with Water Gun at max power!" Ash added the Max Power part as both attacks struck the wall.

Water Gun adding to the pressure Thunderbolt was placing, all the while striking at an angle to reduce electrifying the water stream.

The wall shimmered again, but this time Ash smiled as he started to see what he could only call a crack.

That would work…

"Ka!"

His joy was interrupted by a pair of Kadabra appearing at either side of him armed with glowing pink spoons extended out like lightsabers.

He barely avoided getting cut in half by the two Kadabra, who promptly used said energy spoons to fend off an Aerial Ace and Take Down from Servine and Tauros.

An Exeggutor appeared over Pikachu and Squirtle and landed with a thud, scattering the two and stopping their attacks before firing a wave of Barrage attacks.

Muk stood up to absorb the blow before it hit him as the Kadabra hopped back behind Exeggutor.

"Why does Sabrina have so many Pokémon? And since when does Kadabra have 'Laser Spoon' as an attack?" Ash asked two questions as the Kadabra fired Psybeams and Exeggutor shot volleys of Bullet Seed.

Roggenrola and Squirtle blocked the Psybeams with Rock Blast and Water Gun, while Muk's Sludge Bomb overpowered the Bullet Seeds and struck the Grass-type, knocking it down in defeat.

"She most likely has nothing better to do between murdering people than breeding and training them. As to the 'Laser Spoon', I actually have some data about such a technique being used by a Coordinator at a Saffron Pokémon Contest a few years back," the Pokédex offered up.

"So, she's plagiarizing?"

"Kidnapping, murdering, and plagiarizing, yes," the Pokédex agreed as the Kadabra charged forward with their stolen laser spoon techniques.

Only for Tauros and Servine to charge the Kadabra that had blocked them previously.

With the shimmering purple force of Giga Impact, Tauros shattered his opponent's Laser Spoon before sending the spoon's user right into the wall.

"Broo!" 'That is quite enough of that.'

Meanwhile Servine's Leaf Blade powered tail slashed into her Kadabra's Laser Spoon. It held up, but Servine used the force to push herself up into the air, and have Kadabra stumble forward.
She then slashed back down with Leaf Blade, also scoring a defeat of Kadabra.

"Ser! 'You're done.'"

And with that, the latest wave of Psychic Pokémon attacking them was over, though he suspected the Farfetch'd he caught would be very upset he was not here to battle psychic energy spoon users. However the Pokédex had already told him that he was too busy trying to set up their escape plan to use the H.O.P.E gloves, so there was nothing he could do to rectify things for the duck.

"Okay, now that we should have a few minutes to ourselves, let's get back to making ourselves a door. Pikachu, use Thu…"

Ash found his voice promptly muffled by a pale hand covering his mouth from an individual shorter than him.

Though given who that person was exactly, that wasn't much help in the 'do not freak out' category.

"That was clever, I'll give you that. You are the first person to think it might be easier to break my walls than my windows, and I can't forget your Squirtle's suggestion either. That was also quite smart. However, I am going to have to ask you to stop," Sabrina declared in a tone between her pre and post-Haunter extremes.

At the sight of her all his Pokémon immediately lunged forward, but a Reflect barrier formed around her and knocked all of them back.

"You know, I probably should have told you the rules of my Gym Battle and how to win it first. Call it a mistake on my part for not mentioning it earlier. Of course, you probably should be aware that what is not a win condition this time is getting me to laugh. Even if Haunter decided to follow you again, he would not save you."

Ash felt all the blood in his body chill at the simple declaration Sabrina made, a chill that he saw mirrored in Pikachu and Squirtle. Not that all of his other Pokémon weren't surprised, but to them what was going on was 'someone knew about time who wasn't them'.

But for himself, Pikachu, and Squirtle, there was something else entirely going on.

Sabrina knew what had happened to time.

"Now…” she declared as all of them blinked out of existence for a moment before being deposited in very much the same Gym arena/throne room as before, before Sabrina removed her hand from his mouth and floated to the foot of her throne before smiling his way.

A smile that was creepier looking than the non-expression she had once worn.

"Let's talk," she said, still smiling as she lowered herself into the throne and crossed one leg over the other before steeping her fingers.

They had taken a few more minutes when their Teleport had popped them on top of a roof in a small farming town.

While Anabel had not needed it any more than usual, Misty needed a few minutes to process what had happened in the last Teleport.

Iris had not seen what had happened, but Misty had needed some time to thank Psyduck and wonder
what was wrong with the person he had struck.

Iris didn't need time to think about it, there was a simple explanation.

The person was evil.

After Psyduck had been thanked enough and returned, they Teleported away again even as a Mr. Mime came out of the home with a broom to sweep the front, and found themselves atop a cliff.

They landed fairly well, though Anabel had to lean on Misty and was muttering something about lard.

Whatever that was.

She had an odd look in her eyes and didn't really seem to know where they were even in as broad of a sense as 'atop a cliff'.

Finding Ash really did have an additional urgency to it beyond Ash's own wellbeing, pushing herself as she was could not be good for Anabel.

"I see you have conquered the challenge of the Pewter Gym. Tell me, how many badges does that make for you?"

A somewhat familiar voice shouted from the bottom of the cliff, and so Iris poked her head over the side.

What she found below was a strangely dressed young man with a Marowak (oddly wearing one of those tie things that had been part of that shopping madness with a Keystone affixed to it) staring down a female Ash with an Ivysaur at her side.

Iris did not think she was exaggerating, the girl did not have the same body shape as that waitress or what they had been described of Belladonna, having one closer to her own or Anabel's, and with the right clothing she could probably fool people into thinking she was Ash at a distance.

She would probably have to cut her hair down from shoulder level, and while the white dominant and blue jacket and black undershirt were quite Ash-like (though the collar being red and yellow looked kind of weird), the girl would probably be a better Ash impersonator if she was wearing jeans instead of a jean skirt.

"Five," she declared with a confident tone.

"Ax!" her brother chirped out. *I think that guy's one of the people Misty fought at that tournament with the evil Clefairy*.

Huh, that would explain why the guy seemed sort of familiar.

"Five, huh? You have the same amount as I. However, I seek my sixth badge and you will be an excellent test to see if I am ready."

"Fine with me, but don't think I'm going to be easy. The name's Manna by the way." The now named girl's Ivysaur stepped forward, determination flashing in both their eyes.

"And mine is Otoshi." With that statement Marowak stepped forward with its bone held for battle.

A strange scent wafted up from both of them, Manna and her Ivysaur smelled like odd pollens she had only smelled once in her life. Her grandfather had mentioned something about a ritual of
evolution that some Bulbasaur and Ivysaur underwent that involved unique pollens he had observed once, and came back with the scent of the pollen upon him.

Both of them smelled like that. Had they been a part of such a ritual recently?

Otoshi and his Marowak smelled much more like lightning, both where it was brewing and the area struck by it. Had they been chasing storms?

"Alright Ivysaur, let's start with Rock Smash!" Manna declared as Ivysaur sent two vines at Marowak, the tips glowing red.

"Deflect Marowak, and let's go all out!" Otoshi declared as the Marowak deflected both red tipped vines with its bone, before forming a Thunder Punch and punching itself right in the midst of the Keystone holding tie.

The canyon seemed to darken for a moment, even as a golden light spread from the punch site to cover Marowak's upper chest and arms in a sparking golden light. Said light crept half way up the bone as well before stopping.

What was that?

Manna seemed to share her surprise, as she demanded exactly what it was that Otoshi had just done.

"This, when mastered, is how we are going to win the Pokémon League. Now Marowak, Bone Club!"

Marowak charged at the Ivysaur, who glared defiantly at the Marowak colored gold.

As the battle promptly began to move hard in Otoshi's favor, Iris could not help but note that Ash would have loved to see this for the thrill of it.

The Pokédex would want the data.

Though, she had to wonder why they had come there by the Teleport. What was Anabel honing in on?

The house and the Mew didn't have anything in common, but this was the second time a result of Ash's father's successful gene spreading was at the end of a Teleport.

Could that be it, and if so why the house and the crystals and Mew?

Did those have some connection to Ash? It was possible that the house was the one his mother lived in, but what of the crystal home of that Mew…

"Saur!"

Her full attention was taken back to the battle at hand. Marowak had just slashed at Ivysaur with a green glowing bone that was probably Fury Cutter.

Still as gold as before, Marowak had charged again, only to be stopped as the Ivysaur glowed with a massive green aura.

Said green aura causing the cliff walls it touched to spring to life with moss, and had Ivysaur glaring at the Marowak with glowing green eyes.

Overgrow, but more powerful than she had ever seen. She had heard of such things before though.
Rare strains of the ability that had much more power behind them, but at the cost of control. Those inflicted had unimaginable potential and strength when using it, but at the risk of destroying everything around them in mindless rampages.

"Oh no…" she heard Manna whisper in a mixture of dread and worry before the Ivysaur fired a Sola Beam uncommanded.

"Block it!" Otoshi ordered as Marowak flipped the bone it was holding so the golden half would make the impact, before charging at the attack with the intent to have the golden armor that seemed to enhance it match the powered up Solar Beam.

A hand tapped her shoulder and Teleported her and Axew away before she could see the results of such a clash.

"I could make a joke about you not earning my badge the first time around, but I sense such jokes are meaningless. That such jabs are either friendly jokes from long held companions, or by the jealous and petty people without even a badge 'out of pity' to their own names. Plus I hardly see a lack of effort in the first time you obtained the Cascade and Rainbow Badges even without a definitive victory. If how a battle went was a factor, you'd think the Dynamo Badge would warrant your teasing," Sabrina observed as Ash and his Pokémon remained tense, ready to strike the moment she tried something.

"I offered to give the badge back, but Wattson was…" Ash stopped his explanation of the Dynamo Badge incident when something occurred to him.

"How do you know that?" He had never seen Sabrina after he won her badge, not even when he returned to Saffron City for May's Contest.

Unless Iris or Cilan had run into Sabrina after they got on the Magnet Train, how could she know that detail?

Heck that wouldn't even explain it, he hadn't mentioned that incident to the two at any point.

"Oh, how do I know about your first and second battles with Wattson? How do I know of your two sumo tournament victories, your defeat at the hands of Montgomery's Throh and your triumph over Volt? It's quite simple really, I read your mind. I learn from the deepest depths of it, and reread when I feel the need to double check something."

She read his mind?!

"Yes, and I've been doing it for a while. I know everything." She paused for a moment before adding an addendum to her declaration. "Except how long you actually were traveling. By the best I was able to count you should have been about this age sometime before time broke, either in Unova or Kalos, and yet you were not. I swear it honestly looked like that May girl aged backwards at one point."

May aged backwards?

"But that is a minor quibble compared to the wealth of knowledge you give me. That includes your wealth of Gym Badge experience, so I think you can adapt to my challenge fairly well." She pointed up with a smirk. "If you want the Marsh Badge, you have to fight your way up to the top of my Gym and take one of my badges. They are sitting out on a table, untouched since I put them there. With what power you used to try and break my wall, I'm certain you'd be the first to ever take one. Of course so few people really do try for it, for after about a few minutes they start begging for their life,
yet so few actually prove themselves worthy of it by that point."

"Why would I even want one?" Ash told her bluntly.

"You took one from a crime boss, didn't you?" she reminded him.

"Technically I took it from Jessie and James."

"Are they not working for a crime boss?"

"Not for at least half the time I deal with them from my understanding," Ash quipped.

"And yet a pair of criminals and their Meowth are better than I am?" Sabrina questioned.

"You just admitted to murdering people!" He was pretty sure Team Rocket were too incompetent to kill anyone most of the time, and when they were competent they were sneaking around stealing things.

"It's more akin to weeding than murder, but if you are so insistent on some sort of standard, there is the prize in my basement." She pointed down to the ground as Ash offered his third option.

"I could just walk away and out the door." It was a statement, not a question.

"Where do you think most of the trash was cleaned up?" She replied matter-of-factly before pointing back down to her basement.

"Pika." 'Sorry lady, but if you want him in your bed there is a line, three people are waiting for that currently, and a very long list of people I'd much rather have him with before you of multiple genders and species,' Pikachu declared bluntly, even if Sabrina could not understand him.

Wait what? Huh? Wah? Ash almost gave himself whiplash as his head snapped round to stare at Pikachu.

"I have no need for your Trainer in such a regard. I have no interest in carnal pleasures nor a child."

Did she read that out of his mind? And what, did they really…

"Yes." Ash redirected his attention to his current problem and let Pikachu's statement retreat to the back of his mind.

'Stay out of my head.' Also what question was she answering?

Sabrina responded to his thought with a shrug that communicated the essence of 'no', which also did not clarify what she was talking about.

"No, down there is your missing Pokémon, the one Paul blasted away."

The declaration made Ash take a step back in shock, as Pikachu mirrored his movement. Muk and the others watched Sabrina with renewed surprise instead of unease as she continued.

"Yes, Primeape. I happened upon him before he would have died by a chance of fate and I figured he could be of some use, and what better use than a motivator for you to come challenge my Gym. Make it to the basement and retrieve Primeape. He can be your prize if you refuse my badge. The challenge to get him will be the same, so it works perfectly well for me."

Ash stared at Sabrina for a long moment, a thought entering his mind about what her angle was.
Why did she drag him here? What was her game?

However each thought was quickly swamped by a simple determination.

Primeape was here. He had a second chance to save him. He was going to take it.

He moved to turn his hat around to symbolize his resolve, even as he saw Pikachu prepare to make a beeline for the nearest place a staircase down could be. In the corner of his eyes he saw Servine acknowledge this with a nod, Tauros snorted in determination, Squirtle give him a thumbs up, Roggenrola hop in the air energetically, and Muk raise himself up into fullness for the battling that would be upon them soon.

All ready to take on the next wave of Psychic-types that appeared as Sabrina left.

Chapter End Notes

And, here we go again with another chapter rearrange. Might as well explain why.

You see, originally the Sabrina arc was split in two parts, the first focused on Ash's female companions searching for him, and the second on Ash's battle at the Saffron Gym. Then for last year's April Fools, we released a "Complete Version" that split the scenes of both parts in chronological order, plus added a few additional ones. Given that it turned out to be the LONGEST chapter yet, it turns out convenient to split the parts more evenly, so in order to match the chapter numbers in Fanfiction.net, I'll just use the complete version and split it in three.

The real challenge was choosing the end points for each chapter, but I think this part works rather nicely, don't you agree? Anyway, stay turned tomorrow for the continuation.
Anabel had regained her mind, but she still had to lean against a tree to stay up.

Teleporting the way they had to was incredibly draining, and it seemed like each time she did it was even more so.

It took her longer to regain full faculties.

She took a deep breath.

Every Teleport they did would require more time on her end to be ready for her next one. Minutes adding up every time for her to be in full awareness again.

How many more of these did she have until she'd require an hour to be ready to go again?

"Sparky, Zippo, it's the egg! I think it's about to hatch!"

Looking down from yet another cliff she had landed on, she saw one of Ash's brothers again with his own Pikachu and Charmander, staring at a solid green egg with amazement in their eyes.

This was the second time she had seen him, his name was Ritchie she believed. A nice guy who even dressed a lot like Ash.

But he wasn't him, and every time they returned to where he was it would take even longer to find Ash.

The egg was fully covered in glowing light as it began to take a form, a Pokémon with a spike on its head, a conical tail, and a red scaled belly distinct from its overall green form. It looked up at Ash's brother in fresh confusion.

"Lar?"

"Welcome to life little guy. My name's Ritchie and these are my partners Sparky and Zippo,” both Pokémon greeted the newborn Pokémon, “what's yours?"

The Pokémon looked at him in confusion, and so Ritchie went into a bit of explanation about what names were and why he liked to give them to Pokémon.

She had known her Kadabra wasn't interested in one, she had asked about it a while ago.

She didn't overly follow his conversation, but focused on the recently hatched Pokémon.

So that was how Pokémon hatched from eggs. She wasn't sure if they broke out of them or evolved out of them, and she wondered how long it would be until the Togepi egg hatched.

Would Ash have the same look of joy and wonder that Ritchie had on his face when his new Pokémon hatched?

The thought reinforced her resolve, and she felt her body force back what remained of her exhaustion from the last Teleport.
She'd be feeling the after effects of it later, but that was, as she noted, later.

There was a need now, and she would find Ash.

They would find Ash.

"Alright, Cruise it is! Welcome to the team buddy!" She heard Ritchie declare happily to his new Pokémon as she walked uneasily to where Misty and Iris were, nibbling on some apples that she didn't have the stomach for at the moment.

As they left the way-too-many defeated Psychic-types behind them, Ash and his Pokémon ran to where Primeape was. This was their second chance to save a friend, and they could not waste it.

"Pika!" 'Don't worry Primeape, we're coming!'

As they ran through the halls though, Squirtle kept muttering to himself. He kept glancing at Ash and Pikachu before looking away, and this did not go unnoticed. Eventually, Ash had to ask. "Something wrong Squirtle?"

"Squir." There is a certain something I realized, and I'm not sure you want to hear it..

"Pikachu." If it's important, just say it.

Squirtle took a deep breath.

"Squirtle." What if we can't remind Primeape?

The sheer shock of that question was enough to stop everyone running.

"How can you be sure of that?" Asked Ash, though he wasn't sure he'd like the answer.

"Squirtle." You couldn't remind Brock.

Ash cringed at that. He remembered how much that tore him up inside.

"Even if we can't remind him, he wouldn't be that different, right?" Ash really hoped they could end this on a positive note.

"Squirtle." I'm worried about him not being different enough. Don't forget, he was a problem Pokémon in the original timeline. He was our friend, yes, but only at the very end. We need to be prepared for the possibility that the Primeape we save is the mon he was before he changed, and if he can't be reminded, we wouldn't be able to skip straight to the part where we're friends.

Ash and Pikachu could only stare at Squirtle as they slowly absorbed the unpleasant truth.

"What if he is different?" Asked Ash, still grasping at straws. Squirtle only gave him a look.

"Squirtle." I was a former gang leader in both timelines. I didn't change that much. Hell, if anything, I became worse. I was hell bent on rampaging before the memory restoration got me.

Ash didn't know what to say for that, but Pikachu spoke up for him.

"Pikachu." It's not going to be that bad, will it?

"Squirtle." I only heard it second hand, but it hurt to hear Misty wasn't interested in Togepi's egg.
Ash, Pikachu, you were both there. That must have really torn you up, all I'm saying is be prepared for something like that when we see Primeape again.'

Ash and Pikachu could only stand still as they remained silent. They didn't know what to say. How could they? Squirtle was right. If they couldn't remind Primeape, he could be the same yet different in all the worst ways.

They didn't know how long they were standing there, but it was probably long enough for Sabrina to run out of patience. They were snapped out of their stunned state when a dozen Drowzee Teleported over them and lunged at them with billowing purple gas and glowing fists.

As Ash's Pokémon defended their Trainer, Ash simply stood there. He remembered when he gazed into Primeape's eyes after saving him from his fall. Through his Pokémon's teary eyes, Ash saw all the shame, all the regret, Primeape had for his behavior before then.

Ash clenched his fist and renewed his resolve. If Primeape couldn't be reminded, then so be it. They'd just redo their relationship all over again, and with the lessons of the original timeline, they won't make the same mistakes.

Ash's fists glowed and he joined the fray with renewed vigor.

That had been a rather... wet landing. Literally, as they appeared above a pond, and they fell into it with a loud splash.

She didn't realize until a few seconds later, when she heard Misty yell "Quick, let's get outta here!" and felt all soaked. When she started regaining her other senses, she felt the water on her clothes and hair somehow drifted away from her, slowly but surely, and once she could see again, she saw Misty forming a water sphere in her hands, throwing it to a faraway tree in frustration.

"Great, I manage to do it when I don't need it. Well, at least now we're dry," she complained.

Iris sighed and glanced in her direction. "Are you feeling well?"

'I think so,' Anabel replied. 'But I'll need a bit more time to teleport us again.'

"Time… the only thing we don't have right now," said Misty.

Anabel wanted to say something, but she was too tired to even think. As she glanced at her surroundings, she realized they were in a city park, and fortunately there weren't many people around at the time. They had hidden in a tree grove while Misty used her powers to take the water off of them, and once she felt she could move on her own again, Anabel pointed at where she had managed to pinpoint the signal, and the three went to check it out.

"No, no, Growlithe, no, stop it, hahahaha!"

The hearty laughter came from a little boy, no older than ten or eleven. Save for the clothes he wore and being younger, he could almost pass for a mini-clone of Ash, happily rolling on the grass while a Growlithe jumped on him to lick his face. A girl around his same age was also laughing, grabbing the fire puppy to snuggle it and let the boy get back on his feet.

Anabel couldn't help but wonder if Ash looked that adorable when he was that age. She could easily imagine that boy growing into a fine young man like Ash in a few years.

"Arnold, Laila, it's time to eat!"
A woman carrying a picnic basket and accompanied by an Arcanine called out to them. Boy and girl quickly ran to her, and together they extended a picnic cloth over the grass to sit down and have their meal together. Anabel saw how the Growlithe tried to jump on her to snatch a couple of sandwiches she had pulled out for the children, so she had to keep it at bay until she could take a bag of Pokémon snacks to sate its appetite.

As the group sat to eat, Anabel felt a mix of disappointment and a warm feeling in her chest as some memories came to her mind. She never went on picnics with her parents, but she often did so with her uncle. Especially when she began discovering her telepathy and she had a hard time controlling it, hearing everyone's thoughts at once, it was almost deafening. Her uncle would always take her to a secluded place where they could eat and relax together, just the two of them. That would always help her feel at ease and forget about her worries and everyone else's for a while.

"Another dead end," said Misty. "How long is this gonna keep up?"

'We'll find him,' said Anabel. 'We can't give up; I know we can find him.'

"Anabel, do not push yourself so hard," said Iris. "You need to rest, this is clearly taking a toll on you."

'I'm fine,' the telepath assured. 'I promised we would find Ash, and no matter what happens, we will.'

Iris and Misty tried to protest again, but she silenced her complaints to focus on what mattered at the time. Ash was still out there, and she had to find him. And she would do so no matter the cost. Once she got a lock on their next destination, and making sure nobody was close, she teleported them away again.

She prayed to Arceus that this time it would be Ash.

Iris had always considered herself very patient with things, but as the hours went by and their attempts to find Ash only ended in failure, she was finding it harder to keep calm. She knew she couldn't give in to panic, but her worry was growing by the moment.

They had teleported in front of a strange building by the edge of the sea: a high and thin tower. Misty called it a 'lighthouse', a construct whose purpose was to guide ships to the shore safely at night or in foggy days to prevent them from running aground. But that wasn't important right now.

While Anabel rested and Misty stayed watching over her out of sight, Iris went to scout their surroundings. The 'lighthouse' was closed so they couldn't enter to check if Ash was in there. So she walked across the cement floor, until she got to a beach shore...

"Pikapika!"

"That was…" There was no mistaking: that was a Pikachu. She quickly picked up the pace and ran, hopeful...

"Again buddy, send me your best Electro Ball!"

Only to suffer another let down. Yes, it was a Pikachu, and yes, the trainer in front of it looked a lot like Ash. But the obvious differences, like wearing a blue hat instead of red, and having shorter, light brown hair instead of black, instantly killed her hopes.

She saw the Pikachu charging an Electro Ball on his tail, and leaping to throw it to his trainer. Iris saw the boy radiating a yellow aura as he outstretched a hand, stopping the electric sphere in the air.
He moved the hand behind his back, passing it to the other to throw it back at the Pikachu, who in turn sent it back with a tail slap.

The two continued the game for a while until the Electro Ball fizzled out, and then the mouse began throwing Thunderbolts at his trainer, which he easily redirected just by waving his hands around as he emitted the yellow aura. After a while, the Pikachu ran off and happily jumped to his trainer's arms, who laughed heartily. In her mind, Iris couldn't help but overlap Ash's image over that boy's.

As much as the scene touched her, and as much as it made her think of Ash, it didn't change anything: they had failed again. Not wanting to interrupt the boy's moment with his Pikachu friend, she left quietly in case they didn't want to be spotted.

Once she returned, Anabel was back on her feet, but didn't look good at all. Misty was so focused on helping her she took a while to notice Iris had returned, so she cleared her throat to get their attention.

"Iris… another dead end?"

"Sadly," the dark-skinned girl replied. Misty quickly took a disheartened expression, so Iris made an effort to keep strong. "But we might be getting closer. This time it was a boy with a Pikachu."

"He wouldn't be the only one we've seen today," Misty reminded her. "I wonder if it's another family trait, some of them seem to like the Pikachu line."

'That might… help… narrow it down… if I can…' Anabel tried to walk on her own, but almost fell again. 'I'm… so sorry… if I just…'

"Easy," Misty said. "Rest a little bit more. As much as we want to find Ash, we don't want you to kill yourself trying, right?"

"Of course." Iris nodded. She was worried about Ash, but she too cared for Anabel's wellbeing, and not just because she was their only means to find him.

As she glanced at the horizon over the sea, Iris clenched her fists. It wasn't just a feeling anymore: she knew Ash was in danger, and facing a very dangerous enemy. She hated that they had to wait, but until Anabel had rested enough, there was nothing else she could do.

Nothing but believe in Ash and his strength. She knew he could overcome any challenge. He would do it, he just had to.

The Drowzee attack had been repelled easily, Counter Shield was able to block out the Poison Gas with both Water Gun and Thunderbolt, knocking them back was not difficult.

Rock Blast and Sludge Bomb, Brine and Aerial Ace. The moves all took their share of victims, and he himself had defeated several.

The problem was that after the Drowzee fell, a flock of Natu popped and shot at them with Night Shade from their eyes.

And more Kadabra armed with Laser Spoon techniques with Psycho Cut.

And a troupe of Jynx blowing Lovely Kiss and Blizzard at them.

And more, and more, and more.
It was a numbers game, and they were by far the smaller one.

And they would only lose numbers over time.

The first of them fell after he Quick Attacked into an Exeggutor, pushing the protesting Grass-type away from Roggenrola.

The Mega Drain the Exeggutor was firing missed, and a Sludge Bomb from Muk knocked it out before it could do anything more.

However as the Exeggutor fell down, he only then saw the Natu shooting a bolt of yellow, sparking light.

A Thunder Wave, coming in too fast to avoid.

It would have hit him, had he not been shoved out of the way by a blue blur.

He could only stare in shock as Squirtle gave him a nod, before being struck by the Thunder Wave.

He clattered onto the ground, paralysis static clinging onto him as he struggled to get back up.

He reached for his old friend, his Z-Ring holding hand dripping purple sand for some reason as he did so, but a Natu flew at him with Aerial Ace and he barely blocked it.

The little bird was between his two hands, which he threw to the side as he again tried to run to get Squirtle again, but a Mr. Mime threw up a Barrier in his way before shoving it at him with a Psychic attack.

He was pushed back, though he continued to struggle to get back to Squirtle.

He kept failing to do so, as more of them fell.

Roggenrola head-butted the Mr. Mime's barrier to try and get to Squirtle, but the attack failed to shatter the barrier and Mr. Mime, fists clenched together, smashed Roggenrola with a Fighting-type attack of some sort and sent Roggenrola flying into the wall and falling to the ground face first in defeat.

A Leaf Storm was fired by Servine, the power of the attack powered to the max, right at the line of Jynx. They blew Blizzard to counter the plant growth with ice, but the ice was shattered and the attack moved unimpeded.

Then a trio of Slowpoke Teleported in a trio of Wobbuffet.

They saluted as they all glowed with the reflective power of Mirror Coat, even as the Slowpoke breathed a Heal Pulse on the triple set of blue punching bags.

The reflected power of Leaf Storm blew Servine into Muk, leaving both sludge monster and grass snake defeated on the ground.

It was down to himself, Pikachu, and Tauros now and it quickly became just him and Pikachu as a blue aura surrounded Tauros and sent him rolling back and crashing into a wall.

The perpetrator floated a few inches above the floor as her Pokémon parted around them, leaving an open area for himself, Pikachu, his defeated Pokémon, and Sabrina.

She was giving him a slow, but not mocking, clap.
"Not bad, not bad at all. I think you've set yourself a record for holding out. The previous record holder being a group of Busters and unlike them you're not going to die today," she declared as Pikachu sparked at her.

"I'm getting Primeape back," Ash declared as she shrugged.

"You are certainly trying, and you've more than proven that you deserve to keep living. I had no doubt you would, but you've proven beyond expectations. I finally got to use that Heal Pulse-Wobbuffet trick, and I always assumed I'd only get to use that if I got someone really powerful at my door. Congratulations, you warranted something I was saving in case I had Agatha glaring at my door."

He'd accept the compliment, but that did not change anything. She was going to be blasted. Seconds after he thought it, Pikachu had a Thunderbolt flying at Sabrina.

She blocked it with a glowing blue palm, sending two strands of electricity off into the walls with a loud boom and the sizzle of dust.

"Hmm…." She observed with a frown before continuing.

"You are willing to blast my walls with your full power, but not me or any of my Pokémon? Clearly determination and a goal in mind isn't enough for you. You need something else, perhaps anger."

She…wanted him to attack her with his Bloodline giving Pikachu the power to obliterate an asteroid? He hadn't pegged Sabrina as being that sure of herself, did she really think she could survive such a hit?

"Oh no, I certainly would die if you hit me with that power, and you could probably kill a few of my Pokémon doing that. I'd avoid the attack, not take it on at full power of course, I'm not suicidal," Sabrina answered his thought.

Could she stop doing that?! Again she shrugged with the epitome of 'no' behind her motions.

"It would seem I'm going to have to do something to get you angry, so angry that you stop limiting yourself. Now, how to do that?" Sabrina did an exaggerated thoughtful pose, which he suspected was meant to get him to think about thinking of what she might do.

It was effective, even as Pikachu shouted at him about not overthinking things.

Despite his best buddy's warnings, visions of Sabrina Teleporting in his mother, Misty, Iris, Anabel, or even Brock flashed in his mind.

"Oh Brock, I hadn't thought of using him like that," Sabrina quipped before clapping her hands.

"But no, I don't need him or any of your other friends and family. I can use the latter without them."

A shiver went down Ash's spine as he knew what was coming.

Sabrina was going to be his aunt, wasn't she? Or his grandmother…

"I'm twenty-two. I'd need to share your knack for flinging yourself through time to be your grandmother," Sabrina told him bluntly before smirking. "Of course, by the time I'm done catching two Pokémon with one Pokéball, you'll wish that I was your aunt."

His family tree had a polygamist terrorist, a regular polygamist, several people of various degrees of
quirks from waitress to admirer of his achievements and a girl who hung out with that Hiker, and Red. In what sort of twisted way would he want *Sabrina* in it?

Pikachu muttered something he didn't catch, but one of the surrounding Kadabra did and told Sabrina, who shook her head.

"I checked, we aren't related even distantly. Sharing a Heart Bloodline with another lineage is rare but not unheard of. Of course, that isn't true of all Bloodlines. Dominion for example."

She smirked at him as she elaborated on her point.

"What you and your family all share is Power, specifically the Dominion of Power. Like all Dominion Bloodlines, it is the application of a concept as held dearest to the wielder's nature, forming itself as the person's personality forms. Why look at yourself and Red, to you Power is the ability to overcome immense odds with a sudden burst of power from within yourself, while to Red Power is the ability to know exactly what to do to achieve the best result in the most efficient way. Then you even have Belladonna, who doesn't care for winning or power but wants a perfect relationship, which are built on being truthful. I'm sure some psychologist could comment on how your different environments and family status influenced you all, but that's all speculative work you can ask for in a few decades or so."

Ash glared at the woman, not really caring about her commentary. What was she getting at? It was hard to lie, even to oneself, that they weren't related to him by blood, and the trivia wasn't bad, but did she have a point? She seemed to be under the impression that this would get him angry or something.

"Now of course you got it from somewhere, didn't you? Given the three of you share a parent, I think you can agree your father is where you all got it from. The education system you experienced in this timeline is advanced enough that you are certainly aware of the basic rules of genetics to agree with me on that. Of course, I know a bit more than that. For you see, I've dealt with your father."

Sabrina gave a pause that seemed to be her gathering the right words to say next before continuing.

"He's a monster," Sabrina said simply and bluntly as Ash glared right in the eye when he reminded her that she was no saint.

"You're one to talk."

"Oh believe me, we do have similarities. I'll admit that much. However there are many things he has and will do, that I have no interest in doing, nor any desire to perform. Patricide for one thing, you have no grandparents among the living for more than just the ravages of time."

Sabrina's father was still alive? Was he hanging around as a photographer somewhere?

"Of course your father possesses only one Bloodline, the same one shared by your siblings. However the abilities he gets from it aren't about strengthening others or enforcing virtues upon them. That isn't what power is to him. What he can do, is control others." Sabrina landed at his side, opposite of Pikachu, to continue her rambling right into his ear.

"Not so much like a Heart Bloodliner, nothing so up front and obvious that the person at the end of it all knows something happened. What he does is a bit more insidious, for he does not work with control from the front. He works from behind, messing with the thoughts behind your active ones. He doesn't make you do things; he makes those thoughts that ring in the back of your mind and subtly push you in directions and outcomes, and others of subtle manipulation and control, never direct control. In fact...I just checked the minds of Delia, Atropa, Anna, and Regina. I'd look at
Shinku, but she's dead. Do you want to know what all four of them have in common?"

Ash had no idea who the other four mentioned with his mother were, but Sabrina leaned in for the next point even closer to his ear to a point he could feel her breath in his ear canal.

She Teleported out of his incoming Power-up Punch to get her away from his ear, but reappeared there moments later to continue, right where she had been originally.

"All four of the living who were impregnated by your father all had regular periods by that point. They knew what days they could and could not get pregnant. Their children, including yourself, were all conceived on safe days, all by freak irregular fluctuations in their cycles that made that night. Such things accelerated to the exact point he wanted them to. Good thing your father was quite good at keeping the momentum of daycaring going long enough for such things to be where he wanted them, or else you would not exist. Same with most of your siblings, bar the ones who just had sex at the right point in their periods that such effort was unnecessary. Midori for example, I just checked his mother's mind and she simply forgot it was a bad time to be enjoying male companionship."

Ash stared at Sabrina, a trembling going through his body and perhaps as what she said registered as she floated up in front of him.

And what she was implying began sinking in.

"What are you saying!?

Sabrina shrugged, of all possible responses.

"Depends on what moral theorist you ask. I'm not qualified to say. Your mother didn't require mental tricks to get in bed with your father, a tall attractive man needs not a Bloodline to get many in bed with him, though he is not averse to throwing a few thoughts into the back of their minds to get things moving. However then he did make it so your mother would get pregnant when she normally wouldn't have, and did place thoughts in the back of her head to ensure that your mother wouldn't have you aborted….but he did that with all of them so it was hardly specifically aimed at you. If he hadn't done that, Belladonna certainly wouldn't exist at least. Your grandfather was for that happening by the way, your maternal one specifically, 'I care more about my daughter than the ball of cells some foreign punk left in you.' He said to your mother a bit into the post 'I'm pregnant' conversation after the traditional heartfelt 'I am not angry at you' words he truly meant. Also something about wanting her to live her life before settling down he meant just as much, but you get the point."

The comments about the grandfather he never met and his opinion on him would have registered more to Ash if not for everything else being thrown his way.

Sabrina was trying to get him angry, meaning that if he dwelled on that too long she'd win. He'd have to calm himself down. Perhaps with some rational thoughts, going backwards from the last comment.

His grandfather having preferred him to never have been born. Well his father here wasn't a Trainer, while when he left the first time he was. Thus his words had absolutely no bearing on him whatsoever!

Pikachu's look of 'Ash, thinking is the last thing you should be doing right now' came too late as he realized that his finally taking to heart the complaint many had of him not doing so in the past had come at the worst time.
Because there was a smirking woman trying to ensure he'd try and blast her in anger reading his every thought.

"Nice try, but I am not sure you quite get the full implications. The grandfather who was a Trainer who took more than three days to get to Viridian like his first successor yet unlike yourself, and the grandfather who had a stroke not that long after starting to come around to the idea that you were more than something ruining his only child's life, may in fact be very different people in behavior if not who they were…but the latter has more claim to you right now than the Trainer one does. I'm sorry to say this but I think it is warranted to point out."

"The Ash Ketchum who got Top Sixteen at Indigo because his Charizard disobeyed and obvious sabotage with clear hints of the involvement of a known yakuza gang in the area, the Ash Ketchum who was kissed by either a girl or a Latias, the Ash Ketchum who conquered the Battle Frontier and delivered Tobias the closest to a defeat he seemed to ever have….and you, are not as much as the same as you may prefer to think. Beyond the different flavors your Aura abilities and even my psychokinesis take in this iteration of reality, your body was built with different material. The father you had in the original timeline is no longer your father here. The height you possess and the rage that bubbles out of you is from your new father, not the original father who abandoned your mother."

Pikachu lunged at her, intent to shut her up with a Zap Cannon in his palm. Sabrina simply stopped him mid jump and put him back on his shoulder, before removing the Zap Cannon and having it detonate on the floor between them.

"I'm me. I'm not anyone else, so don't give me that crap. If you want to go declare that I'm not me, I'm going to shut you up before you even get to the not part."

Sabrina looked amused at his threat, which was not good because she wanted him to be angry. Realizing that made her win more, and it was starting to become a cycle.

"If you are worried that I am going to, I don't know, tell your dear mom that you never will be Ash Ketchum, that you aren't Ash Ketchum, and never was Ash Ketchum, you can relax. That would be an untruth. You may be walking about with a different body with a differently built set of tricks, but you are plenty more authentic than that and can avoid overthinking on it. After all, most of your mind and memories are the ones you started with, back when aging had multiple options to it."

"However you are none the less not the same one who had that incident with the Zekrom and the Snivy either, your parts coming from a very different parent. And that father….as I said earlier, is a monster. Who sired you and a truly disturbing amount of others, neither out of love, nor of lust for your mother. She was one of hundreds of people he noted had the potential to have a Bloodliner child on her own, and he simply made that child happen with his genes making those dormant ones activate like someone had just recompleted an electric circuit. You and all your siblings are but parts to him, parts he can and will remove if he finds can't be of any use to him. Turns out that Archer kid he had axed was sterile, for example."

That was a reason to kill someone? Regardless the wanton murder revelation was not helping Sabrina not win.

He'd have to simply not be in the place to let her win. He'd ask Pikachu to disobey him if he told him to attack. It was simple really.

"Pikapi!" 'Shut up! I for one want you to be quiet! My partner does not need to listen to you babble things you can't possibly even know about. You know about the future and have read some science fiction, big deal! We don't have any proof that you have ever met Ash's so called father, be it a deadbeat or some sort of maniacal villain of the sort I'm sure you are well aware we are unnaturally
good at running into. So let us go or I will see if I can burn you like Charizard would with ten thousand volts of electricity!'

Or not, it would seem. And so his anger spiked again, fueled in part by the frustration that telling Pikachu to not attack would not work.

He was starting to see red when Sabrina spoke again.

"My Pokémon say you'd like to see my evidence? Then you shall have it."

And so Ash no longer found himself in a room with five of his Pokémon and friends defeated, himself and Pikachu barely avoiding frothing at the mouth, Sabrina looking pleased with herself, and an army of Psychic Pokémon standing around him in a clear message about the futility of running. No, he found himself in another room of the Gym, where another Trainer lay in defeat (the point about her hurting others flaring his anger even more), and a second Sabrina was talking with another who had walked in and tried to kick the other Trainer in the head.

Then the person who was only in this projected memory began talking with Sabrina, and the words that started coming out...

...

"A pity you don't, My Lord spent many years researching it. It is quite accurate."

"I've noticed. Those idiots up in Cerulean got hauled off by that brother of yours. Executioner I believe you call him. I can only imagine what he's done with them since."

"You can read minds, you don't need to imagine it."

"Yes in fact. Recently the King has grown to question if one of the possible candidates should be terminated. He was previously tested and seemed salvageable, but losing to not only another candidate, but then being outmaneuvered by that strange byproduct over in Gringy City...we request you test..."

"I'm not J, I have no desire for money and I have better things to do than your bidding."

"Then again, from what I see in your mind the King's pretty disappointed about the general lack of killing isn't he. How many like Ash and the 'byproduct' are willing to kill each other like in the King's bloodthirsty fantasies went so far? Four, five, maybe six? Not even one percent that. Even the more aggressive ones like that 'byproduct' don't aim their lethal intent where he wants it. Figuring out they are the same actually made Belladonna not want to kill him."

"My Lord has already changed the world."

...

...Were the final straw.

It went beyond it when the drawing from that MissingNo dream, featuring a man with eyes like Red and Belladonna clenching in his fist Serena's pink hat and May's bandanna.

The memory faded away as Sabrina looked at him with what he could only describe as genuine selfless intent.

"I once killed a know-nothing college professor who bribed his way to a doctorate on foreign
cultures who had a collection of dreamcatchers for things like that MissingNo. You can take one with my badge and Primeape after you stop limiting yourself."

The genuine offer was like a bucket of water added to a lake whose dam had just violently cracked.

"Pikachu, Thunderbolt!" he shouted, and he could feel his eyes glowing as if they were on fire, his rage exploding like ten thousand bombs…

Pikachu jumped off his shoulder, electricity already sparking around him…only for a Water Gun to blast Pikachu onto the ground before the attack could be launched.

This was followed by a gelatinous form smothering him, and his cathartic fury, onto the ground as he saw only sludge.

Though he did see faint images of wobbling blue feet dart in front of them, along with a pair of stone and green feet from a gap in Muk's form.

He didn't see hooves, though he did hear Tauros give the response that was frankly warranted for all of them.

A confused and angry questioning of what they thought they were doing.

"Ser," Servine declared, if a bit muffled to his ears thanks to Muk. 'My idiot, any reason you felt like letting her win?'

He didn't get a chance to answer before Squirtle spoke up.

"Squirt." 'Look, I get it. Everything that you saw and heard would make anyone want to destroy her. However she already said that won't do anything, and all you'll be doing is having her win. It won't change the fact that your father is a horrible person who does horrible things to everyone around him. If you have to break her body, break it because of that kid she beat up like she did to us, and who knows who else!'

Muk's body vibrated, what Muk was saying outside not quite audible as 'Muk muk muk', but he got the gist of it. "Professor Oak always said something about 'You teach me, and I'll teach you' when it came to Trainers and their Pokémon. What you or the Professor teach us is obvious, but this is a moment we teach you something. Sometimes you need to not let rage control you. You taught that lesson to Infernape if I recall correctly, now you need to take that lesson to heart."

"A saccharine moral. You are teaching one of those, right when I was about to make a breakthrough on him?" Sabrina sounded incredulous.

He felt the same way…though surprisingly he felt less that every moment. Maybe it was just the purple sludge forcing his eyes shut to see black instead of red.

"Now I'm going to have to start all over again, and be much cruder. Tell me, have you ever seen a George Lucas film, turtle?" Sabrina declared in a clear threat of commenting on Squirtle's lack of faith.

"I've pirated all of them," the Pokédex beeped in his pocket.

It was silent for hours, and now it finally spoke up?

"Of course, I could talk with the crazy woman beyond this sludge pile about the themes and failings of them, but I have my primary functions to consider. That includes your well-being. I
will now be instigating my plan to ensure it," the Pokédex stated. "Tell me, he whose mad mumblings about time with his Pokémon are a bit more than a concerning psychological quirk, were you aware that your Bulbasaur has above average organizational and leadership qualities? Or that the Exeggutor you obtained can all use Teleport?"

He knew the first one, but what did the second one have to...

Muk got off of him as the ceiling above them shook and cracked, dust falling from the ceiling as Sabrina looked up in concern.

"Also, I had calculated the exact time that a Heart Bloodliner needs to notice and control a Pokémon thanks to your friends. The Exeggutor were in and out before the crazy woman could even notice them, more than enough for the necessary trips."

The ceiling finally shattered, sending pieces of foundation, wood, and steel flying down. Sabrina's Pokémon reflexively shoved the damage to the side before it could hit them.

What that did not allow them to do, however, was stop what was coming down with them.

And it wasn't the half dozen Marsh Badges that were falling, one of which Squirtle picked up and tucked into the same place he kept his shades.

"Bulba!" Bulbasaur, riding the back of Pidgeot with Ambipom, declared as the entire Pidgey and Pidgeotto flock Pidgeot championed followed, several of them carrying Spewpa. 'We're going to get you out of here everyone!'

Charizard roared an agreement to the side of them, where his flight was flanked by Yanma, Butterfree, Vivillon, and the Spearow. 'But first, we are going to have some fun with these kidnappers! This is revenge for the first time you creepy doll collector, this time I am going to smash every Kadabra here so hard they'll wish they hadn't even woken up!'

Behind all of them was a giant solid water wave, one of his fourteen new Tauros using Surf to ride down from above.

Behind him were two of his old Tauros, using Ice Beam to freeze the wave into a solid mass upon which rode every one of his other Pokémon.

Even Raichu and Jigglypuff.

Every one of them landed around them, the space that Sabrina having left them nowhere near enough as the attacking began immediately.

Or in Chansey's case, the healing of the six of them that had begun this mad battle.

Sabrina stared in an odd mixture of surprise, shock, anger, and an odd look that he could only describe as being impressed, before Charizard shouted about using Fling despite not knowing the move and flinging Krabby right at her.

A Stomp struck Sabrina right in the stomach and knocked her through her own wall, leaving a Sabrina-sized hole in the wall.

...

Wind blew through Vulpix's fur as she held onto her father's mane for dear life, her eyes almost shut in fear. This was the first time she had ever been into a proper battle. She may have had practice
battles with some of her father's friends and a few of the smaller Pokémon but never like this.

Her father's bellows gave her a small amount of strength, opening her eyelids just a little. She watched in awe as her father sent a Starmie flying with just a Headbutt, allowing the small plant leader to entangle it with his vines. Seeing her, the small creature gave a soft smile as if to tell her it was alright to be afraid before jumping to avoid a Psybeam.

Those two... they were almost unbeatable.

Her father and the Bulbasaur. They would surely have a weakness against the Psychic types, one due to how smart the mental users were said to be and the other due to typing. Yet right here and now, they were slowly dominating the field.

'I-if they can do it, if they can fight with no problems, with no hesitation... can I?'

Opening her eyes, she gave a small yip as flames grew in her mouth. With a cry, she released the small fireball towards an unsuspecting Drowzee. The Incinerate struck its side as it turned towards the small family. Its hands twitched as black energy formed in its hands.

"Vul!" 'Papa!' Vulpix called out, another Incinerate blazing to life in her mouth.

A snort was her answer as the Tauros bellowed, his own fireball flaring into existence between his horns. As if on the same wave length, the pair released their attacks, the twin Incinerates merging into one. The flame slammed into the still charging Shadow Ball causing it to discharge and explode, sending the Drowzee flying.

"Bruh!" 'That's my daughter!' Tauros bellowed, before charging off to help one of his herd. Vulpix beamed in pride at his words. She really could do this, couldn't she?

She would prove herself. Not just to her father and her new idol but to herself as well.

She was her father's daughter after all.

...

The Abra popped in front of him, charging a Thunder Punch.

Farfetch'd simply glared at it.

The Abra stopped mid-attack and Farfetch'd walked underneath the stunned Pokémon, idly noting a Pidgey fly into it with a Tackle.

No, he wasn't here to fight such a Pokemon.

He had been quite happy to see Spoonmons here, with a new technique he had never seen among them.

He would defeat them.

Spotting one, he lunged at a two-spoon Alakazam while making the Farfetch'd call of battle.

Or at least his call of battle, he wasn't entirely sure.
"So, I have siblings. I had always thought that little girl I had met in Len Town looked a bit like me. I had thought it was just coincidence, but apparently it wasn't."

It had been hours since they had begun their search, though it was the first time she had interacted with one of the Ash siblings they kept accidentally warping to instead of Ash.

Misty met an evil one, but that was about it. Mostly seeing them off in the distance battling or hatching Pokémon or doing any number of things, not saying anything to them.

But that was not a thing anymore, and now she found herself sitting in a Secret Base, a table across from the first sibling she'd be talking to.

Her name was Meliae.

Misty was nearby, helping Anabel get a drink of water. While Anabel had been showing signs of dehydration, Misty was making sure she wouldn't fall into Meliae's little lake.

Also something about giving water something called iodine first. She wasn't sure the exact reason for it, it was just something that Ash and everyone seemed to insist on doing.

Regardless of why they always did odd things with water, it was just her and Meliae here.

And she had just finished telling the story of Ash to his half-sister who Iris had to admit, did not look that much like him.

Unlike Red, Manna, and what she had seen of Belladonna via the Pokédex and Ash's own descriptions, she did not have black hair. Her hair instead was more the color of honey from a Combee nest.

Also unlike Ash she had red eyes, and did not have marks on her face. She did have similar looking ears, as well as height.

"So, you want to be with my brother?" Meliae asked for confirmation as Iris nodded.

She had mentioned that in the midst of passing the time until Anabel was able to Teleport them again.

"Do you understand what that means, exactly?"

She didn't understand Meliae's question. What could the confusion be about?

"To be Ash's mate? That means we would be frequently together, and possess a mutual emotional bond. We would reproduce with each other."

Meliae let out a sigh.

"That last one...I feel I have a sisterly duty to work on that one. I don't know if I'm being the concerned older sister or the concerned younger sister here, you didn't give me the day Ash was born."

Ash had mentioned that at some point, but it was escaping her right now.

"Frankly from what you mentioned of yourself the fact that you do see the emotional connection aspect of a permanent relationship surprises me. However, first you do know that humans do not lay
eggs, correct?"

"I was told about that a while ago, along with the basics of how reproduction works."

"Well, glad I don't have to give that talk," Meliae sounded relieved about not doing that, "However I suspect you have issues grasping things beyond that."

What was there to grasp? Reproduction was reproduction.

"First off, you are aware that humans, and some Pokémon for that matter, have sex for more than just having kids. If every time I had sex I wanted kids, this place would be filled with them.” Meliae told her.

"And no, before you say anything about Bloodliners and humans…” Meliae held up a finger before she could comment, and in fact pinched the finger with two from her other hand.

"Humans and Bloodliners are hardly different when it gets down to it. Look at this finger, it is the same as a regular person's finger on the outside and in the inside. The same blood vessels flow through it, the same skin protects it; the same bones bend in the same way. All that is different about it is that if I scratch this finger and put it in the sun, it patches itself up. Our minds and bodies behave exactly the same, so what applies to one applies to the other."

Meliae sounded a bit forceful on the point for some reason, so Iris would not challenge her on it. However the first statement still warranted a question.

"Why would someone…"

"Because it feels good. I can't say what Pokémon feel when they do it, but at least with humans having sex is very physically pleasing and enjoyable. Not just physically, but also emotionally. I actually recall reading somewhere once that, at least with humans, sex is as pleasurable as it is to encourage more breeding as human females, and thus us as well, do not send off 'I'm fertile right now, please get me pregnant' signals like most Pokémon species."

"But everything can sense …"

"Can you tell when you're fertile?” Meliae cut her off bluntly.

Iris opened her mouth to say yes, but closed it as she thought about it.

She…really couldn't.

"So let's make sure we haven't lost track of anything. Forgive me if I sound patronizing here, I'm basing this on my mom's lectures from her fertility clinic back in Cherrygrove with people who don't have your life story to justify their lack of understanding of human sexuality, and so this may not be the best tone to use. You want to engage in a long term, emotionally significant relationship with my half-brother, whose exact age relative to mine is yet undetermined. You do not care for strict exclusiveness in the relationship, though you yourself do not particularly have any interest in participating in non-monogamy. The main hole you have to figure out is the sexual end of the relationship, not from any lack of understanding of how part A goes into slot B, but the function of it beyond strict reproductive use."

Iris nodded, it was pretty much true.

Meliae looked in the direction of where Misty and Anabel were, her eyes flashing the color Ash or Red's eyes did when their paternal derived Bloodline was activated before turning back her way.
"Your Teleporting friend is pushing her body hard; she'll need at least forty-five minutes before she's at a point she can Teleport again," She had mentioned that her other Bloodline let her look over a person or Pokémon's health at a glance. Handy for spotting something called an STD, she had mentioned. "So, we have some time to kill before then. So, I'll give you a basic rundown on how human sexuality works from initiation to completion, even if you'd probably need a lot more time to get the full set of details. I'll start with the 'time and place' portion of the talk first."

"Is that really so important?" Iris asked as Meliae gave her an amused smile.

"Given you just asked me that, it would seem so. Now, let's start with…"

What followed was a surprisingly informative, yet not lacking in personal experience and opinion, explanation of a topic Iris had once thought immensely simple. Though she did have a few questions she asked during the explanation.

"Why is that considered appealing?"

"Because it's pleasurable."

"So showering with him is sexually stimulating?"

"Yes, though it is quite possible to do so platonically or logically as you did."

"How much time is too little time?"

"It depends, try and gauge it yourself. Seeing how Ash reacts is probably the best thing I can suggest in that regard."

Among others. As Meliae continued to answer her questions, the image of her Dragonite big brother appeared in Iris' mind. While she used to think he had never found himself a permanent mate because he could really be a jerk at times, she recalled that the dragon females did find him appealing on the physical department, and sometimes they would engage in it because 'they felt like it', and not just for the purpose of siring offspring. In fact, her big brother seemed to have a preference for strong females, only those capable of keeping up with him, if not best him in a fight. Iris asked her if human men liked strong women, to what Meliae replied that where she came from, that was usually not the case, but exceptions to the rule always existed and she could not say about anywhere else.

"So… have you ever thought of finding yourself a permanent mate?"

Meliae chuckled. "It's not in my plans. I'm not the type to commit to that kind of compromise, neither would I drag someone else into it. I like being a free agent, and I've seen too many people try to kid themselves that monogamy functions. There is an unhealthy connection people have tried to slap between emotional exclusivity and physical exclusivity that I want nothing to do with."

A free agent? Iris wondered if that was the real reason her big brother never seemed interested in finding himself a permanent mate.

While there were many things that Meliae would have wanted to talk about that they didn't have time to go into, what she did get to say Iris greatly appreciated.

Sabrina watched the chaos that was now in play with an odd mixture of emotions bubbling inside of her.

It was chaos really, what other word was there for a Farfetch'd with three leeks battling three
Alakazam with their Psycho Spoons (and no she did not plagiarize the technique, she had earned the right to use them from their original creator fair and square. She had a hangover for an entire week getting his permission), while a legion of Grimer smother her Wobbuffet with the un-Counterable 'hug' attack.

But she was not paying attention to what was going on in front of her, but rather to the many emotions she was feeling.

Annoyance at how close she had been to getting Ash to shed that self-imposed limitation on himself, a sense of begrudging respect for the hours of silent planning Ash's Pokédex had been up to arrange this rescue plan for Ash, indignation from being kicked in the chest by that Krabby (had she been a regular human she'd probably have broken ribs, as it was they were probably bruised), and a sense she had to remind herself she could not take credit for this.

This wasn't like a regular test of hers. Ash had already proved he was worthy of his existence, and him proving it even more with the Pokémon he had trained and even his own abilities wasn't the point of this.

The primary goal was getting Ash to stop playing with his own restrictive rule set, which had not been achieved.

She had achieved a secondary objective, having Ash know that his father was the worst man on the planet, even if she had not directly noted him as his title of the Bloodline King.

Vague details were easier to let his emotions run wilder than the truth ever could. Also the more specific she had been about him, the more likely he'd have assumed she was messing with him.

After all, the two had met in the original timeline back when they were not tied by blood. He had been quite different there (no known ties to Orre for one, even if Ash didn't have the guy's full backstory), and Ash would have very likely assumed she had taken his name out of the proverbial hat.

Given what she had seen of Ash's history with crazy people with delusions of taking over the world, she figured that such knowledge would be a good way of getting rid of the bastard.

That would be easier, of course, if she could try and get Ash back on schedule for learning about the benefits of not handicapping himself.

But there was a problem with doing that now the hours she kept Ash there basically had him running on adrenaline fumes after a while, same with his Pokémon he had on hand.

Those six, now that they no longer were the only ones there, were now taking the opportunity to rest and realize that it was the afternoon already.

Rest, be held down by Butterfree String Shot on Bulbasaur's orders as leader and Chansey as healer, one of the two.

Chansey was still healing the six, and whatever Pokémon of theirs needed it because one of her own got a strong hit in.

Given Ash, it was likely that he'd recover and be making a move on Primeape sooner than he should have, or before Bulbasaur would prefer.

It wasn't a lot of time, but perhaps she could earn herself some more.
With a thought, she summoned the Alakazam who was leading the protection of Primeape.

He looked at the chaos that was going on in disbelief.

"Yes, there were unexpected developments. I am however, able to adapt to them. Let's teach another lesson."

A lesson he might have been meant to learn before time ended, or might not. Regardless, she'd be ensuring he learned it.

With that her hands glowed with psychic powers to call up one bit of what she'd need for this, and Alakazam held up his right spoon.

Under which hung an Alakazite Mega Stone.

...

Ash hadn't realized how tired he was until Bulbasaur had him bound. Only then did he feel the exhaustion rush over him like a tidal wave.

Though just lying on the ground unable to see what was going on in the battle beyond what escaped Chansey's healing haze was driving him crazy.

He could hear explosions and strikes, burst of electricity and fire. He even heard the faint sound of Jigglypuff singing, just after hearing Charizard shout about 'firing in the hole' and, as best he could tell, throwing Jigglypuff at a group of enemy Pokémon in the next giant room over.

Ash could only hope that he and the others would be back up and running soon. He still had to rescue Primeape…

"Chansey!" Chansey cried out in alarm. He didn't know what she meant, but he got a fairly good guess of what she was going for when both of his arms stuck out above him with a psychic blue glow.

Before he could yell out for someone to make sure Sabrina couldn't drag him away, he was instead lifted up into the air and held in place by psychic powers by a single one of Sabrina's hands.

The other of which had something small fly into her fingers. A small stone of some sort. Exactly like the Keystone in his white bracelet, though a quick glance at said bracelet confirmed he still had it.

Sabrina held the stone in-between two of her fingers, out of which shot streams of golden light.

The battle mayhem ceased for a moment as all the Pokémon eyes drifted in the direction of the stream, to which his own eyes followed.

The streams led to Sabrina and an Alakazam with a stone like the Sceptilite dangling from one of its spoons, and as the light entered the Mega Stone the Alakazam began to glow orange.

Ash could only stare in horror as Alakazam began to change form.

Alakazam became thinner, with more black armor hanging upon the body loosely. Alakazam's mustache became a long bushy beard, and a gemstone formed upon its forehead. The two spoons multiplied to five and hung over its head.
The light burst away, revealing Alakazam in a new form floating next to an impressed looking Sabrina.

"**Mega Evolution has occurred!**" the Pokédex declared loudly from his pocket.

The chaos of the battle resumed in the aftermath of that event, though from his still held position it looked like Sabrina's Pokémon got some momentum back.

It would explain the two Tauros punched over to Chansey's healing circle anyway.

He felt a surge of warmth from his bag for a moment, which vanished immediately after the blue glow around him moved to Butterfree's String Shot and broke it, which led to him falling to the ground.

He stood back up, if uneasily, as he stared at Sabrina and the Mega Evolved Alakazam.

They were just standing there, looking right him.

At least before Sabrina motioned for him to 'bring it'.

Seriously?!

He gripped his palms tightly. She was still trying to teach some sort of lesson?!

Pikachu tried to get up, but collapsed back on his feet. He was still exhausted, so if Sabrina really wanted a fight, she wasn't going to get…

"Goo!"

A purple shape flew over his hand before landing in front him in a loud thump.

Goodra, who stared at the empowered Alakazam with a sense of some determination.

"Alright…" he told Goodra before pointing at Alakazam, if without the snap his dramatic points usually had.

"Dragon Breath!"

Goodra took a deep breath, before unleashing the attack Alakazam's way.

With a bend of the central of five spoons Dragon Breath turned around and flew back at them.

"Bide!" Ash ordered as Goodra glowed red and took the reflected attack on with crossed arms. A white sheen appeared next before Goodra shot a white energy blast back at Alakazam.

The Mega-Evolved Pokémon reflected Bide right back at them, though a blue shield formed in front of the attack and stopped it.

The two responsible for the defense, a Spewpa and the Pidgey that carried it, were blown back and landed in Chansey's healing area.

At his side Pikachu and Servine weakly stood up next to him as Vivillon and Butterfree fluttered over to him.

Perhaps he needed to try a less direct method.
"Servine, use Attract! Vivillon Stun Spore, and help blow it at the Mega Alakazam with Silver Wind Butterfree!" Ash shouted as Servine winked a storm of hearts towards the Alakazam, while Vivillon flapped a Stun Spore that accelerated past the hearts with a silver glow from Butterfree.

The farthest spoons of Alakazam glowed and moved towards the center, which preceded a similar glow forming around the Silver Wind-Stun Spore combo. The storm of powders formed a spinning wheel in front of Alakazam, which shattered the Attract before it could get to him.

Ash did notice something though, it took two spoons to stop a combination of attacks. With enough attacks, perhaps they could get through.

With Pikachu, Servine, Vivillon, Goodra, and Butterfree he still needed…

"Sq…." Squirtle forced himself up with a groan, as did Muk.

Perhaps that could do it.

"Alright everyone, attack!" Ash ordered as the seven Pokémon around him charged up.

Pikachu fired Thunderbolt, Servine spun a Leaf Storm, Vivillon shot a green glowing Struggle Bug, Goodra unleashed Dragon Breath, Butterfree blew Silver Wind, Squirtle shot at Alakazam with Brine, and Muk spat Sludge Bomb.

The seven attacks flew at Alakazam, who had all five spoons glow with psychic force.

The Thunderbolt, Dragon Breath, Leaf Storm, Sludge Bomb, and Brine were stopped in their tracks, before they were redirected. The Leaf Storm crashed into the Silver Wind, while the Sludge Bombs were sent into Struggle Bug.

Thunderbolt, Dragon Breath, and Brine were sent flying back at them.

"Rol!" 'I got the Thunderbolt!'

Roggenrola called out as she spat a Sand Attack into the electric force, cancelling the Thunderbolt before it could hit them.

That just left the other two, would Ash need to punch one of them to protect them all?

"Goo!" Goodra declared as a Sludge Wave formed up in front of them, absorbing the attacks and precluding any need to punch energy attacks.

Still, that had not gone well. Were they going to need any more…?

"Zam!" the Mega Evolved Psychic-type called out in pain as the sludge wall came down, letting Ash see exactly why it was shouting like that.

Best he could tell, Yanma, who was currently being held in a psychic grip by Sabrina. The speedy bug-type was thrown back his way by her, and he caught Yanma before he'd hit the ground.

The force did push him out of Chansey's healing bubble and had him skid along his ass right up to a Slowbro though, who stared down at him with a mouth that suddenly smelled of fire.

Still holding Yanma, he hopped out of the way of the inferno with Quick Attack, even as an electrical surge covered Slowbro and knocked the dopey Pokémon down.

Hopping over said Slowbro was Raichu, who was looking at him with nervous concern.
Her being here…he had to smile.

"Thanks," he told her with all the empathy he could make clear in his voice, as a sudden idea came to him.

A Natu nearly pecked him in the eye as he was getting the idea while also using Heal Pulse on Yanma with the hand not occupied with his plan, but Krabby blasted it away with Bubblebeam and he took his plan out of his bag and handed it to Raichu.

She stared in surprise at the Timer Ball he had given her.

"Sabrina has a Pokémon captive in the basement. His name is Primeape. I want you to get him for me," he asked her. She stared at him in surprise for a moment, an Abra popping overhead that he swatted away just as quickly as Yanma buzzed out of his arm to fly at a nearby Kadabra in renewed vigor.

She nodded after she gathered her nerves, before she punched the ground and dug through the floor.

With that done Ash turned to stare at where he had been blown from, where Sabrina and Mega Alakazam still stood.

Even once Raichu succeeded, they'd still need to do something about that Mega Alakazam. Yanma had found a hole; he'd just have to figure out how to exploit it again.

Returning to where they had been blasted off from, James had only one thing to say.

"So, do we just wait here and hope they come back, or do we go figuring out where they all have gotten off to?"

Jessie and Meowth gave the former upper crust an irate look.

"In case you happened to forget sometime over Stone Town, one of them can teleport."

"Well, then what do you suppose we do: wait until they possibly come back?"

"Well I suppose I could teach you two how to play Skat if we need to pass the time."

Jessie and Meowth stared at their blue haired partner at his suggestion.

It took James a few moments to figure out what they thought he said.

"It's a card game, not an act of Coprophilia!"

"What does being attracted to Officer Jenny have to do with anything?"

Anabel Teleported them over a table.

Misty could not tell what sort of table it was, be it age, intended function, or what type of wood it was.

She could say it was hard, and given that all three of them landed on top of it without it breaking it was probably well made.
It also hurt a lot, sending a wave of pain through her like a ripple in a lake from the impact on her butt. She also got a second thump from Anabel's head landing on her lap, which was probably better than her head hitting the table.

Behind her she heard Iris hitting the carpet, and a thought occurred to her.

They probably landed in front of someone, and that someone was probably looking at them in surprise, shock, and probably near ready to throw something.

That thought quickly died when she realized just who they had landed in front of, and she suddenly wished she had landed in front of some person who'd attack them.

For the table was in front of a couch, upon which Misty suspected drinks and magazines were meant to go and not the three of them.

Upon that couch sat three people, with a fourth being held in the arms of the tallest of the three most likely due to the couch not having another space for a fourth.

Said short person was someone that Misty was unfortunately familiar with personally, only knowing the others from Iris, Ash, and the Pokédex's descriptions.

"…This is unexpected." Vedia, Shadow Sneak Bloodliner and attacker of Power Plants, observed from Belladonna's lap, looking more like a child than usual with Belladonna's arm around her like safety straps in a car or roller coaster.

Iris raised her head off the carpet, where she seemed to lock gazes with the girl she had fought before Evanna, who sent her back a grin that Misty was pretty sure meant a combination of 'hello', and 'I want to punch you more' in some fictional species. Misty had no idea what species though, Klangions or something like that.

Iris's look invoked less something that could be called a friendly greeting with mutual desire to punch in a science fiction series, and more one that someone would give to something dangerous. Axew popped out for a moment, but retreated at the first sight of Evanna.

"Succotash," Anabel mumbled mindlessly from Misty's lap.

"Is she…okay?" the girl Misty was sure was Aurora asked in what sounded like genuine concern.

"Nobody asked you," Misty retorted, which seconds later had Vedia be released from Belladonna and stand to the side.

The purpose of this was so Belladonna stand over her and glare at her.

"My Dear asked you a question, no need to be rude," Belladonna told her in a low tone.

Belladonna's eyes bore into her, a red intensity that bore into her like drills. Misty only realized now just how tall Belladonna was.

Ash had commented on it, but it was only now that Misty really got a feel for it.

She hadn’t grown much recently, and was pretty sure she'd be sticking at 5’10 for the rest of her days, bar shrinking.

Ash had been about that tall for a while, but had passed that and was starting to approach how tall Iris was. Iris had given her height during the Princess Festival, which the Pokédex had translated to
6'2, so saying Ash was either 6' or 6'1 now was about right. (Anabel was about 5'3 and not the biggest fan of the fact).

Belladonna outstripped Iris by at least a few inches. Ash's murderous terrorist half-sister was either 6'4 or 6'5, and more to the point she just felt bigger than Iris.

Iris's body was fairly thin and lithe, little to it but muscle. Belladonna's body had more on it than Iris's did, which didn't go anywhere near the intimidation loss that a stouter frame could give. It was like comparing a Ninetales to an Arcanine in body shape, while both were dangerous, the latter had the additional danger factor of being larger in pretty much every way than Ninetales.

And said person was glaring at her with intensity she had rarely seen from Iris at any point (even when Iris was trying to slash her), simply for not answering Aurora's question.

"Also...what are you three even doing here, and without my brother for that matter? Where is Ash?" she questioned in a tone that, while less 'that was a mistake', was forceful just the same.

Before she could manifest an answer, Iris beat her to it and explained what was going on.

That Ash had been taken by an Abra and that since then they had been trying to find him with random Teleporting, which seemed to focus on Ash's siblings by mistake (along with the occasional house and Mew, the house might have been his mother's but the Mew was still a mystery).

During the explanation Belladonna had stopped glaring at her, but she remained unreadable. Aurora gave Anabel a look of concern for her, while Evanna looked ready for the explanation to end.

Vedia used a shadow tendril to pull over a notepad and was taking notes every time Iris mentioned one of the siblings they had encountered.

When Iris had finished her explanation Anabel had recovered a bit, though she was in no shape to get them out of there in a pinch.

A fight could still break out, and it would be difficult. She still had Ash's Togepi egg after all, and protecting both Anabel and the egg would not be easy.

"Well, I guess the rumors must be true then."

Evanna's blunt statement drew both her and Iris's attention. What rumors?

"Sweetie," Belladonna muttered in a tone that almost sounded reproachful.

"Hey, it's not like we had any evidence they were. Now, you two don't seem to have any idea of what I'm talking about, so let me spell it out for you. Ever heard the rumors of the Saffron Gym Leader?"

Misty nodded, having heard the tale of a crazy person who used Psychic-type Pokémon to harm innocent people. Iris remained confused though.

"Well the rumors say that she's more than just a homicidal maniac. Some people say that she's actually a Bloodliner who can control Psychic Pokémon who wants to find worthy opponents for her power, who she makes battle her with all their Pokémon." Misty made her eyes not move towards Anabel's still recovering form.

"If she did abduct Ash, and the day's nearly half over…" Aurora spoke in horror.
"From what I've seen and been told of the guy, we probably still have a chance before he stops entertaining the crazy lady. He has a lot of Pokémon from what I understand who are all pretty tough, and if he's Belladonna's little brother he should still have some stamina, but time is still wasting."

At her comment about stamina Aurora looked away from Evanna in a 'why did you say that' manner, Belladonna sighed in exasperation, and Vedia just shook her head. Misty wasn't entirely sure what she had meant by that, and Iris seemed just as confused.

"Ehm…well ignoring that irrelevant information, we do still have time to get my brother back. We'll have to leave your friend here, but with My Dear's Shellder, we can get to Saffron Gym quickly."

Ash did mention something about a Teleporter… but that was secondary as Misty went pale. Did she just say 'we'!?

"We probably can get her all back to normal with some of those Revival Herbs we have!" Aurora shot up and declared, surprising her fellow Power Plant attackers.

The look on her face suggested she had even surprised herself with what she had offered, but she quickly reaffirmed herself.

"They helped the time Evanna burned herself out, and if we also use some of the Mental Herbs the mental exhaustion should be fixed too."

"…That will take a while to get them ready. I'm not against the idea, but I'm a little hesitant to wait half an hour." Belladonna spoke to Aurora in a conflicted tone, but Aurora gave a confident nod back.

"But if we do then it'll be the seven of us plus the Pokémon, and seven are better than six to get your brother back."

Prepare them how, exactly?! And still that we thing…

Aurora darted off somewhere as Vedia answered her first question.

"While Bloodlines are similar to Pokémon, some natural remedies that they can use need a bit more preparation to have an effect of us. This is a combination of being either too potent or under-performing in their natural states."

"That doesn't explain why we wouldn't just leave the moment those herbs heals Anabel in whatever way they do," Misty countered.

"Because seven have a better chance than three in rescuing him," Vedia declared simply.

"You forget that four of those seven attacked a power plant just because you wanted one man in a hospital dead. That's not exactly who you want for a rescue party," Misty told the three present bluntly.

"Calling that thing a man is a tad too much," Belladonna declared with utter disdain pointed squarely at the target of her actions.

"If we wanted someone like you helping us, I'd have asked Team Rocket," Misty retorted.

"You know, I actually met some Team Rocket members right before Gringy. It was weird, one of them was a talking Meo…"
"That would be the same Team Rocket we are talking about," Iris quipped at Evanna's reminiscence.

"Really?"

Misty decided to swerve the conversation back in the old direction before it got off topic.

"That doesn't explain why we should let you all come with us any more than those three."

"I'm his sister," Belladonna said simply.

"There is more to being a sibling than being related," Misty declared, being quite aware that full relation did not mean anything if you didn't act like it.

Just being related to someone didn't mean anything. Her family meant nothing to her beyond a Gym she'd like to have to herself one day. Iris didn't have any reason to care for her blood relatives. Ash's father and the seemingly unending deluge of siblings meant nothing unless he wanted to make something with the latter, and Belladonna was not high on the list he'd be doing that with.

Anabel's relations with her family were bizarrely normal despite them being dead.

"Exactly, and what is the behavior of a sibling other than agreeing to put herself at risk to save them from danger?" Vedia poised.

"Iris, don't encourage them! That would only make avoiding them harder."

'Belladonna does…. mean it,' she heard Anabel weakly commented in her mind.

'She can mean whatever she wants, that doesn't mean I want to take her along with us.' Misty thought, seeing as speaking aloud wasn't going to get her anything but more glaring by Belladonna.

'This might not really…be a case of what we'd want. While I can get….to Saffron without needing time to….breath, they aren't wrong. Seven is better than three.'

'And of those seven, one froze Ash to a wall, another spent her time holding me to the ground, a third actually seems to have enjoyed the experience of Iris trying to slash her, and then you have Belladonna."

'I try to be positive, and I like to think I succeed when Iris isn't chasing me while waving a stick. They were hardly the good guys that day, but now they want to be. I think encouraging that can only be a good thing. Plus do you want to have something go wrong and slap yourself for not taking them up on it.'

"Are you two telepathically communicating?" Vedia inquired, interrupting the mental conversation.

"No," Misty lied as Belladonna gave her a look.

"Don't lie, you aren't good at it and frankly should not look to become good at it. I hardly think Ash would appreciate it, lies are among the worst things in relationships."

Misty stared at the giant woman in stunned amazement.

She'd be the first to admit she probably could use a bit of advice on how relationships would function, but was a person Ash had described as 'questionably stable' really the one who thought she had the right to do so?
"In fact, it will probably take at least ten or fifteen more minutes before we can leave, so let us give you some advice on how relationships work in case you have any other bad habits. In fact my sweet…"

A shadow tendril pulled a notepad and pen into Vedia's hand, who held the writing set at the ready.

Belladonna beamed a smile at how quick the little thing was to matching her want, before doing that faux cough people would do before speaking.

"Okay, now the first thing you all should know…"

What followed was a quarter hour of Ash's murderous half-sister giving them a crash course on relationships, their do's and don'ts, what were common issues that came up, how to handle jealousy flare ups, and many other such things while Vedia kept taking notes that she'd presumably make them take with them.

Cursive notes it seemed, damn her.

Though Misty had to feel sympathy for poor Iris. This was the second lecture she got from one of Ash's sisters today, and that had to get tiring.

…

It was actually rather useful information. Meliae had said most of her advice should probably happen after the non-sexual parts of it, and that was good advice.

The short girl's writing was weird though, hopefully someone could read it clearly.

Chapter End Notes

And, sorry again for the cutoff, but I already explained in advance. In fact, while we discussed this chapter at Spacebattles, some of us actually agreed this one would have been a good ending point, to set up for the climax. Do you guys agree?

Anyway, stay tuned tomorrow for the grand conclusion of the Sabrina arc. For now, I'll go post some of the other sidestories.
Saffron Gym

After slipping from the battle, Raichu found the door to the basement and went down the stairs. At the bottom, she found a door, and several Natu guarding it. She was expecting more, but perhaps the heavy hitters were called to the battle upstairs? Nevertheless, it was in her favor as a quick Thunder wiped out all of the Natu.

Once that was handled, she opened the door. Well, break down after she learned it was locked really. The way things were going, Raichu was pretty sure that the only person who'd care was that crazy woman.

Inside, chained to the wall, was the Primeape Ash wanted to save. A very familiar Primeape.

"Rai." 'No way...'

Primeape looked up and his face was tinged with recognition as he scowled at her.

"Primeape!? 'You!? What are you doing here!? Did you always work for that crazy woman!? Is that why you blasted me to near death!?'

Raichu flinched at the reminder of what she did while she was still with Paul. It looked like the good luck from the lack of security was averaging out.

"Chu." 'I... Um... I...'

"Primeape!" 'What do you want!? If you're here to finish the job, then go ahead and do it!'

Primeape shouted that, but right afterwards, he closed his eyes in resignation. Raichu saw tears fall down his face. She wasn't sure what the best thing to say next was, but she needed to say something.

"Raichu." 'What happened after you were blasted away?'

Primeape opened his eyes, and Raichu was shocked by what she saw. In his eyes, Raichu saw someone who was past the point of despair and had given up on hope. She saw that before. She saw that in her own eyes when Paul left her to fend for herself, without even letting her heal properly.

"Primeape." 'I almost died from the crash. An Arbok almost finished the job, but that was when that woman found me. She drove off the Arbok and took me here where she healed my wounds. I thought of her as a savior, but...'

Primeape spat.

'The moment I was fully healed, she placed me in these chains! She told me I was useful bait for an 'Ash Ketchum' to come challenge her Gym! As if any random human would come save me!'

Was that why Ash was here right now? Was that why Sabrina kidnapped him? If so, then Raichu knew what to say next.

"Rai!" 'He's here! That boy is here!'
"Prime?" 'What?'

"Raichu!" 'Ash Ketchum is here! He told me to rescue you with this!' Raichu held out the Timer Ball. 'You enter this, we can escape!

Primeape was silent for a long while. Raichu could tell he was hesitant to feel any hope.

"Primeape?" 'Why? Why would a random human brave this fortress to rescue me? Who is this Ash Ketchum and why would he do this?'

"Raichu." 'He is one of the kindest and most understanding humans I know. When my previous Trainer abandoned me without treating my injuries, Ash found me. He offered to catch me and heal me, and told me that he would never force me to fight if I didn't want to.'

"Primeape." 'Even so, to come to rescue me was suicidal. Why would he do this?'

Raichu thought about that.

"Rai." 'He might have known you before. I overheard some of the others talking about it. That's why that crazy woman thought you were good bait for him. If you want proof, then here's how he reacted when he saw you blasted away. Ash Ketchum was shocked and angry that it happened at all. He was far angrier than might have been warranted for a wild Pokemon almost dying. I know you only have my word, but please, believe me!'

After Raichu finished, the room was silent for a long while. Primeape looked at her carefully, as if he was trying to find any hint of deceit. Eventually, though it was small, Raichu saw a glimmer of hope in Primeape's eyes.

"Primeape." 'I… I believe you.'

Raichu nodded, and tapped the Timer Ball on Primeape. After Primeape entered the Timer Ball, there was no struggle. The Timer Ball registered the capture immediately.

Raichu noted the Timer Ball teleport away to the Professor's lab and ran back up the stairs to Ash's side. After that talk, she couldn't let Primeape or Ash down.

Servine was always eager to toss herself on a new fight, and her time with her idiot definitely provided her with plenty of action in both regions and timelines they had gone through. That said, even for her, a horde of powerful Psychic-types might've been too much to handle, even after her battle in Gringy City.

Keyword being might.

After charming two male Kadabra with Attract and blowing a female one through another room with a Contrary-boosted Leaf Storm, the Unovan starter fell back on the ground with grace, only to immediately be tossed into another skirmish as several Natu surrounded her and attempted to peck at full strength. She made short work of them with carefully-aimed Aerial Aces, and the birds were thus fried by a generous heaping of Flamethrower from above.

She traded a quick thumbs up with Charizard and ducked out of the way of an incoming horde of Exeggutor, just as her idiot's own herd of Tauros stampeded in to help. The Grass-type held a hand over her racing heart and rubbed away the sweat on her face before she gave a cursory glance of the battlefield. It was pure chaos: between that woman's horde of assorted Psychic-types and her idiot's veritable army of Pokémon old and new, every Pokémon was doing their best to gain the advantage,
with Flamethrowers, Psychics, Water Guns, Rock Blasts, Zap Cannons, Swifts and all other manner of moves dotting every corner of the Gym.

Servine frowned and took a deep breath, observing her hands. She was strong, and her Contrary ability made her Leaf Storms even stronger, but even she had a limit. She could feel that her moves had gotten less powerful the more the fight went on, and she needed a way to recharge. Easier said than done, when she had to toss an Attract and a few Aerial Aces as some persistent Slowbro attempted to get to her, and a few Xatu had the same idea. The enemies were so numerous that the idea of giving up felt more and more tempting with each attack.

As the desperate fight went on, however, Servine felt even more galvanized instead of fatigued. She couldn't give up just there, not when everyone else was putting their lives at stake for her idiot. She had been loyal to him ever since she was a Snivy, and that wasn't gonna change no matter how many evolutions, regions or timelines they went through. And now, she needed a way to recover her energy while still kicking as much ass as she could.

That was when her eyes fell on one of her idiot's recent captures, that Farfetch'd with three leeks, currently engaged in a frantic duel with two of those weird spoonsaber-wielding Kadabra, twisting, jumping and parrying hits like he was having the time of his life as his opponents barely kept up with his leeksmanship. And then, Servine grinned as a spark of inspiration hit her.

She gave a quick look around, and found a few Kadabra with spoonsabers ready to strike coming her way. Servine beamed and rushed after them, tackling one of them on the ground and sending the psychic 'blade' flying. She quickly caught it and held it in her arms, rather glad to still have them, and swiftly sliced at a couple more. More spoons flew at her as her first one exhausted its psychic energy, and the Grass-type quickly grabbed those with a huge grin. Ahead of her, the Kadabra appeared much less confident of their plans as they backed down. Servine took her chance to leap at them instead.

"Ser! 'Come on, show me what you've got!"

And thus, going from one psychic blade spoon to another, Servine joined the battle with renewed vigor, energy welling up within her as she recovered her strength little by little.

Though eventually, she did find herself back with Chansey again, just in time for her idiot to execute a new plan.

Throughout her life, Roggenrola had wished to be a faster Pokémon more than anything else. And smack dab in the middle of an escalating war, that desire was being even more pressing than usual.

After narrowly dodging a beam clash between Butterfree's Psybeam and a Slowbro's Hydro Pump, the Rock-type took a few seconds to rest, only to be ambushed by a flock of Xatu that tried to use Psychic on her, before a few well-aimed Rock Blasts sent them all sprawling on the ground. She tried to rush somewhere else, only for quite a few Kadabra to try to blast her away with Psywave. She ducked under a hit, and then attempted to Iron Head her opponents before she rushed out of the way. The Xatu came back, as did the Kadabra, before she could leave to safety as they forced the sentient rock on the defensive.

They were too many, they were too fast for her, and everyone else was too busy fighting elsewhere to come to her aid. She was alone against everyone, and she had no time to mount an effective counteroffensive.

Faced with her opposition, however, Roggenrola didn't leave. She was outnumbered and slower, but
she was clever and resourceful: she was the one who managed to solve the mystery of her friends' disappearance one timeline before, back when she first met Ash, after all. It didn't matter if those Psychic-types were more numerous or able to make complex calculations in three seconds flat: she would find a way to outsmart them. And as she surveyed the ground underneath her, an idea formed in her mind.

She dodged the latest barrage of hits, focused, and then blasted several Rock Blasts groundward. The floor proved sturdy and didn't break, but the knockback was strong enough to send her skyward, right above a narrow Psywave. The Rock-type would've grinned if she could've, and then started to fire several Rock Blasts at machine gun speed, until she was almost on the ceiling.

The Xatu tried to fly at her, but Roggenrola was already on the move: she twisted around herself and another barrage of Rock Blast ensued, every single piece of stone raining down her opposition: They tried to stop them with Psychic, only for the rocks to grow higher and higher, until they became too quick for them to keep up with, and they were all buried under Roggenrola's assault, falling down unconscious.

Roggenrola landed on the ground right after as the Rock Blast ended, wobbling on her feet before she steadied herself. Her head was spinning and there were still several more enemies to face, but she couldn't help but feel energized by what she managed to do. Who cared if she was slow? She just had to think quick and strike smart, and then there wouldn't be any problem.

And thus, she jumped back on the fray with far more energy than before, ready to help out. And where better to start than with Ash's new plan.

... 

"Attack!" Ash ordered again as he took the old attack order from before with a bit more to it.

As before Pikachu fired Thunderbolt, Servine spun a Leaf Storm, Vivillon shot a green glowing Struggle Bug, Goodra unleashed Dragon Breath, Butterfree blew Silver Wind, Squirtle shot at Alakazam with Brine, and Muk spat Sludge Bomb.

In addition though, Pidgeot were flying overhead and fired a glowing Air Slash, while Krabby provided a Bubblebeam.

Mega Alakazam's five spoons glowed, and all the attacks clashed into each other and cancelled each other out.

Sabrina shook her head before holding her palm out opposite of Alakazam. It glowed, freezing the charging Ambipom, Yanma, and Bulbasaur (with Shadow Claw, Quick Attack, and Tackle respectively) in place.

Still holding them there, she looked at him with a 'really' look, as if expecting better out of him that that.

She promptly got to see his better when a flaming form charged into Mega Alakazam, arm around the Mega Evolved Pokémon in a lariat style.

Charizard slammed Mega Alakazam into the wall before flying back and glaring at it.

"Rrr..." You know, you feel lighter than the last two regular Alakazam I beat,' Charizard observed, before unleashing a torrential Flamethrower right into the Mega Evolved Pokémon.

However mid-stream the fire glowed purple and turned towards the three Pokémon that Sabrina held
immobilized. She floated out of the way of the flames, while still holding them in place for the attack.

"Cover for them!" Ash shouted as Squirtle shot a Water Gun across the Flamethrower's redirected path, wiping it out and leaving only a hot steamy mist in its wake.

Charizard growled and held up a Metal Claw for the next attack, but he himself glowed and was pulled back into the overall battle melee (in which Ash could hear the insane cackling of Farfetch'd and many Tauros bellows).

A few Pidgey and Pidgeotto were blown into the healing circle, followed by Pidgeot flying back into the overall chaos as Sabrina raised an eyebrow before absentmindedly tossing Ambipom, Bulbasaur, and Yanma away.

"You need more Pokémon here to fight my Mega Alakazam, yet that would lead to the melee of Pokémon your Pokédex brought in faltering. Yet it would be so easy if you would just fight with everything you have instead of having some silly restriction upon yourself."

"If I do that, you win," Ash reminded her bluntly.

"And is that so bad? I win all the time, I win whenever challengers proves themselves worthy, and I win when they don't. Still, what do you hope to pull out for the win if you are so insistent on not using your paternal ability? Perhaps that Thunder Armor thing?"

Pikachu sparked his cheeks, looking ready to try it with the nearest Swellow substitute.

Ash gripped his hands together tightly, feeling the same hand covered in a lot of dust and crystal shards as it had before. He gripped even tighter in response as he stared right at Sabrina.

"Maybe I'll do that, or maybe I'll find another way. If you claim to know everything, you should know that I have gotten out of tough battles before."

"Yes, I am aware of what you have accomplished with a combination of quick thinking and those old proverbs of 'Innate, Resolve, and Spirit' people love in Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, and Sinnoh. Though tell me, what do you plan on trying to achieve?"

"We'll all find out I suppose," Ash held out the fist he was gripping a handful of that odd sand out at Sabrina in a gesture of resolve, only for the hand to start glowing in a yellow-orange aura.

"And it would seem we have," Sabrina noted as the yellow-orange aura gained a purple hue, before sucking in purple aura from all over the battlefield. The purple aura began overwhelming the previous color, causing his hand to glow deeply in the color while his arm shook so violently he had to grip his arm with the other hand to have any control of what his arm was doing.

All Pokémon present stared at his hand in shock as the Pokédex had its own thing to say.

"You are generating odd energy readings from your hand! What exactly are you doing?!"

"If I knew, I'd tell you!"

Sabrina observed his still shaking hand in interest, though she made no move to attack him during the process. She was apparently curious as to what he was doing too.

A more light-based glow of bright pink began leaking out between his fingers as the aura flared up one more time before receding away. The light faded moments later, as did the sheer shaking of his hand. Something solid was now in his hand and he pulled his hand back and dropped whatever was
in his hand now into his other palm.

What he found was a pink crystal, resting in the center of his palm as if he had not made it out of seemingly nothing.

As all of his Pokémon present stared at the crystal in surprise, the Pokédex spoke up.

"Ash, are you aware of what that is?"

"A violation of at least one law of physics I guess?" At least the remnant of his science classes was shouting that in the back of his mind.

"Possibly, but more than that. The readings of that crystal indicate that it's a Z-Crystal, much like the one that Lilo used. Best I can determine at this time, that crystal was created by some combination of the residual energies given off by Pokémon and the energy you naturally give off as a Bloodliner. Most likely with an additional third element as a catalyst, which I'll hypothesize to be the make-up of a Z-Ring given the seen incidents so far. That crystal itself is a Psychium-Z, used for the Psychic-Z move."

That point made Ash stare at the crystal in his hand.

That time against Lilo, and later against Elwood and Aideen, it wanted to lead to this?

"How interesting. I think I know all your surprises Ash, and you throw a new surprise at me."

Sabrina's observation put the focus back on her from the crystal as the woman continued.

"It is said in Alolan folklore that the first great king of Alola, Kahele, created all the Z-Crystals in a method only he himself knew. If he did so like you did just now, he has become much more interesting to me."

So his creation of a crystal in a manner he had no idea how to do again, was going to get her to watch a documentary?

"Read a book actually."

Oh yeah, the mindreading thing. She was still doing that.

Ash looked at the crystal in his palm for a moment, then at the Z-Ring. After a moment he placed the crystal in the top of the ring.

Step one, placing the crystal. Done.

Step two, activate it. That, he wasn't sure on how to do.

"As I mentioned before, Alolans manifest the power of Z-Moves..." The Pokédex glowed and was yanked into the melee before it could finish explaining by a Kadabra, who promptly Teleported out of the way of Farfetch'd who instead crashed into a Alakazam instead.

While he did need the reminder the Pokédex had mentioned it before, he could probably figure it out.

In fact he actually could remember seeing it performed in that weird vision thing that happened after he got the Z-Ring, and the Keystone too for some reason.

"If you are asking for why that happens, don't ask me. It actually happened with me too and I
Ignoring Sabrina reading his mind again, he didn't need to look behind him to know that Butterfree had flapped over to him to see if this would all work.

"Okay, this will apparently do something because you know a Psychic-type move. Be prepared for anything Butterfree!" Ash declared as Butterfree gave an acknowledging nod.

The first thing was an arm cross, which he did as he felt the crystal and Z-Ring flash. That was probably a good sign.

"Protect," Sabrina simply said as Alakazam formed a glowing orb around himself. However he didn't stop.

After arm cross, he was supposed to poke his temples. He did so, and he felt a further spark of energy course through him as he did so.

It felt a bit weird though, as if some of what he was feeling had been held back.

Next was taking his right hand and holding it out, palm facing out. He did so, and he glowed the same initial color he had seen in the forming of the crystal.

Orange-yellow, which promptly flew at Butterfree and surrounded him, turning a pink color similar to that of the crystal seconds after impact that kept building and building up in higher intensity, moments away from release.

Sabrina simply stepped behind Alakazam. She was apparently quite fine with letting him get off the move, though she seemed quite sure that a Mega-evolved Protect would be sufficient in stopping it.

Perhaps it was, Ash wasn't really sure. However, she had missed something, something he had kept out of his mind as to not to remind her.

However Sabrina promptly was shown what she had missed when a glowing leek was thrown right at the Protect bubble even as the full power of the Z-Move was building up in Butterfree (who was currently buzzing so much he was half wondering if he'd turn into a Beedrill from the power).

Said glowing leek caused the Protect to fade away into nothing, before the Feint powered leek bounced right back into the jaw of the Pokémon who had used it.

"Far," declared Farfetch'd bluntly as the name of the Z-move came to him.

"Shattered Psyche!" Ash shouted as Mega Alakazam was surrounded in the same sort of aura that was around Butterfree.

The Mega Pokémon was promptly sent flying across the battlefield, knocking over a Girafarig and Exeggcutor before hitting an invisible wall. From said invisible wall Mega Alakazam ricocheted over a Slowking and a second wall that sent Mega Alakazam into the air, before the light exploded in a massive burst of power that illuminated the entire field.

On top of that impressive display, each time Mega Alakazam hit one of the walls Ash felt a massive wave of, something. He wasn't sure what it was, it did not feel like heat, wind, or some scent that was wafting through everything. He wasn't the only one feeling it either, given the odd looks Servine, Pikachu, and the others were giving each burst.

He had to catch Butterfree though, who seemed rather exhausted from using the Z-Move.
He did not miss the feeling of a Vine Whip from Bulbasaur slotting the Pokédex back in his jacket pocket while he was catching him however, which was glad to give some clarification.

"Your attack, which I must admit some respect for doing without my guidance, has created three waves of radiation. Before you ask, yes I have built in radiation detection software for all sorts of scenarios. However, I cannot tell you the exact reason for the radiation discharge, only that the radiation was not detected when Lilo used it, my scans detect no adverse harm to any of the Pokémon in this building or to the two Bloodliners present, and that the radiation wave from the final attack did go through part of the nearby city area, though if all present were unharmed I can safely assure you that you will be responsible for no ill effect bar some sync issues in certain electronics."

He did what!?

"Also, Raichu placed the Primeape in the Timer Ball while I was away from you. Congratulations, the ball is now at Professor Oak's with the Exeggutor."

Sabrina just stared at him in a weird mixture of shock, anger, and respect, which was highlighted when a telekinetic pull from another of her Pokémon dropped a defeated Mega Alakazam at her feet.

It flashed orange and returned to normal, even as Raichu popped out of a hole and let out a cry of self-satisfaction at a task well done.

All Pokémon around him other than Pikachu promptly glowed the same color as Sabrina's eyes, before being flung out of the area. Seconds later he found himself surrounded by Psychic Pokémon from Starmie and Exeggutor to Xatu and Alakazam.

"I would really prefer to not have to resort to such measures. However, for you I will make an exception. Stop limiting yourself, use your power liberally, or suffer the consequences."

Sabrina's tone sounded like it was borderline cracking with frustration as the Pokémon around him began charging what appeared to be Psyshock.

"Pikapi! 'I got the ones of the left, you get the tree.'

Ash nodded and prepared to see how this would all go, when a second Teleport went off.

Ash would have said it spelled their further problem, before he saw who had popped in.

"Get away from him!" Misty's shout was followed seconds after by the Whirlpool that slammed into the Xatu and spun it away.

Iris pretty much snarled as she lunged at an Alakazam, knocking it away with sheer physical force. No Bloodline ability in action, just pure human strength and anger fueling her assault.

Anabel didn't say anything as she stood still and telekinetically swung the Starmie away as she looked for her next target.

"Step away from my brother."

Ash had to look a second time as Belladonna of all people struck the Exeggutor with Poison Jab, while Evanna punched the Hypno in the stomach with Power-up Punch.

Aurora froze the Mr. Mime's hands together while Vedia struck an Abra that had popped in behind
him with a shadowy hand.

"...What?" Sabrina all but mouthed as a fresh wave of exhaustion, brought on by the addition question of why Belladonna of all people was here, caused him to drop to his knees. He quickly felt his body held by two pairs of arms, summoning whatever energy he could Ash looked up to see who the arms belonged to.

One pair belonged to Misty, the other were Belladonna's, and both looking at him in relief and concern, which quickly gained a hint of confusion as a fiery explosion that was probably Charizard's doing went off behind them.

"...What is even going on here?" Evanna asked of said loud boom, before absently punching away an Abra.

"You came in the midst of the second escape plan, which had been ongoing for some time before your arrival. I'll admit your arrival, while unexpected, is advantageous."

Belladonna stared at the pocket where the sound had come from in confusion.

"I was quiet when your lover froze him to a wall. I'm an artificial intelligence given to Ash Ketchum by an old man. You can call me the Pokédex, Dexter, Handy, or whatever you please. Regardless of what you wish to call me, there is no use dawdling. Can Vedia restrain someone?"

"I take it you mean the bitch over there?" Belladonna eyed Sabrina darkly.

"Of course. To ensure we can get everyone out, we simply need to ensure she can't try anything bothersome," the Pokédex declared, even as a shadow moved to strike her.

Sabrina simply glared, and Vedia was sent flying into Iris instead. However she didn't have long to enjoy the feat before a stream of icy energy struck her, causing a solid layer of ice to form around Sabrina.

Aurora, whose hands were steaming from the cold she had unleashed, looked different than when she had frozen him. She seemed a tad more enthusiastic about it, as if freezing Sabrina in a solid block of ice was more enjoyable to her than freezing him to a wall.

She quickly began blasting at it again as cracks began forming on it, a concerned look on her face that quickly lessened when a glowing aura formed around her ice and slowed the cracking. Anabel's psychic glow reinforcing the frozen bindings.

Barely a second after Sabrina was in the ice, ten Teleports were heard behind him, then ten Teleports out.

This repeated quickly, in and out rapidly. A Teleport popped in front of him, obscuring his view of Sabrina's icy cube she tried to escape from with the form of an Exeggutor.

The Exeggutor seemed to stare at Sabrina, an emotion wafting off it in a manner Ash could only describe as hatred.

"Tor." Exeggutor seemed to practically spat before Teleporting away.

A thought occurred to Ash, these Exegguitor's original owner, as the Pokédex had theorized. Did Sabrina have something to do with their released status?
The thought was quickly snuffed out by exhaustion though, so when the Pokédex declared everyone (every Pidgey, every Grimer, the Jigglypuff and the crazy Farfetch'd, etc.), was at Oak's ranch, even Servine, Muk, Tauros, Squirtle, and Roggenrola, everyone huddled around him and with Anabel as the final touch, they Teleported away.

Just as Sabrina finally broke out of the ice, looking a combination of so many emotions Ash would struggle even at full awakeness to tell if she was furious, utterly impressed, or just wanted to go to bed at this point.

They had Teleported back to where this long, long, very long day had begun, and Ash knew just what to do.

With the day finally over, Ash walked right into the very Secret Base after a token nod and a clear, non-verbal recognition from everyone that he was dead exhausted and to talk to him in the morning about it.

He threw the Item Capsule for his bed seconds before he collapsed on it, just wanting to go to bed and be done with today.

Pikachu didn't even get that far, and settled for a corner of the base instead. Given he had dropped his jacket earlier; Pikachu had claimed it for a nest tonight.

He'd find a laundromat for it tomorrow if he needed to after that. He had also dropped his backpack at the foot of the bed, but Pikachu did not claim it for a place to sleep.

Perhaps another Pokémon would sleep in his backpack someday, but today was not the day that would happen.

Right now, he just wanted to sleep.

He turned rapidly as he felt a Teleport pop in about five minutes into trying to fall asleep and not managing, though he didn't actually strike the one coming in.

Anabel was not an enemy after all, he could tell that even when dead exhausted.

Anabel, having used the five or so minutes since he got out of that crazy place to change into her sleep clothes unlike himself, lay next to him with a concerned look on her face.

'I don’t want to wake up tomorrow and find you’ve been Teleported away again,' Anabel told him, her tone leaking with concern.

"I don't think…." Ash tried to reassure her that Sabrina would probably not grab him again, before another body thumped behind him.

"This is not a thinking thing," Iris told him from behind him. He heard Axew off somewhere in the base, probably taking up his own corner. She moved closer to him, and he could feel her body heat. If she went any closer he could probably start feeling her body against his.

Then would he ever get to sleep?

'It's a worry thing. Let us be sure this Sabrina thing is over, at least for tonight.’

Pikachu's comments from earlier rang up in his mind briefly. That wasn't what was happening, right?

Footsteps at the front of the secret base rang out, as he looked up to find Misty looking at them.
He wasn't sure the exact emotion she was displaying right now, it was a look that was both 'really', and 'how nice', and 'why didn't I do that already'.

Those feelings and the rest of the composition of Misty's odd look (that didn't seem aimed at him specifically, at the very least), were replaced by surprise as she was shoved in by a grinning Belladonna.

"Oh stop overthinking. That bed can totally hold you as well. Go make sure my little brother is alright tonight, the more the merrier! Not expecting you to do anything crazy, but do the thirteenth thing. We'll have pancakes tomorrow if you manage it."

Belladonna's tone was giddy, and she left with a wink his way, followed by a thumbs up also meant for him.

Misty stumbled from the push Belladonna had given her, but didn't fall and looked ready to yell at Belladonna with a blush heavy face.

"My Dear can freeze you in there with a wall of ice if you'd prefer," Belladonna both teased and warned her. Misty promptly no longer looked ready to yell at her, though she did mutter something about needing something better to sleep in.

Ash quickly offered her one of his spare shirts in his unclaimed bag, and Anabel dropped a slender arm on his face for Misty's privacy.

"Is that really necessary?" Iris questioned Anabel, his blocked sight not hiding the sounds of Misty's clothes hitting the floor with a plop.

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Even knowing Ash wasn't staring at her, Misty felt pretty odd at changing clothes in front of him. Not exactly uncomfortable, and since he had already seen her wearing bikinis it wasn't like she had that much left to his imagination. However, that wasn't important right now.

Once she was well covered, Anabel removed her arm from Ash's eyes, and Misty glanced at them.

"Ash, I …"

She stopped there, unsure as to how to follow. It was like the night they left Cerulean; she wanted to apologize for snapping at him and not properly thanking him for saving her life. Then again, that time it was easier, given it had been just the two of them.

As much as she'd love a private moment with Ash, she didn't have the heart to tell Iris and Anabel to leave. She wasn't the only one in there who cared for Ash, neither the only one who was frightened when he vanished. Anabel and Iris exchanged glances, and without further words they rolled over a bit to make more room for her on the bed, though Iris went back into her earlier place when Misty put herself in front of Ash in Anabel's old spot.

'It's okay. We all feel the same way after today. You don't need to feel embarrassed.'

Misty sighed. Was she making it that obvious? "Alright," she finally said as she sat on the bed and laid next to Ash. Close, but not that close. Though she still had a bit more contact with the others than she was used to.

"Look, you guys don't really have to do this, I…"
"Shhh…” Misty placed a finger on his mouth. "Even if we don't, after today, I want to be close in case something happens. I just… I don't want to lose you."

She had to struggle to let the last five words out. She had been keeping them to herself for a long time, probably since that time she felt jealous of Iris. Admittedly, her fear of losing Ash still lingered, but it wasn't so much as losing him to Iris, or Anabel, at least not in that sense, let alone after the effort they made to find him, and showing they cared for him as much as she did.

No, what she feared was that someone would want to hurt him. She had already gone through that when Hunter J kidnapped him, and after this... she didn't want to take any more chances. Iris was right. She had to become stronger, stronger to protect him. And she couldn't do that alone.

So at least for that night, she wouldn't mind sharing him with the others. They would all keep him safe, together.

It had taken Belladonna some time to fall asleep, and she was pretty sure she was using Evanna as a pillow when she eventually did. However when she eventually did she found herself in a place she'd rather not be.

Dreams.

Dreams had always been weird for her. When she wasn't having a peaceful sleep, she was prone to having dreams of just the most random things.

Like this one, where she found herself on a floating island next to a small white house with a red roof.

The house had been nicely sized, when she was ten. Now she doubted if she could even fit in it.

Especially as the door to the little house swung open and a Pokemon darted out of it before staring up at her for a moment, before hissing.

She narrowed her eyes at the Pikachu doing the hissing, though she wasn't sure exactly why she was doing that. The narrowing seemed to be autopilot.

Said Pikachu wasn't Ash's, or Red's for that matter. The Pikachu had an older appearance, with gray-yellow fur around its nose and lines around its eyes similar to what you would see in aged humans.

"A rodent, really?" the words that left her mouth weren't her own. They didn't sound like her at all. The words were colder and more sensual.

The Pikachu hissed at her more, cheeks sparking as her body continued to move on her own and talk with a voice that wasn't hers.

"You could have done so much better. You are my son, and yet you ended up with that pitiful creature. What is a Pichu worth?"

Her body promptly moved as to glare over the Pikachu, as if at something behind the old Pikachu. Or someone.

She felt her eyes flash with power, though her own wasn't the one being activated.

"You're not going to sleep for forty-eight hours." The not her own voice came out of her mouth
moments before the Pikachu fired an electrical attack.

She woke up before she felt the attack, her eyes jolting await.

It turned out that, in fact, she was using Evanna's toned stomach as a pillow, just as Aurora was using her own the same way.

She didn't move to avoid disturbing either of them, though she wondered how long it would take to fall back asleep.

She might have that dream again.

Unbeknownst to her however, in a region far away an elderly Pikachu also awoke from a bad dream, though a tad less unnerved than her.

For he had done something he had wished he had actually done all those years ago, and electrocute the evil woman who had made his friend and master's life hell.

Belladonna however, wasn't the only one having an odd experience in dreaming.

In a stadium filled with cheers, her very body glowed with the power she and her partner shared via Mega Evolution. She had thought there were no powers equal to it.

She had been proven wrong, and the Chesnaught whose billowing grass aura blew away to reveal a changed appearance was what had shattered her belief in how the world worked.

And yet despite that, the idea of testing herself and her trainer's might against this pair was a thrill she hadn't felt in years.

"Alright Chesnaught, let's win this! Spiky Shield!"

The Chesnaught didn't use the move like a normal one would. A spinning vortex of leaves and green energy formed on its right forearm, forming into a round shield. The Chesnaught threw the shield, said shield growing spikes as it neared impact with her.

"Iron Head!"

White light surrounded her form as the energy of steel flowed through her, and she countered the imminent impact with her own blow.

The moment her first collided with the shield she felt, something. A burst of energy that wasn't tangible, warm, cold, the blowing of wind, or even having a smell, radiated off the impact like a damage less explosion.

It would be one of many such bursts of energy that battle. Nor the only such incident of it that tournament, for she vaguely recalled it in his battle against young Remo as well.

...

At the moment of first impact, and the feeling of that radiation stream from the impact the Pokémon's eyes shot wide open, her expression one of unease and concern.

Her partner was woken up by her own waking, and stared at her in concern.
"Mawile, did you have that memory in your dream..."

Her nod led the old woman to sigh in her bed, a sigh of someone who carried a great weight on her shoulder.

"I suppose we can only hope it didn't happen in a stadium this time, or worse."

Thus Mabel's first thoughts this day were one of worry and dread.

Chapter End Notes

*Phew*, and that pretty much wraps this little arc of ours. How was it?

Well, starting from now, the chapters will be numbered normally, so it'll be a match with the Fanfiction.net version. And fortunately, almost all of the expanded universe sidestories have been posted, though a few will still be delayed until certain main story chapters have been posted, for obvious reasons. Until then, nothing more to say. Thanks for reading and keep up the support!
Aftermath of Saffron

Professor Oak's lab

It was early morning when he finally returned to his lab and the Professor felt great.

It was amazing what a minor surgery could do for your quality of life. He honestly felt at least seven years younger.

He might even live another seven years too, always a good thing.

A skip in his step, the old man opened the door and whistled his way into the kitchen, where he did what all did upon an early morning return where sleep wasn't a priority.

Begin the coffee process. He did have work to make up for, papers and poetry did not write themselves after all.

He reached for a packet of coffee, but found the box empty of anything good.

It was all the stuff the interns liked. Bah, new age coffee.

He was an old age coffee guy as much as he was an old age guy. Of course, he was not unaware of the possibility of that happening, so he had bought additional boxes of good coffee. It was now just a matter of getting…

"Kook."

Or having a friendly crustacean claw it over to him.

"Oh, why thank you Krabby, you are very handy to have around, more so than Gary's own…" The Professor stopped his words mid-sentence when he realized the claw that handed him a box of coffee was not in fact Krabby-sized.

It was instead Kingler-sized, coming from a Kingler that had not been that way before his surgery.

"Kooky," the Kingler greeted as the Professor smiled.

"Why, glad to see that all the training you've been doing has finally paid off. You and Ash must have had a good training session while I was under anesthetic."

Kingler seemed to bubble gurgle a response that seemed to be suggesting he didn't know the half of it, and given the fact that Ash had sent him slimy dragons without wings from in-air elevations perhaps he didn't know even half of what had occurred.

It may also be better that he did not know.

"So…any other evolutions that happened while I was gone?"

…

In the early morning light, Bulbasaur stared at the end result of the madness that had been yesterday.

"Bul." 'Well, you seem happy'.
The recently re-evolved Pokémon flexed her regained limbs in interest.

"Bo!" Boldore declared. 'Well of course I am. I missed having these things. You never realize how
great arms are until you don't have them anymore.'

Bulbasaur used Vine Whip to point towards his front limbs as the evolved Rock Pokémon gave an
apologetic look and grunt.

"Boldore. Dore." 'I meant front limbs in general, not just arms. Not sure I could ever go back to just
feet again.'

Boldore then lifted her front right limb and jabbed it in the air, before putting it back down in
confusion.

"Dore?" 'Shouldn't I be doing Rock Smash now?'

Bulbasaur shook his head.

The grass behind them rustled, drawing their attention as a Pokémon that was not at the ranch in the
old timeline slithered out.

However, it was not a Pokémon they were unfamiliar with, nor a stranger.

"Ser." 'Well, this wasn't how I expected to wake up today,' Serperior declared.

Krabby, Roggenrola, and now Servine had all evolved in the aftermath of the Sabrina battle.

"Bul." 'Well if it helps you look great, and powerful too.'

"Ser." 'I no longer have arms.'

Serperior's blunt statement made Boldore back away a bit. She clearly was aware of the potential
issue of starting up the 'getting more limbs is great' discussion.

Bulbasaur wasn't entirely sure what to say in response to it.

"Bul..." 'Well, it could be worse...'

At Serperior's long glare Bulbasaur quickly elaborated.

"Saur." 'I mean, Torterra apparently used to rely on his speed all the time, then he evolved and
couldn't use it. Not sure the guy ever recovered from the loss of his agility. You didn't really use your
hands for anything, did you?'

Serperior continued to glare at him.

"Ser." 'I Liked. Having. Hands.'

Bulbasaur briefly considered also bringing up Sliggoo's blindness, but evolving again had fixed that.

Unless there was a Mega Serperior who grew arms again, he doubted that would be an option.

So Bulbasaur took the safer option than try and help the miffed Unovan Pokémon deal with her
evolution based loss.

"Bul!" 'Hey, I think I hear a Wooper arguing with a Hoppip. Gotta go deal with it, talk to you later!'
He promptly ran for the other end of the compound, running even faster when he heard Serperior snap at him about the idea of either species arguing about anything.

As his mind stirred from slumber, Ash honestly felt totally recharged.

He couldn't imagine the last time he slept as well as he did, and that was even counting the few days he had so far with a bed in his secret base. Even going back to his own room he had never felt so refreshed.

Maybe it was just the feeling of rest after yesterday, but he could've slept like this forever.

His eyes slowly opened, Ash found himself staring at the secret base ceiling, still feeling fully recharged and at peace.

When had any bed of his ever felt so comfortable?

A slow series of breaths that weren't his or Pikachu's slowly registered, and Ash felt his rejuvenated haze rapidly fade as he realized the source of why his bed felt so comfortable.

Namely the two warm bodies lying on either side of him.

To his left lay Misty, her mouth slightly open as she continued to sleep, while on his right side Iris had curled herself against him.

Each feeling was different, Misty had a minuscule gap between them, though he still felt her body heat clearly. Iris meanwhile, he could feel the muscles of her legs against his, her nose rubbing against his ear, and her breasts pressing against the side of his pinned right arm.

His left arm was also pinned, though under Misty's neck as he felt a mess of something soft against his hand.

He raised his head and looked over Misty, trying not to linger too much on how her chest rose and fell with each small breath she took or the fact that the shirt she had borrowed from him didn't cover everything and he could see her underwear (if this had been the old timeline, he suspected such a sight would mark him for death by Gyarados if she was merciful, and her personal fury if she wasn't), and saw Anabel fast asleep up against his arm.

She looked as content as the others, though part of him did wish there was a way for her to not be so far away from him.

Another part of him immediately yelled at that part and told it that this was not going to be a thing going forward and thinking of how to better manage access to his body was not necessary.

The part of him that wondered about how to better manage closeness seemed oddly more enthusiastic about its job though. Said part of him promptly also wished that Misty was lying on her side too and pressing into him like Iris was, and that perhaps Anabel could then be closer to him, either lying against his legs or even on top of him...

Surprisingly the part of him that yelled at that other part of him about that idea did not sound like Misty or his mother.

Still the fact they were all like this on his bed, sleeping alongside him, was an odd mixture of
comforting and awkward, and Ash wasn't entirely sure of what to do next.

Did he just lay here until they woke up?

Could he even do that? The part of him that was thinking about his bodily access to the girls was all for it but he wasn't one for just laying around. Even at his lazier points he didn't sit around on the couch all day. He went off and starred in questionably tiered movies and got involved with old surfers instead. His loafing around was a quite active loafing.

Though still, compared to his own bed back then, perhaps he could almost manage…

Ash's thoughts of proper bedmate waking etiquette was interrupted by a second point that had come up last night he vaguely recalled.

It had been mentioned after Anabel, Iris, and Misty's declaration of wanting to make sure he stayed in one place this night that there would be pancakes, and the smell of pancakes was now wafting into the Secret Base.

He had also not eaten in what was possibly twenty-four hours, and he wasn't sure when they had last eaten either.

Thankfully the smell of pancakes caused the girl's eyes to snap open before his stomach gave a long, loud growl demanding it be given pancakes.

…

Cooking was a skill that was not quite with her yet.

It was something she and her sweet Vedia were both learning when they had the chance, a process that was somewhat held up by interruptions and the fact that their lovely teachers also had to teach other.

Her Dear and her Sweetie both knew how to cook, but in different ways. Aurora knew how to make the tastiest and sweetest treats, while Evanna could make you something that kept you going for a surprisingly long period of time without any unnecessary calories. Evanna's cooking had been put to good use a few times and resulted in some very enjoyable nights as well as a couple of afternoons.

The two were still struggling to find a balance between taste and efficiency. It wasn't as important for her as for others, as it seemed like she could eat anything and all it would do to her was make her breasts bigger.

After the extra calories had helped her get a bit of healthy flesh back on her of course, though if they ate only what Aurora could bake her sweet Vedia would start to feel like cookie dough.

She was sweet, but she'd rather not have her become a sweet.

She would've loved to joke with Aurora that her cakes were solely responsible for the difficulties she had shopping for bras, but she wasn't entirely sure how Aurora would take that. So, it was sadly a joke she kept to herself.

It wasn't fully accurate either, seeing as her Sweetie's food had done quite a lot at fixing the damage her mother and poverty had done to it.

Still, food memories aside, pancakes were something they had long found a happy medium on, a batter composition that satisfied both of their viewpoints.
And she was well qualified in the ability to flip them, even if creating the batter was still a coin flip.

A batter of which they were now fully out of, as the last of it was now the latest pancake on a full plate of the stuff, which Vedia picked up and took to the picnic table.

Said table having been found in the woods nearby, a remnant of some old woodcutter's boredom or something. After a bit of sanding, it was perfectly safe and fine.

The batter materials, the spatula, the portable grills, the table cloth on the table, the plates, the silverware, the butter, the juice, the Pokémon food in the corner, and all other elements of a proper breakfast were also found by them. They found it in a store that wasn't open yet.

"Gastly has released the restraint on the scent. They should awaken rapidly in…"

Vedia's statement was interrupted by a scrabble from within the Secret Base that her brother or one of his lovelies had been clever enough to come up with.

It was a neat idea, though she wasn't sure she could ever really make much use of it. While they could do so if need be, Aurora and Vedia deserved proper beds whenever possible. She and Evanna could rough it, but they always needed a mattress.

Or herself. She was basically a set of pillows that breathed after all. As such camping out was more something they did only when necessary, and thus had the supplies for it.

And yet despite what they had rustled up suiting them much more than it did themselves, she suspected they'd be holding onto the stove and such after this. Her brother seemed the stubborn type about things that were not 'properly' gotten, and why create more strife than there had to be.

The scrabble within her brother's hideaway came outside as the four darted out and without a second thought took to consuming the pancakes like they hadn't eaten anything in days.

They hadn't in quite possibly a day in fact, particularly with her brother. The thought made her emotions darken.

If she ever saw that Gym Leader again, she would die, though she didn't have time to dwell on the thought before a shadow tendril put a fork of buttered pancake into her mouth.

Proper conversation would not begin until all the pancakes were gone, and thus she could observe the little things she noticed.

Her brother seemed a bit fitter since she last saw him. His shirt seemed to be a slightly tighter fit then the last time they’d met and there was some faint definition on his forearms of lithe muscle. Not that he wasn't before, but it seemed like he had been doing more physical work on himself. Iris's doing perhaps? It certainly was good for her that Evanna had them work out on a schedule.

Anabel had longer hair since Vedia had last described her. It looked good on her.

Misty likely had given her brother a few shots of her panty-clad rear, last night and quite possibly this morning too. Interesting, she didn't think they were quite at that step yet. They were still at that phase where they were struggling with the artificial concept of strict monogamy after all, and there didn't seem to be self-harming competition going on for her brother at the moment.

Eventually the pancakes were all consumed, and with it the attention of her brother and his lovelies were now able to go elsewhere.
"How exactly did you guys end up on the 'get me away from the crazy person' mission, exactly?"

For example, asking a question he'd likely have asked yesterday if he hadn't been dead exhausted.

From that question began an explanation from Misty, Iris, and Anabel about their side of their story, a story she had already heard but Ash wasn't familiar with.

An odyssey that kept plopping them in and around her and Ash's siblings, a list that seemed so large Belladonna honestly couldn't have believed it if she hadn't started looking around herself.

From young siblings to ones closer to her age, to one who Belladonna had to hope she'd never need to deal with. It had ended with them running into each other, and with their help knowing where to go directly instead of trying to get lucky.

What was missing from that was what had exactly happened with Ash in the meantime. He seemed to need a few moments to collect himself, before he began his own side of the story.

A side that was a near endless battle through a crazy nutcase's lair and her endless horde of Psychic Pokémon. It was a tale of his own stubbornness and determination to not give in, his Pokémon's desire to stand their ground, and his sentient machine's gambit to even the score.

It was a story of creation too, not only of some sort of crystal like the one that had been used against him by that Alolan Trainer, but also of his own origins.

"Oh, you caught that, time for elaboration then. Ever wonder exactly why Bloodliners are much more common these days, and why so many are female? Here's the thing, it's because of you, and Ash, and all your other siblings. If you all had never been born, I'd be as boring a human as my sister, who runs some talent agency in Unova and now is tasked with making sure some League winner remembers to feed himself. But thanks to you, and your many hundreds of brothers and sisters found from Sinnoh's snowy tundra to Alola's tropical shores, I am more than human. Your little lovelies in there are more than human. Foongus Hair and the rest of my Prince's lovelies are more than human. Your line being born, perhaps not even as massively as they were but the range of how many were needed was utterly massive, met the conditions, and now we sit on a transitioning world. The world that you, Ash, and every one of your siblings who shares a unique take on what power means to them, from sea to shining sea, are all responsible for!"

And those of herself.

It was the second time that sort of thing had been brought up by her, and what were the odds that two people were crazy in the same way.

"…The woman was nuts Ash, don't pay her any mind." Misty's reassuring words to him didn't seem to reach him, and she couldn't really blame him.

It was hard to really say for certain that a telepath was lying when she said that someone felt that way. She could agree for certain with the idea that her mother would have aborted her if she mentally could have.

She could feel Evanna's gaze lingering her way. She was aware that this wasn't the first time they had heard a narrative in the same sort of crazy vein.

Hopefully Evanna would not throw that onto this potential fire. She certainly wasn't going to.

"I had been looking into our father, and from what little I did find out, it doesn't contradict that bitch's comments." Her admittance drew the attention of the others, who looked at her as if she had a grand
tale to tell.

As she had even less of an idea how implying that Ash was responsible for how their lives turned out than she did Aurora, she cut the idea of her having something to say off before it could go anywhere near that.

"Why did you come for me? You could have just told Anabel and the others where to go."

She honestly felt a tad hurt by Ash's question, but perhaps that was just how things started. She didn't earn the love of her three angels in a few meetings; perhaps that was the same with the bond of brother and sister.

She simply had to keep moving with the idea, step by step.

"I said it before, didn't I? You and I are siblings, even if we are that way because our father took Playboy as a personal challenge and has low approval ratings with mad psychics because he is apparently worse than they are. I said I'd help you out, and I mean what I say."

She couldn't help but feel rather happy as her statement made a bit of the apprehension Ash seemed to have toward her fade away.

Was there still more work to do with their relationship? Certainly, and she suspected she would not like the outcome of asking him right up if they could travel with them to work on it.

She wasn't ready to make that call without asking the others first anyway.

But perhaps this could be a start to a point where they could travel together a bit, and he could stop being uneasy around her.

Then he could call her sis, and they could do whatever it was siblings did.

She'd have to figure out what that involved beyond giving him tips with his relationships.

…

Ash was able to get off on his own after breakfast and the conversations after a reminder of his lack of shower since his battle with Sabrina, and like before he had found a waterfall that was neither too cold nor too hot to stand under.

However, he had learned from last time. Not only did he have shampoo and soap this time (100% bio-safe, bio-degradable material that independent research not tied to the corporate world had verified the status of), but he also had Pikachu watching to make sure Iris would not join him under the water again.

Or at least warn him she was going to do it. He didn't expect Pikachu to shock her to stop her from doing it again, and as awkward as the last time had been, electrocuting her away seemed overkill.

Digging his fingers into his hair and really pushing the conditioner into his scalp, Ash had something he had to let out.

"What's happened to my life?"

Pikachu turned his head slightly his way while giving the impression that, if Pikachu had eyebrows, he'd be raising one of them.

"Pika. 'Puberty.'
"What does it say about my life when puberty is usually an afterthought?" Ash had to say on Pikachu's joke response. Pikachu was, after all, aware that many of the oddities of his life were not connected to the fact that he was now growing far more hair than he had any real need for.

Though that did raise the question of why he had never noticed Brock or Cilan show a need to shave. Was the mystery of Brock's hairless lip to join the G.S Ball and his age as one of the great unanswered questions?

"Yes, your existence does seem to be one surrounded by odd events and circumstances. An overly complicated family history, the duality of a person's nurtured morality and the morality brought on by nature, a former enemy saving your life and you having to acknowledge that along with your negative opinion on her past actions, and amazing powers that you can barely figure out without discovering some new facet on them. Compared to all of that, the mysteries of the maturing human form are nothing if borderline inconsequential."

The Pokédex's snark originated from his jacket, which hung from a tree. It hadn't required immediate stain control surprisingly, and thus only needed airing out like the rest of his clothes.

Still the Pokédex's comment did remind him of something, a question that had been in the back of his mind ever since a bit into the giant fight.

The Pokédex...what exactly did it think about time travel and alternate worlds? He tended to forget about it when he talked about it, and the Pokédex had heard another speak of it with Sabrina.

Did it think he was insane, or did he fully believe that he had in fact traveled across time and space?

He'd ask it, but the Pokédex spoke of another topic.

"Regarding your battle with the Mad Gym Leader of Kanto, are you aware that during the battle Squirtle obtained a Marsh Badge? At some point he even slipped it into this very pocket."

Vaguely, but why bring that up? He was pretty sure you couldn't just grab them without the Gym Leader's permission and use them freely. At least here there seemed to be things in place that could catch that, like computers.

"It's also been registered to your name. Congratulations, the Marsh Badge is all yours!"

"Pi-Pikachu?" Pikachu trailed off the traditional cheer with a confused tone of voice.

Ash, who had stopped soaping his body mid-arm, had the same question Pikachu did about that.

"Why would she do that?" She didn't seem in the mood for letting the badge count when they left her.

"As I said, Mad Gym Leader of Kanto. I suspect that will be her first and last badge, but that is merely my hope after I did the Good Samaritan routine. Though I suspect that this will be a mixed bag for you in the long run. Tell me, are you familiar with how the Indigo League differs from other leagues?"

Wishing he had a loafer or something for that part of his back he couldn't reach (and adding an empathetic no to the idea of asking for some help doing it. Doing that would only summon Iris again), Ash gave his response, though he had to wonder about the Pokédex's words.
It sounded like the Pokédex had called in that Sabrina might be tired after his kidnapping and subsequent battle to the people who'd be in place to arrest her.

"I think a few more floats and later full battles."

"Certainly, later than the Ever Grande conference brings them in, that's for certain. However, that was not what I was specifically referring to. It was how Trainer data is given."

Trainer data…Ash could actually sort of see what the Pokédex was referring to. In Indigo no one had ever given a hint that there was any data on who your opponent was beyond their name and face. Meanwhile Silver had entire pages of data devoted to Macy and Gary, the former's letting him catch her surprise Electabuzz.

Ever Grande had some data, but he didn't think it was as in depth, at least on things that mattered. Katie's diet did him little good, while Lily of the Valley had data, but only Paul seemed to understand what it all meant.

"Indigo data is gathered over time and only shows what the Trainer him or herself has shown beyond a few cursory facts. In the case of the former, Pikachu would quickly be public knowledge on your Indigo data page because he doesn't go in a Pokéball, though any data on what sort of skills Pikachu had would not be available prior to them being displayed. Meanwhile if in your first round battle you were to use Ambipom, Butterfree, and Primeape they would appear on your profile with all observations on them listed."

"In related facts, attempting to access information like recorded tournaments prior or smuggling in written or data notes used to be an expulsion worthy offense though the rule was rarely enforced and even then, only when actual spying was used to get the data. It was a holdover from older times where without League-provided data or even just media, espionage was used to gather information on opponents and written notes were the easiest way of proving it. The rule has since been repealed and replaced with a new rule forbidding actual spying attempts or other invasions of privacy."

Okay? That was an interesting history lesson, but...

"Not sure what any of that has to do with the Marsh Badge registered to me."

"Among the default data available on Trainers is what badges they won to gain entry into the competition, and especially early on those badges are how people make guesses on what their opponent may do. For example, possessing the Soul Badge suggests the opponent may have measures to fight against Poison Pokémon, while a lack of a Volcano Badge may suggest unfamiliarity with Fire-type Pokémon. Having a Marsh Badge…well that will make people realize that you are capable of battling against someone that powerful, and that may lead to overestimating you. From that, you will likely have to be concerned with the use of big guns earlier than planned to ensure you are beatable."

So, like if Cameron had used Hydreigon in the first round?

Holding his left foot against his right knee as he scrubbed the bottom of it, Ash had a rebuttal to the idea of having secret weapons thrown at him first round.

"If that's the case, then I'll just beat the secret weapons in the first round instead of the fourth or fifth rounds."
"I’d expect nothing less from you at this point. You do have a knack for surprising me."

With that the Pokédex was quiet for the rest of the shower.

…

When Ash had come back from the shower, she had noted a slight bit of surprise on his end.

He had apparently suspected that Iris would pop under the waterfall with him again, and seemed amazed to see that she didn't.

What was honestly more surprising, at least in Anabel's personal view, was that she hadn't tried to do so. Was it because she had that talk with another one of Ash's sisters and realized that doing so was not appropriate behavior?

She didn't think so. She had only gotten a slight bit of what the two had talked about, given she didn't pry deep into people's minds, but it didn't feel like that was the case.

Closing her eyes for a moment, Anabel let the water of the waterfall wash over her, removing the soap from her body along with the dirt and sweat of the last day.

They were in no rush, even after they all slept surprisingly well they weren't jumping at the idea of going on the move again.

With that lax mood she could take her time. Which she'd need because the now longer hair of hers were being a little difficult.

No matter what she did, she didn't seem to get it feeling as soaped as she had when it was short.

She ran her hands through it, feeling the uneven shampoo application with a dissatisfied frown.

"You need to dig it in with your fingers."

Her eyes shot open as she found Iris staring at her from the dry side of the waterfall. A ripple of light shock and wonder ran through her mind; how did Iris manage to approach without her noticing?

Iris ran her own fingers through her mane of hair, as if by demonstration.

Anabel reached for the shampoo with her mind and applied what she did, while also talking.

'Is this going to be a thing you do?'

Iris looked at her in confusion, so as she dug the soap into her scalp (and it did in fact solve the problem she had been feeling) and elaborated.

'Walking in us while we shower under waterfalls?' Would it even extend to actual showers?

"If I want to talk about something and you are showering, sure," Iris declared as she began removing her own clothes.

Compared to the memories she had seen of Ash's reaction, Anabel could say her reaction was a lot less flustered.

It was awkward sure, but she had the benefit of not finding Iris removing her clothes physically appealing the way Ash did (and would if she or Misty did the same in front of him).
'You could also talk to me clothed,' Anabel pointed out as she, perhaps counterproductively to her point, telekinetically moved Iris's shirt onto a branch to dry, followed by the rest of her clothing.

"Yeah, but doing this saves time for both myself and Misty when she comes down for a shower." Iris explained as she stepped under the waterfall next to her.

A decent point, Anabel had to admit.

"Though I think we could probably fit Misty under here pretty easily, and Ash too if we…"

'Let's not.' Anabel was tempted to say 'maybe next time', but that had the scary potential of Iris actually doing it the next time Ash found an inexplicably functional waterfall for showering.

Iris thankfully dropped the idea, and Anabel handed her the soap while her face remained heated from the thought of Iris somehow getting Ash under the waterfall with them. As Iris began rubbing her arms the conversation continued.

"You like Ash, right."

Iris's words were a statement, not a question. Her blush returning, Anabel looked anywhere but Iris and sputtered out a reply.

'I…I guess you could say that. He's always been nice, and that's only been shown more as we travel…Plus he is rather good looking, even before you went nuts about it.'

"Nuts?" Iris spoke the word in context-based confusion.

'Never mind.'

Iris looked at her for the use of a term she didn't explain nor would elaborate on, but continued even as she soaped up her stomach.

"Not sure why everyone sidesteps saying that."

Anabel felt the urge to point out that Iris didn't exactly go up to Ash and say 'Ash I find you physically attractive and I like you', but somehow if she did that Anabel figured that she'd do that, plus asking Ash to have sex with her or something, so she kept it to herself.

"Though I guess I do not exactly go right up and say it either, come to think of it."

Oh, she recognized her own bit of hypocrisy.

"I had actually told Misty that I would give her time to get Ash's attention alone. It was actually a bit before we met you," Iris informed her. "However, I think that time is about up."

Anabel looked at Iris from the corner of her eye as Iris began washing the back of her neck. That was going to be fun.

Misty was going to have a Tauros…

"And I would like your help with it."

Iris's statement interrupted Anabel's mind imagining the ramifications of Iris actively working to start a relationship with Ash.

Help? Help with what exactly? She wasn't exactly a romance guru.
"Not sure what I could do that would be of any help to you."

"Simple, that anger problem that Ash apparently got from his father is something I want to see worked on. Also, with all the things that Sabrina told him about him, and Belladonna had found out, I think Ash would really benefit from something more positive."

She couldn't help but agree that from what she had been told about Ash's anger spells (against Paul, Joshua, and Sabrina), were disturbingly uncharacteristic of Ash and something that should be worked on, and trying to not have him dwell on the fact his father was probably the definition of human scum was also good.

But she failed to see what that had to do with her helping enter an actual relationship with Ash, be it emotional, physical, or both.

'Let me see if I'm following. Not only are you attracted to Ash, but you are worried about his paternal inherited issues, plus the problems that come from realizing your father is some sort of psychotic megalomaniac who has probably committed every crime under the sun. Your idea is having you and I work together to help him deal with those issues, plus anything else that comes up and our general mutual pleasure, ourselves and Ash.'

"Misty too, but I have not talked to her about it yet," Iris clarified.

'…Sure. Okay, let's follow that. Let's say that in the midst of some random angst spell, Misty or I break him out of it with a kiss to the lips and a heartfelt confession. You don't see the problem with that?'

"There is a problem? I mean, between you and Misty I thought you would get it better," Iris responded in genuine confusion.

And 'get it better'?

'What is that supposed to mean?'

Iris put her washed left leg back down as she explained what in fact she meant.

"Well, think about it. You can read people's minds and emotions. You know when people mean it, and when they do not. You saw the minds of Belladonna and her lovers; do they seem jealous of each other?"

She hadn't exactly pried deep into them, but she didn't exactly sense it. However, she couldn't exactly say that applied.

They were all in a relationship with each other, while Anabel had no attraction to Iris or Misty, and she'd bet money that the same applied to all three of them.

If she looked into Ash's mind images like Misty in swimsuits (or her panties this morning), Iris in the shower next to him, and her partially stripped form would probably be fairly embedded in there. Iris was highly unlikely to do the same with her showering here, or mid change Misty. Same with Misty and mid change her or Iris.

She suspected Iris was aware of the difference, but didn't really pick up on what that difference really entailed.

"You can look into Ash's mind and see it. You could see that, in the end when you, Misty, myself, and anyone else…" Uh…what? Who? Why? How? "…are together with Ash. You can see his
thoughts and go 'yes, he does care and love me as much as everyone else.'"

Iris didn't seem to understand jealousy. Sure, she could, in Iris's weird idea of the future where Ash decided his father was at fault for merely 'daycaring' with hundreds of women instead of being more permanent with a fraction of the number, look into Ash's mind and find equal, or similarly sized, affection, love, and all other emotions for her as Iris, Misty, and whatever other girls Iris seemed to think Ash would just randomly run into and magnetically attract.

Okay there was Serena, but the way Iris was talking she'd think Ash might attract enough partners to form his own Pokémon League with Gym Leaders, Elite Four, and himself as the Champion.

That didn't mean she'd not feel jealousy, that anyone else would not feel jealousy.

Iris was not incorrect in saying that she would be able to tell herself in such a scenario that Ash loved her as much, or even about as much, as everyone else.

She simply underestimated the difference between telling yourself that, and actually feeling that way.

Anabel would not ignore Iris's suggestion they work on helping Ash deal with any issues from his father, be it the anger or any 'I am related to a monster' moments. That was something they could and should work on as soon as possible, though it would only be Iris who thought that would lead them to some end result like Belladonna's family.

A Misty shower of little eventfulness later

"You know, this is actually a nice waterfall. Wish we could find ones like it that wouldn't kill us."

Before they left their separate ways, Ash had offered them to use the waterfall he had stumbled upon, and his companions had used.

It beat a late day shower in any case, and it had a nice temperature. Also, less attention grabbing.

The only problem was that it not exactly big enough. Sure, all four of them could stand under it, but it would not be the most conductive for washing.

It was easier two at a time, with her and Aurora under it at the moment, while Evanna and Vedia waited for their own turn. She had her hands in Aurora's soft hair, getting the soap in, while Evanna had stuck her own legs under it earlier and was currently running a razor along them.

Vedia was just patiently waiting.

"Sadly, it seems to be a talent I can only presume came from his mother," she answered Evanna's quip as she removed her hands from her dear's hair, letting it fully rinse as she took a bar of soap to her own forearms.

"You know, it really was nice. Do you think we can do more of this?" Aurora's question stopped her mid arm, and Evanna mid-leg.

"When it comes to sharing showers, we are not adverse of doing that in this and other activities in showers."

Aurora shook her head at Vedia's point.

"No, not about showers. I meant helping people."
She'd quip about not wanting more of her siblings kidnapped, but she held her tongue. Hard to say how Aurora would take that.

She turned around to look at her right up in the eye, her blue eyes clearer than the water.

It really was interesting, a lot of what she had noticed in Aurora since her father was put down seemed to have vanished since they went after Sabrina. It was a new spark to her, something that, if she had to be completely honest, had always been missing.

"Acquiring sufficient spandex would be highly improbable. Also, I would look horrible in spandex."

Hardly true, Vedia, though she suspected that wasn't what Aurora meant.

Though she was hardly opposed to the idea of helping more people, even if she had to admit 'people' would have to be replaced with a much narrower term.

Like she had said to Hilda, there were only so many she really cared for in the world.

Still, there had been something nice about saving Ash beyond the feeling of simply saving her brother. A nice feeling from doing good, that she couldn't recall feeling after finding out Tokiomi had croaked.

Did just doing good in general feel better than getting justice?

"Helping people huh…not sure how we'd do that, but I'm all for it."

In a move that was rare for Aurora to initiate herself, she bounced on the tips of her feet and left a quick kiss on her lips. She didn't quite land well on the rocks, but she caught Aurora before she hit her head.

When she had regained her footing again, Aurora gave her three more kisses, and only one of them felt like it was a 'thank you for saving me' kiss.

"I am in favor of considering Aurora's idea too, though I would suggest watching the naked kissing. I doubt your relationship with your brother has progressed enough he is quite prepared to hear the evolution of you two kissing through the trees."

Despite Vedia's dry point, even she had a bit of a smile on her face. It would seem her sweet also felt that feeling about their recent action being different from before.

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*Later that day, post Belladonna and Co.’s departure*

Ash stared at Primeape.

Primeape stared at Ash.

That exchange was going on in a quiet clearing, with five of his other Pokémon on standby.

Pikachu, the recently evolved Boldore and Serperior (both of whom were greatly congratulated, even if it did get followed by Serperior trying to use Glare on him), Ambipom, and Squirtle.

Should Sabrina come back, they'd react, and would if this went badly.

"So…do you remember me?" Ash asked the fighting Pokémon.
Said Pokémon stared at him for a moment, then two, then three…before quickly swiping his hat and jumping up and down playfully.

A grin came over Ash’s face, even as Primeape stopped bouncing and looked at him in confusion.

"Yeah, a lot happened since we last met. I matured, in theory."

Maybe. Sure, he didn't act up as much when Ambipom stole his hat, but he wasn't sure how long of a difference in time that had been.

For all he knew, it had just been the Tuesday after Primeape.

"Primeape is male, and knows the moves Mega Kick, Cross Chop, Seismic Toss, and Thrash."

The Pokédex's info dump made Ash’s grin widen even more.

Cross Chop?! He never had a Pokémon know that move.

"Cool, can you show me?"

Ash's question caused Primeape to give him a smile that made him a tad uneasy, a feeling that got even more intense when Primeape grabbed him above both his elbows and jumped.

He meant Cross Chop, not Seismic Toss. And he certainly did not mean on him!

Also, ow.

After that, painful learning experience, Ash promptly took a training sample with all of his Pokémon who were in active battle rotation, many of which were kind enough to not do so at him without any sort of warning.

Pikachu, Butterfree, Pidgeot, Ambipom, Charizard, Squirtle, Serperior, Goodra, Yanma, Muk, Tauros, and Boldore, and now joined by Kingler and Primeape.

All seemed stronger than before the massive battle, and from what he had heard it wasn't just with them.

All the Pokémon who participated were showing signs of being stronger.

And come to think of it…he did too.

He wasn't sure how to test it though.

His own strength aside though, his mind drifted back to the Pokémon who weren't in active battle rotation.

One species in particular, particularly after that last statement one had made the other day.

"You know, do you think any of the Exeggutor would be interested in being used in battle?"

Ash's question caused the Pokémon currently with him after the recent swapping of Pokémon (Pikachu, Butterfree, Serperior, Charizard, Goodra, and Yanma), to look at one another in uncertainty.

"Ser." 'I can't say for certain, I never spent much time with them. But it is worth asking.'
"The Exeggutor, like the Tauros, each have their own set of moves. For example, you have one that knows Confusion, Teleport, Barrage, and Stun Spore, another that knows Confusion, Teleport, Dream Eater, and Sleep Powder, and a third that knows Confusion, Teleport, Trick Room, and Flash."

"If any of them want to battle, then I'll work with them, no matter the move."

Ash's declaration was met with a mechanical sigh that suggested the machine was resigned to what would happen.

"You at least know not to use Trick Room with Yanma, right?"

If that was the Pokédex asking if he knew that the move reversed speed, then yes, Ash knew about it. He fought through it.

He was also well aware of the horrible things he could do with that move and Torterra or Snorlax.

But other than that, he looked at his arms where both his Keystone and his Z-Crystal shimmered in the light.

"You know, let's see if I can do that again."

"You'd have to be more specific," the Pokédex pointed out as Ash pointed at Pikachu.

"Let's make another Z-Crystal!" Ash declared as Charizard stepped forward in interest.

"Alright, Charizard use Flamethrower into the sky! That should be enough."

Charizard nodded before bellowing a pillar of fire, which Ash pointed his hand towards and concentrated every ounce of willpower he had.

An hour later however and nothing happened. Charizard shut the flame off and coughed a bit as one might after a lengthy period of singing.

"There appears to be additional factors not at play here required in your stone creation abilities."

The Pokédex's observation was obvious.

"It's not time, I was definitely battling Lilo, Elwood, and Aideen a lot shorter than that. Can't be how many, I was getting brown dust from just that Mudsdale."

"That might have been because said Mudsdale used a Z-Move. However, I doubt that would be much help unless you want to make dozens of Psychium-Z crystals."

"That's not a bad idea. I mean, if Anabel had her own Z-ring..."

It couldn't be so unlikely she'd randomly get mailed one.

"The odds of that happening again are slim. Before you ask, I have no idea what a Z-ring is made of. I have data that suggests a specific type of stone is used in the construction, but I doubt that is the only part of it. The stone has no description beyond 'sparkling stone', and I couldn't tell you if it was quartz or diamonds or some sort of meteorite. Frankly it could be Vibranium for all I know."
"Pretty sure that isn't a real thing."

The Pokédex let out a mechanical noise that suggested the previous statement was sarcasm.

"Ser." 'Well, if you did see dust forming when you were battling those twins, quantity is likely a place to start. I'm not sure if you just need to be in a place with a ton of Grass-type Pokémon, or if it does need to be saturated with it like Sabrina's Gym.'

"Translation?" The Pokédex's request was quickly given, and so he was able to add his own comment.

"An unknown quandary. Perhaps it would be wise to take the local ferry to Cinnabar and stop at the Seafoam Islands. The interior of the islands are known for a large concentration of Ice-type Pokémon, and you may manage the feat again there if it does require saturation. I'd recommend it over trying in the Cinnabar Volcano in any case."

Charizard growled under his breath something about they'd probably be at the volcano anyway, so they could try then.

"Translation?" The Pokédex's request was this time not given.

Still, Seafoam wasn't a bad idea. With how many Ice-types in Kanto were also Water, he was sure Misty would be happy with a detour there.

Ash supposed he could see if the Mysterious Garden would work too, but Bulbasaur had been adamant he was not getting kidnapped again and was going to be staying in Pallet Town for the duration.

In fact, his exact plan was to have the Professor bring him to Johto for a radio show for the entire duration, and from what he understood it was working.

So, Seafoam would be the place to test the idea out. Then Cinnabar, assuming he could explain to Blaine why he was making strange poses over lava.

(Misty was in fact very happy with the idea when he asked her later, just before he gave Iris the possibly dangerous idea of seeing if he had gotten notably stronger too, which was promptly followed by Misty and Anabel looking at him like he was crazy. It would take him about half a minute to realize why and he promptly cursed himself for bringing it up).

Elsewhere, around the same time

As luck would have it, she had been in Saffron City during the entire incident with the Psychic Heart user and Ash Ketchum, and with some difficulty she had observed it.

Being noticed would not have ended well for her, but leave it to Ash to keep the woman's attention focused on him.

Well Ash and that machine in his pocket, but semantics.

"And then he somehow creates a Z-Crystal. I don't know how you do that, but he does and actually figures out how to use it! I mean does he do those poses in his spare time or something, who gets them functioning on improv!?"

Hilda's exclamation of disbelief was acknowledged by her Prince, who stood silent staring into the
moonlit sky for a moment before giving his piece.

"Clearly it appears that I will have to pay more attention to the history of Alola. I had thought the culture of Alola would be merely something to take note of for approaching something better, a starting point for the new world to be created, but it would seem that the history of those islands may have something more to them than a first step to the better society. Perhaps I would not be the first Bloodliner ruler of a land, I will have to see what he did right and wrong so I may follow his successes and avoid his failings."

"A meticulous analysis of history then?" she quipped as a slight smile formed on his lips.

"Indeed."

She didn't just give him unbiased information that wasn't filtered through the King; she also helped him see the culture that humans had created.

For all their failings as a species, they did have some achievements worthy of note. A pity the film and literature industry would likely collapse in their new world, but they were already making considerations for what to save for a reborn one somewhere down the line.

She had also taken to bringing him more philosophies, histories, and theories than what he had been provided himself. He expressed interest in creating the best possible new world where this one continued to fail, and wanted as many sources to inform his decisions as possible. Though she never did understand how he could comprehend half of the things she brought him.

"I take it with this Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town is now looking like the one?" Hilda asked as the prince turned around from his moon gazing to stare right at her, giving her a nice view of his naked body.

Like nearly all of his siblings, of which he was the firstborn, his form was tall and pleasing, befitting the children of a man who declared himself king and his children princes and princesses.

He towered over her, six foot six of marble like skin. His body was smooth and slim, a thinner frame than Belladonna or Ash. His beautiful face was unmarred by the marks that rested upon many of his siblings, which was important for more than cosmetic reasons.

"The exact point in which 'one marked with evil fights one who embraces it' must fight to create a clear path for the future of the world isn't defined, so I won't simply believe that he must be it. However, he certainly is the best candidate so far, though I must admit I find the 'embraces evil' connotation to be disconcerting."

She could certainly understand why. Her Prince was many things, but evil was not one of them.

That was his father's hat.

However, she wanted to see him reach his goals, and him worrying he'd take on his father's behavior was not something any of them would want him to dwell on.

So, she raised a counterpoint to those concerns.

"Evil is relative and dependent on the culture in question. Rangers think Trainers are evil and Trainers think Rangers are evil. The ancient people who wrote down prophecies had their own culture, and every culture has odd foibles. I'm pretty sure there were at least three ancient cultures who thought left handedness of all things was evil."
To emphasize the point she waved her left hand around, oooing sinisterly as she did so.

"No need to be fixated on what others would call you. Those who would call you evil are those who are ruining the world, or would hate you simply for being a Bloodliner. When we are done fixing the world, they will be the ones being called evil for opposing it, not you. Now come, stop thinking of what people who don't matter might call you."

She beckoned him with a gesture and a raised leg, bare as his own from the bed she had been reclining on the entire time.

"Now, let's leave this talk behind. We do need to relax after all, and discussions of morality are hardly relaxing."

The Prince, as always, was more than eager to help her in that.

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**Back with the heroes**

Ash woke up the next morning, alone in his bed.

It was how it was supposed to be, how things were always before. It was normal. Most people, including his mother, would probably call it proper.

He couldn't help but feel that it was mildly depressing to wake up normally.

He rose his torso up slowly, leading Pikachu to stir from the end of the bed as the Pokédex chimed in.

"Good morning. It's before sunrise and you have woken up early."

Yeah, he noticed.

Pikachu looked at him with an uneasy face, and he tried to reassure his buddy.

"It's nothing buddy."

"You look like a Johto political elite when they woke up and found out that Rock Peregrine won the mayorship, like something is just wrong with everything about the morning," the Pokédex snarked.

Why did he leave the Pokédex out of his pocket last night so he could actually see his face? Also, who?

He voiced his question, and the Pokédex elaborated.

"New mayor who is atypically progressive yet typically rough and blunt for a Johto politician. His main campaign promise, besides the standard rhetoric of progressives, was to help Johto's rural folk by instituting major reforms to his city's farming industry which according to him, was in need of a serious technological uplift, and he's very much adamant that his reforms will work. He hopes to become a regional governor after his run as mayor, and doesn't really make for an easy ally on either side of the political spectrum."

Ash felt that was good. He was worried Johto would be a lot worse than he remembered when back
in the original timeline, they were easily the most open to him keeping Pikachu out of his Pokéball with Kalos a close second.

"I'd have said you look like a Johto political elite after he realized that the mayor meant everything he said and either went about implementing it or making quite clear what was holding back his policies for the common folk to see, but you don't look like you've seen Articuno flapping cold wind over your pumpkin patch while singing a song of war, so the comparison was what was given."

Interesting…metaphor? Was that the right word for that image, a metaphor? Vocabulary skills aside, they weren't wrong.

"I guess….something is bugging me."

Actually, it was a few things.

"Pikapi?" 'I take it isn't just the fact you woke up alone?'

It being multiple things was handy to step around that conversation.

"Er, I'm more just finally feeling everything that came up."

"Pika?" 'Do you mean about your father, or…'

"More of what you said when you thought Sabrina wanted to do…er…"

"Pi." 'Jessebelle you?'

"Yeah".

Yeah, that, for lack of a better word. Even if in hindsight this was probably not the best way to avoid talking about how off it felt waking up alone again.

Hopefully this conversation would not randomly have the Pokédex reveal he had a sibling into that sort of thing. The odds were probably not in his favor that such a sibling did not exist.

"Pikachu-Pi." 'So, the bit about your ability to attract females regardless of species, probably in context with Misty, Iris, and Anabel.'

Ash nodded, and posed the question.

"Do they really…"

Pikachu gave him a flat look that was a blunt 'yeah, they do.'

Ash took a long breath and a minute to get his thoughts in order before continuing.

"Any idea how to handle it if they actually do like me like that?"

"You are really asking the advice for a machine without lust or love in my circuits, and a creature whose solution to your dilemma would most likely involve you stripping your clothes off and going into each of their secret bases?"

The Pokédex's sardonic point was not helped by Pikachu giving a rebuttal that wasn't so much a refute as declaring there were more steps to it than that.
"So, none of you are much help."

"I have an Oak recording about what to do on a date, but that's more about how you dress for it than anything. I also have one for how to handle being late to a date, how to cancel a date, and how to break up a relationship, none of which would benefit you. Still, if it helps I feel quite sure in declaring they are just as lost on how to approach it as you are."

As lost as he was? That was hard to believe, except maybe in regards to Iris. He could sort of see her being as clueless as he was.

That shower was certainly not her flirting with him.

"You know, and keep this just to you two and not the others…"

"All three are deep asleep, as are any Pokémon."

"…if you can. They are all wonderful and beautiful, but I don't know how I'd even go about a relationship. I mean, let's pretend that I figure out that I really, really like one of them in particular…"

Pikachu coughed something that sounded suspiciously like 'Belladonna and Cleff'. He ignored the point.

"…How would I even know how to get there? Like I said, I don't have a clue how being a boyfriend would even work. How do you get to that point? None of us do."

"Then it would be best for you all to simply move forward and see what happens. Perhaps you will all find a way to sort it all out, or perhaps you won't and it will just flicker away. Such things do happen."

The Pokédex went silent after that, so Ash looked at Pikachu for the second part.

"So I'm attractive to more than just them?"

"Pikapika." 'Why do you think Misty always got jealous?'

Ash was at a loss for words. Misty jealous, over him? Especially pre-Cyrus.

"Pikachu." 'Oh, come on. She always got angry whenever another girl liked you, but she'd probably cuddle with a bunch of Weedle before admitting that out loud. Though I think she'd probably have bragging rights for giving you your first kiss on the mouth."

"When did that happen?" No really, when did that happen?

"Pika Pikachu." 'Well, I think it's that thing humans call CPR, but when you and Lugia fell into the sea that time, Misty volunteered to do it."

"And why didn't you tell me?"'

"Pika!" 'Because I couldn't! Besides, she told Tracey she would murder him if he ever told you about it.'

Ash was again at a loss for words. Misty had saved him that time, but he never actually considered it. Someone would have had to get him to expel the water he swallowed, and… give him mouth-to-mouth. Did Misty really keep that to herself all that time, however long it had been?
"So… Misty and many others find me attractive."

Pikachu nodded.

"Pikaka. 'Yeah, that's right. Even before all of this Bloodliner stuff you made girls from Anabel to Angie to Macy look at you longingly. I've always sort of half-wondered about Blonde Bianca's insistence on knocking you into water myself, though if she did that in this timeline I'd say that she would in fact be doing it on purpose. Same with all the girls you traveled with, though Serena had it before you started traveling together, and I suspect it is the same in this timeline. Should Dawn be alive the way Iris was, she'd probably find you just as attractive, and May too probably.'

"Huh. I always sort of thought May and Dawn had something with Drew and Kenn…"

Pikachu promptly made a sound that sounded like he was about to cough up a hairball of disgust. Odd, sure Kenny could be a tad tough to deal with and Drew was Gary with James's old rose gimmick, but they weren't that bad.

"I'd ask but I'm afraid to find out something weird, like you telling me Drew is addicted to licking stamps or something. Back on topic though, what did you exactly mean by species though?"

Pikachu had a blunt response to his question.

"Pikapi." 'Ash, it was Latias, not brunette Bianca'…

Oh…okay. For one small piece of information, it was a lot to process and Ash wasn't entirely sure how to react to that, so he moved to the bit he could at least process.

"It was multiple genders and species, right? So, there are guys who find me attractive?"

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_Later that day_

Ash had encountered a variety of odd groups and people on his travels, from schools of ninja to hidden prehistoric paradises.

He had dealt with martial arts studios, and towns interested in Pokémon Sumo competitions, though Iris had found something that was very much a related, if very different sort.

Namely a wrestling dojo, where dozens of youth around his age were clashing with each other in the open sunlight.

Not sumo youth, but other sorts of wrestling.

He turned towards Iris, who was observing them with an inquisitive eye.

"So, did you bring me here to learn from them?"

It didn't seem like she brought him here to join her in watching sweat coated, muscle bound youth straining themselves. That seemed more of the thing she'd bring Misty and Anabel for.

Even if Pikachu and the Pokédex were right and they were attracted to him, that didn't mean they couldn't appreciate sweaty muscle men grabbling with each other.

"Actually, it is more for you to get an idea of what I want you to do today."

With that Iris removed her shirt and tossed it to the side, standing in front of him in just a bra and
entering what looked like a fighting stance. Ash forced his eyes to stay focused on hers as he fought to stop them travelling south and to keep his cheeks from reddening.

"We are going to practice hand-to-hand combat like they are. We can use Bloodliner powers later, when you have the basics down."

Many questions promptly ran through his head, first among them wondering why this was what Iris came up with after he mentioned to her wanting to see if he had gotten stronger.

Second was if this had anything to do with the earlier mentioned Pikachu and Pokédex talk. Did Iris remove her shirt, expect him to remove his own, and tell him to try and throw her to the ground for any reason related to being attracted to him, or was this just as platonically meant as the shower?

With Iris, that was actually a question.

Third, would this be better done by seeking help of actual wrestlers in training, or was that academy private property?

Still, he did (sort of) ask for it, so he removed his own shirt and jacket (less dramatically than Iris did due to having more of it), and entered what he thought might count as a fighting ready stance.

Mentally preparing himself for the repeated bouts of pain and awkwardness that was likely bound to happen.

At least the Pokémon (both his and Iris's) weren't here to watch the following awkwardness or pain. Misty had decided to train with her own custom-made melee training, and Anabel was hanging around to play ref and egg protector for the entire thing.

…

She wondered if Ash was confused why she did not get someone more familiar with trained combat to work with him instead of herself.

True, she did have some idea of how to fight (the fact she slammed Ash into the ground for the second time with a new explanation of where he was putting his weight incorrectly was proof of that), but she was not ashamed to admit there were those who knew more than she did.

However, they were not interested in helping a random set of strangers. Also, the director seemed to think her being around his young charges would lead their libidos to distract them.

An odd statement given what she had generally seen of human libido at their age. If anything, it would be Misty who would be distracting, not her.

Really, some of the youth she had seen wrestling looked strange compared to Ash, and she couldn't say she really liked it.

Their muscles were unusually defined. Ash was hardly without muscle, but their muscle stuck out in a manner that seemed unnatural to her.

Ash's muscle felt like it was part of his overall body to her, while their muscle almost seemed like it was taking over their body.

There was also the matter of their hairlessness.

Unlike Ash, their forms seemed devoid of any hair other than on their head. Not on their arms, or
their legs, or their chests.

She had no idea about elsewhere.

From what she had been told, they apparently waxed it off. After she asked the machine what that was, she was just baffled.

That was painful, and it seemed odd.

If you were grabbing hair to throw people around, the head seemed a much more logical place to grab. Ash had hair on his body, and she wasn't grabbing that to throw him down.

That was what his wrist was for, though he caught himself before she slammed him into the ground this time. She congratulated him on pulling that off, before their training resumed and her thoughts continued.

Was that what Misty and Anabel prefer him to do, cover himself in the semi-melted form of candles and remove his hair? That would just make him look naked.

And not in the way she'd prefer.

Grabbing his right arm, she moved to swing him down, but he caught himself with his left foot against her own foot and unbalanced her footing.

Regaining it she tried to grab his shoulders for a full push. He ducked, allowing her hands to go right over them, and he grabbed her below the shoulders and forced her to the ground, his bent knee over her thigh.

It was an area she had noted he was trying not to grab earlier, though as their grappling continued he seemed less hesitant about it. A battle rush she suspected adrenaline and instinct overriding his reluctance to grab at particular areas of her body.

Still as he panted over her, his face slowly flushing with embarrassment, she grinned up at him.

"Good, do that a few more times and we will start using attacks."

Meliae had mentioned that a man pinning down a woman, or a woman a man, could be considered a sexual act, and it was likely why she hadn't noticed him trying to grab her by the upper chest or hips until he got too sucked into the battle rush to think about those things.

And Iris had to admit, without the overt force of a fight pushing her down, she could certainly see why. As she stood back up for another round, she could not help but feel a rush.

A rush that she honestly had never felt before, though it did match a bit of what Meliae had mentioned in similar regards to starting sexual acts.

Though her explanation had little to do with the sort of wrestling she and Ash were doing. Though the basic idea of doing a bit to relax Ash from being tense around her unclothed form was going as planned.

Perhaps if she did this for a while, she could start joining him in the shower for not exclusively practical reasons, Meliae had suggested that be a later step. Perhaps by then Misty or Anabel would stop being weird about her suggestions and finally see that her way of thinking was a viable solution to the situation they had found themselves in.
It also gave her some additional observations about Ash and his paternal originating anger. It did not seem to flare up when she threw him to the ground, sometimes more harshly than she meant it.

Did it just need someone like Joshua or Sabrina to trigger? Like the machine would say, she'd probably need more data.

The thought about the anger was knocked out of her, with the air in her lungs it seemed, when Ash elbowed her in the stomach and used momentum to force her to the ground.

---

**The next day**

It was just after they finished breakfast that the egg began glowing like a star.

All present from Trainer to Pokémon stopped what they were doing and looked at the egg as it continued to glow brighter and brighter.

Ash couldn't help but be a bit concerned. Togepi's egg didn't glow like that the last time. It cracked.

Sure, all the other eggs he had seen glowed, but Togepi's was different. Was this a sign that something had gone horribly wrong!?

Or did Cyrus mess that up too?

Regardless of the exact nature of egg differences, the glow of the egg illuminated them all in one final massive burst of light, before the light receded and Ash found a blinking Togepi looking right at him in mild confusion, just as Ash remembered Togepi looking.

Round and spiky headed, wearing an egg around itself with a pair of stubby arms and rounded feet. Rather adorable looking too.

Togepi (what was Togepi's gender? Ash could not recall if he ever knew), was also looking at Misty, Iris, and Anabel because of where their heads were.

They had all leaned in to take a look at the hatching Togepi, and Ash wasn't entirely sure of what having four heads visible when hatching would exactly do.

Togepi's confusion soon ebbed away into the cheerful demeanor he always remembered Togepi having, and the Pokémon promptly trilled joyfully.

Something about the resulting 'awww' from Misty made him feel lighter in the heart.

"*Togepi, the Spike Ball Pokémon, as I had previously noted. This Togepi is male, and knows the moves Charm, Growl, Metronome, and Extrasensory.*"

So, Togepi was a boy. Glad he finally knew that.

"Toge!"

The happy cheer of Togepi made a smile form on his own face, which grew even more so as Pikachu darted up to the rounded baby and shook the little Pokémon's hand.

"PiPiPi! "Hello, I'm Pikachu.'

The more things were different in this new timeline, the more things he could see, from time to time, was just the same.
"You know, it is cuter than the image provided earlier. I actually rather like it more than I'd thought."

Iris's point was followed by the Pokédex in his pocket muttering about her offending the pride of 2D enthusiasts.

'I'd make sure Togepi is fully captured to you quickly. Team Rocket's not around yet, but I'd rather not have them swoop in and grab him before he's fully registered.'

Anabel's point raised a few memories of Team Rocket antics he'd rather not see repeated, and if they were actually not around for a change it was best to use the window.

He turned to his Pokémon with a simple question.

"Any volunteers to go to Oak's so I can keep Togepi on hand?"

...

The day may have begun with a hatching, but that didn't mean the common things weren't performed.

Walking, talking, blasting Team Rocket off when they popped up, and such normalities.

He had a feeling like Misty, Iris, and Anabel were being a bit harsher in blasting them off recently, though he wasn't exactly sure how it was they were being more so.

It wasn't anything he could pin down; just a feeling he got overall that was the case.

After that came some personal training, which was another bout of wrestling slash hand to hand combat with Iris.

Then after even more walking, it was time for some training of another sort.

Serperior's tail glowed bright blue before clashing with Charizard's glowing claws. It was interesting to watch, since evolving Serperior used Aerial Ace differently, as well as Leaf Blade from what he had seen earlier.

The attack required less spinning and jumping, and reminded Ash more of sword jabs and slashes instead.

It was worth noting for later battles, though it might not be a bad idea to see if Serperior could still attack with jumps and flips the same as before.

Charizard's Metal Claw was effectively stopping the attack from landing, but it did clearly require effort.

Charizard blocked a final, harsh jab just as a pair of grass blades formed up around his feet. Charizard growled before igniting into a Flame Charge to burn them away.

'You could do better than that, and will have to do better if you really want to make it as a battler.'

Charizard's growl was aimed at the Exeggutor who had been found to be most interested in further battle focused training.

Confusion, Teleport, Grass Knot, and Sludge Bomb were his moveset, and his response to put down was to stomp the ground and glare with multiple faces at Charizard.
Charizard was not intimidated by this. Perhaps it was because Exeggutor apparently could not use Scary Face?

With Pikachu off doing starting training with Togepi (was more akin to playing at this stage, given that Togepi didn't have the same aggressive streak that Scraggy had), that left him and Butterfree.

They had more things to test out.

"Shattered Psyche!"

Like the Z-Move for example.

He had adjusted his posing a bit, and he felt a lot less of that energy loss he had felt the first time. It didn't feel perfect yet, but the fact the rock he and Butterfree had targeted was bounced four times before exploding suggested that they were on the right track.

It still left both of them exhausted though.

"Free." 'You know, the power that gives…it's incredible. But I could do without the….'

"Exhaustion?"

He finished the sentence as the two tried to regain feeling in their bodies.

"Well, we are getting better at it. This doesn't feel as rough as the last few times."

Still he'd like to find a way to not have as much exhaustion before using it in another large battle, and that still had the question of if every new crystal would have the problem, or just the first use of one by a Pokémon.

He was trying to still trying to figure out how to cause a new one to form for him after all. Psychic moves were not exactly well spread among his team in both current or potential use, and there was the additional fact that it only seemed to work with Butterfree.

He had tried with Exeggutor and Togepi earlier today, and it hadn't sparked when he tried with either. All it did was leave Exeggutor confused and Togepi amused.

So far after Charizard his attempts had involved a five-way Tauros brawl, dipping his hand in the water while Misty did some fishing in a high-water Pokémon density area, had Butterfree, Vivillon, and the Spewpa cover his hand in String Shot and keep applying it for a good while before walking through a rather buggy forest, and similar failed ideas.

Misty had not appreciated the minor Beedrill swarm that chased him out of said buggy forest, even if she did want to work her abilities more.

Continued puzzles upon continued puzzles.

As Togepi and Pikachu returned to the spot he was resting on the ground with the former woozily tuckering to a stop as the little Pokémon reached him, the Pokédex spoke up.

"While you continue to struggle with replication, I have additional data. Would you like to know about a newly discovered half sibling?"

Togepi retracted his head inside his shell sleepily against his leg as Ash took the device out of his pocket.
"Sure, what's the worst he could…"

Ash stopped himself mid-sentence when he remembered that (insert word that was more extreme than creep that Ash could not think up right now that felt appropriate) Misty ran into.

Just thinking of him honestly made his blood boil.

"This sibling does not match the description given by her, so if your current raised levels of agitation are related to the half-brother of yours closest in reported behavior to your father you can relax. This sibling is not human scum. However, he is…fascinating."

Ash did not like how the Pokédex paused before choosing that word.

"He isn't addicted to licking stamps, is he?"

"No, that is a strange thing you think someone named Drew has a problem with."

Actually, no, he didn't think Drew had that as an issue. It was something random and strange he randomly came up with.

The Pokédex was displaying an image, with scale, of a tall fellow who looked around Belladonna or Cleff's age instead of his or Red's. Similarly, unlike him or Red he had a lither body type.

He had long brown hair that went down beyond his neck, though it looked kempt. He had marks on his face like his, though his eyes were yellow instead of red. He was dressed in a white suit of all things, which was probably not what had warranted the title 'fascinating'.

"His name is Fender, and as you can probably guess from his eye color he's actually native to Unova. His mother was a lawyer representing a cross-region business operation, though they ended up in Johto permanently when the Unova end of the business cut their losses with them after a case went bad. One of the other businessmen got caught in a lie, though he was irremovable so a scapegoat was needed you see. After that she functions to this day as a small-town lawyer."

That was a way to catch yourself, but Ash was still waiting for the fascinating part that wasn't related to his choice attire.

"Now, what gets real interesting is a twofold case. The first is what happened after he left home. Not because he wanted to be a Trainer, I have it on record that he's 'more into long-term strategy games than action ones. More Meirer than Kitase'. As you have no idea what that idiom means, basically he is more a fan of the sort of games that involve long term planning without the constant factors of action, which one would see in both a fighting game or a Pokémon battle. No, his departure was more due to not feeling like living in a small town forever. Like he was meant for greater things."

That sounded unnerving, and it didn't sound like how he felt about himself. He couldn't recall really feeling like that about Pallet Town.

"That greater thing, based on what Gardevoir and company have reported, is becoming a rising star in the Johto smuggling underworld."

Ash, Pikachu, and Butterfree stared in stunned silence at the machine, unable to process what was just said.
"Not even two years running, and he's the head of the major supplier of many of northern Johto's illicit goods and information, as well as an emerging provider of off the book products that aren't strictly illegal but are still dodgy in origin."

"Though as best as they could find, it seems to be only mostly moral illegal products. He isn't involved in drugs or guns or living creatures, seemingly based on moral choice."

"Good for him, still can't believe I have a criminal brother of that magnitude."

Ash's quip was still in disbelief. Given recent events he could take a deep breath and say that Belladonna was not the most horrible person in his family. Even without her assistance in saving him, what had come up about his father and that brother Psyduck punched outstripped her, and he was able to say that she wasn't dangerous without provocation.

Then she was utterly dangerous to all in her way.

But a junior crime boss? How did that happen exactly?

Did he get recruited and join up with some two-bit gang he eventually took over? Did he just start his own criminal business?

How did you even do that? He couldn't even ask Team Rocket, who were probably nearby and had some familiarity with the underworld. They didn't start Team Rocket, and were probably not in charge of recruiting people.

"Oh, don't worry, Gardevoir also sent some information that is much more familiar to your family than crime profits."

He didn't like the way the Pokédex said that.

"Free." It's going to say that this Fender is another sibling who has...

"You see, Fender has many people who work with him as part of his operations. All of them are female, and have the same relationship with him that you see with fellow sixteen-year-old siblings Belladonna and Cleff!"

'...And I was right.'

There was a saying about one is chance, twice is coincidence, third times a pattern. Fourth time made you wonder...

Fourth time...

"What the, again!? How?! Why!?"

Seriously, what was going on!? Three siblings doing the same thing, and that wasn't including Meliae.

That wasn't including Midori, who had multiple female friends who were traveling with him.

It wasn't including himself, who he had to admit sort of qualified like Midori. In fact, a bit more
given he knew that Misty, Iris, and Anabel did, for some reason, find him attractive. For all he knew Midori's friends didn't and kept him around for platonic reasons.

This didn't make any sense. Sure, they shared DNA and looked a bit alike, but this was honestly bizarre and probably at the peak of the illogical.

Was he going to next run into Red and find him in a relationship with multiple girls? Was Yellow going to walk up to him and wave hello next time with a half dozen girls her age?

Or boys. That hadn't happened yet, and with his luck some sibling of his probably got a hold of whatever catalogue Nastina ordered her speedo clad boy-toys from.

"Why do we keep finding people like this?!"

"Ashley and several siblings your companions reported were lacking the trait currently giving you stress, but that is inconsequential. There are two notable differences between Fender's lovers and those of your other older siblings. The first is that his paramours number more than three, as I hinted earlier. It's an oddly large group, as including him they are nine of them in total. The second is that at least one of them I can say for certainty is not a Bloodliner."

The screen image on the Pokédex changed from Fender to that of frizzy haired girl with bleached color hair and a pair of glasses. She was a bit gangly looking.

"This is Tesal, a self-professed 'mad scientist' formerly attending the future geniuses' school in Ecruteak City before being expelled for building a mostly safe 'Azoth Reactor' against school and city ordinances, as well as general scientific achievement possibility. There is extensive information on her before her admission I have access to, and there is no evidence of any Bloodliner abilities. She is as human as the old man who made me, and yet I could easily provide video data of her mutually flirting, romancing, and more your elder brother. Have you reconsidered the benefits of such recordings for sleep purposes?"

"...No."

Ash's blunt response was not factored into what the Pokédex said next.

"Very well, but you'd be interested to know she has managed to independently match the recent achievement of the Professor's associate with item capsule storage recently, an achievement that led your brother to pick her up, spin her around, and kiss her in that manner than caused her spine to bend over and her back to lean parallel to the floor. She apparently is currently working on creating wormholes next."

“Others in his organization include Bloodliners Sam, Asi, and Secra, who appear to be Technique Bloodliners for Strength, Discharge, and Secret Power who provide related services for their little organization. Sam has super strength; Asi provides electrical charge to Tesal's super-batteries for their base, while Secra is able to continue to expand their hideout with her abilities as needed, along with creating side bases. Gardevoir and co are still gathering more information on them for the data base, so they will be monitoring for a while. It may take a while to get useful information however, as things there are currently weird."

Ash looked at Pikachu and Butterfree uneasily before looking back at the Pokédex.
"I'm going to regret asking, but what is 'weird' exactly."

The Pokédex promptly gave him an answer, by playing a recording that was apparently being given live.

It sounded a bit altered and amplified for clarity, but he could hear the voice of someone with a slight Unovan tint to their voice. Most likely Fender.

"…The wonderful thing about girls, is girls a wonderful thing. Their tops are made of springs, their bottoms are made up of blubber!

They're bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy. Fun, fun, fun, fun, fun! But the most wonderful thing about girls is...there are so many!"

Lithe and slick, wonderfully curved hourglasses, charmingly round and soft, and everything in between, it is nearly impossible to find a truly ugly girl"

Who was currently singing in a manner Ash could not tell if it was due to drugs, tiredness, or drinking unhealthy levels of coffee mixed energy drinks, possibly a mixture of all three for all he knew.

It sounded like a song from his childhood, and it had awoken Togepi, who was currently trying to trill to the tune of it in a manner that was both cute and somewhat strange.

Well, that was it for the day. He couldn't really muster up anything more after hearing that.

No, not whatsoever. If Iris was still training Misty and Anabel like she had been recently, they'd probably be just as tired and they could all go to bed and be done with today.

Then he could wake up tomorrow, and hopefully find a normal sibling for a change.

---

A few days later

Perhaps it was because they had recently met that photographer that her dream was filled with photos stuck to walls all around her.

As for knowing it was a dream, her last memory was putting her head down on her pillow and idly noting that it still felt oddly vacant.

She noted what was in the pictures, and couldn't help but note that all of them seemed to be her when she was younger, perhaps ten or twelve or something around that point in life.

Or whatever age she had liked suspenders as a fashion statement.

Despite her younger age in them, she seemed to be a Pokémon Trainer in them, as all of the photos featured her with some Pokémon or another.

In one image she was holding a Poliwhirl who had apparently been beaten in a battle along a river. She didn't see her opponent, but she could see a look of disappointment on the Poliwhirl, and a look of sad pride on her own face.

In another she was standing with a Psyduck, one that looked a lot like her own, in front of a set of well-made dolls.

A third had her standing on top of a Gyarados who again looked a lot like her own, looking rather
A fourth had her in the water somewhere, it looked like a canal if she had to guess, hugging a pink Pokémon that looked like a Corsola, and was in fact probably a Corsola. A photo right next to it had her holding a fancy medal/medallion in her hand that featured two stylized winged Pokémon of some species.

They were all like that, and there were far more than those. A number of them had her holding Ash's Togepi, and in doing so there was a different air about her. It stirred something in her that she couldn't figure out, it felt vaguely familiar but in truth she couldn't really say what it was.

"You know, you were like always better at that stuff than we were. All we had was beauty."

An unfortunately familiar voice rang through her dream, and she found her body shifting to face the back of someone who was looking over another wall of photos with the pose of a museum goer.

The familiar voice was paired with an unfortunately familiar fashion sense and head of blonde hair, who turned around to look at her.

"The Sensational Sisters of Cerulean City and the runt, but look at you now. We can't call you that now."

Daisy was smiling at her, which was a weird thing to see happening. It never happened, ever.

There had to be something else, a catch. She was wearing shades; she was probably hiding her leering gaze behind them.

Yeah, that was what was going on.

"You're just as sensational as the three of us."

Misty could only stare at the shades wearing shade in apprehension. What was this about, a trap? A trick? A cruel bait and switch?

"Yeah, the sensational it. The unwanted one. The Bloodliner."

Her bitter tone seemed to confuse Daisy.

"What's a Bloodliner?"

Who did she think she was kidding?

"I mean, I don't know a lot of things. I'll freely admit I'm not smart, and I'm not even a hundred percent of me. I'm just a Dream figure talking to you a person who's dreaming, and I'd have to, like, go really meta here, but I'm not just a thing in your dream. I'm the memory of Daisy as seen by someone outside of the four of us incompletely being played by your subconscious, or perhaps, like, your subconscious' subconscious."

That didn't make any sense.

"Hey, don't ask me, I'm just a memory of a memory, but if you'd let me be honest…"

Daisy, or whatever she was, lifted her shades, though she couldn't really describe her eyes. It was as if they had no detail, though she got the unsettling implication that her eyes were matching her mouth.
Being that both of them were giving her a feeling of being happy, true, and sad in same and equal amounts.

"You're beautiful Mist, and that isn't all you have. You may have been the last of us, but you were, and are, truly the best."

And with that statement, delivered in a way she had never heard any of her sister's say, Misty awoke in her bed. She jerked upright, throwing her covers off in the process and looking around only to find darkness and an empty Secret Base. Misty sighed and fell back onto her bed and stared at the ceiling as she thought about what she'd just dreamt.

Utterly confused, and feeling a strange mixture of emotions. Confusion, pride, sadness, a feeling of something having been lost but not really remembering that you ever had it to begin with, a whole giant mess. She just lay in her bed, not moving to get up yet. It was still early, and maybe by the time everyone else was up she'd be able to make heads or tails of it all.

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**Seafoam Islands**

Ash had never paid much attention to the Seafoam Islands before. Other than a ferry stop, he had never really visited them.

He had spent some time on the unofficial member of the chain, Binnes the Seafoam Island, but not much on the actual Seafoam islands.

They had gotten the express ferry service to Cinnabar originally, while this time they had taken the local service that stopped at all of the islands. While they had skipped over the first island in the duo due to how crowded the exit was (Anabel having commented it appeared to be a major tourist spot and thus something they should avoid), it had looked enough like the second one they were currently on for Ash to comment on both in the same breath.

The islands were divided in three parts, two outer bands and a center area.

The outer bands were beach areas, areas coated in sand and stone lapped at the edge by the waves of the sea. They were what drew people here, and he suspected they were serious business to the people in Seafoam.

The 'litter and pay this ludicrous fine' signs at every entrance to the beach was only the most obvious way they made that point clear.

Pikachu had taken one step on the sand, winced loudly at how hot it was, and had taken residence on his shoulder for transport across it.

The inner band was a line of buildings and houses that circled the island around. It was where the people of the island lived and operated, and went into the island about as far as it could, though it had seemingly run into the limit possible for doing so.

For the inner part of the island was a steep and severe rocky mountain, within which was a series of icy caves. No one was sure why they were icy exactly, there weren't any cold currents nearby to generate the cold water, yet somehow it was.

The Pokédex had offered a theory that it was because of the large colony of Ice-type Pokémon who lived in the cave. However, Ash had a question about that.

Where had the Ice-type Pokémon come from? How did they all end up on an island, particularly the
Jynx population?

Did they teleport there? If so, again why would they choose to do so?

The caves in the center of the island were something he could concern himself with later. The main reason they were stopping there was to see if the concentrated amount of single type energy there would let him create another Z-Crystal.

Secondary reason was for Misty to try and find more Water-types.

A far less important reason was for the Pokédex to scan the local Zubat population, which apparently had more hair on them than regular Zubat populations.

How anyone could tell that was beyond him, or did the Zubat on this island resemble Woobat more than Zubat?

The Ice-types were apparently more active at night, when everything overall was a bit colder, so they had decided to wait the time out in the only way one could really spend their time in Seafoam.

"Hey Ash!"

In swimsuits on the beach.

Misty was waving to him at the water's edge, dressed in the yellow and blue bikini she had looked quite good in back during the Princess shopping madness. Distantly behind her, he could see the forms of Iris and Anabel swimming, which he suspected was Iris's training of Anabel today.

"Come on in, the water's fine!"

Given he was in his swim trunks from the same shopping spree, he was quick to oblige, slowing only to avoid a kid's sandcastle.

…

In what had been aired out since Sabrina to everyone but seemingly himself and the three of them face to face, Ash noted at several points where the attraction they had to him, and his towards them, flared up.

When they were swimming, Ash had noticed his eyes drift to certain parts of their bodies. Be it Misty's breasts held up by a strapless bikini top, the ruffled white covering Anabel's black clad rump, or the way Iris's swimsuit stuck to her athletic body, those were just some of the places he had noticed his eyes wander to.

He wasn't sure if they noticed him doing it, though he thought he had noticed them looking at him a few times the way he felt he had been looking at them, though he wasn't entirely sure what they were exactly looking at.

He wasn't entirely sure where girl's eyes wandered in such situations, and he wasn't sure if it would be worse to ask them about it, the Pokédex, or his mom.

That last one could really hurt. 'Hey Mom, what parts of my body would a girl ogle' was not the conversation he wanted to have with his mom over the phone, or in person frankly.

Out of the water there had been a few clearer signals, when they had gotten some ice cream a pair of young women more in the age range of whatever age Team Rocket was (and if he didn't know how
old he was back in the day he sure wasn't going to know how old they were) had come over and flirted with him.

At least he was pretty sure that was why they were complimenting him while bending over in a way that was good for showing off their bikini clad chests.

That had led to an annoyed Misty and Anabel glaring at them, who were joined by Iris only after they made a disparaging comment about Anabel's swimsuit. He had quickly followed in getting them to go away after that.

He had felt similarly annoyed at a pair of muscular bodybuilders walked over and started flirting with Misty and Iris (apparently, they could appreciate her body more than most other guys who tried flirting, who focused more on Misty and Anabel).

They didn't end up leaving the same way as the girls who had been flirting with him, mostly because they didn't insult him the same way the girls had insulted Anabel. Was it because Iris had been drilling muscle into him and thus they didn't have ground to call him scrawny or something?

Regardless they eventually, thankfully, did leave at some point, though they did offer him a suggestion on a good place to get wax.

Even had Iris not quickly told him not to get any, and Anabel and Misty saying it was his choice (even if he did get the feeling they were just over the fence on the waxing side), Ash honestly had no idea when he'd even have the time to wax himself.

He had a fairly busy schedule as it is with all sorts of training, and even outside of all the swimming and diving Iris had him do that day his Pokémon bar Pikachu were all training at the lab right now, and even that was such a hectic thing to arrange Ash couldn't see himself doing that every so often just to try and wax himself.

"Hey, it's Ash! I can't believe it, he's here too!"

Such thoughts were thankfully interrupted by a familiar group of five, Midori and his four female friends (as far as he could tell). It took him a moment to remember their names. Hoshi was the one in the pink one-piece swimsuit with a white star near the left waist, and Monet was the one in a white bikini with a transparent black sarong. Rana was the name of the girl in a blue bikini a white skirt if he recalled correctly, while it was Kusa in a green strapless one-piece swimsuit with a palm motif.

Midori was in a pair of green and black swim trunks alongside them, though something about him seemed off somehow.

Nervousness, unease, or some sort of emotion like that seemed to waft off him a bit.

"You guys taking a day off too? We're here celebrating the fact I somehow won the contest here the other day, but are you guys celebrating something too?"

"More a day off than celebrating."

Misty answered Hoshi's question, and thus some small chatter started up. It was more from the Stone Town group than Misty and Iris, given that they hadn't really interacted much.

They knew who they were, but there was ice needing to be broken.

So as the ice continued to get steadily broken Ash found himself slowly edging towards Midori, who continued to be as uneasy as Ash had noticed him.
With talk having slowly edged to talking about the Seafoam Caves they were planning on looking at later in the day ("Ice-type Pokémon are cool, but I don't know if they are worth it that much"), it would be just them.

"What's bugging you?"

Ash's question caused Midori to flinch, who looked around nervously before answering.

"It's that obvious?"

Ash nodded to his pretty much confirmed bar an actual DNA test half-brother, while Pikachu muttered something about wondering why his friends had missed it.

To that Ash could very well argue the amount of things that he kept to himself, but that was hardly for here. That would just make him sound deranged.

"Well... do you ever feel inadequate?"

"I hope you are talking about losing and not something else."

Ash was spared having to put his feeling of defeat at the hands of people like Ritchie, Harrison, Tyson, Tobias, or Cameron into a workable context when Midori shook his head.

"It's not that. Really it is more..."

Midori waved his hand over his chest, seemingly unable to put it into words.

Ash wasn't entirely sure what the issue was. Midori's chest didn't seem to have anything wrong with it. It wasn't covered in boils or sunken in with some sort of ailment. It was lightly muscled and looked rather healthy.

It only looked bad compared to the bodies of people who body built for a living, or that martial artist a bit older than them who had talked him up earlier rather curious if he'd be in Seafoam for a while and if he wanted to know about a good bar (he wasn't of age for that yet, though he wasn't sure why Anabel was blushing by the time he left. He hadn't noticed her checking him out at all, and she had made an odd sound when the guy asked if he had a place for the night yet), or possibly his own chest...

Ash avoided face palming when it came together.

There were a lot of body building types on the beach, even beyond the two that flirted with Iris and Misty. That could get at anyone if they thought about it too much.

"You know that how much muscle you have isn't everything, right?"

His point to Midori was met with looking away.

"You mean you don't feel like you are..."

"That I don't spend all of my time lifting twice my body weight? Look, the both of us are Pokémon Trainers, and how much muscle we have isn't important. We get it by traveling around and training with our Pokémon, but it's a side effect."

Ash would have said something about the only important muscle for Trainers being the brain, but that would sound sort of sappy, and hypocritically sappy at that, coming from him.
Pikachu would likely then snark at him about it, or slap him in the face with his tail.

Midori looked at him more closely, or at least at his torso.

"That's all from training?"

"No, it's from Iris deciding that I should be able to outrun my Tauros because of a ninja."

"Pikapi." 'You mean Kunoichi.'

Same thing.

"You mean the Fuchsia Gym Leader?"

Midori's question seemed to be layered with an additional bit of confusion, perhaps at the Tauros part.

Most likely at the Tauros part, if Ash had to guess.

"Yep. Honestly you won't look like me, and definitely not them, unless you start doing something crazy or nuts, or you only do that thing. You're fine as you are, and if you keep traveling you will only get better."

"What does she have you do?"

Ash's attempt at reassurance wasn't very effective, as Midori still seemed interested in going through the same training as he had.

As someone who had done so, Ash felt a duty to tell him not to do so. Plus, that was probably the big brotherly thing to do.

Beyond that, warning him was the good and moral thing to do. He was not ready to start calling people his brothers and sisters, but he was always ready to prevent people from hurting themselves.

"I joke and all, but Iris has some idea what she's doing. She pushes all of us only as far as it doesn't hurt us, and I couldn't tell you where the line for that really starts. I don't think you could really tell either. Unless one of your friends has that knowledge, or you meet someone who has it, it isn't safe."

"What if I'm tougher than I look?"

Midori still didn't seem convinced, and so Ash did a bit of thinking to try and keep Midori from worrying about himself so much he decides to wrestle a Nidoking.

Even if he was 99.999999% likely to be a Bloodliner, that was still horribly dangerous. Also, he needed to work on his vague phrasing, but that might just be because Ash was aware that Midori shared a father with him and that because of him they were all 'tougher than they looked'.

He did have an idea of how to prevent him from bothering royal purple Pokémon though.

"Do they mind?"

Ash's pointed at Midori's friends, a gesture Midori followed and blushed a bit, before shaking his head.

"Then remember that. They don't think you need to change, and would be horrified if you hurt yourself trying to. Iris doesn't have us all train because she thinks it makes us look better. She does so
because she doesn't want a ninja to get us."

Ash specifically said the last part as seriously as possible, and it got Midori chuckling a bit. Ash felt a smile form.

Mission accomplished.

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**Nighttime, the Seafoam Caves**

"Vee!"

As the last Zubat in the air was knocked down by a Quick Attack, Ash had a free moment to reflect. The Seafoam caves were as he was told they would be.

The walls were caked in a blue sheen from the icy cold, and that cold was quite tangible. Cold was something he could handle, as they did obtain winter gear at some point during the shopping madness.

When exactly eluded him, but beyond the cold the trip hadn't managed the results he was hoping to find.

That being getting a Z-Crystal to form again. However, it wasn't without the other desired outcomes, and more.

For example, the massive amount of Zubat and Golbat in the cave that seemed to react to their unexpected arrival in their inner sanctum with a massive swarming attack was good for training.

Not just for their Pokémon, not only did Pikachu, Boldore, Squirtle, Exeggcutor, Ambipom, Goodra, Kadabra, Eevee, Excadrill, Gible, Emolga, Axew, Psyduck, Staryu, Poliwrath, Slowbro, Wooper and the Seel Misty had caught while they were here get a lot of training out of battling the swarm, but so had their own Bloodliner abilities.

Also, the Pokédex got a lot of data on the local population of Zubat, which were apparently hairier than usual.

"Seel!"

As Misty's new Seel clapped in the aftermath of their great victory, he noticed Iris had a proud look on her face. As best as Ash could guess, it was directed at Anabel, who hadn't fallen onto her knees in exhaustion after all of the fighting.

Squirtle stepped over a Zubat and looked at him with a curious look.

"Squirt." 'So, no crystal out of nothing. That's a bummer.'

It was. Not even some dust that seemed Zubatty, given that most of the Pokémon they saw were Zubat and Golbat swarms.

He honestly probably could have gotten more use out of a Zubat generated crystal than one created because they discovered a colony of dancing Jynx.

Perhaps not as much a Poison Z-Crystal, but Flying….he could make a lot of use of a Flying one.

He'd have to figure out how he'd even make that work, given he didn't see a vision in his head of
how to do the move.

"They'll be alright, right?"

Misty's question was directed at the Zubat and Golbat, all of whom were lying unmoving on the icy floor around them.

"With their additional fur, that is a fairly likely outcome. Most of their potential predators are aquatic, and none of them fell in the water," the Pokédex's point did not stand for long though.

'That might be the case now, but it may not remain that way. Am I the only who has noticed the water's gotten higher since we got down here?'

Anabel's point, upon translation for the Pokédex was quickly scrutinized.

First by them looking at the water's edge, which was a subjective measure and by no means conclusive.

"Hmm, it would appear that the tide was low when we came in, and it is in fact rising. Can't say if they would have time to recover before the flood comes in, nor that there are even enough predators to prevent them from just decaying in the water on mass. The results of that, in case you are not aware, would be quite negative."

Ash eyed the Zubat and Golbat that had just tried to bite them all (Misty having translated from Seel that they were primarily blood feeders on surfaced Seel and other such species earlier, though at the point about the effect they'd have if they all drowned she was now looking a bit green) while also trying to drive them out, then at the water where the white fins of a Gyarados were breaking the surface, then back at the Zubat and Golbat.

It wasn't a hard decision to make, and he had missed out all the way back in Mount Moon. He'd finally be able to make up for it.

Make up for it, and then some.

"Can you guys make some room; I'm going to make sure that doesn't happen."

Everyone obliged, either by being returned or moving to the bat-less edges, even as he reached for the H.O.P.E glove and the enhanced duplication feature/glitch.

It took about five minutes, but in the end of it there would be no mass dying in the caves starting at high tide.

"Registration complete. You are now the proud owner of forty-one Zubat and fourteen Golbat, and ecological damage has been avoided."

"Ecological damage that we would have been responsible for."

"Only as far as being something above their weight they tried to attack."

Iris countered his point with her own, which was not inaccurate. They didn't enter the cave with a plan to cause water pollution via Zubat, but what was done was done.

They had taken steps to control the possible damage, and now all that was left was to continue exploring the cave as long as they could manage.
With that Gyarados he, and most likely the others as well, had spotted they'd need a different fishing spot for Misty…

"Vro."

A distant sound rang through the cave, coming from the depths of the cave where he suspected the water was already well risen.

'What was that?'

"I do not know. I have never heard that call."

Iris's uneasy point was met by a second call from the same Pokémon.

"Vrooo."

This one louder, and closer.

One that wracked his brain with familiarity. He couldn't help but feel he had heard it somewhere before.

"Vroooooo!"

It was much closer, and now he could figure out the direction it was coming from.

Misty too, as she was pointing in that very direction.

"Look!"

A blur shape was now coming towards them, a blue shape that Ash had seen before.

A shape that he had battled before.

A shape that was among the rarest in the world, a Pokémon he had seen four times originally.

Once in the Orange Islands, once in Johto, once at the command of a powerful opponent, and once as a mirage.

"Articuno."

He breathed out the Pokémon's name as the legendary bird flew over their heads, seemingly not noticing them. A trail of frosty air flowed behind the powerful bird, chilling him to the bone.

All of their bodies turned around to watch the Legendary Pokémon, which flew out of sight and through the cave towards the entrance of the cave.

"Vrooo."

Leaving only the distant sound of its rare call behind as a reminder it was ever there to begin with.

"Pi? 'What's Articuno doing in a cave?'

Pikachu's question was not answered as the Pokédex made a sound that sounded like a slot machine that had just hit the jackpot.

"Data obtained. Let's do Zapdos next!"
The Pokédex's request was as ignored as Pikachu's question, as Anabel had her own statement.

'We just saw a legendary Pokémon. I can't believe it…'

"We did see that Mew, but even so to see another one…"

Misty's disbelief made it two for two. Would Iris make for three?

However, she was staring in the trail of the Pokémon in shock, so Ash wasn't sure if that counted.

"Pikapi! 'Ash, your hand! Look at it.'

Pikachu's shout drew him to look at his hand, which he rose up in front of his face and found it covered in a thick layer of that Z-Crystal dust.

Icy-blue dust at that.

He looked back at the trail of fading freezing air Articuno had left, then back at his hand.

The dust didn't manifest any more of itself.

"Well, that would be progress. I just hope you obtaining more does not require you to battle Legendary Pokémon."

Iris's concerned tone at the implication of a failed Z-Crystal formation only now was appreciated.

"It's winning two battles with one attack, I say go for it. You can probably survive the wrath of an angry Legendary Pokémon and I would not melt unless an Entei swallowed me in theory."

The Pokédex's was not.

The next day, on Kanto proper

His doorbell rang.

The door opened after a moment, revealing a familiar face to the homeowner.

"Oh, Gary isn't it? Welcome back to my home!" Casey Snagem, novelist without a distinguished novelist mustache, greeted warmly to the young Trainer he had once discussed the nature of Pokémon Mastery with, before taking in the returning young man's appearance more closely.

More specifically, into his eyes.

"You lost, didn't you?"

And not just lost. The look in his eye suggested that the boy had not only lost, but lost badly. Lost badly to someone he despised.

Gary stared right into the retired Trainer's eyes, his body almost trembling in frustration and desperation, before kneeling at his feet.

Casey just stared at the act in surprise, a surprise that grew when the boy spoke.

"Please, train me. I'll do anything you want and everything you tell me, but I need to get better. I
need to figure out what I'm missing."

Casey stared further at the youth kowtowing at his feet and begging for his knowledge before turning his neck around and shouting into his home.

"Honey, remember that youth I gave unsolicited advice to a while ago? He's begging at my feet for training for the league and to avenge a likely soul crushing defeat. That's no problem with you, is it?"

"Only as long as I get a crack at him too."

Surprised for a moment at his wife's request, though fine with the application of it should this go through, he nonetheless turned back to the young man looked him right in the back of the head (as he was still kowtowing and could not see his eyes).

"Very well, we will train you and see that you get what badges you still need for the league. I suspect you will find the one who defeated you there, that is how this tends to work when it plays out both in the written and real worlds. However, I will warn you now, you will train intensely, you and your Pokémon both. My wife's Avalugg will likely be involved in training somehow. Are you unaware of what Avalugg training is?" It was cold.

"Like I said, I'll do anything," Gary murmured.

"If you say that around my daughters you will be made to clean their bathroom instead of them all as it is supposed to be, but if you are willing to endure that and our training, we will do it and you will grow for it. Pray that you survive."

The last part was for dramatic effect, he'd live. Worst Avalugg training could do was freeze off his buttocks or some other organ.

Still, the boy would likely come to regret his request, even as it helped as intended.

OMAKE CANON: TOGEPI TRAINING BEGINS!

Charizard grinned as his arms grabbed each limb of the now quite scared Boldore.

Evolution was a way for a Pokémon to gain many new things. Typings, moves, power, strength, all good things.

But it also introduced new weaknesses. It was after all, much easier to grab a Boldore than a Roggenrola.

With a flap of his wings he flew into the air, spinning Boldore a few times before throwing her into the ground with an audible thump and a grass shaking shockwave of force.

He landed with a forceful wing flap, even as the Chansey Ash somehow managed to catch ran to the hurt Boldore and began healing her.

A cheer went off at his side, leading him to turn around and see Togepi, jumping cheerfully. He was at the ranch with them while Ash had a day mostly off as to better avoid getting rusty in their Pokéballs all day.

Still cheering, Togepi picked up a stick and jumped in the air with it in hand. He dropped it at about the peak of the jump, cheering some more when the stick clattered to the ground.
It was cute, it was like Togepi was trying to use Seismic Toss…

The thought made Charizard pause for a moment.

Could Togepi learn Seismic Toss?

He had no idea, but it wasn't a bad question.

Charizard felt a smile form, and it only got larger and larger as he started thinking about it more.

Even if Togepi couldn't learn Seismic Toss, could he learn Flamethrower? Perhaps another move he had familiarity with, or even a move that one of the others knew.

Maybe Pikachu could offer up some sort of electric attack if he could remember that Togepi could be just like that Scraggy instead of Misty's weight carrying exercise.

Even if he didn't, the face he could see Pikachu making at seeing Togepi breathing fire made his smile grow so large he wasn't sure if he hadn't accidentally learned Scary Face by mistake.

Charizard growled as kindly as he could to the little Pokémon, such wondrous plans in mind.

'Hey Togepi, do you want to learn how to do all the best things I'm able to do?'

Meanwhile in the shallows of the Seafoam Island beach he was partially submerged in, Pikachu felt a horrible disturbance in the force of all things pure and innocent.

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OMAKE (NON CANON): THE AUTHOR TALKING CORNER

The chainsaw ceasing cutting at the chapter for the moment, the edit changing the ending of the scene per the suggestion of Viroro.

He put the chainsaw down for a moment as he took a breath and put his time into a time sink that was the bane of men and mon alike.

Also known as T.V Tropes, and in particular something from the depths of internet madness.

"Ebony appears in dozens of fics to mock, the Conversion Bureau spawned a genre, and four deconstructions or remakes by others of a single Mykan fic. Why do they spread everywhere?" The author wondered aloud as he looked upon the entry.

"Because the worst of the internet will always exist, stand out, and spread beyond."

Standing above him, upon a mound of solid black obsidian, stood a dark armored figure, colored black and blood red.

His name was Darkern Edgier, a dark armor figure who had once tried to 'improve' Earth 083116.

He had since somehow escaped being a statue to a Princess of Friendship and now was active on the meta fringes of Earth 121913, the world of Reset Bloodlines.

It had been via the 040118 side door.

"Have you not seen? Characters bound to a single universe, a single author, those of One Creator, or
O.C. are only the ones that are good or mediocre. It is the bad ones that spread and are used by others freely as an actual canon character!"

The guy actually seemed bummed about that fact.

"That sucks. I mean, I love what people can do with the Bureau like the great Fluffy, but what is there to do with Ebony? You can't improve her the way you can Ash, Harry, or Naruto."

Given what Darkern considered improving those three, the Author had to feel relieved for *Ebony Dark'ness Dementia Raven Way* being safe from harm, which was a thought he'd never thought he had.

"I'd clarify what Fluffy you are talking about. There's another Fluffy in my works, very different from the one on Spacebattles."

Darkern ignored the quip, though he continued.

"Sadness for the immortality of them aside, I was thinking it is about time I improve this fanfic. You've got the perfect set up for the world hating Ash, and if you do another shower scene you can confirm that Ash is a true man."

Darkern then declared a measurement that would in fact make Ash 'a true man'.

"…Have you seen a Caterpie?"

Darkern looked at the author in confusion.

"Sadly yes."

"A Kricketot."

"Also, sadly yes."

"A Pichu?"

"Do you have a point?"

"Your declaration was with the intent of me going away from my point in Chapter 29 about not talking about the size of Ash Ketchum's genitalia. You also gave me a measurement of what it should be, which is commonly given by your kind to other characters. I am merely giving some of the many Pokémon that are in fact that tall, including Froakie, Shellder, Jirachi, and Eevee. True Reset does not have the 'they must be that exact height' rule, but it is a mere statement of the ridiculousness of your point."

"Ash Ketchum having an Eevee length…I like that."

Darkern's declaration made the author just stare at the armored figure in disbelief, before he raised the writing chainsaw into the air and began slicing.

He sliced six times, and before him appeared six creatures in two groups of three.

A green bear with yellow eyebrows and chest marking, a red and white horse, and a blue animated coral creature, paired with a green haired lemur with a tail holding a berry, a red and white rabbit with a black smoke collar, and a blue platypus.

"Fake leak mons, Triple Finish!"
The set of Pokémon created in the build up to the next Pokémon game glared at Darkern as they began charging up their elemental attacks, before unleashing them in two combined beams.

They struck Darkern before he could react, blasting him into the sky with a black shadowy twinkle as the Author looked at the six mons sadly.

"It's a pity really; I actually like most of you."

Sadly, they weren't prep-hating goths or insistent on only having a single character trait. Then they might live forever and everywhere.

Instead this may just be their last appearance in anything that was vaguely relevant. What would they do with it?

Seven flicks of a reality altering chainsaw later and the answer would be juice box.
There was a time when he could have consider himself a good man.

That had been years ago, and he could no longer do so.

He told himself he was doing good things, that no matter what he did to see those things done, that it would be for the greater good.

The only good that he had left.

He placed a hand on the growth tank, sorrow the only emotion on his face. He both hated and adored the tank as it kept him from his greatest treasure but also made that treasure a possibility.

"Amber…forgive me."

It had taken far longer than he'd hoped for to find the way to stabilize the recreation of human body and flesh in a stable form that would not die.

Again, and again, and again! Over and over he'd failed but each with failure he'd been given a clue towards the road of success.

It had taken decades, and to do so he had to learn things in the last year that he suspected could destroy the world if they ever got out.

Forget what was upstairs, the things he had learned could tear a world apart, and he'd have learned those things a thousand times over if it would finally bring her back to him.

Had he taken robotics and computer programming, perhaps it would not have led him down this path. He could have simply used metal and circuits to revive his daughter, the same technology that they had developed for Subject # 150 to flash learn techniques could just as easily have been used to recreate her memories in bytes as it would in this new, perfect attempt.

Sadly he had always understood how to transcribe DNA into RNA better than making code work. He was a mechanic of flesh, an electrician of nerve impulses.

A servant of evil, crafting something that could only be used for horrible things.

They had been tasked with creating the strongest Pokémon as the payment for bringing his daughter back.

At some point it had started to be a bit of an enthusiastic project, and not something they were merely obliged to do. Among those people, they had started to dream of what the most powerful Pokémon would be like.

He could say they succeeded, if their calculations were correct.

Those calculations having joined that hit and run in his nightmares.

He moved towards the stairs, though his gaze lingered on the tank of his personal use.

He would succeed this time. Amber would be back, and then he could see that project shut down.
He had plans to see it end. He could summon the G-Men, or even another criminal organization if casualties seemed likely to be heavy. He would disappear first, he and Amber both.

They'd be far away when the island was burned to the ground, along with #150.

He sealed the door behind him in the deepest basement before he ascended upward. No point in letting just anyone down there.

The last thing he wanted was to find one of his fellow scientists watching his daughter's rebirth incubating. They would not be looking in hope and determination if they were doing that, he feared.

Getting to the floor they kept #150 on would take a while, and it left him time to think.

He was getting on in years; perhaps he would need to update his life insurance policy. It would be terrible twist of fate if he did die and left Amber alone. More money, more regularly, perhaps he could make that part of the G-Men's deal for his amnesty. He did have other sensitive information they could benefit from, even if he kept the darkest secrets to his own mind.

No point in trusting any organization with that information. It didn't matter if it was Team Rocket or the G-Men; that information leaving him would only end in tragedy. Some things were better left untold, no matter to whom it might be told. Even a person with the best of intentions could cause mayhem and destruction with the things he knew.

A part of him wondered if he should upgrade Amber beyond what was needed to ensure she would be reborn. There was nothing wrong with augmentation after all, and he had downloaded all of his knowledge as a test for the latest memory implantation process. He could easily give her all his knowledge along with his replication of her memories. She'd be a doctor at birth.

He had already altered her genetic code when he determined what made a Bloodliner a Bloodliner to ensure she'd survive, so what was the harm of further modifications for the same purpose?

Another part declared that was going too far, and his daughter was perfect as it was. If he made her a genius capable of running miles in record time, what did that imply about the original? That she was weak and could be made better?

The part that had thought of doing so countered that if he did die and she started to suffer unintended side effects of cloning, it would be best she knew how to work on herself genetically, and with enhancements beyond that she could even eclipse him and create a better world, perhaps even being the second coming of Professor Oak.

The negative part of him then started listing off historical tyrants! Loudly, while the positive part of him countered just as loudly about all the benefits it would bring her.

Upon realizing his mind had two distinct voices shouting in it, his decision was made.

"You know what, this is clearly an indication that I am in fact deteriorating mentally. Augmenting it is as a backup in case I need to be put into the loony house to ensure Amber's survival."

His declaration only got part of him shouting at him again, which was not an argument so much as a blaring signal of his growing madness, so he ignored it and finished walking up the stairs.

If his fracturing mind was so determined at making historical references about the dangers of genetic engineering as loudly and annoying as possible, perhaps it needed to be reminded at what a truly dangerous genetics experiment looked like.
Subject # 150.

If his daughter could be someone who could take over the world, than # 150 was someone who could destroy untold swaths of it. Not could be, was.

Or worse still, # 150 could reach the point it was more the equivalent of the apocalypse in a single living entity than a mere bringer of destruction.

He closed the door behind him at the top of the stairs, locking the top door with the same heavy duty protection as was on the bottom, with the resolute reminder that he had it within him to stop that from ever coming to pass.

Only to be greeted by fire.

The lab was in flames, smothering itself in smoke.

He immediately began coughing, glad that he had snuck in those backup generators for his basement lab. If the fire could be contained, perhaps he could still…

The smoke parted, and all thoughts in him were replaced with terror.

For the one who parted the smoke was the Pokémon whose creation gave him the chance to revive his daughter.

The Pokémon that haunted his nightmares, a terror and despair as great as seeing his own daughter struck by an automobile.

Subject # 150.

Designation, Mewtwo.

A bipedal creature, gray in body bar a long purple tail. Human-like, but inhuman in a way few Pokémon were, round digits for fingers and toes. The skin was glistening, and he wasn't entirely sure if it was from bursting out of the incubation tube, or something natural about it.

Like uncannily reflective plastic, the skin was not something he had ever seen in nature. Fitting, for this creature was not born.

It was made.

It looked at him, eyes burning with a rage with an uncanny intelligence to it. It was a mind sharper than that of any other Pokémon.

It felt almost human. An angry human.

As a blue glow formed around it, the doctor knew that he was about to die.

He would die without Amber coming back, and she was liable to be lost with him and this entire island. In trying to recover a life unfairly lost, he had created something that was a threat to everything in the world.

No matter the afterlife he found himself in, he would willing walk to his punishment for what he had done.

Seconds after declaring so, there was no more of him. Only ash.
On an island with a lot less fiery death

Like Gringy City, Cinnabar seemed to be in the improved category of places this go around.

The original one he had visited had become a soulless tourist trap, a place that had been consumed by uncontrolled capitalism and greed and lost all sight of what it was originally meant to be. Innovation and morality having been traded in for trending market focused detritus that was fully under the sway of those opposed to freedom.

He'd have never phrased it like that, but he could see someone saying that. Most of them looking like Blaine's disguise, interestingly enough.

This Cinnabar was a lot less of that. Sure, there were tourist shops and a lot of tourists, but it wasn't nearly as concentrated or as thick.

He could actually see places that didn't seem meant to cater to tourists, for one thing. The Battle Club was certainly not there originally.

Though he could say that about the Kanto Battle Clubs in general, though if they were in Kanto originally he doubted one would have been in Cinnabar.

"This place seems busier than Seafoam, I wonder why that is?"

Iris's question could be answered by himself. It was something he had seen signs for while they were here, so he could say it was still in effect.

"This island has hot springs."

Iris's interest was piqued by his point, though the interest seemed to vanish when she looked into the skyline of the island nervously.

"Hot springs are often around volcanoes."

Her comment was made in a way that was heavy on the worry.

"I'm pretty sure it's not going to blow up anytime soon."

'It's smoking'.

Anabel's point made him freeze mid-step as he tried to figure out the best way to counter the idea that a smoking volcano was a sign of imminent doom.

"If it isn't creating any earthquakes, it's fine. Plus, if it was about to blow up, would there really be so many tourists around?"

Ash hoped tourists didn't do anything stupid in the next few seconds to prove they were not a barometer for doom.

…

It was more of about two minutes really, but they did spot a kiosk about volcanoes that did in fact confirm the Cinnabar Volcano was not fully active.

It did tell Ash that an active volcano did release toxic gases that could kill a living creature in seconds
that wasn't specifically adapted to it, which did make him wonder how getting the Volcano Badge the first time did not kill him.

Or die from the other times he was around bubbling volcanoes.

Perhaps they were just less dangerous in the old days.

…(*)

The Cinnabar Battle Club was rather lively that day. Ash found it unusual that there were so many Trainers, and from what he managed to pick up among the screaming, all of them were trying to call dibs to challenge Blaine.

"Butt out, you idiot, I got here first!"

"You're just a noob, I'm coming for my final badge!"

"No fair, I want my rematch, now!"

The last one was familiar to Ash, a guy he had fought once before getting that invitation he could never answer, but ignoring him, with so many people waiting to challenge Blaine, what was he supposed to do? Would he have to get in the line and wait for his turn?

"AWW, SHUT UUUUUPPP!"

The female screaming voice, along with a large Overheat flaming stream fired up to the air got people to calm down, and everybody glanced at the source. A fiery red-haired girl about fourteen and her Flareon had been the ones responsible for the scream and the attack to get the crowd to be quiet. Ash could have sworn the girl's skin looked a little bit red, possibly out of anger for the noise or the effort of shouting atop her lungs to get everyone to quiet down.

She needed a deep breath before she could continue.

"Now that we're all calm here, this is the situation. Grandpa is too busy with his research work today, so he can't accept any challenges at least until tomorrow."

Grandpa? Gym Badge? Cinnabar? Was she Blaine's granddaughter? That was a thing this time round?

Also, she mentioned something about Blaine doing research work. Was it on the history of riddles or something?

"Mr. Don George, if you were so kind?"

The male possessor of Jenny-Joy syndrome tightened his belt before continuing.

"Of course. Listen everybody, we're doing a mini-tournament here and now. We'll have rounds of one-on-one battles in a sudden death elimination, and depending on the ranking, we'll determine the order to challenge Blaine. Does everyone agree?"

There were some mumbles, but most of them were apparently Trainers with four badges or above, so most of them felt confident enough to accept. Those who didn't just left, leaving about a dozen and a half Trainers including Ash and discounting Misty, Iris and Anabel.

For some reason, though, the red-haired girl with the Flareon looked at him, and for some other reason her eyes sparkled as she ran towards Ash and spoke in excited glee.
"You! Yes, it's you, there's no mistaking it!"

"Er… me?" Ash said a little uncomfortably taking a small step back since this girl didn't seem to have a sense of personal space.

"Yes, you! Ash from Pallet Town, aren't you?" Her excitement built with every word spoken, and as she did so her skin seemed to continuously get a bit more blush-pink as the temperature around her suddenly raised. Hopefully that didn't mean...

"Yeah, it's him, but please give him some room for breathing, will you?" Misty intervened, thankfully, and she apologized quickly enough.

"Oh, sorry, I'm Alish by the way. The local Gym Leader is my Grandpa Blaine and I'm always on the lookout for new Trainers to challenge him. I saw your matches in the Lavender Battle Dome and the Fuchsia Tag Tournament, you were incredible! I was wondering when you would come here to challenge my Grandpa!"

Ash chuckled nervously, apparently his growing fame had reached as far as Cinnabar, but it still felt awkward. Meanwhile, he could see through the corner of his eye that Misty seemed to be trying to hold back the urge to push her away from him, but it didn't look like the girl was attracted to him or anything. At least she was refraining from making physical contact.

"I... thank you, I guess I feel flattered."

"Hey, I'm hoping you win this, I'll be rooting for you! Kick their butts!"

And without further words, the girl went to the spectators' seats, while Don George registered everyone's info for the improvised tournament. Ash figured it wouldn't hurt to get his Pokémon to do some additional training before the Gym battle.

The matches went one after another without much difficulty, in fact, in the semifinals his opponent preferred to back down before fighting him when he found out who he was. That sucked, and he was quite glad he had decided to not bring Charizard out against the guy. Now it was just him and the other guy coming for a rematch. Don George then walked into the referee box.

"The final match between Raymond and Ash is about to begin. It'll be a one-on-one battle and the Pokémon who remains standing will be the winner. You guys ready?"

Ash nodded in acknowledgement of George's request.

"Ready."

Raymond didn't give a 'ready' as he took out his Pokéball, but he did have something to say.

"Tsk, I don't know what the ruckus about you is. No matter, you'll be a good warm up before my rematch with that old duff. Golem, go!"

As the Rock-type appeared on the field, Ash considered his choices. In the past timeline he had been able to beat the guy with almost no trouble. Time to see if he could do the same now, but just in case, he'd be careful.

He'd have Pikachu fight him if he popped up again, but for now he'd be a bit more by the book.

"Squirtle, I choose you!"
"Squirtle!" The turtle landed with a flip and stared at their opponents. Just as Don George gave them the signal to begin, Raymond gave him a glance and then burst into laughter.

"Hahahahaha! No really, you don't seriously believe that little squirt has a chance against my Golem! At least use a Wartortle, then you might actually last ten seconds."

"Only one way to find out. Squirtle, Water Gun!"

Squirtle fired a high-pressured water stream, hitting Golem so hard in the face that he rolled backwards until he almost left the field's boundaries. Raymond's smug smirk all but vanished in an instant.

"Golem, fire Rock Blast! Don't let that pipsqueak make fools of us!"

He thought he heard Alish mutter something about it being 'too late for that', but he couldn't say for sure.

Golem rolled forward to get himself upright again and several of his armored plates glowed, firing chunks of rock at Squirtle. Pretty big, but nowhere near as fast as Boldore's. They were no problem for them.

"Iron Defense and Counter-Shield!"

"Squirtle! 'Hope this works.'

Squirtle retracted into his shell and it took a metallic layer for a couple of seconds. Boldore had been kind enough to teach him a stronger defensive move to replace Withdraw, so when the first projectile hit, he barely felt a thing despite being sent flying. Using the same momentum he began spinning as he fired water through his shell's holes, deflecting the following rocks with little difficulty as he arched back like a flying saucer and struck Golem himself. Squirtle landed on the other side without problems and turned around, ready for the next move.

Raymond's next command was tinted with sharp anger.

"Golem, use Rollout and crush that little squirt!"

"Counter with Water Pulse!"

Squirtle formed a water sphere in his hands, the fruit of recent training to pass the move limit, making it bigger than usual thanks to his training with Misty and her Gyarados in her recent push to additional training. The water ball was thrown, stopping Golem dead in his tracks and trapping him in a great bubble that burst a couple seconds later, splashing all over the field. Golem fell to the ground with a loud slam, and when he got back up, his eyes were spinning and disoriented.

"Golem, snap out of it!"

"Use Return, Squirtle!"

The faster they ended the battle, the better for them. Squirtle leaped forward as his fist glowed white, delivering a hard punch right at Golem's face, sending him rolling backwards. He managed to right himself, but was still dazed by the confusion.

"What the hell, how did that attack hit so hard?! And from an unevolved starter Pokémon!"

Raymond's disbelief was matched only by the resolution of his response.
"We're stronger together, that's how! Squirtle, finish this with Brine!"

"Squirt...TLE!"

And with that single command, all the damage Golem had suffered from the previous attacks was capitalized by the salty water stream, dragging Golem through a trench and splashing water all over the place. After that last hit, he rolled one last time and stopped moving, unable to get back up.

"Golem is unable to battle, Squirtle wins! Victory is for Ash from Pallet Town!" Don George's declaration was followed by a fist pump into the air Squirtle and Pikachu joined him in

"Yeah!"

"AAARRRGGHH, NO, NOOOOOOOO! HOW COULD I LOSE LIKE THIS?!!" Raymond's cry rang out as he fell to his knees, despondent. From her seat though, Alish did not seem sympathetic.

"Just like you lost to my Grandpa, you jerk! Now that you've lost again you should scram!"

Raymond grunted something Ash didn't get, but after seeing Squirtle donning his shades and crossing his arms, as if saying "Deal with it", he finally left in a huff. Ash and Pikachu approached to high five with Squirtle. They had won the right to challenge Blaine first, that was great.

With the club now getting a bit cleared off of people, Alish approached to congratulate him, along with the rest of his companions.

"Congrats, I knew you'd kick that idiot's butt all the way to Viridian," she said. Ash still felt a little awkward to see her so excited, and even his friends seemed a little embarrassed at her fiery enthusiasm. "Well like I said, my Grandpa can't take your challenge until tomorrow so... do you guys have a place to stay?"

"Come to think about it, we haven't had the chance to check in any hotel, and the Pokémon Center is full." Misty's tone was filled with dread, as if she could from across time and space remember how busy these hotels could be here.

"Oh, that's no problem. You can come to our Inn, we offer discounts for Gym challengers and also..."

Right then, everyone's stomachs growled loudly. Why did that always happened?

"And we can offer you a buffet dinner too. What do you say?"

…

They said yes, and after a fairly unremarkable check in they settled in until the big day tomorrow.

…

The slope of the volcano was easy enough to teleport to, and it was remote enough they could be generally unnoticed on it.

It was the best place for her to train with Ash before the Gym battle.

"Shattered Psyche!"

One such training was seeing if the new trick would be an option for Ash in the next battle.
Ash was thinking on how to use the technique on someone who wasn't overconfident, before her Kadabra could attempt to teleport out of the way he had Butterfree use Sleep Powder.

With that Kadabra was vulnerable, and he would not have been able to take that attack and still stand.

However there was more to battling than exchanging move per move.

"Vee!"

Eevee may not be able to hear her, but she was good at reading moods as well as what was needed in a battle at the moment.

That in this case was interrupting the buildup on Butterfree, and Quick Attack was the move to do so.

The speedy tackle struck Butterfree just before the move launched, causing the energy to spiral out of Butterfree into the air like pink fireworks instead of the intended attack.

"Free!??"

Butterfree's confusion was followed by a thump as he skidded on the rocky surface of the volcano for a few feet before Ash was able to jump down and catch him.

Holding Butterfree and with an unspoken decision to end the training match right there, she returned Kadabra to his ball for healing later as she floated down to where Ash was standing, followed by Ash's Boldore who skidded down on her three feet.

"I can't believe you managed to do that."

Ash breathed his surprise as Eevee jumped onto her shoulder and mewed in protest.

'Actually, she made the move, I just thought we had to do it. Still, even if you are getting better at using the move at more power, you still don't have experience in using it against opponents yet.'

"Some time at the Battle Club…"

She admired Ash's optimism; it was something she tried to share whenever possible. However this was not quite the time to be that way.

'Will not make it ready to go against a Gym Leader. If Eevee can throw a Z-Move off with Quick Attack, I am quite sure any Pokémon with that move can do so. Last I checked, most Fire-types in Kanto can learn that move.'

She had actually heard the Pokédex mention that once, of the Kanto Fire Pokémon had records of (by that meaning no Moltres data), only the Growlithe and Magmar families could not use it. Even then Arcanine could use Extreme Speed, which was Quick Attack 2.0.

'It's not nearly ready to be saved for a secret weapon. If the Gym Leader didn't use Fire-type Pokémon or some other type Butterfree wouldn't do well against I'd say at least have it on you in case of a large amount of Pokémon. Not even the four Pokémon Janine used, more like five or six. As it is now it would only be a bad choice.'

Sound advice was not always pleasant, but it was important to heed none the less. Disappointment covered Ash's and Butterfree's faces, and Pikachu offered a few words of shared disappointment
with his Trainer and first capture.

However Ash quickly recovered, with a determined grin on his face as always.

"Well I guess that that means I'll just save the Z-Move for the next Gym. So, who would be a good choice who isn't obvious?"

Discussing the question went on for a good half hour further into the night.

Their hotel, other than being a place to stay that wasn't boiling over in either intense heat (like a secret base on the volcano slope) or occupancy, had a different clientele than the other hotels.

It attracted a lot of offbeat types, including visiting scientists to the Research Laboratory and the musicians who played at other hotels for in-guest entertainment.

Apparently giving them a place to stay was not part of the paycheck, or perhaps it was a case of getting more money if you didn't do that even after getting separate rent.

If she was more curious she'd probably see if she could pick up on which was the case.

Regardless a green track-suit wearing young man finished his guitar practice slash free entertainment for the Big Riddle Inn guests and took his leave as a different musician, one much older than the track-suited youth, took his practice spot and set his harp in place and begun stroking the strings.

It took only a few notes for Anabel to begin feeling her eyes water. The musical instrument was channeling emotion through the notes in what she could only describe as a super-effective manner.

Or was it just that she was more sensitive to lingering emotions in things than others? She noticed Iris and Ash over at the buffet; perhaps she'd ask them if they were feeling the same thing.

The music continued to play, seconds turning into minutes of the emotionally charged music as she closed her eyes, feeling a bit self-conscious about the effect she was feeling from it.

However with her sight closed, she felt the emotions of the notes even stronger, and heard their meaning more clearly.

The tune being practiced, a practice of allowing emotion to be conveyed purely through the plucking of strings, was being channeled from the man's heart.

From the part of the heart his wife held, and still held even after her death some time ago.

She was drawn in before she could really think about it to exact about the time, and she got the impression of something that happened decades in the past.

Of a day that many did not soon forget, when an angry youth and a pack of Gyarados leveled cities.

Even today the emotions he felt towards her, both loving and sad, were pure and strong, channeled through his fingers and strings. The emotion wafted through the air and towards her and all others present.

Including the man's current wife.

Morbid curiosity drew her towards the woman, little details coming to her about her.
The man’s wife of thirty-four years, second love of a man who lost his first to a madman. She had known the first wife, and had affection towards the husband even before her death.

It turned to love in the time it took to recover from devastation.

The woman knew quite well where the music came from. It came from the part of the man’s heart that belonged to another woman.

The other woman.

The woman who was dead for twice as long as Anabel had been alive and a good few more years to spare.

And yet, she smiled sadly at the music. Not smiling in victory, but in knowing where the music came from and appreciating everything that was put into it.

Anabel could feel the faintest hint of an emotion, a less positive one, also present. She couldn't name it unless she really went into the woman's feelings, but it was there.

Yet it was so small and restricted it didn't seem to really affect her appreciation of the music, her view on her husband, or his first wife.

After a few more minutes the man rested his hands, the music falling silent. After a few more moments for her eyes to clear up she opened them up again, and let out a deep exhale to let out some of the feels from that experience.

Her gaze then rested on Iris. She wasn't looking at her, instead having gotten into a surprisingly vivid discussion about the nature of teriyaki sauce with Misty for some reason, yet she was reminded of that conversation they had under the waterfall.

Was that what Iris thought she'd be like with Ash and other women? Quite possibly even without that little black dot of negativity to the whole thing?

Regardless of what Iris did or didn't mean, the song did prove that such things did exist outside of Iris's view of the world.

The question now was for Iris to prove if it applied to her just as much as it did the musician's wife.

…

After the buffet dinner, Ash found himself enjoying an after-dinner soak in the hot-spring that Blaine had at the Big Riddle Inn.

It was a bit different from the original one, beyond the fact that Blaine actually had customers this time around.

The barrier between the bathing areas seemed more solid. Was that because the Gym secret entrance didn't need to break it down to open?

(Also was that an intentional design choice by Blaine originally? Hard to tell with the crazy old man).

It seemed a bit better at muffling sounds from the other side, though he couldn't remember just how much he could hear Misty back in the day so maybe it was always like that.

Regardless of the exact reason, his thoughts drifted to the next day's battle.
Blaine used Fire-types, which were weak against Ground, Rock, and Water-type Pokémon, along with the occasional Rhydon. He had no idea just how many Pokémon Blaine would be using. He used three Pokémon last time, but he could easily change that up.

The obvious Pokémon to use were Squirtle, Kingler, and Boldore, but type would not be the only factor.

Anabel wasn't wrong in pointing out just how fast a lot of Fire-type Pokémon were in Kanto. They weren't a bunch of Slugma.

Plus he was pretty sure all of them could use Solar Beam, and by not being in a volcano Blaine would have all the sunlight he could need.

He would not be able to get away with not using Charizard, and Pikachu was always with him. That just left a single other Pokémon.

Assuming he didn't decide to leave Kingler behind, Kingler might be a bit more vulnerable to speed than Squirtle and Boldore were, and using two Water-types could make him vulnerable to some odd strategy.

If Erika was able to use rain and Janine Stealth Rock, who knew what sort of tricks a man of science could pull off.

Anabel had suggested Goodra as an option, setting up Rain Dance could work. Of course there were also Ambipom and Tauros, who Ash could see doing pretty well. If a Magcargo came up Primeape could be a good choice if Yawn was around, as Primeape's ability was Vital Spirit.

He'd probably not use Pidgeot, seeing as he didn't think Blaine would have a Gym open enough to really let his Flying-type use her full potential.

Could he possibly use Farfetch'd?

A few splashes idly broke his train of thought. Some people were leaving the pool and others were coming in, not a problem. He could take the heat for quite a while longer before he'd need to get out for a bit for a cooling shower.

The sound of displaced water came his way, and soon a trio of guys within the area of his age had waded over to his end.

As he was sitting on the end where the water was being pumped into the spring, they were probably here for the feel of the water flow…

"…So this is the fence? Gotta be a hole here somewhere."

Or not.

Ash glared at the trio as they examined the dividing wall closely before giving them a piece of his mind.

"What do you think you're doing?"

His accusing tone stopped the trio's wood examining before turning his way with blunt expressions.

"Gee, we're three hot-blooded fellows looking for a peeping hole in a hot-spring. What do you think dumbass?"
"You know that is what creeps do, right? Also I'm fairly certain that's illegal."

The trio did not seem perturbed by his comment.

"What, you don't want to see the babes? Sure there are some Grans, but there are some real stunners over there. Like that redhead. She's got all the stuff."

Ash's hands balled into fists under the water at the remark, he really did not like the grin the Trainer had on his face when he was talking about someone who could only be Misty. He didn't see any other redheads here after all. Except for Alish he guessed, but that was just another name to put forward in the 'don't be creeps' argument. Also no word about the legality?

"Sure she's a stunner, but she's a tad too tall for my taste, and don't even get me started on that really tall one with the exotic skin. Where do you even get skin like that? Now that lavender-haired friend of hers…." The second of them licked his lips when talking about Anabel, and it made him glare at them even more. Ash could feel his fingernails digging into his palms as he tried to keep calm and resist the urge to physically defend his friends.

"I mean, how could you not want to see them in all their…?"

"Pretty sure he's their friend actually. I saw them check in together."

The third fellow interrupted the question of the first, drawing the attention of all three on him as more than the guy 'interrupting their fun'.

Though this fact didn't really cause them to go 'oh, that's why he's telling us not to be creeps. We should totally stop being creeps'.

They just looked confused.

"What, you travel with three attractive girls and you don't want to see them au naturel, as the Kalosians would say?"

"Or do you already see them that way, and you want to be the only one who does? Did your mother never teach you to share? I mean, all we'd be doing is looking, while you can probably do a lot more than just looking."

Ash leveled a long glare at them.

Sure, with the recent admittance to himself that he did find them attractive sparked by knowing they found him attractive, he wouldn't mind the sight. But peeping on them, even ignoring the entire part about moral and most likely legal consequences, would not be worth the fact that it would likely be quite easy for Anabel to tell that he was doing so.

All that would do would make him look like scum to her, and she'd probably inform Misty. She'd react the same way.

So no, he was not going to stare through a hole in the fence at them. There was no way that would end well for him even if he didn't get thrown in jail.

Plus, if he really wanted to see one of them naked, he could just ask Iris. It wouldn't be the first time that had happened after all.

While he maintained his glare at them, internally Ash wondered where that thought had come from. Why on earth would that come up?
What brought it up, indignation at them thinking he was like them? A bubbling of snark kept internal? Puberty?

He had invoked puberty as being rarely a problem for his life, was it now getting back at him for saying that by making itself a lot more bothersome?

Did it team up with Karma, and his jokes with Bulbasaur about it were now coming back to haunt him?

The question of if Karma had decided to punish him was promptly answered when the water began to enter the pool at a hotter temperature. The trio winced and tried to suck it up, before leaving the fence woozily, a tad pink as they got out the sides of the spring, needing a cold shower before they could get back into the water safely.

The water returned to its old temperature soon after, leaving Ash soaking in the water, quite glad to see those jerks were gone.

Though due to the direction the conversation had eventually gone, it became necessary for him to take a bit longer to leave. The trio's words causing certain thoughts and images to appear in his mind that resulted in a bodily reaction that wasn't really publicly acceptable.

Curse puberty, even if it wasn't plotting with Karma.

Hopefully Togepi was asleep by now in his room, which would let Pikachu sleep too. He might be a bit longer than planned.

Meanwhile on the other side of the fence…

"Be careful how close you get to the fence, or how long you hang around there. Grandpa has motion sensors in place that will react if someone stands too close for too long, and then you'll be steamed out."

Alish's point only made half sense to Misty, who stared at the fence in confusion.

"I get on the guy's side, but why the girl's side?"

Sure if she knew for a certainty that Ash was directly in line of sight of a hole she might, or maybe or possibly…but it seemed more likely she would catch sight of an old man.

"Because an old lady snuck in the screwdriver, not an old man."

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**The morning**

Iris did not particularly sleep well on beds, nor inside of buildings. The only time she could really say a bed worked for her was after the Sabrina attack, and that was quite different.

She was aware of why they were using a hotel; she was there when it happened. She did not think it would be nearly as strange as the others thought it would be if they had declined and found a place to use Secret Power.

Though with how many people were on this island, she agreed that finding a place as quiet as the inn
would probably be difficult, she could see the benefit.

Regardless she would not have gotten the best sleep. Either because of the noise, or because of the softness and staleness.

She watched the moon as it made the last stretch of night glow. She wouldn't be able to go back to sleep.

"Ax."

Her brother was still asleep though, still within the confines of the room even with the fresh air from the open door she had stepped through. He was not so affected by the stale air and unnatural softness like she was.

It was a good quality.

Was it one she would ever learn? She could not say she could teach them, but she was aware that regaining beds as a constant was new to them.

It was something they could just as easily do, they just chose not to.

Her lack of sleep did get her thinking, though in a way she did not normally do.

Nor was she particularly happy to have thought of it.

She could see a quite nice future ahead for themselves. Among them, and the most brilliant of all, was the utter defeat of J and the freedom of her family.

Though she had to admit, the idea of the future with everyone and possibly others living together was catching up in appeal to their rescue and avenging. They were rarely in conflict though, as she usually did see the rescue involve all of their talents in some way or another.

What she was not fond of thinking of however, was the possibility that the family that raised her, and the family she formed to rescue the first family, might not become a single large whole.

She had been jolted awake by the travels sought by the Dragonite, and the travels sought by Ash, Misty and Anabel, being in such conflict.

And being asked by both to make a choice of which of them she wanted to be with.

What was the right thing to do in that situation? She was aware that at some point, you could easily leave a group to form your own. It was a sign of maturity in many species.

Even humans did it.

But the idea of declaring that option after so much work to get them back…Iris had to admit it was an odd thing to do. To spend so much time accomplishing something, and not being a part of it when it was all over.

It was not something she liked thinking about, but now that she had…she could not forget it.

Especially as she could not figure out how time affected the choice. Would reaching the choice too quickly mean that there would not be time to try to have them all come to love travelling on their own away from civilization, and would a long time mean that there would be more possible sources of conflict?
May Ash battle well that day, to banish the question away from her.

_Pallet Town, also early morning_

The Professor should be smiling today.

There was plenty going his way. His research was going well, the investor interest in the tech he had worked on with Boxer was high and both of them could finally relax around the sight of numbers, and despite his fears from some odd casting choices and story changes in pre-release material that reboot of a show he liked from two decades ago was actually good five episodes in.

And yet, there was a simple problem.

"Hey Gramps, you won't hear me for a while. I need to do something serious. See you at Indigo."

His grandson. That was the last he had heard from him a while, and he was worried for him, even as that phone conversation continued to linger in his mind.

What had happened to his grandson to warrant such a choice? Where was he? Was he going to be alright?

How would he know if something happened to him? The world may be safer than in his day, but that just meant plungers didn't need to also be capable of fighting off Grimer attacks from the toilet.

The fact that plungers didn't need the bayonet attachment did not mean that his Grandson couldn't get eaten by a swarm of some and he'd never hear from him again.

He still wasn't sure if his decision to not tell Daisy that her brother was out of reach at the moment was a good decision or not on his part.

A knock at his door removed him from his family worries.

"Come in!"

His shout was followed by the door swinging open, and a familiar set of steps approaching him.

"Oh Professor, pardon me. I just…just want to talk."

It was Delia. The Professor nodded at his old friend, who took a seat on one of his couches. She did in fact seem worried about something.

She also looked a bit tired. Did she not sleep all that well?

"Go ahead my dear. Talking and being talked to is literally part of my job description, and I appreciate conversations that don't require a citation list every so often."

He took his own seat as she yawned, confirming his suspicions about her lack of sleep.

"Ash is in Cinnabar, right?"

He nodded to Delia's question. He was there earning his sixth badge after defeating the Fuchsia Gym, even if he really didn't need to be doing so.
"Are you worried about making everything look nice before he comes here? A ferry from Cinnabar to close enough to here isn't that fast moving, and I doubt he'll be picky about the state of the home. Trust me dear, after traveling for days a single dusty mantle isn't going to drive him to contempt."

There was also the fact that Ash Ketchum was not a stickler for cleanliness, but that was beside the point.

"No, that isn't it. I'm honestly just worried. Little old me, worry-warting over my fifteen-year-old son like he's still my little baby."

"They never stop being your little babies, even when they're dead."

His morbid comment on his own experience caused Delia's eyes to drift to a family photo from nearly two decades ago, from shortly before he became a Grandfather.

"They never do, do they. Ash can get taller and taller, and I can only see that little boy sucking his thumb. Yet, I can't help but worry what my little boy's seen and experienced since he's left. Manipulative Gym Leaders, falling out of the sky, I don't even want to know why he has all of those affectionate Grimer…"

Both their eyes drifted to the doors to see if any of them were present with an interest to smother. Thankfully it was not the case.

"…And worse, if he's met people who don't see him as just a friendly boy, but something to be afraid of."

Oh yes, that would probably worry her from time to time.

"I'd love to tell you that wouldn't ever happen, but I'd be lying if I told you that isn't possible. Animosity is as likely an obstacle for him to face at some point as a hailstorm or a great storm. All anyone can do in the face of such things is to stand strong and weather the storm until it passes, as they usually do."

He specifically avoided referencing something that was inevitable, as it was possible to keep things similar to Bloodliner status hidden.

He still had old buddies from the day coming out. He'd never have guessed his old partner in elementary sciences was pansexual.

"Yet, I think he can get through it. He's a wonderful kid, and anyone who can look twice at him can see that. Plus he has friends with him who are just like him who can help him through it."

He was still getting data from his machines about all four of them after all, even if he never went up to him and said that his two new companions were like himself and Misty.

It was certainly interesting data, though he wasn't sure he could make it into anything major yet.

Delia seemed to wince when he mentioned Ash's companions, and at his curious look she elaborated.

"That's not helping me sleep either. I'll admit it's silly of me, but I can't help but think you know. My little wonderful boy and three girls. All alone…and Ash isn't as oblivious as we all joke."

It was probably not going to help, but the Professor couldn't help himself. He raised an eyebrow at Delia and pointed out, in some amusement, the irony.
"I distinctly remember you talking to me once, not that long ago, about Ash not noticing how many girls found him attractive, and now you are worried about him doing so. How times change."

Delia blushed at the reminder.

"Well, I guess I did ask for it. I'm just half-worried I'm going to get told I'm going to be a grandmother when he gets back here is all, quite possibly multiple times over."

"Ash isn't completely oblivious, but he isn't that aware."

The two laughed that bit off. It was probably true, he knew the boy fairly well, and Delia infinitely more so.

Ash certainly could have started noticing girls more while traveling with several, but it was probably a new thing. Factoring in youthful awkwardness and Delia was certainly not going to be told anytime soon she was going to be a grandmother.

Still, they should see Ash and his friends soon, and when that happened Delia could hopefully stop having dreams about her son going through innocence destroying trials of barbed put downs and hatred filled glares, or her being made a Grandmother before she was thirty-five.

Then she could start having new concerns. Like the fact that when Ash returned, the attention girls had for him would be amplified with that of his gained fame.

If he came back with something more, like perhaps a few more inches of height or muscle, Delia might need to barb the windows. Oak kept those thoughts to himself however as they would probably cause her more stressful and sleepless nights.

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**Back on Cinnabar**

The Gym that had, in one timeline, become a shamble stood proud and tall this time around.

It was built better too, instead of looking more like a shed than an actual Gym it was built from stone. A glowing lamp in the shape of a Volcano Badge glowed from the entrance, and flanking the path into the Gym were two Arcanine statues.

'Well, this is it. You ready?'

Ash nodded at Anabel's question, Pikachu sparking his cheeks in agreement.

A team was assembled, options were in hand, and he checked what Pokémon could possibly learn Stealth Rock.

If Blaine used that Rhydon again, or a Magcargo, Numel, Camerupt, Torkoal, Chimchar, Monferno, Infernape, or that Alolan Marowak he only just found out was a thing, he would not give them a chance to set up the way Janine did.

If it never came up, he still had everything he could need to win this battle.

The wrist that held his Z-ring seemed to gain a few pounds of weight as he thought that.

Perhaps not everything, but he doubted that not having it would cost him this fight.
The moment they stepped in front of the Arcanine statues, a recording played.

"I am both terror and protector, often to the very same. It is by the lead of those I follow that makes me noble or ignoble."

Oh joy, a riddle.

"Sounds like he's describing a Pokémon."

Misty's observation did seem right. He could see how that would be referring to a Pokémon, more so than any comment made about wigs and firefighters in the past.

Still, following both noble or ignoble applied to pretty much every Pokémon, and he wasn't sure how being both scary and protective would narrow it down.

He had seen scary Togepi after all. Terror was relative.

"It's also probably a Fire Pokémon of some sort."

Again Misty offered a good point.

"We could just smash the door through. Excadrill could probably do it."

Iris offered a point that he probably should save for the last resort.

But on the point about it being a Fire Pokémon, that did narrow things down.

Pikachu pointed to the statues, and Ash thought about it for a moment.

An Arcanine was certainly a noble Pokémon, and it could likely be ignoble with the wrong owner. He could see Arcanine protecting something too, even if it wasn't its own pups.

He struggled to imagine Arcanine as scary though. That seemed more like something you'd call Houndoom…

Memories of that Houndoom and the Mareep farmer flared in his mind, and he couldn't help but think he had it.

"What is Houndoom?!"

Iris looked at him oddly for how he said it, but the doors let out a correct sounding jingle and slid open.

…

The arena was honestly a bit standard looking, like a dirt version of the one the Gym Leader had suspended above lava.

It wasn't really until one saw it without lava and chains that it really was shown to be bog-standard.

As opposed to swamp standard, Ash suspected.

The origin of phrases aside, Blaine was currently on the other side of the arena, staring at him as if he was nuts.

Beyond not being sure why Blaine was doing so, Ash did have to blink to make sure it was in fact
Blaine he was looking at.

Sure he wasn't partially cosplaying as a hippie this time around, but all the hair on his head was now gone. He did have a mustache though, and was dressed instead in a white lab coat with a pair of black shades covering his eyes that were much smaller than his original ones.

Also he had a cane, though he seemed to be more using it for the effect than full need of it. There seemed to be something on the bottom of the cane's rounded tip, but Ash wasn't sure what exactly it was as Blaine's hand rested there.

Was he going to do that Willy-Wonka thing with the cane at some point? That seemed oddly likely for some reason. Or was what Ash noticed at the tip of the cane going to come into play.

For some reason, Ash's eyes kept being drawn to it.

"How on earth are you still alive?"

It took Ash a moment to realize that he was probably referring to Sabrina, which probably also factored into his 'are you nuts' stare.

"Careful planning and good friends."

Blaine shook his head at the response, though he did seem to be looking at him in a different way. As if Blaine was processing observations so minute about him that Ash couldn't even figure them out.

Or he was plotting a riddle, one of the two.

"I see. Clearly you are one who possesses not only talent and drive, but also luck. That's certainly important. Therefore it is clear I'm going to have to pull out more of the stops than usual to see if you're ready. After all, Giovanni is notoriously prickly, and I may be the last stop worth your time."

At Blaine's declaration a metal cylinder dropped from the ceiling, before stopping a few inches from the ground. Floating there, two slots extended out of the cylinder's side, each jutting out a pair of flags.

"Judge program initiating. Gym Battle to begin. Each side is to use five Pokémon each, with no substitutions allowed for the defending Gym Leader. When one side is completely depleted, the battle will be decided."

The cylinder was one of those judging robots. Neat.

"Five on five, I can do that. I was ready if you wanted to go a full six on six!"

Blaine chuckled at the idea.

"Certainly possible, but that would be a bit long. Five is plenty!"

As Alish, Misty, Iris, and Anabel moved to take their seats, Blaine held up and threw his first Pokéball, which revealed a bubbling lava creature with a black shell.

Or as it was more commonly known…

"Magcargo, the Lava Pokémon. Magcargo's bodies are made of a material very similar to lava, and can interact with lava without disintegration. However, it is not in fact lava and is
thus safe to be in contact with. In some countries, having a Magcargo or Slugma slither across your back is considered quite relaxing."

"Car?"

Magcargo seemed confused about the idea of such an action being considered enjoyable, and Ash had to share the sentiment.

Still he remembered what Magcargo could do, and he had the perfect counter for it.

"Go!"

Ash threw his Timer Ball, and out exploded Primeape, who snorted loudly at the Magcargo. Blaine chuckled at the sight of Primeape.

"Good, good. I see what your thought process is, and I can appreciate it. Now, let's see if you are more than just good ideas."

"Begin!"

At the robot's declaration, battle began swiftly.

"Use Heat Wave!"

Magcargo's mouth opened up like a tear in the not-lava form of the form, letting loose a stream of visible red heat right at Primeape.

"Use Thrash on the ground and block it with the dust!"

Primeape promptly began punching the ground, punching up a dust cloud.

In proving that you didn't just have to kick up such a thing, the Heat Wave was blocked. He could almost see Blaine grin.

Primeape then jumped over the dust cloud, fists still flaring and still lunging at Magcargo.

"Thrash is an ongoing attack."

The Pokédex's comment was followed by Primeape landing right next to the slug and continuing to punch away at the slug, striking at the side again and again.

However each time Primeape did punch it, Magcargo seemed to change color slightly, and with each punch afterwards the Thrash did a bit more.

At least to him, he couldn't really speak for Magcargo.

However he could say that after about seven punches Magcargo started doing something really odd.

It was dodging the punches with rapid twists and curves of its body.

Primeape stopped punching when Magcargo flattened itself to have both his fists go right through where Magcargo's head once was.

"Pri?" 'What the fuck?'

"Heat Wave!"
Before Primeape could swear again a Heat Wave struck right in Primeape's center of mass, blowing the angry Fighting-type and leaving Primeape clutching his face.

Swearing loudly about Magcargo's mother and things that were probably physically impossible to do.

"I thought you would be prepared for a repeat of what you went through in your battle with Janine, and if you would have an anti-Magcargo strategy in place. That's why you brought a Pokémon that would be immune to Yawn. In fact, my regular Magcargo I'd be using about now is in fact trained to use Yawn and set up Stealth Rock. However, this isn't my regular Magcargo. It's my fancy one!"

"Car!"

Magcargo followed Blaine's declaration with a snort of flames from its nostril.

"I see. I suspect that Magcargo has the ability Weak Armor. It's an ability that sacrifices defensive power for speed each and every time it is struck. Primeape's rapid punching was turned against it."

The Pokédex's explanation of what was so fancy about this Magcargo was helpful, though it didn't really give him a way to counter it.

Primeape glaring at Magcargo while muttering dark things under his breath that were not appropriate didn't help.

"Alright Magcargo, Will-O-Wisp!"

Blue flames bubbled out of Magcargo's body like bubbles, before they suddenly fired in the direction of Primeape like rapid fired bullets.

He didn't need to order Primeape to dodge them as he bounded past each of them nimbly, eyes flashing in fury as he got right in Magcargo's face, fists glowing for a Cross Chop attack.

Just as he saw the faintest flicker of Will-O-Wisp bubble out of Magcargo's face.

"Return!"

The blue flame floated through Primeape's energy form, barely missing a direct hit as he pulled Primeape back. The Timer Ball twitched angrily at the early dismissal.

…

"I haven't seen Ash need to do that since Vermillion, and even that seemed more like a personal call and not strategic at all."

Misty's worried observation was true, but Anabel didn't see the need to be so concerned so quickly.

The plan the two had been working on had been overcome by equally clever thinking for Blaine. In a game of I know you know I know, he had come out on top.

However it was better to have Primeape unburned, if heated in anger, than affected by a status. Though that would mean they still had to deal with Magcargo's flexible form. The best solution to that would be an attack that covered an area of effect.

The best Pokémon Ash could use against that was someone like Ambipom or Goodra.
And seeing as Ash had a Heal Ball in hand…

…

"Goodra, I choose you!"

His purple dragon dropped onto the field in an oomph, as Blaine grinned.

"Interesting…Recover!"

Magcargo's pseudo-lava began to turn gold, though Ash had an idea for how to stop it.

"Use Rain Dance!"

"Goo!"

A dark swirling cloud formed over the field, sending water droplets falling down across the field. The moment that the rain began hitting Magcargo the gold color faded away as the Fire-type began wincing, as if each light rain drop was akin to a downpour of heavy rain.

The flinching cancelled out the healing, though Ash wasn't entirely sure if it was doing damage. Magcargo was letting out bouts of steam, but he didn't see Weak Armor activate.

Though part of Ash had to wonder if the use of Weak Armor had made the rain bother Magcargo more than it normally would.

Regardless, it did leave an opening, and he'd be taking advantage of it.

"Dragon Breath!"

Goodra bellowed out the breath attack, which engulfed the still wincing Magcargo. Blaine flinched and covered his eyes as the attack landed, only to grit his teeth as Magcargo was blown out of it, wincing in paralysis as well as continued rain assault.

"Again!"

A second Dragon Breath struck Magcargo again, and this time the slug was lying on the ground, still steaming from the rain droplets.

"Magcargo is unable to battle!"

The robot said it, and with that he was in the lead.

…

"Using rain offensively, when did he think of that?"

At Alish's question Misty had a small smile.

"If I'm being honest, I don't think he woke up today and said 'Rain Dance can make Magcargo stop moving'. I honestly think he thought it might work and tried it out on the spot."

Alish stared at Ash as if she had trouble believing such an idea just came to someone randomly.

…

Blaine returned Magcargo, muttering something about Weak Armor's unintentional side effect before
looking back his way.

"Not bad, though I hope that isn't all you've got."

"Course not. Me and my Pokémon have a lot more up our sleeves."

"Pikapi." 'Yeah, you haven't seen what I can do yet.'

Blaine chuckled, though only at his own line if Ash had to guess.

"If that's the case, then I intend to see all the tricks you have. Arcanine!"

And with that his second choice appeared, the same form as the statues outside, but made of living flesh and fur.

Unlike Magcargo the rain didn't seem to bother it. The fur perhaps?

"Dragon Breath again!"

"Dragon Pulse!"

As Goodra attacked, Arcanine countered with its own Dragon-type move. The shiny green ball flung itself forward, piercing through Goodra's attack with some difficulty and striking Goodra right in the center.

Goodra took the attack with little issue though, but Ash wasn't going to assume the damage was nothing.

"Good, now Iron Tail!"

"Bide!"

Ash's command may have been given later, but Goodra's red glow flared up just as the Iron Tail landed. The slammed tail seemed to have a bit more oomph to it than Dragon Pulse, but Goodra took the attack like a champ. The red glow intensified.

"Use Headbutt before backing off to a safe distance!"

Arcanine slammed its head into Goodra's stomach before using said stomach to bounce back, glaring at Goodra as the red light flared up in full and Goodra fired the white energy beam.

"Protect!"

Arcanine stomped its feet into the ground before a blue bubble formed around itself. The Bide energy struck against the barrier with blinding force, but Arcanine was completely unaffected.

Goodra was panting heavily. Clearly this was not going to be a good matchup.

"Goodra, return and take a good rest."

And so he made his second substitution of the match.

…

"Should we be concerned?"

Iris's question was not an unwarranted one. This was an atypical turn of events.
Was it just bad luck, or perhaps had there not been enough time for Ash's team to recover from the battle with Sabrina?

Anabel wasn't sure if declaring lingering exhaustion to be the cause, though she couldn't think of any particular issue.

Even with his recent endeavor in figuring out Z-Moves, as well as Iris's own training, his own Pokémon were getting plenty of training.

Though it was also possible they were just thinking too deeply about this and it was just a minor turn of events warranted by the specifics of the battle.

"Neither Goodra nor Primeape were beaten, so Ash still has the advantage."

Misty's declaration was followed up by Alish's own point though.

"Yeah, but unless Goodra is the last Pokémon Ash sends out, it won't have enough recovery time to make up for even two of Grandpa's attacks."

What was Ash going to do? He could try and avoid revealing his hand and take Primeape out, though she suspected Ash would not be doing that.

She suspected a third Pokémon would be appearing.

...

There were two options Ash considered for this round, and it took him a few moments to pick one that felt just right.

"Boldore, I choose you!"

And with his choice, his third Pokémon appeared before Arcanine, who tilted its head at Boldore in surprise.

It probably wasn't expecting to see a Unovan Pokémon.

The rain cleared away, and the battle began anew.

"Flamethrower!"

"Sand Attack!"

Sand shot out of Boldore's eyes, cancelling out the flame. He heard Blaine give a 'tsk' in approval, and with that Ash kept up the momentum.

"Alright, now use Rock Blast!"

Boldore's center crest shown white as the projectile was fired. Arcanine dodged the attacks and came in closer to Boldore.

"Iron Tail!"

"Iron Defense, then follow it up with Headbutt!"

Boldore shimmered with the heightened defensive tactic as Iron Tail struck. The impact rang through the stadium, before Boldore hopped up and slammed into Arcanine.
The solid blow knocked the dog back, who shook his head a bit and glared at Boldore. Boldore for some reason though, didn't have a 'I landed a solid hit' elation about her.

"Dore." *That didn't seem to do nearly as much as I thought it would*. Arcanine growled something to Boldore, which made Boldore wince.

…

Alish's attention was peaked after Arcanine growled. Misty was quite sure of what she noticed, and for good reason.

It was the same way she would see Iris react if Axew chirped. And she was quite sure it was the same way she would when Psyduck had something to say.

…

"Tell me Ash, how long have you had Boldore?"

Blaine's question caused the battle to temporarily pause, and Ash had to find the best way to put it.

"Since just after the Tournament in Fuchsia, but we've done a lot of training in the meantime."

Give or take six Gyms, a League, and a crazy organization interested in controlling a legendary Dragon. Plus some ferry stops, and all the training in the meantime.

Blaine adjusted his shades before speaking again.

"How long has it been a Boldore?"

Not sure where Blaine was going with this, Ash offered up the date he found out Boldore had evolved.

"I see. Too long to still be on cloud nine about it, and too short to have fully mastered itself."

Ash wasn't sure what Blaine's point was, but if it was something bothering Boldore…

"Boldore, you still up for battling?"

At his honest question Boldore gave an affirmative nod.

"Then let's see if we can work through what's on your mind. Rock Blast!"

Boldore's crest began glowing as Blaine shook his head.

"Protect!"

As Arcanine threw up the shield Ash had a brainstorm.

"Hold it in for a bit!"

'Bol?' *The attack?*

She sounded confused, as if she was wondering if he was talking more about the bathroom than the battlefield. But regardless of it she did so, and the white light of Rock Blast stayed put, if starting to
glow brighter and more intensely.

The Protect flickered, and Ash saw the chance.

"Fire!"

And Rock Blast was released, flying right into the post-Protect Arcanine.

Five of the blasts.

Arcanine was knocked down by the attack before struggling back up, and then slipping back down in defeat.

"Arcanine is unable to battle!"

Blaine returned Arcanine with a thankful mutter, before looking at him and Boldore with a thoughtful eye.

"Rapidash, let's go!"

And after the moment of thinking came the third Pokémon, who nickered loudly as it stood before Boldore.

"Rapidash, the Fire Horse Pokémon. Rapidash and its pre-evolved form, Ponyta, are associated with mountainous terrain as much as they are the open plains. A master Rapidash Trainer once won a race against a bullet train, though such speed is not going to be a factor in this battle."

The Pokédex factoid of the day was noted, and Ash looked over the fiery racer for a moment.

This was not going to be the best battle for Boldore. Even if there were no bullet trains to race, speed would be a problem.

"Take a rest Boldore."

He wished he hadn't noticed Boldore wince as he returned her. Whatever was bothering her, he'd work with her about after this.

Until then…

"Primeape, I choose you!"

His stomping Fighting-type was back out.

"Begin!"

"Megahorn!"

At Blaine's command Rapidash reared up, the horn atop it glowing and growing larger. Rapidash crashed all four hooves back on the earth before charging forward, horn lowered for stabbing.

"Cross Chop!"

Primeape crossed his arms, which gained a white sheen as the two attacked collided. The impact was roughly equal, and both ended their attacks with interest in resuming the offensive.
"Seismic Toss!"

"Defend with Flame Wheel!"

Before Primeape could grab it, Rapidash was surrounded by a flaming ring of fire. Primeape cursed loudly, with words he wasn't sure the exact meaning of beyond 'his mom would not approve', as he flared his hands around in an attempt to reduce the heated feeling they most likely had.

Rapidash charged forward with the flames, which Primeape avoided with a quick dodge.

"Mega Kick!"

From behind the flames Primeape lunged, his foot glowing blue.

The foot struck Rapidash in the rump, causing the horse to stammer just as the flames flickered away.

"High Horsepower!"

Rapidash's back legs kicked at Primeape, who avoided a hoof to the face by a hair.

Primeape promptly muttered a curse he knew his mother knew he knew, but she'd still not like ever saying aloud.

Rapidash righted itself around so it was facing Primeape directly again.

"...Tell me something, you're still working on move limits. Let me guess, only a few Pokémon you own have managed to pass it by?"

"Four, why?"

Blaine frowned.

"I previously declared that I may be your last battle before the League, as Giovanni is talented but about as pleasant as volcanic gas to deal with. I'm changing my declaration and saying that you would do well to spend the months before the League fixing that, and working on power for that matter. You are clearly too talented to have that limit cripple you when the League comes."

"Pikapi." 'Because power is clearly something we don't have.'

Pikachu's muttering was part defensive about him being told off, and part confusion on the idea that they weren't powerful enough.

They hadn't exactly abandoned the idea of hitting things real hard as a strategy.

...

While the statement was made without seeing how strong Ash's team was in full (as Boldore and Primeape were newer Pokémon chosen for specific strengths in this battle despite being among the weaker of Ash's battling Pokémon, and Goodra was probably somewhere in the middle if she'd had to guess), it was true that Ash could do with more power battling skill.

However, Anabel could not say that it was because he wasn't training towards that. It wasn't that he didn't have an idea of what he was doing.

Honestly it was just that others, like Paul or Red as she had noticed, put a lot more focus into that training than he did.
She couldn't peg it towards them doing more work. They were just more efficient at doing it.

Ash's training let them adapt more, but they were going to need a lot more time to match what those two were doing.

They'd need to see if that time would also need to be spent here after this battle.

…

"Double Team!"

Primeape swore again as the battle resumed with a spinning ring of Rapidash duplicates, which quickly grew to a second ring that kept spinning around Primeape, cutting off his movement.

Primeape kept bouncing around the center of the ring, fists ready for any looming attack should it come his way, in whatever form that may be.

The first attack was a series of Megahorns, which Primeape avoided by ducking.

The second attack however…

"Inferno!"

Was an attack Ash had little experience with. It wasn't Ice Beam, that was for sure.

But it was still something to avoid.

"Primeape, use Mega Kick on the ground!"

The idea he had in a mere microsecond to avoid the fire bursting off the Rapidash vortex was one-upped in execution by Primeape.

He did it with both feet, stomping the ground with such force he leapt into the air fast enough to avoid the attack.

In addition, the kick off into the air left behind a wave of energy and displaced air that, combined with the fire of Inferno, wiped out the dupe Rapidash, leaving only a staring Rapidash, and a Primeape who Ash was pretty sure was about to hit the science class point to cease rising, and begin descent.

There was an equation to it Ash didn't remember off the top of his head. It had some sort of number minus another number after the first number was multiplied in some way…

Math. He didn't argue it wasn't correct, but he was having enough trouble figuring out his original age, and that was probably just addition.

Or at least hopefully it was just addition.

"Primeape, Cross Chop!"

Regardless of the math, Primeape was falling, and with a spin to point right at Rapidash Cross Chop would have amplified power.

"Flame Wheel!"

Rapidash reared up and formed the wheel of flames before leaping at Primeape, the two attacks
colliding in midair.

As was common in such scenarios, an explosion went off.

…

"How did a pair of fists generate an explosion?"

Misty's question led Iris to look at her like she just asked why leaves were on twigs.

…

The explosion cleared up after a moment, revealing a still standing Primeape.

A Primeape who was breathing heavily, a tad woozy on his feet, and muttering words under his breath that reminded Ash he needed to buy some more soap in the near future, but standing none the less.

Rapidash however, was lying on the ground.

"Rapidash is unable to battle!"

And with that, Ash was up by three.

Blaine returned Rapidash with a thanks to it, before looking at Ash with a thoughtful look.

"You know, I normally would not do this. It's more something to save for just above what you are technically battling for. However, if I am the last stop worth your time, you probably should be ready for this. From what I've seen this year, you'd be a fool to not be aware of it."

With that vague statement, he picked up a Friend Ball and threw it into the air, which exploded into the form of a Houndoom.

However, it was a Houndoom with a lot of white around its muzzle, and a look to it that made Ash think of Professor Rowan.

The 'scary old man' look. Not to be confused with the other flavors of old man.

…

"He brought him out?"

Alish's comment drew Misty's curious gaze, and so the granddaughter elaborated.

"He's the oldest Pokémon he has. He's been with him for longer than I've been alive, and he's mostly retired. He used to be one of the Pokémon for Badge 8 challenges. I mean, I guess with old age he probably qualifies for a 7th badge, but still…"

Misty stared at the old dog for a moment, before her eyes went wide at the sight of the ring around one of Houndoom's horns.

It had a Mega Stone on it.

…

"Wait, Mega Houndoom's a thing!?
Ash's surprised declaration got Blaine's attention, who looked at him in surprise.

"So you know how Mega Evolution works? Did you manage it?"

"No, I actually fought one a while back."

Blaine look a bit put out at this realization before shrugging.

"Well, I guess I didn't need to substitute that Charizard out. Still, I can't really return him without officially forfeiting, and the Mega Evolution helps with his arthritis. Alright, let's do it!"

And with that he slammed the cane into the ground, from which the odd bit Ash had noticed before flared up and sent tendrils of light flying towards Houndoom.

Upon contact just like Sabrina's Alakazam, Houndoom glowed yellow and began to shift in form. Houndoom grew taller, with more growth to the bone-like ribs and horns the species had. Houndoom howled wildly as the changes continued, with a tail splitting at the end from a spade to a two-pronged trident (a bident?) and a pair of front limb bands on each limb.

Primeape looked a bit nervous at the entire thing, and the swearing stopped. That could not be a good sign.

As the light faded away and the changed Houndoom was revealed in full color, Blaine grinned.

"Well, let's see how you can do against this one. If you did defeat one before, I'm sure you can replicate the feat. If not, show me your improvement."

Ash's eyes darted to the Z-ring.

That…probably wouldn't happen again. If the only blip he had with the ring was encountering Articuno, the only way it was going to work was if one of his Pokémon suddenly learned how to use a Psychic-type move.

Which he was pretty sure wouldn't work anyway, unless Houndoom's Dark type was lost due to Mega Evolving.

"Fire Blast!"

He felt Pikachu flinch as the Mega Houndoom took a deep breath, before spewing out the very same symbol that had ended his first Gym battle with Blaine.

It flew at Primeape just as quickly as it had a lifetime ago.

---

OMAKE (NON CANON): SMOOCH or SLAP

"Hello everybody and welcome to a new rendition of Smooch or Slap!"

The hostess, Marian, waved from the stage as the crowd who watched this fun-packed game show let out a round of thunderous applause. Once everyone calmed down, Marian stepped forward and respectfully bowed to her fans.

"Thank you, thank you, I love you all! Our contestant today is none other than Ash Ketchum from Pallet Town, let's give him a big hand too!"
Once again, the crowded erupted in applause and cheering as the Trainer with the red hat and his Pikachu stepped up to the stage and waved, the former smiling a bit nervously.

"Welcome to our show, Ash. Tell me, are you ready to play?"

"To be honest, I don't even know how I got here, but I never turn back from a challenge," The Trainer replied.

"Well, that's good to know. Alright, in case you need it, let me explain you the rules. We've brought five of your closest female friends who agreed to take part in this game. They will come over one by one, say something to you, and then you'll have to guess whether you'll get a smooch or a slap from them. You have five tries and you need to get at least three right to win. You ready?"

"Well, if I have to," The Trainer said with resignation.

"Okay. Let the first girl come, Miss Misty Waterflower!"

In the middle of another round of applause, the young redhead and future leader of the Cerulean Gym approached, dressed in a white stage dress with matching gloves and heels, Goldeen fins behind her back. Her hair was also adorned with extensions to make it look longer. She slowly walked besides Ash and standing next to him, she placed a hand in her hip and stared at him with a seemingly annoyed expression.

"Ash, I want you to know, sometimes you really drive me crazy," she said.

Ash had a little shiver and gulped before daring to take a guess. "Er... slap?"

Much to his shock and surprise, Misty's expression morphed into a flirty smile. "But you know what else? I love that you drive me crazy!" *SMOOCH!*

And thus the redhead ran off happily after smooching him on the lips. The black-haired boy was left with his mouth agape and his eyes widened like flying saucers. The crowd cheered and laughed, while the Trainer couldn't do anything but touch his lips, unsure whether he should be annoyed for failing or happy for the kiss.

"Oh, too bad, you got it wrong Ash," said Marian. "Next, Miss May Maple!"

Second girl, the future brunette Pokémon Coordinator from Petalburg arrived waving at the crowd enthusiastically. Just like Misty she had dressed herself in a very special outfit, but hers looked more like that of a dancer from the One Thousand and One Nights, with an orange top and belt exposing her belly, a long light purple skirt and a veil covering her head. She stood next to Ash with a big smile in her face.

"Hey, Ash, the dinner last night was unforgettable," she said winking at him.

"Hmm... why do I get the feeling it's gonna be a slap?" Ash asked. "Slap."

"Until you ate the last slice of cake, that one was mine!" *SLAP!*

And just as fast as Misty, May walked away in the middle of the crowd's screams and laughter. Ash had to rub his cheek and make sure all of his teeth were still in place, while Marian patted him on the back.

"Very good, you got that right! Next, Miss Dawn Berlitz!" she announced.
The aspiring blue-haired Coordinator from Twinleaf came over next. She came over wearing a pink cheerleader outfit complete with pom-poms, and performing a little routine, she landed next to Ash.

"I hope you don't mind some cheering today, Ash," she said in a cheerful tone.

"Hmm… is it a kiss?" *SLAP!*

"But find someone else to wear this costume, this skirt is too short for me!" She came, she saw, and she slapped. Dawn walked away immediately and Ash was grateful she at least balanced it out by slapping him on the other cheek. The crowd's laughs exploded again.

"Aww, too bad Ash!" said Marian. "Next, Miss Iris!"

Unlike the previous three, Iris came over swinging on a cable hanging from the studio's roof and almost crashed into Ash and Marian, who had to step away. Fortunately, the purple-haired and dark-skinned Unovan girl was able to get a hold of herself, and everybody could admire her shrine maiden outfit, complete with her diadem adorned with leaves and a red gem on the forehead.

"Ash, we need to talk very seriously. You need to stop acting like a kid."

"Hmm… now this is definitely gonna be a slap, right?" Ash said. "Don't be too harsh with it, please?" *SLAP!*

Iris' slap was so hard it sent Ash into a spin and almost knocked Pikachu off his shoulder. The Trainer stumbled around for a few seconds and Marian had to help him regain his footing afterwards.

"Ouch, even I felt that," she said. "Well, here we are, you got two right and two wrong, so the last one is the decisive. Good luck, now here comes Miss Serena Yvonne Gabena!"

And so the last girl came over. The young Kalosian was wearing a furisode dress clearly based in a Red Flower Florges, and unlike the others the honey-blond girl approached her friend rather shyly, as if she wasn't sure about being in that place.

"Ash… last night I saw a shooting star, and do you know what I wished to it?" the girl asked with her most tender face.

"Hmm… please tell me it was giving me a kiss," Ash replied nervously as he crossed his fingers.

"I wished to have the courage to give you this." *SMOOCCH!* And blushing more than any of the others, the girl walked away, her face hidden between her hands. The kiss was less aggressive than Misty's, but somehow also sweeter. This time the crowd gave a standing ovation and everybody began celebrating.

"Very good, congratulations Ash! You got three right, so you've cleared the challenge!" Marian announced as she applauded as well. "And that's all for tonight everyone, thank you for…!"

"Woah, woah, wait!" Ash interrupted here. "Where's my prize for winning?"

"Oh, that's right, silly me!" Marian knocked her head and stuck out her tongue. "Alright, you win a full-course dinner at the Seven Star Restaurant for you and nine more people. Hope you enjoy it! And that'll be all for tonight, thanks for coming and until next time!"
A good dinner was pointless with no one to share, so Ash quickly invited his dear friends to come over and enjoy his prize all together.

"Bring more ice cream!" Misty shouted after finishing her fourth chocolate and cherry sundae.

"Hey Ash, sorry we slapped you so hard," said May.

"Well, at least we held back a little," Dawn commented. "Iris on the other hand…"

"Hey, if he can't take that, he'll never be a real man," the dark-skinned girl replied.

"Here you are!"

The voice by the door got everyone's attention, and they quickly saw some familiar faces in Ash's life. These included a head covered in short teal hair, a pair of brown pigtails, and of course another head covered in light purple hair.

Angie, Macy and Anabel had just entered the restaurant, and they didn't seem all too happy. Furthermore, Latias came flying over them and before landing she took on her Bianca disguise to join them.

"Hey you five! Why didn't you call us for the game show?!" Angie protested.

"No fair, I wanted to go too!" Macy cried out grabbing her pigtails.

"You snooze, you lose, girl," said Misty, pulling her lower eyelid as a taunt. The newly arrived frowned, but fortunately Ash intervened.

"Hey, hey, we still have four empty table seats for the prize I won," He said. "How'd you like that for compensation?"

"Hmm, tempting," said Angie, "but I've got a better idea. Girls, you wanna play another round of that game?"

'Better yet', said Anabel telepathically. 'Let's do it only with smooches, so Ash has to guess where he's going to get them.'

Every girls' eyes widened, and they all turned at the boy. The smiles they gave him weren't reassuring at all, let alone when Bianca!Latias came up, as she suddenly got another idea.

"You wanna participate too? We all can play the game!"

The five girls sitting by the table turned to glance at Ash, all of them wearing different expressions, but one thing was for sure, they all seemed on board with playing the game again, only with smooches.

Ash on the other hand, wondered whether it would have been better to get only slaps, because somehow he felt he wouldn't survive so many smooches from all those lovely girls.
Cinnabar Chapter Minor

**Cinnabar Gym**

As the Fire Blast flew towards Primeape, Ash had a rapid plan for avoiding the damage.

"Use Mega Kick to jump!"

In one micro moment Primeape’s feet flashed blue before rocketing him out of the way, the Fire Blast missing its target and dissipating before it could hit something outside the field.

Primeape stopped rising after a moment, before losing one blue foot and flying down towards Mega Houndoom with a flying jump kick.

Not that it was a Jump Kick attack, be it High or not High. Could Primeape even use that move?

"Counter!"

However the enhanced Houndoom looked right at Primeape, unimpressed, as the kick flew in.

Just before the kick hit a shimmering aura formed around Houndoom, which took the Mega Kick head on and sent Primeape tumbling back from the recoil.

Primeape unsteadily got back onto his feet from the hit, snorting the smack back at Houndoom as smack talk.

Surprisingly not involving swear words.

'Is that….all you got?'

"Dark Pulse!"

The twirling black shadow blast was more of what Houndoom 'got', and Primeape was down after that struck.

"**Primeape is unable to battle, the winner is Houndoom.**"

…

As Ash returned the Fighting-type, Misty felt a nervousness ignite in her stomach.

How was he going to be able to get through this one?

Ash was tough, but that was a lot of power he was going up against.

And there was still one more Pokémon left after the Houndoom.

Idly she touched the keystone that hung from her ear.

While she had heard about Sabrina’s Mega Evolution, this was the first time she saw one in real life. It felt more real somehow, now it wasn't just word of mouth.

Her gaze moved towards Alish, a thought coming her way.

The way Alish had acted, it was enough like how she'd react that she had a feeling the girl was a
Bloodliner too. If her grandfather knew, could Ash get away with…

She felt her mind pause at the idea that Ash would suddenly use his Bloodline in battle. She couldn't see him doing that, even against Red.

Let alone a grandfather whose daughter probably was a Bloodliner.

Though could a crystal come instead?

…

"Boldore, I choose you!"

The second of the three Pokémon he had used so far was sent out to face Mega Houndoom.

He could feel her nervousness as she stared down the Mega Evolution.

"Fire Blast!"

Blaine started the battle as he had with Primeape, with the powerful and rushing fire-type attack.

"Douse it with Sand Attack!"

Boldore spat out the burst sand right into the Fire Blast, which did weaken it.

However the giant fire attack was still going, and crashed into Boldore with sizzling force.

Boldore struggled audibly trying to hold the attack back, all three limbs digging into the dirt with immense strain for several long seconds before the Fire Blast faded away, leaving a black coating of ash on Boldore's face.

Which promptly grew larger as a small flare up of flames signaled a burn on Boldore.

"Boldore!"

"Now Dark Pulse!"

The second attack flew at Boldore, and it wasn't the sort of attack one could say was dousable by sand all that well.

"Use Rock Blast!"

It was the best idea he had, and Boldore followed through with the glowing launch of three shimmering blasts.

They were soon crushed by the dark vortex that was Dark Pulse just as it struck Boldore, flipping her over and leaving her motionless.

"Boldore is unable to battle!"

…

This wasn't like what Ash had described with Mega Alakazam.

Anabel frowned as Ash returned his second Pokémon defeated in a rapid pace.

Ash had described the Mega Alakazam as powerful, but he seemed to be caught off guard by just
how much power this Pokémon was throwing at him.

Was it a case of difference in power, or was it how that power was being used? Everything Ash had said about Sabrina had painted a picture as someone who honestly sounded more like she was trying to teach a twisted lesson than putting that power into straight forward use.

It could also be experience, as Ash’s explanation hadn't made it sound like Mega Alakazam was a regular occurrence with Sabrina.

Regardless of what it was, she hoped Ash had an idea to turn this around.

…

Was there a way of turning this around?

It was a question he did have to think about as the Houndoom continued to stare him down.

With a frown, he enlarged the Heal Ball.

It wasn't quite at a point he'd have wanted to bring Goodra back out, but it was the best idea he had going forward.

Even then, it was the sort of multi-step plan he wasn't the biggest fan of using. Even against something as indestructible and imposing as a Miltank or Metagross he would prefer to not need to do this.

"Goodra, I choose you!"

As his dragon landed with a thump, Ash noted that Goodra did seem to have rested a good amount, though it wasn't nearly to the degree he'd have preferred to see done.

It would have to do though.

"Fire Blast!"

Blaine was going three for three with that attack.

"Use Rain Dance!"

Goodra bellowed as the swirling rain began forming overhead, drenching the field.

It also drenched the Fire Blast, which began weakening as it approached Goodra.

Goodra was able to side step the attack with ease.

Blaine grinned.

"Not bad, but I hope that isn't all you've got. Sunny Day!"

Houndoom howled, snout pointed upward, as a blinding light covered the field.

Ash shielded his eyes from the intense glare, the rain completely vanishing.

"Pika…." 'Well, that worked for maybe a minute'.

A blunt but not untrue statement.
"Now Fire Blast!"

And once more the fire attack was sent flying at one of his Pokémon, this time even larger and faster.

"Goodra, weaken it with Dragon Breath!"

Goodra nodded, before bellowing the breath attack. It flew towards the Fire Blast, sparking a few times as it went with purple and red before exploding into a larger, more colorful version of itself.

The attack collided with Fire Blast, holding it there for a few seconds before collapsing and letting a weaker attack through.

Goodra took the attack, though not too much damage it appeared.

"What was that?"

"It would appear that Goodra evolved the attack into Dragon Pulse."

The Pokédex's point confused Ash a bit, as that did not look like Dragon Pulse. It wasn't a glowing sphere.

Still if it was going to be calling itself that, and seemed to be stronger on top of it all…

"Goodra, Dragon Pulse!"

Goodra took a deep breath, before firing the oddly formed pulse attack right at Houndoom.

"Fire Blast!"

Ash's idea on what to do next came at the same time as his grin, which was followed nearly immediately by Pikachu turning his hat around for him.

"Quickly, use Rain Dance!"

Goodra cut off the Dragon Pulse and created the spiraling rain storm, setting it off moments before the Fire Blast was fired.

Upon being fired the Fire Blast lost power, and was overwhelmed by the Dragon Pulse.

Said pulse then blasted into Houndoom, pushing back the Mega Evolution with the first damage it had taken in the battle.

Houndoom wasn't down though, and with a quick howl the Sunny Day was set back up.

Still, it would take a lot more than a single attack to bring this Houndoom down.

"That Houndoom has taken more damage than just Dragon Pulse."

Iris's observation caught his ear, though he couldn't really look her way for what was going on before a Fire Blast was sent flying at Goodra again.

With a call for a Dragon Pulse it was struck, and he noticed something odd.

The Fire Blast seemed weaker than the last one, seeing as Dragon Pulse cancelled it out instead of leaving a minor trail of damaging sparks in its wake.

Both the observations were odd, but it did make him wonder.
"Are there any abilities that make moves stronger for a price?"

His question was quickly answered by the Pokédex, who had a tone of 'good catch' to it.

"There are, one such ability being Solar Power. Solar Power being an ability that increases power in the sun, but at the cost of damage to the user. However like any ability, a Pokémon can learn to turn it off or on…"

"And that is exactly what is going on!"

Blaine came right out and confirmed it with a raised finger.

"Houndoom and I spent years figuring out how to only release Solar Power's effect in controlled bursts. Without it, we'd defeat ourselves far too easily. Of course when we do let ourselves loose, it is certainly worth all that time…Dark Pulse!"

The spiraling black mass was fired next, this time even larger and more powerful than before. Clearly it was the boosted variety.

"Dragon Pulse!"

For lack of any better option the new attack was fired, which slammed into the Dark Pulse. It was overpowered and the Dark Pulse struck, but it was weaker and Goodra was still standing after the impact hit.

Though Goodra probably prefer to not be hit by more attacks like that.

He could see what Iris's point was though, as Houndoom seemed a bit more depleted from that attack than it should have, and it wasn't because of age.

He had seen Tracey's Scyther enough times to know the difference.

"Secret Power!"

A pink aura wafted from Houndoom towards Goodra like a pulse across the field.

"Use your tail!"

Goodra slammed his tail into the air, bounding him above the attack power before crashing back down on the ground.

"Dark Pulse!"

"Dragon Pulse and go into Bide!"

The two attacks collided, and while un-boosted the Dark Pulse still overpowered Dragon Pulse and flew into the red glowing Goodra.

However the red light had flared up just as the Dragon Pulse had been unleashed, so once the attack hit Bide charged up in and full and sent the white beam flying back at Houndoom.

"Use Solar Power on your Fire Blast!"

Blaine's command was followed by the attack, which slammed into the Bide beam and shattered it before crashing right into Goodra, who was sent flying right into him.
He caught Goodra before said dragon could hit the ground, stumbling back from the impact and struggling with the sheer bulk, but he was holding.

Pikachu darted off his shoulder before Goodra crashed into him, landing on the field as Ash managed to get a stable footing and avoided falling or being crushed.

"That was not intended."

Blaine's apology for sending a rather heavy dragon into him was quickly met by the declaration from the robotic judge.

"Goodra is unable to battle, the winner is Houndoom. In addition, as Pikachu darted onto the field, Pikachu is now in play as the fourth Pokémon in this Gym battle for the challenger, Ash Ketchum."

…

"Wow, he's strong."

Alish's compliment for Ash catching Goodra was only somewhat registered by Anabel, who looked at her hand and frowned.

It was equally impressive and dangerous, and after all her thoughts and resolve to help Ash she'd been too shocked to do anything about the flying dragon.

…

After returning Goodra, Ash needed a moment to catch himself. That was a bit of a scary moment there, after all.

He was pretty sure you could get hurt from situations like that.

A deep breath, a moment to let the adrenaline fizzle out, and he was back focusing on the field, where Pikachu was looking back at him nervously.

"Pikapi. 'This wasn't what I was going for, I was just…'

Trying to get out of the way, he got it. A bit less pressure, a bit less likely to be hurt by mistake, it was completely understandable.

Unplanned sure, and if Magmar was last Squirtle was going to be sitting this out. But, there were worst Pokémon to put your faith in to defeat a powerful opponent than Pikachu.

In fact there were a lot that were worse, and only a few that were better. And as his name wasn't Cynthia, he didn't have one of the few that possibly were.

"Well, it's a bit redundant to say, but Pikachu I choose you!"

"It is redundant unless you wanted to substitute, Secret Power!"

And with that the battle was on again as Houndoom sent the pink energy pulse across the field again.

"Dodge it with Quick Attack!"

Pikachu seemed to pick up that that wasn't all he had in mind, so the speeding charge towards Houndoom wasn't as fast as it could have been. Still it was more than enough to avoid the Secret
Power pulse and get in close to Houndoom.

Houndoom gained a shimmering aura as Counter was prepped, which was just what Ash was expecting.

"Zap Cannon!"

He couldn't see Pikachu grin as the electric ball was formed and slammed right into Houndoom.

Despite being so up close it was pretty much a punching attack, Counter didn't react as the sparking ball was slammed into Houndoom, who yowled from the strike.

Pikachu bounced back from directly next to the Mega Evolved Pokémon as it growled back at him.

"Well, that was clever, and fairly powerful at that."

Blaine's compliment wasn't much appreciated by Houndoom, who seemed to grumble something.

…

Misty was quite sure she heard Alish admonish Houndoom for language under her breath.

…

"Thunderbolt!"

"Dark Pulse!"

The two attacks collided, with the Dark Pulse winning out and flying towards Pikachu. Pikachu avoided the remnants with a quick dodge before firing another Thunderbolt.

Houndoom blocked it with a Dark Pulse, the remnants of which flew into the ceiling instead of at Pikachu, though Ash started to notice a few sparks appear along Houndoom's coat.

"Alright Pikachu, now let's do Wild Charge!"

Yellow electricity formed around Pikachu, framing him in black and white as he charged at Houndoom. Houndoom made the motion to start Counter, but as Ash had spotted, the effects of Zap Cannon kept it from reacting.

With a shoulder slam Pikachu knocked Houndoom with great force, knocking the hound back on trembling legs.

It was nearly over.

"Alright Pikachu, let's end this with one Thunderbolt!"

Pikachu's cheeks sparked with all available power before firing it right towards Houndoom, who opened its maw with a fiery counter attack all to itself.

"Fire Blast, with the last dregs of that Sunny Day!"

Fire Blast was fired into the Thunderbolt, crashing into it and holding in place for a moment. However just as the Fire Blast started to win out, Houndoom's body twitched and reverted from the Mega Evolved state as Houndoom fell to the ground in utter exhaustion.
The Fire Blast flew towards Pikachu, who stared right into its path as he fired another Thunderbolt. It shattered against the Fire Blast, though by the time it struck Pikachu it had been quite weakened. It pushed Pikachu all the way back to his feet, and left Pikachu waving his hands to try and cool them down, and panting heavily on top of it all, but he was still standing.

"Houndoom is unable to battle!"

…

Iris grinned as that Mega Evolution was finally taken down. Good for Ash and Pikachu, she could not have seen them do that when she first met them. Though why did she sort of remember him throwing a Pokéball at her when that happened. It was not what happened at all. Odd quirks of her mind aside, she ignored the ache in the back of her skull that was a reminder she had not slept all that well. The battle was entering the final stage, and it should keep her awake for it. After all, Ash’s battles were never boring.

…

"Well done, as quite likely the last Gym Leader you will face before the League I must say you should be good on the Mega Evolution front. However, I still have one Pokémon, and you won’t get a Volcano Badge until you can defeat a true denizen of the volcano!"

With that declaration Blaine threw the last Pokéball into the air, which burst into a shape that Ash did recognize.

It wasn’t what he was expecting though.

"Magmor!"

"Magmortar, the final evolution of Magmar and the Blast Pokémon. Magmortar in the wild claim volcanic craters as their territory, which mated pairs protect viciously. They shoot attacks from their cannon like arms."

As the Magmortar stared him and Pikachu down, Pikachu still heavily panting in exhaustion, Ash knew one thing. Evolution or not, there was only one thing to do.

"Pikachu, take five."

And as his partner did in fact take five, he threw out his last Pokéball, which exploded into Charizard, who roared at the first normal Gym battle he’d be facing in the new timeline since evolving.

No rain, no Stealth Rock, just him and a Magmar evolution.

Charizard looked a bit surprised at the sight of Magmortar, but nodded. Confirmation this was the same Magmar, but evolved perhaps?
Or was it good enough regardless?

"Begin!"

"Lava Plume!"

Magmortar began the battle by expelling an explosion from within itself, sending a smoldering smoke cloud right at Charizard's way.

Charizard blew the attack away with his wings.

"Alright, now Flame Charge!"

Charizard charged, the flame coating around him glowing with new force as the attack came in for Magmortar.

"Skull Bash!"

Ash remembered Magmar using that move the first time, and Magmortar clearly still had it as the two Fire-types collided head first in the center of the field, sending a massive wave of force through the arena.

It nearly knocked him down, and he heard a thump from the seating. The clothes and hair of everyone present were blown wildly as the shockwave burst through the room; Ash nearly lost his hat if not for Pikachu keeping it in place.

The two were now grappling, their heads butting into each other as each seemed determined to make the other blink first.

"Mud Slap!"

He distinctly noted Magmortar's cheeks puff up, as if ready to spit mud into Charizard's face. Which it probably was.

It would be effective, even if it was probably what one could call cheap.

"Charizard, stop Magmortar!"

He wasn't entire sure the best way to do so though, but Charizard seemed to have an idea as Charizard's face darkened and he seemed to glare right into Magmortar with glowing red eyes.

Magmortar made a sound that somewhat resembled choking, and the attack was cancelled as a small dribble of mud rolled out of the corner of Magmortar's mouth, shortly followed by Charizard throwing Magmortar back.

Did Charizard just use Scary Face? He wasn't sure when Charizard had learned to do that, but he'd take it.

"Metal Claw!"

"Karate Chop, then Lava Plume!"

Before Charizard could keep up the pressure, the slashing attack was deflected with one glowing hand, followed by a fired burst from the other hand's cannon that pushed Charizard back a bit.

"Grr…" 'Not bad, got something that'll actually hurt?'
But it did nothing to dampen Charizard's enthusiasm.

"Thunderbolt!"

"Deflect it, then Flamethrower!"

His quick order ensured that the next attack didn't do anything more to said enthusiasm, as the fired bolt of electricity was met by a swing of a dragon-enhanced tail, which deflected the bolt away.

The deflection was then met by a strike right into Magmortar's chest, which pushed Magmortar back just as the Lava Plume had Charizard.

He got the impression that the cocky look in Magmortar's eyes and the words Magmortar uttered were similar to those Charizard used.

...

The air wasn't open.

Charizard noted the lack of air he could exploit as he was called for another Flamethrower.

Like often when a human gave a command he found it a bit odd to do so, but couldn't deny the results when the attack struck the shoulder of Magmortar quite precisely.

He was good, but he probably would not have been able to make that hit. Humans had good eyes.

He winced as that phrase sat with him for a moment, even as he only just heard Ash's call to avoid the Thunderbolt from Magmortar.

Bad phrasing, bad phrasing.

As another came, he heeded the call of Ash and matched it with a Flamethrower.

The two attacks were matched, though with a bit more deep exhaling on his end his attack began winning out.

He was strong. He always had room to be stronger still, but he was still stronger than he was when he first came to this Gym.

Or more specifically the volcano that was this Gym once, but regardless of the exacts he was stronger.

He would win as before, even if he didn't have all the air he needed to move.

The Flamethrower overpowered the Thunderbolt, and slammed into Magmortar. It wasn't much damage true, but it still was a blow.

He would keep it going.

"Screech!"

Magmortar's arms were now firing a sonic cannon his way, an impending attack he didn't really see a way to get out of. But perhaps Ash…

"Use Flame Charge and have it burst out with all the power you can at the last second!"
He did just that, setting himself on fire as building up all of the power he could. When he could feel
the sound wave ticking his scales he let it all out in a massive burst of fire and energy, which
shattered the attack before it could hit him.

He did hear Pikachu complain as the sound assaulted his ears.

He took into the air as the sound began, ready to strike at Magmortar the moment an opening
presented itself.

"Dragon Tail!"

Ash seemed to see one as he flew forward, his tail ready to strike the tensing Magmortar.

"Thunderbolt!"

He blocked the attack with his tail as he had before, the jolts coursing through his body and setting
half his nerves alight with shock, though his tail was in the air this time, creating a bit of an odd
angle. An angle that sent the electric attack right into Magmortar's knee opposite the shoulder he had
struck earlier.

Was that a result of that human thing called 'arithmetic'? That hit seemed angle based, at least from
what he understood of angles.

"Now grab it!"

He grinned at Ash's command. It was time for Seismic Toss.

He loved that move.

Landing behind the struck Magmortar, he grabbed the Pokémon from behind and lifted him into the
air.

He made sure to keep the cannons from being able to point his way. His wings were flapping, so
even the explosive Lava Plume would not be a problem.

"Mud Slap! Stop it before it can execute the move!"

He couldn't see it, but he could feel Magmortar filling his cheeks. That wouldn't do.

He couldn't glare at it again to stop it, he'd need to improvise.

That meant slamming his chin into the top of Magmortar's head, breaking Magmortar's concentration
and causing him to spit up mud.

He felt some of it splatter his face, but nothing nearly so bothersome that he couldn't follow through
with Ash's call.

"Charizard, use Seismic Toss!"

He did so with pleasure, nearly as much so as he did teaching Togepi how to use the move himself.

…

Charizard slammed Magmortar into the ground with a quite severe amount of force.

It shook the ground, sending up a plume of dust as Charizard landed at his side, growling in
contentment at the impact, though also with a judging way.

The words he was muttering to himself reminded Ash of that one time he listened to Professor Oak comment on his golf swing.

The odd comparison aside, the smoke cleared and he soon found himself with the answer to the battle.

"Magmortar is unable to battle, the winner is Charizard! The Gym Leader is out of useable Pokémon, and the match goes to the challenger Ash Ketchum!"

…

The boy was prone to being animated, Blaine noted.

He posed with Charizard and Pikachu after getting the badge, and seemingly being surprised that something odd didn't mess with the receiving of said badge. He was praised by his companions for his win, though with an air of being aware of what had been rough in the Gym battle and needing work.

He left soon after, as he noticed Alish walking up to him, a thoughtful look on her.

"Grandpa…do you think they're like me? Misty seemed to pick up that I knew what your Pokémon were saying, and seeing as Ash caught…"

"Oh most certainly. He'd have to buy the same shirt sizes as Bruno to have caught that Goodra like that if he wasn't."

Though he hadn't picked up on the behavior in the stands. His attentions could not be everywhere at once after all.

"Should I…"

He stopped her question with a shake of the head.

"I may not have noticed that Misty noticed your involuntary motions, but I do notice other things. It seems that those four are currently going through a period of fluctuating hormones and confusion. Best not to fan the flames of it."

He noticed Alish being confused at his question.

"Teen drama. Best not risk being drawn into it before your time."

Alish's mouth opened wide in understanding, before she blinked with a sudden thought.

"But wait, aren't I a teenager?"

"Yes, but one without teen drama. I'd like to keep it that way for a while."

Avoiding anger over the actions of 'Brad' and other such teenage things for now, Blaine couldn't help but wonder something about his challenger.

How was he a he?

He was aware of the odd gender ratio going on, and he probably had a bit more understanding of it than most.
Back before Alish was born he was well aware of the issues that had been had trying to, well, have her. Her parents were having fertility problems, and odd ones at that.

Neither had the inherent issues that led to such things, the only odd thing about it being that Alish's father had a bit of a higher count of Y chromosome carrying gametes.

Yet for some reason they were not being successful until they had taken more precise measures, and with an X chromosome carrying gamete specifically chosen. Hence, Alish.

With what the young ones in the room shared of course…it was certainly an explanation of the odd bloodliner gender mechanics. Though it didn't explain why that was the case, why it was only the case now from everything people knew pre-boom, and why Ash hadn't been affected the same way.

Of course this finding was something he'd keep to himself for now, if only because explaining what he had found would only result in Alish getting harassed.

Also asking Ash about his gametes would only confuse the poor kid, and if he used the more common words the boy would probably be well within his rights to run away.

…

Entirely unaware of the scientific observations occurring, Misty found herself at the start of post-Gym festivities with a tray of ice creams for the each of them.

Or to be more specific the three of them, as Iris was currently conked out on Ash's shoulder, a fact that seemed to have left Ash in a state of mild paralysis.

She felt a spark of annoyance raise up in her, if tempered by the fact she knew Iris hadn't slept all that well.

Though it might just be because she had no idea what would become of Iris's ice cream, as it would certainly be melted by the time she woke up…

*POP!*

A stubby yellow hand promptly solved the problem as the ice cream was quickly taken by Psyduck.

'So, what should we do now?'

Anabel's question was answered by Ash, who had to eat his cone with his left hand due to Iris's sleeping form pinning his more dominant arm. After he was finished with his awkward ice cream cone movement, his answer came.

"I'd actually like to go up to Pallet Town. I think I want to try something new with training before the League. If you guys have anywhere else you'd rather go its fine, I can figure something out."

None of them had anywhere else to be, so that was the plan.

…

Still having a few hours before their ship off Cinnabar set sail, the group (or rather Iris) decided to do some last minute training while they waited. It would be just some light (well, Iris' definition of 'light' at least) physical training, with no powers.

For a change, no one had objections. Anabel herself was actually starting to enjoy the exercises, and she didn't feel as tired as before.
She did notice, though, that Misty seemed to take her training with an unusual enthusiasm, working much harder than before. Iris actually had to tell her to stop and not to overdo it, lest that she could end up injured or something.

She suggested to Misty that they went to do some meditation techniques. That way they could rest their bodies and train their minds while they were at it, and Iris agreed, deciding to continue her training with Ash for the time being.

The two of them were now sitting cross-legged on the sand, as they listened to the sound of the waves. While technically part of the training, they clearly needed a moment's rest, especially Misty.

Anabel had noticed that the redhead seemed to be trying to push herself more than usual, specifically since the Sabrina incident. So it wasn't too hard to guess that perhaps the reasons for Misty to take her training more seriously had to do less with being stronger and more with her concern for the boy they all cared for. While understandable, Iris was right, she couldn't overdo it, lest she ended up hurting herself.

Being within her passive telepathy range, Anabel could tell that Misty was a little bored with the meditation, and her thoughts were somehow directed to Ash. Was she still worried that something could happen to him again? She could also feel a desire to be stronger…

Stronger to keep Ash safe…

Anabel heard a faint sound, and opened an eye to take a peek in Misty's direction. Said eye and the other quickly widened as she noticed what was going on. If it wasn't for Iris' sense-sharpening training and her own telepathy, she would have probably scanned the area to make sure nobody was looking.

That was supposed to be a light training, without powers, but Misty had two rings of water orbiting around her at waist level, glimmering every few seconds.

'Misty…' Anabel called out to her.

Misty didn't open her eyes. 'What's up? Aren't you supposed not to interrupt my meditation?'

Hadn't she noticed what she was doing? Probably not given her tone.

'It's not that, Open your eyes and see what you're doing.'

"What am I--" Misty finally opened her eyes, and was left with her mouth agape for a few seconds as she finally realized. "This is…"

'Aqua Ring?' Anabel said as she recognized the move in question. 'Misty, we weren't supposed to use our powers.'

"I didn't…' Misty looked around alarmed, and then the water rings stopped orbiting and vanished in a splash, much to their relief.

'What happened? I thought this was just a light physical training.'

"I never meant to do that," said Misty. "It's just… I wished I had a bit more energy to keep going a little more and then…"

Misty stopped there, but Anabel didn't need her to say anything more. Something similar had happened when she and Ash learned to use Heal Pulse on each other, it wasn't uncommon to
discover new powers when they needed them, or at least in Misty's case right now, when they felt they needed them for whatever reason.

She felt she needed it because of Ash.

Anabel stood back up and offered Misty a hand to help her; that would be enough training for the time being. Misty accepted the gesture, and she recalled for a moment their first encounter, when back at that Power Plant.

'You're thinking about Ash again, aren't you?'

Anabel wasn't sure why she asked, she just felt that Misty needed to talk about it. The redhead sighed and let out a slight chuckle before answering.

"It's so weird isn't it? A few weeks ago I was complaining about Iris' training regime, but now… I feel like I'm not doing enough. Like I need to grow stronger for him… for Ash, I mean. In case someone tries to hurt him again."

Just like she had imagined. It made sense, they had told her that back when they met Iris, Ash had been abducted by some woman called Pokémon Hunter J. Why a woman who stole Pokémon for business would want to kidnap him was beyond them, but that didn't matter. It was obvious that Misty didn't want to get used to Ash getting kidnapped for whatever reason.

'You're the one who has traveled the longest with him, aren't you? Obviously it must have been much harder for you to see him get kidnapped, not once, but twice.'

"It's not just that," said Misty. "I can't explain it, but… have you met someone, and suddenly you feel as if you knew them for a lifetime? As if you were friends in another life or something, if that makes any sense?"

Anabel hesitated for a moment before answering. That sounded a lot like some stories she had read about lovers who not even death could do apart, and they were fated to meet over and over again throughout the eras. Of course, she couldn't use the word 'lovers' so lightly.

'I can't say I have… but some people say some friendships can transcend life and time itself. At least to me, it doesn't sound crazy.'

She tried to smile. It wasn't like she thought that was something for real, but she had known Misty long enough to know she wasn't crazy. Maybe she was just trying to explain her own feelings and that was the best she could come up with.

"You know, until I met Ash, I never thought about trying to become stronger for someone else. I've been alone for a long time, so I've had to take care of myself. But now… it's almost like I can't picture my life before he showed up."

Anabel smiled even more. 'He's really dear to you, isn't he?'

Misty nodded. Obviously she cared for him beyond being a dear friend and a traveling companion. From what she knew, she had come to rely on him for many things, and that included to keep not just her but all of them safe from harm. Anabel felt the same way.

"Anabel… you too like Ash, don't you?"

There was also her not-so-subtle attraction to him as a person, as a boy. She felt her cheeks flushing, but given that Iris had already talked to her about that, it would make it easier and a tad less
"I'll be honest," Misty continued, "maybe I am a bit jealous inside. But the more time I spend with Ash, and with you two, the more I get it. Iris might like his strength more, but she also likes his kindness, just like me. And I'm sure you do too."

'I'm not arguing that,' she replied. 'Personally, what I like the most is that cheerful and optimistic attitude of his. Although sometimes…'

She paused for a moment, her demeanor faltering for a second. A thought had suddenly come to her mind, about Ash, and a concern she too had about him, but had kept to herself.

"Sometimes what?" Misty inquired. Given that she had caught her brief grimace, there was no point in trying to hide it.

'Do you remember what I said about Red the night after the Fuchsia Tag Tournament? About how I could feel he was bottling a lot of pain inside?'

Misty grimaced too. "Don't tell me… you've felt the same with Ash?"

She shook her head. 'Not quite the same. With Red, I can feel he has it all the time. With Ash… it's just a few times and for short moments, but… it's like he too is burying something inside. Something that causes him pain for some reason."

"Doesn't it have to do with, you know, that sociopath who just left him as a gift for his mother, and did the same to who knows how many other women?" Misty asked.

That seemed a logical conclusion to draw, but Anabel knew it wasn't the case. For all she knew, Ash didn't know a thing about his father until Sabrina ranted about it. No, it came from before Saffron, and it happened more often after that.

Sometimes she picked up stray thoughts that didn't make any sense. Like that time Red and Ash were discussing about their training methods, she could hear a conversation that sounded like Ash had argued with someone else about the same topic, someone who was more aggressive and far less pleasant. And why did suddenly Paul's face come to mind?

'No, I don't think so. This is from before the Sabrina thing. It's more like… something he feels he can't share with us. I think he might be afraid of our reaction.'

Anabel saw Misty place her hand on her chest. Of course she'd be worried, Ash was keeping a secret to himself, something that he was afraid to tell them. But what could it be? And why was he keeping it to himself? After all, the reveal of his father being the worst of the worst among criminals in history didn't change a thing about Ash himself, barring those anger outbursts, which were far and in-between, he was the nicest boy she had ever met in her life.

She could feel that Misty wanted to help him, and she felt the same way. If they hadn't left him when they learned about his supposed father, she doubted there would be something so terrible to drive them away from him.

Since Iris had asked for her help on trying to get Ash to control his anger, maybe she could work on that too. She had to be careful, though, Ash wouldn't tell her anything if he felt uncomfortable. First thing was to get him to trust her enough.

However, any thoughts about helping Ash were interrupted by a running Wartortle who seemed to be suffering a panic attack.
This tower they were interested in building, the Realgam Tower, was something he didn't really match.

He was no interior decorator, such careers were rare in Orre outside of a few places. However he was aware that in a tower of shining metal and glass, a man with a bared chest who looked like he could have been playing a barbaric king in some low budget movie was not exactly the most expected visitor.

In fact even the guy with a giant afro would fit in more, which was an odd thought to have. The idea that Miror B. would fit in a non-asylum better than someone else was not a common thought.

But appearances had their time and place, and this was not exactly a time where people were bustling around the tower.

That would be in about a year, give or take.

Until then, it was just him and the representative from the group he had been doing business with as part of the overall operations of Team Snagem.

A representative that did make him wish it was the music obsessed Miror B. here, for at least he was amusingly disturbed.

No, he had to be meeting with the one who made his skin crawl whenever he spoke.

"You've been doing quite well for us, you and your little band of thieves."

The man was Ein, Cipher head scientist. Gonzap didn't particularly like any member of Cipher, and he was well aware that most of Cipher did not particularly like his team and it was certainly a possibility their partnership could break down one day, but of all the members he had met Ein disturbed him the most.

Some of Cipher smelled like they needed to shower more, others like they dusted themselves in lavender.

Ein smelled like evil. There was no other way he could describe it, and he looked the part too.

"Well, I wouldn't be calling the team Team Snagem if we were not able to steal things."

Then they'd just sound like fanboys of an old League competitor, which was far from the truth. Gonzap cared little for the professional battle circuit, available only to those who were lucky enough to be born in a rich region.

What they did for amusement and fame an Orrean did to survive.

"Yes, and you've been quite busy haven't you? To think you managed to double our expected numbers from last month's raid on Gateon Port."

Gonzap concealed his suspicion about that job.

Their original job had been to break into a Verich Shipping vessel and capture all of the Pokémon cargo within. The job had been a success, too much of such in Gonzap's opinion.
Was Ein's organization, Team Cipher, somehow connected to Verich Shipping? It would be a good con if it was, setting up their own ships to be robbed to cover their tracks should one of the busybodies on the international police start sniffing around.

However the job had hit an unexpected windfall when his newest recruit had managed to hack into a completely different ship after he had run a diversion on the local guards, and they managed to get into another ship and run off with a crate of Pokéballs.

Said amnesiac recruit wasn't able to explain how he was able to hack their security systems, or even where he learned to hack, but one could not argue with the results of said inexplicit skill.

The owner of said extra robbed ship, some energy company from Sinnoh, had probably raised a massive fuss and warning about expecting justice on threat of lobbying, but really it was just smoke up the pipe.

No one cared for Orre, so what was the threat of sanctions on top of that?

"My group saw a chance to do more than originally planned, and took the chance. I doubt you disagreed with the end result."

Ein shook his head.

"Not at all, we were more than pleased to get additional Pokémon for our goal, especially ones from Sinnoh. I never thought I'd get a chance to work on a Glameow or a Stunky. It was an excellent way to speed up the time table. We might actually be ready to put our full plans into motion before next year's Silver Conference."

When was that exactly? Again Gonzap didn't much care for rich kids play fighting.

Ein rose from the table the two were sitting and walked to the massive window. It wasn't much of a view, all it showed was desert.

They weren't even on the side to look at Phenac City.

Of course the windows weren't made for any sensible people. They were made for people who'd be willing come to Orre.

"Of course, to make the time table we will need to change a few things. You are doing well as it is, but to really keep things going on schedule we will need to go into phase 2."

And what was what, exactly?

He could almost hear Ein grin, before he turned around rapidly.

Gonzap recognized the motion from his youth on the Pyrite Town streets, and on reflex he flung the table up to stop or slow down the projectile. However, it wasn't a bullet that flew out.

It was an energy whip, red in color, that phased right through the table and wrapped itself around his wrist. It vanished from sight after a moment, nor did he feel it around his wrist.

However when he moved to put the table back in place and took a step back, he felt what he could only call a firm grip around his wrist.

Ein was smirking at him.

"I see you have the right idea and reaction, but hardly the ability to avoid it. That was hardly a bullet
after all."

Ein had dropped his jacket, revealing a scrawny body that was neither chubby nor muscled. On his left arm was a red and black metal device, the tip of which was glowing with the same color as the energy whip originating from a little lens.

"I'll confess that the energy restraint was not our work, but we obtained it from an agreement with a group from Kanto. The rest of this is Cipher work; we call it the Snag Machine. This one is model zero."

"A Snag Machine?"

Ein grinned at his question.

"Yes, though I suppose the term 'snag' is vague enough you'd appreciate the elaboration. This device does what countless Ranger scientists dreamed of for decades and disrupts the protection and control of a Pokéball upon a Pokémon. However it does not, as those fools would prefer, set them free. Despite what they tend to think, Pokémon aren't so flawed a creation they can only be tamed by the work of the balls. What this device does, is make any Pokémon catchable as if they were wild Pokémon."

Gonzap stared in stunned surprise at such a feat from the machine, while Ein continued.

"Yes, if you were in front of Cynthia herself, you could take her Garchomp and make it your own. Now I'm sure you are aware that trying to wear down such a Pokémon could be a difficult task, so I'm sure you'd be happy to know that this device is equipped with that odd 'glitch', as we officially call it. You won't have to worry about running out of Pokéballs like some imbecilic fifteen year old in Kanto, and if one of our groups was ever to find a Master Ball…"

It was highly unlikely that such a thing would ever happen, but the point was still made. He did have to make another though.

"That won't fit on my arm."

"A price for musculature, you will simply have to give it to a subordinate. Though fret not, for I did say this was model zero. We have other Snag Machines in the works, and it would not take much work to make one that even you or Dakim could make use of."

"Of course, before I give you the instruction manual for model zero I do have a question. I was looking over the manifest of Pokémon obtained from Verich and the Sinnoh ship: Skiploom, Quagsire, Stantler, Lickitung, Poliwrath, KeCLEON, Audino, Throh, Sawk, Noibat, Espurr, Honedge, Mawile, Stunky, Glameow, Croagunk, Bronzor, Murkrow, and Misdreavus, and something has been bothering me about it. It seems, lacking somehow."

The tone at the end of Ein's sentence made his back hair stand on end, and Gonzap was reminded of why he found Ein to be quite unsettling.

"Clearly you must have thought that the shipments would be about equal. Twice the ship, twice the cargo. However I suspect you must have forgotten that the other ship was not a dedicated shipper of non-energy products, and assumed that a single crate from it would match several from Verich Shipping."

It was the best sort of lie to say. After all, it was a truth as well.
Several Hours Later, Team Snagem Hideout

Ein had commented that there was something off about the shipment they had last received, and there was a truth to that.

Normally the agreement was that as part of their pay, they would be allowed to keep some of the stolen Pokémon for their own use. It was understandable after all, more firepower to steal better and from better targets.

However the understanding was that this would be limited to Pokémon found in excess, they'd keep Oddish while Cipher would take the Snorlax.

However let it not be said by anyone that he was not capable of kindness to those under his command.

They were the riffraff of the riffraff country, and there was a level of brotherhood from that status.

So sometimes he'd let them keep something they officially shouldn't and just leave it off the official manifest.

A Pineco here, a Smeargle there, that sort of thing.

He paused as he walked through their lair, the first of the new machines still under his arm in the box with the instructions on use along with it, and he felt a hint of a smile form.

Lying on the couch was their newest recruit, the amnesiac Wes, and two of the very things he was just thinking of.

Cipher would certainly not be harmed by letting his best raw recruit ever keep a pair of Eevees. They would be the start of Team Snagem going on to greater and greater things.

Especially if they ever found some stones to make the Eevee evolve.

They may not know where Wes had come from, or why he didn't have most of his memories, or why he seemed to have the skills he did, skills and instincts that seemed even sharper than his own.

It made Gonzap pause, the idea that there was a harder place and learning curve than the Pyrite streets. Perhaps it was best the boy did not remember the exacts and only had the vaguely remembered skills from it.

But that was in the past, and Team Snagem had a very different direction going forward.

To the future.
He looked at the three who had come before him.

They looked back at him, tense with readiness to do whatever he would ask of them, be it question or task.

If he was younger he'd ask them to jump, but he wasn't that young man anymore.

"Good job."

As they relaxed with cheerful sighs he mused on his words.

Jessie, James, and Meowth had provided him all the data he wished on the boy from Viridian all the way back to his home town.

It was more than enough to consolidate his plan, and with him lingering in his hometown for the time being they could take a break from their vigil and come his way.

It was time to give them new orders.

"With the current phase of your task complete, I will soon be assigning you a new objective. But before I do so, as you have both earned the right to, and it will amuse me, I will let you ask one question. Tell me, why do you think I had you monitor the boy?"

His three servants looked at one another for a moment, than back at him nervously.

"...Promise you won't get mad?"

He gave a tentative nod to James's question. A nod that conveyed that unless they asked something that could only be treated as offensive they could ask anything.

"Well then, here's what we were sort of thinking. You see, the boy is a young man with remarkable powers..."

He nodded.

"...who was born to a single mother with no father in sight..."

He nodded again, curious where they were going with this.

"...his mother, unlike you, doesn't have dark hair..."

He nodded once more, seeing exactly where they were going.

"...so we were sort of guessing, that he was your son and you are interested in seeing if he's worthy of taking over Team Rocket for ya someday with his Bloodliner powers."

As Meowth finished the trio's theory he let out a brief chuckle before shaking his head.

"A funny little theory, but no. My son has red hair, and while what I've seen of his mother is a nice-looking woman, that is not the case at all. No, Ash Ketchum is not my son, and that is not why I
wanted you to observe and report back to me on."

That gave the trio pause, causing them to look at each other nervously before looking back at him.

"Okay…then why did you want us to watch some random kid from Pallet Town?"

Jessie’s question would be answered.

"I’m sure you’re aware that people like him are becoming more common. No one knows why, and I
don’t personally care. There will always be a place for Team Rocket, regardless of what the ‘average’
person is. As a result that also means there are criminals of that nature as well."

He still had the brother of one particular one locked up in this very facility, whose DNA had been
useful for matching with a strand of hair the three had gotten from their target, and a few others
including a boy from HopHopHop Town.

"You talking about the guys older than the kid, or…"

"Both. There’s a bothersome little nuisance out in Johto trying to make a name for himself, but that
isn’t your concern unless you get promoted or transferred. What I want in place is someone who
exists as an opposite of their kind on the wrong side of the law. A paragon, an icon, someone who
can be seen as the model of ‘right’ to oppose them in both action and viewpoint. Doing so protects
Team Rocket, and without the issues of also being part of the organization."

Such issues including being more noticeable, possibly having interest in the power struggles, and
having to pay him.

"So, you want the kid to be some sort of champion hero? You want him to be a good guy?"

He nodded Meowth’s way.

"What better shield for Team Rocket from Bloodliners who might compete with us than a Bloodliner
hero? Even if he doesn't put on spandex there is power in just being visible."

Namely that in ten or so years when he was some sort of champion or other famous person and
revealed as a Bloodliner to the world, which was bound to happen at some point, young Bloodliners
would look at him for inspiration, and not some King.

Thus not being a threat to Team Rocket unless they walked past a grunt running the other way with a
sack of money.

Then, while annoying, it would be no different than the regular reaction to someone passing a grunt
with a sack of money.

"I had my eye on a few others, but as he's the oldest and for lack of a better phrase, more marketable
than the others, I'm going to be betting on him."

"Sir, you do remember that the Red kid beat him at…"

"Smiling is more important than raw win ratios. Take it from someone with experience, on their own
between the two of them it is Red Tajiri who is most likely to directly compete with Team Rocket
than Ash Ketchum. Of course, as neither exists in a vacuum that is where the new assignment for the
three of you comes in."

The three resumed stiff attention to his words, and he nodded before continuing.
"Your new job is to make sure that no one makes Ash Ketchum stop being a good man that everyone like him can admire and aspire to be."

"You want us to keep him out of casinos?"

"Only if they aren't run by us, Jessie, but that is not my main concern. I do not want him to wake up one day, find out some blood crazed nut job blew his mother's house up, and have him declare war on crime. That is the exact opposite of what I want from a paragon shield. If you see anyone dedicated to attacking him and hurting the things he cares about, get rid of them."

"Got it, make sure no one gives him reason to dress in spiked black leather, rename himself Shadow, and declare vengeance on the world. Though, do you want one of us to watch his home…"

"That will be taken care of by other members. Depending on how large a detail it will require, it may require an entirely new department being formed. Do well and you might find yourselves running it."

With that the three cheered loudly and giddily at the idea of being in charge of the Team Rocket's 'keep the world safe for criminal enterprises' department in future, he nodded their way.

At least if he did do such a thing, he'd be sure they'd stay loyal.

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**Pallet Town, around the same time**

As a mother, Delia had an intrinsic sense of her only child's approach.

It may have been months since he left, and even with the clatter of new shoes on the dirt and grass, she knew that he was coming upon her place even as she moved to the door.

One might think she'd be at risk for a blunder of mistaken identity, but she knew even the specific way that Ash would maneuver the door knob.

Meaning the warm body she embraced the moment the door opened up was her son's, no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

"Oh honey, it's so good to see you again! Seeing you on a screen or hearing your voice over a phone isn't enough! It's not enough to tell if you've been eating well or getting enough sleep, and with six badges and a League qualification I can't imagine you've been getting a proper eight hours…"

Delia's worries stopped flooding out of her when she made a few observations about her hug.

It was definitely Ash she was hugging, but there seemed to be a bit more above her head than she remembered.

Also the arms seemed a bit tougher than she remembered. The percentage of muscle mass present had increased.

She looked up and saw the awkward, embarassed but sincere smile on her son's face, Pikachu on his shoulder and looking at her in amusement as she noticed the changes his Trainer had gone through.

Her taller and more toned son, with a trio of female heads looking around his shoulders to stare at her hugging him with a mixture of embarrassment, confusion, and some level of longing.

"Glad to see you too mom, but could you stop hugging me? You are kind of blocking the door."
Her son getting taller wasn't exactly the surprise of the year.

She remembered the man she met that night, height wasn't a surprising thing for Ash to inherit from him.

The muscle was a bit odd though. She was aware that Trainers didn't tend to be unfit, but she wasn't entirely sure where all of the growth Ash had came from.

Did he take up weight lifting? Or did he become one of those Trainers who trained with their Pokémon instead of training them, like that Unovan Gym Leader who wrestled his Pokémon?

She really hoped that wasn't the case. That was dangerous.

Her son's muscle growth aside, she noted the three girls that he had brought home, though as she referred to them as such she had to resist the urge to slap herself.

That had a completely different context to what seemed to be going on.

All three were rather nice-looking girls, though in different ways.

The girl with dark skin looked like someone into athletics, and not into personal grooming if her hair was any indication. It was nice hair, but as someone who had to remind her son for years to brush his hair she could see signs of a lack of care.

The lavender-haired girl looked like she could look pretty good in a suit in a way Delia could never quite pull off. She hadn't made a sound since they had come on by, perhaps she was just shy?

Then there was the orange-haired girl, and Delia knew exactly how she'd have reacted to someone who looked like that in school.

Jealousy. Being in her thirties she could look back on such thoughts and shake her head in hindsight, but it was the truth. The girl would probably have given her teenage self a complex.

Regardless of it all three of these girls had been traveling with her son. Could even her boy's infamous obliviousness hold up against it?

…

Hospitality for visitors was sacred among the Pallet Town residents, and Delia was no exception.

First thing to do after properly introducing herself to Ash's friends was going to the kitchen to offer them something to eat, while Ash went to Professor Oak's lab for a bit to greet his Pokémon.

Also to explain himself to the Professor about the Jigglypuff he caught, which was why he was going alone.

After making a few sandwiches and waiting for the tea to heat up, the woman fell deep into her thoughts. Her first impression of Ash's new friends was that they were very nice girls, and bloodliners just like him. She had so many questions to ask them, since she didn't know much about them beyond what Ash told her, and what she had seen on TV from the tournaments they took part in.

Half of that was worry, and the other half was simple curiosity. Something natural for a mother whose son was growing, in more than one sense.
"Ms. Ketchum?"

One of said friend's voice snapped her to attention. She saw the redhead, named Misty, standing at the kitchen's entrance.

"Hi. Can I help you with something?" asked Delia.

"No, actually… I was wondering if you needed help with something, so…” The girl looked away and scratched the back of her head sheepishly, a habit Delia thought the redhead might've picked up from her son.

The woman smiled. "Don't worry, but I appreciate the thought. But since you're here, maybe we can chat for a bit. There are a few questions I have for you and the others."

"Er… sure."

Delia offered her a chair and took another, sitting in front of her. She had had enough time to think about what she was going to ask, but more importantly, how she was going to ask. She didn't want to make the girls uncomfortable, let alone making them think she was accusing them of improper things. However, she needed to sate her curiosity somehow.

"So… what was it like when you met my son?" she asked. "He already told me his version, but I'd like to hear yours too."

That part was half-truth at least. Delia knew Ash had intentionally kept the less savory details from all the things that had happened, perhaps so she wouldn't worry, but she could feel there was a lot more that she needed to know. If the girls could tell her, she'd get rid of that weight.

Misty told her how she was fishing by a river of Route 1, and she spotted Ash as he fled from the local murderous Spearow flock. Delia had to hold back a cringe, she hadn't forgotten that the previous year one of the rookie Trainers was attacked by those birds, and while she survived, didn't come out unscathed. She was glad that a combination of Ash's Bloodliner powers kicking in and Misty being close by helped him reach Viridian safe and sound.

"To be honest, at the time I just followed him because… well, I had never met another like me before," said Misty. "A Bloodliner I mean. I thought perhaps… we could understand each other. I had been travelling alone for too long, you know."

Delia nodded. That was understandable, she felt lonely and wanted a friend, there was nothing bad about that.

"So, have you enjoyed travelling with Ash?" Delia asked.

"Of course. There's never a moment of boredom with him." Misty smiled. "We've really had a lot of fun, he's a great Trainer and an awesome sparring partner. And also…"

Misty stopped, and began twiddling her fingers. Delia could also notice a slight blush on her cheeks, and that was all the answer she needed.

"He's a really nice boy, isn't he?" Delia asked, and Misty nodded. "Being near him makes me forget about all my troubles."

"I know. And now that I've met you, I can see where he got it from. Also, he has a knack for helping others for no particular reason."
"He's always been like that," Delia replied. "Even at school, he would often stand up to bullies who picked on the weaker kids. If someone needs help, whether they ask him or not, he never looks away."

"You don't need to tell me that." Misty smiled again, but then looked away and her expression turned into a slight grimace.

Was she recalling some of the less pleasant moments of their journey?

"About the Cerulean Gym badge, there's… something you should know. If anyone's to blame for what happened there… that's me."

Delia tilted her head in confusion. She was already way past what had happened in that Gym, when Ash explained that the Leaders were desperate for a victory due to their losing streak and being under PIA scrutiny, so they just dragged him into a rigged battle to tip the scales on their favor.

For all the good it did to them, anyway.

However, she couldn't imagine what Misty was about to tell her. Of how she requested to skip Cerulean altogether, of how she breathed in Vileplume pollen and had to be rushed to the nearest hospital, right in Cerulean, and how the Doctor sent him over to the Gym to blow off some steam.

Delia also noted that Misty lowered her gaze in shame as she confessed to have snapped at Ash for not respecting her wishes, even if it had been to save her life. It turned out that she had a lot of good reasons for not wanting to be near that city, or that Gym, for that matter.

"What happened at that Gym was very personal to me. I know it wasn't his fault, but I was really angry at the time and I lashed out on him. I'm really sorry for that."

"There's nothing to apologize for, dear," Delia assured her with a smile.

"We've gone through a lot of stuff during these months," Said Misty. "But let me assure you, barring that one time during Gringy City's blackout, Ash never goes around looking for trouble. It's more like… trouble finds him for some reason."

"That's what I'm worried about," Delia admitted. "Ash is my only child, and the most important thing in my life. I know he needs to chase his dreams for the future, but… I'm scared to think there could be people out there who'd want to hurt him for whatever reason."

Delia remained silent. Her boy was growing and she couldn't always be there to take care of him. But with everything that had happened, how could she be sure he wouldn't be involved in dangerous situations?

"Ms. Ketchum, this might sound weird to you, but if you're worried about Ash, you can count on me… and the others, for that matter."

Delia perked up to attention. Misty's demeanor had completely changed, it had turned much more serious, and her eyes seemed to glow with a determination the woman had only seen in her son's eyes, whenever he talked about his dreams of becoming a Pokémon Master.

The redhead took a deep breath and spoke up. "I may not have known Ash for too long, but he's done a lot for me all this time. He not only saved my life once, he encouraged me to chase my dreams, he's always supportive, and more importantly… he's been a great friend. I promise you, I won't let anything bad happen to him if I can stop it."
"Are you serious?" Delia stared into her eyes.

She could see the resolve in the girls' eyes. It was genuine, of course she meant it all. Somehow Delia felt partially relieved. Maybe she couldn't be there for Ash all the time, but she could feel more at ease if she knew he had someone to watch his back in case something happened.

Then again, there was an issue about that someone being an attractive young woman. Or three of them for that matter. Delia had no idea about how close Ash had grown with them, and the only other girl with whom her son actually formed what could be called a close friendship was Serena.

The tea began whistling and steaming, indicating that it was ready. Delia put out the fire and prepared to serve it in a few cups, placing them on a tray.

"Say, could you take this to the other girls?" She handed Misty the tray with the sandwiches and teacups. "There's something I need to do before Ash returns from the lab."

"Sure. What is it?"

"Well, we're hosting a little surprise party for Ash at my restaurant, and I need to sort out some last minute details. Could you and the others keep Ash busy for about half an hour when he comes back?"

"Are we going to get invited too?"

"Why of course! You think I'd leave my son's friends out of it? I reserved a special table only for him, but I don't think he'll mind sharing it with you girls."

Delia winked at Misty and the redhead nodded, grabbing the tray and going with the others. That wasn't a bad start. For now, perhaps she could forget about some of Ash's issues. Maybe during the party they could get to know them better.

If they were willing to take care of her son, she'd have to trust them.

…

Among the many things Ash had told them about his mother, he had forgotten to mention something. Namely, that she truly knew how to throw a party.

Even the party they had attended back in Stone Town with those brothers seemed tame compared to this one. Pallet Town had a rather small population from what they had seen, but the townsfolk knew how to have fun and celebrate the triumphs of one of their own. It was also nice to see Ash was so well-liked among his neighbors.

With the three of them being the strangers in that place, they tried to stay a bit out of focus, each for different reasons. Misty wasn't too keen on dancing or singing, so she was content with watching and occasionally greeting other guests. She did notice Iris was notably uncomfortable among the crowd and with the loud music, while Anabel simply enjoyed some snacks at the table.

"Do they really have to be so loud when they celebrate?" the wild girl asked.

Misty turned to her. "This is a quiet town, let them have some fun."

'Even Ash's mother is into it. Look at that.'

Anabel pointed at the improvised stage, where Ash's mother was performing a song with a
microphone in hand. If they didn't know better, they would have assumed the woman was just
another among the youth, seeing as she didn't look that old to begin with.

However, the three Heart Bloodliners quickly directed their attention to another corner of the party.
In the short time they had lost sight of Ash, they could see the boy had gotten himself in a little...
problem.

Not that she thought many men would call it that.

"Wow, check these arms! Dance with me, Ash!"

"No fair! You danced with him on his birthday!"

For after all, a half-dozen or so attractive girls trying to get you to dance was not something many
would see as a bad thing.

Misty involuntarily tightened her grip on the glass she was drinking from, the liquid in the glass
churned slowly in response to her emotions. And if she hadn't noticed Ash was clearly
uncomfortable with those (admittedly attractive) girls, she might have lashed out on him instead of
them.

"Shouldn't we get him out of that pinch?" Misty suggested.

"Pinch?" Iris asked, tilting her head.

Misty and Anabel glanced at the wild girl. At that point it seemed virtually pointless to try and
dissuade her from that idea of hers about Ash.

Though as a wild girl, it's also possible she didn't understand the meaning. So they needed to clear
that up first.

"A pinch is a tricky or dangerous situation. Like a bridge breaking while you're crossing it, or
running into a tree with a Beedrill nest in it."

Iris nodded in understanding of what the phrase meant, but she didn't seem to necessarily agree with
that being a pinch for Ash.

That said, in the hypothetical scenario of that happening (not like they actually expected it to
happen), they could at least establish some limits.

After all, it wouldn't do any good for Ash having to deal with, say, twenty, or fifty of them at the
same time. He only had so many arms that could be yanked on so much.

"Iris, we should split that up. I don't think you'd like to see Ash with either of those two."

"Why is that?"

Misty sighed before explaining. It wouldn't be easy, but she had to make her point clear.

"Look, those girls have no real interest in Ash. They're just infatuated because of his looks, and
because he's now becoming a bit of a celebrity as a Trainer. They don't actually like him as a
person."

The wild girl glanced at the redhead, and then turned to Anabel, who nodded to confirm what Misty
had just said.
"Perhaps you'll agree that if Ash is going to be with someone... whether it's one of us or somebody else, it should be someone who sees the real him, and not just because he's a good-looking and popular guy," Misty continued. "I don't know about that girl Serena, but from what we've been told, she seems to like Ash as himself, even before he was a Trainer. But those girls... they're not like her."

'It's not like they're bad, but Misty has a point. I can feel their attraction to him is rather shallow. They're not even close friends, they barely know him."

Misty was pleased to see Iris' expression shifted again as the message sunk in. With that done, she decided to approach where the girls were still playing tug-of-war to see who could pull Ash to her side more.

"Excuse me, do you mind? I'm gonna need to borrow Ash for a little bit."

"And who are you?" one of the girls asked, frowning a little.

"Hey, I remember having seen her at some of the tournaments Ash took part in," the other added.

"That's right. The name's Misty, and I'm Ash's sparring partner, is there a problem with that?" the redhead asked, causing the girls to back off a little, hearing the underlining tone of challenge in Misty's voice. "Isn't that right... Ash?"

Unfortunately, Ash still did not get the message. Misty gently pushed one of the girls away from Ash's arm and whispered to his ear "Play along so I can bail you out". He quickly nodded.

"Yeah, sure. Excuse me, but this is important. See you later."

With that said, the two left to meet back with Anabel and Iris, Misty taking advantage to grab Ash's arm to make it clear to those girls that Ash was off-limits. The redhead couldn't help but feel a tinge of satisfaction upon seeing their faces.

"Hey thanks," he said.

"Think nothing of it," said Misty. "But in exchange... why don't you come and dance with one of us?"

Ash's relief left as fast as it came, and for some reason, Misty found it more amusing than usual. There was still a lot of the party ahead of them, so they might as well enjoy it.

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**The next day**

With the end of a night-long party and the start of a new day began the period of training.

Be it for the final badge or for the League itself, Ash took to working with each and every one of his battle Pokémon to prepare for whatever laid ahead.

It hadn't prepared him for when his mom told him it was time to learn to make pancakes that didn't combust unlike the last time, but it was just another part of the training he had found himself in.

Hopefully training with his Pokémon went about as well as his mom training him out of his pancake arson habit, which it did seem to be seeing as this morning she had him make eggs.

The training session of that day over, Ash found himself sitting in a clearing, catching his breath with a good number of his Pokémon.
They two were catching their breath or taking a rest, with the exception of Togepi, who was also the only Pokémon not in on time travel who was here at the moment.

Togepi was still jumping into the air, doing a flip, and slamming a branch into the ground in a cute attempt at a Seismic Toss.

It was cute and effective, seeing as the stick broke apart on impact, much like the other sticks Togepi kept finding and promptly shattering against the ground.

The sight made Pikachu stare in shock, and Charizard to give Togepi a thumbs up and an approving nod from Squirtle, which got Pikachu to move his stare of shock to Charizard.

"….Pi…." 'What did you…'

Charizard chuckled proudly in response, which grew louder when Jigglypuff wandered over with a stick of her own in hand, though before the song could occur Togepi used Seismic Toss.

It wasn't that effective, though Jigglypuff bounced from the impact to the ground and bounced away like a bouncy ball, so there was that.

"So, I was thinking…"

He ignored the imitation Pikachu did of a scream of terror, or perhaps it was of that painting about screaming. Regardless of what it was it wasn't that funny.

"We're all probably going to do everything in the same rough order. Even if the GS ball isn't a thing, I'd want to find Snorlax anyway, and I'd like to make sure Lapras isn't a cyborg or something."

With his luck that could happen, even if it did make Bulbasaur look at him questionably. In his defense Sabrina was more nuts, J popped in earlier, Team Rocket was competent earlier than they should have been, he got sent a power ring out of nowhere, nightmare monstrosities entered his dreams from time to time, and Brock's parents were dead.

Cyborg Lapras was certainly possible with all of that. He'd need to make sure that Lapras wasn't going to tell him that 'Kalosian science was the best in the world' in a half mad tone or something.

In part because that would mean that something was seriously wrong with Clemont, and Lapras might then explode. "Orange, Johto, Hoenn, and everything else."

"Ser?" 'So, what do you plan to do if everything important from a region is accounted before. I mean you ran into myself and Boldore already, what happens if you run into the rest of us before you ever go to Unova. With Iris already here and Cilan….'

Serperior paused when she brought up that Cilan was M.I.A and presumed deceased. Her thoughts were caught up by the reminder, and her question stopped there.

"I'll play that by ear. Even if I wake up tomorrow and find Staraptor, Torterra, Buizel, Infernape, Gliscor, and Gible on the front lawn I'd still go to Sinnoh to stop Cyrus, but other than that..."

Did he do anything he'd need to go do again while in Unova? If Team Rocket was following him he didn't think the Forces of Nature would go on a rampage….

He'd probably need to think on it a bit and see how much he did in the various regions. He didn't want to wake up one day and find that he had thought that something he didn't do led to cyborg Lapras attacks.
But back on topic.

"When we do go to Johto, I'm thinking that maybe I can go in it fresh like in Hoenn and the other regions after it."

The curious looks of Squirtle, Ambipom, and the other Pokémon with him prompted him to continue.

"I was just thinking that I don't think I was able to bring out the full potential of everyone. When it came to pushing through the tough battles it always came back to Charizard or Snorlax or Pikachu…"

"Squir." 'Also me."

Ash nodded before he continued.

"It might have been me only having like, only twelve Gyms of experience going in, but I'd like to see if going forward like I did elsewhere would have the same results. I mean think about how far I got with just Pikachu and the Hoenn and Unova crew, and even with you guys helping in the League the Sinnoh guys did great too. They matched Pokémon Paul had for who knows how long head to head."

Charizard grumbled at the mention of Sinnoh. The entire time he was out for that League due to a broken tooth, much to his dismay.

"I can only imagine how far I'd have gotten in Kalos."

He lingered on that thought for a moment, before Ambipom interrupted him.

"Am." 'Slight problem, Paul."

He wasn't sure what Ambipom was getting at, and she continued.

"Ambi." 'Correct me if I am wrong, but most of the time you don't have Trainers you know follow you to new regions, yet there is no reason Paul or Gary would not do so to Johto, or Red for that matter."

Ash nodded, that was true. Gary went to Johto when he did, Paul said he went to Johto before, and Red hadn't implied otherwise.

Yet as he saw Gary so rarely, and battled him even more rarely, it wasn't really a case of him even being there the same way Paul or Trip were. He only ran into Gary three times before the Silver Conference, at the creepy forest with the creepier old women, that time with the power plant, and Eggsetter.

He honestly saw more of May's rivals across regions than he did Gary.

"Bipom." 'We have no idea where Elekid came from, but he definitely had it longer than Chimchar. So he probably does not do as complete a team refresh as you do, if at all. Meaning he probably always had Torterra around, and could have thrown him at Turtwig or me if he wanted to specifically beat us to a pulp rather than train Chimchar on us for experience's sake. However now he definitely has an issue with us, and probably would go to Johto."

Ash followed Ambipom's reasoning, and it gave him the mental image of Torterra glaring down at Cyndaquil.
He saw the pointAmbipom was making, his strategy was good for training more Pokémon up to stronger levels, but if he did have people around who knew he wasn't some boonie idiot and had Pokémon already at such stronger levels…

Yeah, that could be a problem, and it made him rather glad Paul didn't go to Unova with him. Even with the post League battle attitude adjustment, that could have been a pain to deal with.

"Yeah, that could be a problem, but if Paul also goes to Hoenn and Sinnoh…"

"Bul." 'If I may offer a suggestion.'

All eyes were on Bulbasaur, who nodded before continuing.

"Saur-Bul." 'As I recall from talking with the Sinnoh team, most of the battles you had with Paul, with the exception of the battle at Lake Acuity and the Pokémon League, were three on three. That means you can probably split the difference. Three Pokémon to make sure Paul or Red don't beat you twelve ways to Sunday, and three Pokémon to train the way you trained Sceptile, Krookodile, and the others.'

Ash thought about the proposal, and he couldn't help but feel a smile form.

"You know, that's a good idea. I can cycle everyone through here where they can train as well, and I probably can change the exact number when I'm about to challenge a Gym or have a major battle coming up. It might take a while to get to that point though, seeing as it took a while until I had three Johto Pokémon…"

"Ser." 'That's assuming you don't turn a corner and find Oshawott just randomly there.'

Better randomly there than a cyborg in any case and handy for the Whirl Cup. Though how'd he make sure Misty didn't claim him on the spot was a different story.

He'd rather not have to battle for every one of his old water Pokémon.

While Ash was wondering just how he might have to deal with a conflict over Oshawott, Misty was doing her own work.

She hadn't mentioned the idea for fear that Iris might get ideas, but she was dedicated to bettering herself and she had her own idea on how to get better.

It just happened to be a something that Iris was just as likely to approve of as tell her how stupid and dangerous it was, if she would touch the Pokémon involved with a ten foot pole.

Said practice found herself standing in the middle of the newly dug Professor Oak Basculin pool atop a bridge of ice given by a clapping Seel.

What the training meant for her was avoiding being bitten by the Basculin, who were prone to biting anything around them and was part of the reason they had their own pool.

They jumped at the sight of her shadow, or even her reflection if they were on the other side of the ice, jaws open wide with sharp teeth.

At each attempted chomp, she avoided it, which required her to react fast enough.
Which she did, most of the time. There was one Basculin that sunk a bit right into her arm before she shook it off.

It hurt, but that was what Aqua Ring was for. It did make for good motivation to keep improving though.

It wasn't just for her though, each time a Basculin jumped out, a line of her Pokémon aimed to blast them down.

The Basculin were no worse for wear, and it was good practice for the Pokémon she had with her.

Seel with Water Pulse, Gyarados with Dragon Rage, Psyduck with Water Gun, Staryu with Bubblebeam, Poliwrath with Mud Shot, Tentacool with Poison Sting, and Wingull with Air Cutter, among others.

It was practice for all of them. Even the Basculin got practice, even if it was attacking her for the sheer point of it.

The sound of a distant branch snapping interrupted their training.

She stopped mid training, saved only from a Basculin bite by a quick Mud Shot from Wooper, and hopped off the ice bridge.

A good call on her end, seeing as the stranger who walked out of the woods was a stranger and having to heal a Basculin bite would not do.

At least if she didn't want a rock thrown at her.

The stranger was a young man, perhaps just a bit older than her. Blue hair and glasses were the most distinct feature of him, with a body type she could only describe as 'fit nerd', as odd as that sounded.

But there was no better way that came to mind.

Around him floated a Pokémon that Misty wasn't familiar with. It was a gray Pokémon that looked like a human woman's head, with pink highlights and what looked like a red pearl necklace.

"Misdreavus, a Ghost-type Pokémon that likes to scare people by making scary noises. They live in caves, forests, meadows, graveyards, and a wide variety of other habitats."

The Monodex she had brought with her did the very thing she had taken it for, thus justifying her doing so.

"You're a Trainer, and our eyes have met. You know what that means?"

The guy's question was one she knew the answer to.

Battle.

"War." 'I got this.'

She idly noted one of the Wartortle that had recently entered her care step forward. Not the one she first met, as said Wartortle had decided to go with Ash's Pokémon for today's training, but that was not a mark against him.

She nodded i to his request as the Misdreavus floated forward.
No word was given before the battle officially got underway.

"Headbutt!"

The Ghost-type flipped in air as it flew towards Wartortle headfirst.

She'd tell him to counter with Skull Bash, but headbutting a ghost was not an option.

"Dodge then use Scald!"

Wartortle may have only recently joined her, like all the others from the island, but the dodge it pulled off was already showing promise.

Ash coming here for training benefited more than just himself, despite his concerns.

After avoiding the attack with some finesse Wartortle spat out a steaming stream of water right at the ghost.

It struck, leading to a tumbling ghost type and a startled Trainer.

"Psybeam!"

Not enough that the Misdreavus wasn't able to quickly flip around and blast the psychic attack right into Wartortle, causing the bushy tailed Pokémon to stumble back from the impact.

It was a pretty good strike too. That move was well practiced.

With the ghost floating back in the air after striking the ground the Trainer kept up the pressure.

"Swift!"

"Use Icy Wind to counter!"

If there had been more than just a single Wartortle training with her today, she'd have missed that detail in their varied move sets.

However the recent memory was thus reliable, and Wartortle's cold wind blew into the Swift, detonating them at a safe distance away.

"Alright if that didn't work…Psybeam!"

One thing she had picked up from traveling with Ash, the same thing that briefly stirred in memories of seeing her grandmother's battles on tape, was the need for split second decisions with the utmost confidence.

"Overpower it with Scald!"

That was one such moment, and the boiling water attack was sent right into the path of the Psybeam, overpowering it and blasting into the ghost Pokémon that had fired it.

Misdreavus was sent tumbling to the ground.

"That's enough!"

And with that, the battle ended without a K.O.

Wartortle came over to her, and she patted him on the head for the good battle. They didn't say
anything while the Trainer fed the ghost some healing berries.

As they took effect, the Trainer muttered something about needing to work harder if they were going to get to the Raizen Mountains and be ready.

"You want to go there for what? I don't think there are any Gyms near there, am I wrong?"

Her question caused the Trainer to turn her way with a smile.

"Oh, I'm not interested in Leagues. I don't like crowds. No, I'm after something even better."

Better than the Leagues? She felt like Ash might make a joke about sacrilege at this moment.

He adjusted his glasses as he looked at her confidently.

"My name's Nelson, and it's my goal to capture an Entei, Suicune, and/or Raikou. My Misdreavus here is one of the ways I plan to make that happen."

A lofty goal, though the difficulty of the task only briefly registered to Misty as she heard the name Suicune. Suicune, a legendary Pokémon. Moreover, a legendary water-type Pokémon. A Pokémon that her dreams required her to catch one day, however difficult that would be.

"How are you going to do that? Catching one of them is so hard, I don't think anyone's done it."

"Actually there are records of people capturing an Entei, Suicune, or Raikou in the past. It's hard, but there are some ways to do it. First off, you need to make sure they can't run away with an attack like Mean Look, which Misdreavus knows. Of course you also need to stop the move Roar..."

One could call the first step in realizing that part of her dream was more training with herself and her Pokémon.

The second step would be getting information, and this would probably be the best time to get it. Between the Mew and the Articuno, she could very well see a Suicune tomorrow.

"...If you can't do that, other moves and abilities are an option including…"

And this guy was perfectly happy to keep talking, and she was quite sure the Monodex was recording this on top of it all.

Though that was a while away, as she knew she was hardly at a point where she could catch such a Pokémon.

Though perhaps there was a way to see how far she still had to go.

---

Ash felt pretty good about himself, seeing as after the immensely long run he just did he didn't feel the need to collapse on the ground in a heap.

Iris was similarly winded, while Anabel was perhaps even more impressive in the fact that she had made it without stopping.

She was bent over, breathing heavily and as red as Corphish, but she made it.

"Good job."
If Anabel heard Iris's compliment she didn't express it, though she did take the water when offered. By the time she returned it to him she had plopped down on the grass and was looking, with what seemed to be increasing focus, off into the distance.

'You know…this is a nice view. We're teleporting back though.'

The last bit was said with a bit more seriousness in the tired tone, and Iris didn't argue it. However Ash looked in the direction Anabel was, and he found himself smiling wistfully.

From here, Pallet Town was a bunch of brightly colored roofs standing out amidst fields and spotted trees. The windmill of the Professor's laboratory was the tallest thing visible, and even then it wasn't that distinct upon the hill.

'Your hometown's nice.'

Anabel's compliment was followed up by Iris not following it up. She probably didn't have an opinion on what was and wasn't a nice town.

"It is, isn't it? Though…it if I have to be honest…"

"Is there any reason you would not be honest?"

Iris's question interrupted him, but he followed on it none the less.

"No, I don't have a reason to lie, but it's a bit rough to say aloud. The last few days here…it honestly feels a bit cramped. I know it is weird saying that when I can see just how much space there is between my home and the lab, but especially when I'm not doing something it feels like a less roomy secret base."

'You can never go home again.'

Anabel's quote quite possibly hit the nail on the head.

It had never quite sunk in back in the original go-around, perhaps because time decided that it didn't need to record itself properly, but if he had to think about it, it was probably part of the reason he never did quite stay that long any time after.

He had seen the world, and he was doing it all over again in a world that had remixed itself with new elements and takes on everything he had seen and done before.

After that Pallet Town, a place that had seemed so big and wonderful…it seemed to be less.

Out of the corner of his eye he noticed Iris seemed deep in thought, as if the comment also made her think similarly. Ash wasn't sure about what though.

'Even if it never does feel quite like home anymore, it still is nice.'

Ash looked over the town again, not thinking about what it felt like being in it after everything he had done for just a moment, and found a smile returning to his lips.

"That it is, that it is."

'Plus, it isn't like you can't ever find a home to go back to one day. The world is big enough I'm sure there is somewhere that you can go back to and feel just like you did before you left.'
At Anabel's optimistic statement, he shrugged.

Anything was possible.

…

"Sludge Bomb!"

The Exeggutor that had emerged as the battle favorite stamped his foot into the ground as a series of brown bullets shot out from the top of his head.

Yanma avoided the bullets in turn, flying circles around the Grass type with a green trail from the ability Speed Boost following in his wake.

Yanma turned suddenly, moving in right at Exeggutor, shimmering white wings signaling the use of Wing Attack.

"Use Teleport!"

Exeggutor vanished in an instant, though surprisingly as Yanma flew in the bug vanished as well.

Exeggutor reappeared a few feet away, looking around nervously for the bug, as said bug reappeared behind Exeggutor and slammed into the tree from behind.

Exeggutor stumbled forward, unbalanced and with significant damage as Yanma continued to speed around it, a white wind surrounding it.

Not the Quick Attack style wind, but…

"Is that Aerial Ace?!"

"The data suggests so."

The Pokédex's confirmation in hand, Yanma buzzed happily at the declaration of his achievement. Exeggutor meanwhile muttered something that was probably complaining about being the test subject for the new move.

He'd ask Pikachu for confirmation, but he had darted off somewhere with Raichu and he didn't want to know why.

"Hey, you're both looking great. Yanma learned a new move, and your Sludge Bomb is looking pretty good too."

Exeggutor seemed a bit less bothered about the entire thing, though before he could return to giving more training a Grimer slithered his way.

"Gri!"

Ash felt the muscles in his legs tense in readiness to run before his brain could remind himself that having Exeggutor teleport away was a smarter escape plan.

Before either plan could be executed though the Grimer rose up to full height, revealing an egg held within the slime.

An egg with a marking on it he knew well from however long he had to deal with James and Smokescreen.
"Exe!"

"A Koffing Egg, and before I could even get the data for it. My program is now reduced to being redundant!"

Grimer nodded, oblivious to the Pokédex's concern, before retracting the egg back into itself as Ash wasn't quite sure what gender the Grimer was. Done showing off the egg proudly Grimer promptly slithered off somewhere, most likely to show off the egg elsewhere.

"…It happened."

Ash felt a bit weightless at the realization. The Pokédex had commented on it, but it didn't feel all that real until just now.

"Yes, yes it did. Your Pokémon count will increase even without proper catching vigor on your end."

As Grimer vanished from view, Ash couldn't help but think.

Once upon a time, he had seen being a Pokémon Master as capturing as many Pokémon as possible. He had grown beyond that over time, and saw more value in the quality of Pokémon before quantity. Yet here he was, finding himself getting Pokémon without even trying. It felt… off somehow.

"Does it even count? I didn't catch that Koffing."

"Yes, but your Pokémon did, and you caught the Pokémon."

Ash shook his head at the blue snark his Pokédex had in the former part of that sentence.

"Plus I'm sure you will appreciate having more Pokémon to save you next time a crazy person kidnaps you and you need a full on rescue force."

Did the Pokédex really think Sabrina was just a prelude to future repeated scenarios where his entire team would need to break roofs to rescue him?

Ash would like to call it paranoid, but he was pretty sure he lost the ability to claim that given the fact Sabrina was not the first person to kidnap him this timeline.

…

Eevee mewed happily, the defeated form of Axew below her paws.

She hopped off after a moment, the results clear to all. Axew pushed himself back up, muttering something that Anabel was rather sure was self-disappointment from the tone.

Eevee hopped into her arms, snuggling in with a happy chirp as Axew wandered away, presumably back to Iris.

Clearly still seeking the goal of being stronger, a goal that wasn't uncommon around here. Those who wanted such a thing clearly outnumbered those who sought to meet a personal challenge or to…

Well, whatever she eventually decided on.

Eevee still in her arms after that training battle, she turned around and looked at the sun in the
distance, still rising up for the day.

When she had left home, it was to see the world. To see more than just her little piece of it. It was nothing so grand, even as she saw many amazing things, been to new places, and got wrapped up in homicidal attempts and random motto sprouting crooks.

Did she need something ambitious? If she could talk right now it just made meet and greets at parties a bit awkward.

"I want to be a Pokémon Master with Pikachu's help."

"I want to have one of every water Pokémon in the world."

"...I'm just along for the ride."

Especially when she imagined the conversation in her head.

Lying down on the grass, Eevee still in her arms despite the change in angle, she had a question to ask.

'What might work for me as a goal?'

"Vee."

She should probably ask this question to someone who she could understand back the next time.

"Mankey use Scratch!"

"Dodge it!"

Ash would've loved to explain in detail exactly how this battle had started, but really there wasn't much story behind it.

He had darted up to Viridian City to pick up a parcel for Professor Oak, and on the way back he had been challenged to a battle by a fresh Trainer and his Mankey.

It was just how things went, and he wasn't complaining much.

It gave Togepi some good practice, as the little ball of spikes hopped out of the way of the swiping attack.

It was a pretty good dodge, he had to give Charizard compliments if he was responsible for it.

It didn't mean Pikachu looked any less tense as the battle continued on though.

"Try a Low Kick!"

The young Trainer's call was panicky and unsure, though Mankey swept at Togepi with its foot regardless.

"Seismic Toss!"

Togepi grabbed said foot and hopped into the air, spinning before throwing Mankey to the ground. Mankey landed there in an oomph of pain, before Togepi landed on top of Mankey for further damage.
It wasn't a Body Slam, but it did the damage as Mankey was well and defeated.

"Toge!"

Togepi cheered at his handywork as the Trainer ran up to his Mankey, concern all over his face as he cradled the fallen fighting-type.

"Mankey, I'm sorry."

He picked up the still cheering Togepi as he walked over to the Trainer and Mankey.

"...How did you get so good?"

The Trainer's question was whispered, and he repeated it at a higher volume. Ash shrugged.

"Practice mostly. It takes time to be sure about the calls you make and how to counter effectively. You'll get it eventually."

"But I don't want to be eventually."

The Trainer's muttering turned into a bit of loathing as he looked in the direction of Viridian Forest.

"Most everyone in my grade on journeys already went for the forest, but most of them have Pidgey or Ratatta. Mankey doesn't do super well against all the bugs."

Fighting attacks were only half effective on Bug types, Ash was pretty sure that was a question on the test he got right.

Same with Poison… so that was why he wanted to practice with Mankey so much.

He wanted to prepare before he went north.

'Pikachu, I don't have a time limit, do I?'

Pikachu shook his head at his mentally projected question.

Good.

He shifted Togepi so he'd only be held up by a single arm as he reached for the Great Ball, as well as a Safari Ball with each of his freed hands.

"You know, sometimes it is better to work smarter instead of harder. Instead of picking fights with everything to get ready for Viridian Forest, you should have an ace in the hole."

As the nervous rookie looked at him in confusion, he threw out both his balls, revealing Serperior and Chansey both.

"After my Chansey helps Mankey out, Serperior and I are going to teach your Mankey Aerial Ace."

When he returned to Pallet a few hours later, it was with the sort of smile only a successful helping session could provide.

"Sorry to do this so suddenly, but I'm actually curious if this'll work or not."

Ash's preemptive apology was acknowledged by Ambipom, even as she prepared to start counter-shielding with all of the reluctance she had originally shown when he originally brought up the idea.
Meanwhile he and Butterfree began preparing the Z-Move.

"Pikapi" 'I don't think this will cover all of them. I mean Tectonic Rage wasn't exactly a projectile attack'.

Ash would have responded to Pikachu, before he finished the pose and felt an even stronger rush of power flow onto Butterfree.

"Shattered Psyche!"

The psychic wave flew at Ambipom's counter shield, and wasn't phased as Ambipom was smacked around a few times by a mysterious force and sent flying into the sky.

So that was two Z-moves Counter Shield was not going to be blocking.

Thankfully before Ambipom could go and meet Team Rocket a flicker revealed an Exeggutor with Ambipom tangled up in the foliage of the Grass-Psychic Pokémon.

"...It might work if the Z-Move is more of a solid attack being thrown at you. Like a giant fireball or something."

He was pretty sure he saw something like that in the visions.

"Am…." 'Yeah, but the only way you can figure that out is if you figure out how your hand made the crystal the first time, and hands do not come with manuals.'

Even if it did, would he even understand it? Manuals were slogs to read after all.

Another day of having to train himself in not mixing up how to do scrambled eggs and sunny side up eggs, and another day to train with his Pokémon for what lay ahead.

"Toge!"

And another day of oddities, as he wasn't entirely sure when Togepi had found the time to convince one of the Zubat he caught to fly him around in a circle while cheering happily.

It was a cute sight, enjoyable to everyone around but Pikachu, who kept staring at the flying Togepi with a sense of dread that he was pretty sure his mom had on her face at a few points in the past.

"Pikachu, relax. Togepi's always been tougher than we gave him credit for."

Pikachu didn't give an answer, only continuing to watch Togepi in concern. The Pikachu worry corner, though, lost his attention when he heard footsteps and turned around to face the owner of said steps.

Misty, who had a serious look on her face. One that could only elicit a stare from him in response.

"Battle me."

Misty's blunt declaration was enough to get Togepi to have Zubat let him go, sending the little ball to the ground without injury and to let out a curious chirp.

This in turn got Pikachu to pay attention.

"Sure…thought is there any reason that you want to do it now?"
It seemed a bit odd timing for her to go into one now.

Misty took a deep breath before explaining herself.

"A while back, we agreed that one day you and I would have a proper battle for the Cascade Badge. I want to see how far I am from doing that, among other things."

She didn't clarify what those other things were, but as she continued to look right at him with her green eyes.

She was truly serious about seeing just how far she did have to go for that battle and everything else that was on her mind.

"Alright then."

Pikachu quickly began shooing Togepi out of the way as Misty held a Safari Ball in her hand.

"You battled with six Pokémon to get the badge, so let's do that."

She promptly flung said Safari Ball, which burst to reveal the Slowbro he faintly recalled she got while in the Safari Zone.

The rustle of some nearby bushes heralded the arrival of the Pokémon he'd be battling with first.

"Ai." 'I got this one.'

And with that, the first battle was Slowbro versus Ambipom.

"Shadow Claw, right off the bat!"

His first attack was the basic strategy, but as Ambipom thrust her tails forward with the glowing shadows extending he was sure that was the right way to go.

Misty did want to see how far she had to go, and that was one way of getting a read on it.

"Use Yawn!"

Slowbro's counter move of choice was to open wide and release bubbles to incur insomnia. They worked on contact, and thus would be a problem for the long arms of Ambipom.

That didn't mean he couldn't think of ways around that.

"Quick, change into Double Hit and launch yourself into the air!"

"Am!" 'Got it'.

Ambipom's hand tails lost their shadow extensions and glowed purple, before slamming into the earth. The force sent Ambipom into the air in a cartwheel-like manner, spinning over the Yawn bubbles safely.

In fact Ambipom was actually spinning, like what they had done in Sinnoh.

"Scald!"

However Misty was not caught off foot, and the boiling hot water sprayed right into Ambipom before she could make contact for an attack.
The blow sent Ambipom to the ground, a tad red but otherwise fine after the attack hit right on.

He looked at Misty's eyes, and he saw what he had suspected from that quick response.

Confidence. She knew not to panic after he avoided her first counter. He liked that.

Misty was always at her best when she was confident, and in a true sort of way as opposed to the bluster of one pretending they were more confident than they actually were.

Both of them used to have that problem.

"Psyshock!"

A purple light flared up in Slowbro's eyes, before firing at Ambipom as laser vision.

She hopped out of the way before the attack could land, but Slowbro responded to that with more laser vision.

This wasn't going to go anywhere in the long term, he would have to make the move here.

"Swift, as wide as you can!"

"Blast that thieving monkey before she can do that!"

At that reminder of how they met this time around, Slowbro fired Psyshock just as Ambipom swept her tails forward. Both attacks hit, Psyshock striking second as the Swift slammed into Slowbro from all sides.

Ambipom was a tad shaky after the two hits, though Slowbro didn't seem nearly as shaken from the Swift barrage. Slowbro was winning this so far, and Ash was at a bit of a loss as to what to expect from it.

What were Slowbro's other moves, for one?

"Quickly, Shadow Claw!"

Quickly meant only one tail shot forward to the maximum length before sending an extended shadow forward to slam into Slowbro. Ash felt a grin come out as he found the battle going back their way.

"Slack Off!"

A grin that quickly vanished as he was informed of Slowbro's final move and a green healing glow awashed Slowbro.

…

It was after a few more minutes that he called Ambipom back, conceding that round.

It was an endurance game, and that was something Slowbro was winning.

"Toge!"

Togepi darted over to the sitting Ambipom, cheerfully trying to get Ambipom to smile with cute antics and bouncing.
It wasn't very effective.

"You did it Slowbro!"

Neither was Misty hugging Slowbro enthusiastically after the battle, despite near equal enthusiasm on both ends.

When she was done hugging Slowbro, she stood up fully and grinned his way, even as she backhandedly gestured for Slowbro to get out of the way before the next battle began.

"Well, that's one for me. You know, a quitter could probably say that's enough. That's better than anything you got the first time."

"But you're not a quitter."

His confident statement was met by an enthusiastic nod from Misty, as Wingull flew to her and landed on her shoulder.

"Nope."

A burst of displaced air signaled the arrival of a Pokémon of his own, as Pidgeot landed on his side.

"Caw. 'Any reason for this battle?'"

"Self test, I'm down one," he informed his old friend, who nodded.

She'd be righting that, taking back into the air as Wingull joined her.

This battle would be in the air.

"Air Slash!"

"Dodge it!"

Pidgeot flapped her wings with one strong swipe, sending a tendril of glowing air towards Wingull, who swerved out of the way of the blast.

A dodge repeated for two more Air Slash attacks.

The newer moves weren't doing much for him today, were they?

"Water Pulse!"

Wingull spat out a blue sphere Pidgeot's way, which missed as Pidgeot gained altitude, a gain that would soon vanish.

"Aerial Ace!"

It caught him off guard that Misty shouted the same command, but he was nothing if not interested in challenges.

Pidgeot was the same, seeing as she flew right at Wingull, both birds having the white streaks of a flying Aerial Ace trailing them as they neared each other.

The attack struck midair with a beak on beak collision, before Pidgeot won out and sent Wingull spinning.
Pidgeot flew on her intended path, while Wingull righted itself behind and under Pidgeot.

Such a position was probably not going to end well for him, particularly given that Wingull had ranged attacks. He would need to change that.

"Quick Attack!"

Pidgeot glowed white as she turned around and flew at Wingull, who didn't react in the way one would normally assume a small bird would do when a much larger one was moving towards it at a breakneck pace.

Did Wingull and Misty have a plan up their sleeves?

"Shock Wave!"

Ash was sure he misheard that, but then he saw with his eyes that his ears had heard it right.

Wingull's orange beak color was glowing bright as a bright light shot out. The light struck Pidgeot in a continuous shock, forcing Pidgeot to veer down and missing Wingull completely as the attack eventually ended.

Pidgeot was a bit shaken, and he couldn't blame her.

"Since when could a Wingull do that!?"

"Since last Tuesday."

The Pokédex's sarcasm was unwarranted.

"I had no idea Wingull could learn to do that either when she first used it a few days ago, though it wasn't a Tuesday. Speaking of which, Wingull!"

Wingull promptly fired the bolt attack a few more times, though Pidgeot avoided them each time.

The bolts struck the ground, scorching a few grasses and forbes but doing no lasting damage.

He would need to do something more than dodging to ensure they didn't do damage to Pidgeot.

"Pidgeot, use Steel Wing and bounce the next one back!"

Such a command would probably have not worked if Wingull hadn't fired a Shock Wave just as he gave the call. Pidgeot's wings flashed metal white as the bolt was swatted back, which struck Wingull and sent the little bird spiraling down.

Misty caught the now quite defeated bird, as the battle became a tied game.

"Good job."

As Misty comforted Wingull in her arms Pidgeot landed next to him and got an appreciative head rub for her part.

Following that came battle three, and Pikachu looked ready to go for it.

"Bul." 'Hang around for a bit, I feel like taking this.'

Only to stop as Bulbasaur walked up to his side, ready to battle once more.
"Interesting, all of the Pokémon you have used so far battled the inferior Waterflower Trainer just as they are now battling the superior one."

The Pokédex's observation was true, even as Misty made an odd choice at her third Pokémon.

"Psy."

Psyduck honestly sounded as confused at being sent out as he was seeing it.

…

Misty had to admit, she was sort of spit-balling this part. She hadn't expected Ash's Pokémon to be the exact same ones as he had used against her sisters. Bulbasaur in particular was a surprising choice.

She'd have thought Serperior, she had Pokémon she wanted to try against Serperior. Bulbasaur…she didn't have any ideas.

This battle proved she did need to learn to think a bit more deeply about possible battles she'd have. A lesson learned for the real battle for the Cascade Badge, which was what she was here to figure out so that was good.

What she did think might work, even if she wasn't entirely sure about it, was having Psyduck get a Vine Whip to the head and spark a powerful attack. Plus, she remembered Psyduck complaining the other day about not getting enough sleep recently, so that left two outcomes.

Either Psyduck was one of the Pokémon with an ability like Insomina and wouldn't fall asleep from Sleep Powder, or losing would be good for Psyducks's health and wellbeing.

The answer would become clear when Bulbasaur used Sleep Powder.

"Psy." 'He's grinning at me in a creepy way.'

Bulbasaur had a wide grin on his face that she had to agree was kind of creepy. It went from one side of the Bulb Pokémon's face to the other, and it was honestly somewhat worrying.

The only reason it wasn't worrying her more was that, despite some similarities, it felt very different from the smile she had seen on Red's Clefairy.

It didn't quite help her worry when Bulbasaur tangled up Psyduck with vines though.

…

"The move Tickle is one that the Pokémon Bulbasaur cannot learn. However tickling in of itself is not something a Bulbasaur is unable to do, as it licking."

Togepi was giggling, louder than the other Pokémon doing so but far from the only one as Bulbasaur continued to use Vine Whip to tickle the poor duck while licking the top of his head.

A technique that had served Bulbasaur well in defeating Psyduck once, and was doing so again.

Said duck was laughing in defeat and humiliation, all attacking options unavailable unless laughter could power psychic attacks as much as pain did.

He did feel bad for the poor Pokémon though, having Wingull, Ambipom, and Togepi laughing at
you was one thing, but even Slowbro was laughing at the poor guy.

Hysterical laughter from a Slowbro in your direction was not something anyone should have to experience. It was seriously kind of creepy.

"That's enough!"

Eventually Misty called Psyduck back, who was still trembling with phantom tickling as he waddled back to her side.

"….That was weird."

He had to agree, it was. But smacking Psyduck in battle never worked.

He tried that before, all it did was get Kingler thrown into him like a crustacean dodge ball.

"Free. 'So, I heard there was a battle going on. I'll take the next one.'"

Before Pikachu could volunteer to go Butterfree fluttered down in front of them.

Pikachu muttered something about cutting in line, but regardless of school yard etiquette violations the battle continued with round number four.

"Poli!"

A battle between Butterfree and Poliwrath, a battle that seemed on paper to be the sort of thing Butterfree had in the bag.

That of course meant Misty had some sort of plan, and he'd need to be strategic.

"Let's do this smart and use Sleep Powder!"

At the command that got him one of his three fatal knockouts at the Top 16, Misty smirked as if he had just done exactly as planned.

That wasn't…

"Poliwrath, use Water Sport!"

Poliwrath fired a wave of water that seemed, for lack of a better set of words, thin yet dense, that collided with the Sleep Powder and washed it all out.

From the impact came a wave of thick dew that covered everything like a coat of paint. His clothes and hair all felt damp, and Pikachu's fur darkened as it tended to do when wet.

"Free…." 'Ash, remember Erika?'

His attention was drawn to Butterfree, whose wings were flapping futilely as they themselves became damp.

He grimaced as he did in fact remember Erika, and it seemed Misty did so too. Butterfree was being grounded once again.

Of course he remembered that flight wasn't everything, just as he proved against Erika.

"Quickly Psybeam!"
"Bubblebeam!"

As Butterfree fluttered weakly above the ground, the eye laser collided with the bubbles. The two attacks cancelled each other in a burst of energy and air.

Said burst also blew more water into Butterfree, whose wings fully gave out and caused him to crash into the muddy ground.

He was still struggling there even as Poliwrath charged towards Butterfree, a glowing fist at the wake.

A Dynamic Punch.

"Psybeam!"

Poliwrath jumped to the side to avoid the beam, before sweeping low and striking Butterfree with a Dynamic Punch Uppercut.

Or was it Dynamic Uppercut?

Regardless of what the best way to name the attack was, Butterfree was still sent flying. He caught his first catch, but in doing so he was knocked back a good distance and left upturned turf in the wake of his shoe heels digging in.

…

She couldn't help but smile at that one.

It was something she had thought of a few days ago, and she was curious how it would work. Seeing as they were tied up again, she had to say it worked rather well.

While he wasn't saying anything, Poliwrath seemed pretty satisfied with the results too. Good for him.

She did feel a bit bad that she couldn't claim credit for the idea. Like having Gyarados use Iron Tail to ground electrical attacks, she got that one from watching another.

In this case Erika.

How did they come up with ideas like that? She had wretched her brain for a good few days with trying to have something that was originally, fully hers, but nothing had come about it.

Erika had at least the benefit of time, the way Ash came up with ideas sometimes you could had to wonder if he really was a rookie.

Hopefully she'd have a trick or two (hopefully more) that was a full Misty original when they had a real battle.

A roar and a heated gust of air wafted over the field, and probably dried it out a bit, as Charizard landed and growled.

So that meant that Pikachu was going to be last. Good, she had a plan for that, one with an accomplishment of her own making it a bit closer to something that was fully her work.

For Charizard, she had a Pokémon that would be quite fitting for the matchup. It was a bit of a cliche to have the battle, with fiction on the subject quite often saving such a clash for the final battle, but it
was hardly an undoable cliche.

Particularly since she aimed to subvert said cliche's outcome.

With the Net Ball she had in hand, her plan was ready to go into motion.

"Blastoise, go!"

…

The king of the turtle island, now with Misty, landed before them in a loud thump. The sight of said evolved water type made Charizard growl enthusiastically.

Clearly he wanted some practice in should they run into Gary at Indigo. He couldn't deny that a Blastoise warm up would do them good for such a scenario.

"Hydro Pump!"

Misty made the first move, with Blastoise's two cannons unleashing powerful water blasts in their direction.

Charizard avoided them by taking off into the air, while he avoided them by hopping to the side of the blasts.

The faint sound of Jigglypuff crying out as a pair of intense water blasts struck registered at the edge of his hearing.

"Fire back with Flamethrower!"

Charizard bellowed flames down at Blastoise, who took them head on.

It wasn't damaging though, as when the flames died down a shimmering green field covered the turtle.

Protect, the damage blocking move.

"That's not going to work, Flash Cannon!"

Blastoise grunted as the left cannon fired a white beam of light, which struck Charizard in the chest before they could react.

Charizard grunted from the blow, though he didn't seem too harmed.

When a Flash Cannon was then fired from the right cannon he was able to stop it with a Metal Claw shoved right into the attack, detonating it before it could make contact.

"Flamethrower!"

Charizard reared his head back and fired the powerful burst of flames that surged towards Blastoise.

"Protect, then Hydro Pump!"

Blastoise grunted as the green bubble formed, taking the Flamethrower entirely before fading away with the flames.

Then the Hydro Pump was sent flying towards Charizard, who avoided it once more.
However it was by a rather close shave, and he was sure he saw some droplets of water sprinkle on Charizard's closest wing to the attack.

Attacking at a distance was not going to get him anywhere, they would need to get in close.

"Fly in and use Seismic Toss!"

Charizard growled in agreement as he flew into, arms ready to grasp the massive turtle.

Blastoise countered with Hydro Pump, with Charizard managing to avoid being hit by the close range water attacks. With gripping arms Charizard was now in position to attack, when Blastoise shimmered white.

Skull Bash.

"Quick, change into Slash and avoid that attack!"

His call was too late as Charizard dropped attitude, even as Blastoise was firing off as a turtle rocket.

Good news was that in dropping down Charizard avoided the Skull Bash.

Bad news was that even with extended white claws from Slash, Blastoise was well out of range for them.

Now Charizard was by Misty, and Blastoise was in front of him.

Charizard looked at his claws, then all the way to himself with a serious look, before bellowing loudly his own idea for how they'd win this.

'Create a Z-Crystal!'

Ash looked at his hand, then at Charizard, then back at his hand.

"It doesn't feel that dusty."

Charizard looked back at him with a look of irritation before roaring back.

'That doesn't matter, you have to try. We haven't had any luck before now and now's the time to see why that was. Perhaps a resolve to win, instead of a curiosity, is the missing element. We won't know however, unless you try!'

He looked Misty's way, who didn't catch any of that. She couldn't understand Charizard, and only really had for reference his hand comment.

However regardless of the context limit Misty nodded. She wanted him to try.

In that case, he thrust his hand into the air, gripping the hand that had created the Psychium-Z tightly. Charizard mirrored the movement with a Slash affected claw.

Moments later his hand began glowing with a yellow-orange aura, even as it began absorbing other colored auras from the battlefield.

Many blues, of two different shades, as well as bits of gray, yellow, purple, pink, reddish orange, white, and further other colors. His hand was shaking violently as it had before, held in place only by him gripping his wrist firmly.
His hand shook more violently than the last time, with burst of heat and intensity within it as if all the colored auras were fighting to figure out what color would win out.

A mixture of blue and white light shot out from the middle of his fingers, with the colors seemingly being the ones that were duking it out at this point. His hand continued to shake violently as the blue light began to slowly edge out the white light.

"Caw."

As the blue light began winning though, he noticed that the battle was gaining a few additional watchers beyond the six Pokémon who had battled with him at Cerulean, Togepi and his Zubat friend, and Misty’s, the trees were now home to several Pidgey and Pidgeotto from Pidgeot's flock, as well as the Spearow he caught by mistake.

A few new white auras shot into his hand at this point, which seemed to reverse the coloring that was going on. White aura was winning over blue, and with one final shake his hand was at rest, with a new item resting in his palm.

He opened his clenched hand with his other at the ready to catch what fell out. What fell out was a white Z-Crystal.

"Well, you now have more data on how to do that. I would suggest not spending too much time gawking."

He nodded as he looked afar to Charizard, who nodded back with an eager grin.

"Use Protect the moment that move goes off!"

"Blast!"

As Misty prepared her own counter Ash recalled what pose he had seem his dream self do when he first go the crystal, and formed his own arms stretched out wide diagonally before slamming them down into a Z across his chest.

Charizard mirrored the movement, and while he did feel there was some energy disruption from a mistake in the pose somewhere the power still felt strong.

The yellow-orange aura around him spread to Charizard, where it flashed a paler yellow around him before sticking to the color. The aura around Charizard grew massive, the sight of which made Misty stare in shock and Blastoise to activate Protect immediately.

"Breakneck Blitz!"

Remembering the name of the attack, he declared it loudly as Charizard roared in anticipation, before flying at Blastoise with the gentleness of a speeding jet.

The attack struck Blastoise's Protect, and shattered it.

"What!?"

Misty and the Pokédex's declaration of surprise was mutual and simultaneous as Blastoise was sent flying. She had to jump out of the way, and Bulbasaur pulled Togepi out of the way, as Blastoise soured back and crashed into the ground, leaving a rut in the ground that ran for several yards.

Charizard was panting in exhaustion, but he had a pleased look on his face.
A look that Ash was fairly sure matched his own. He at least had the tired part down, he felt like Iris just ran up him up another hill at a full run.

"Pikapi. "I'm learning how to do that next."

No one argued with his claiming.

Misty returned the defeated Blastoise with a congratulations and an apology.

... It was the final battle, and Misty had seen all she had to.

She still had a long way to go if she was to give Ash the battle that he deserved, and she had plenty to do going forward if she wanted to meet her goal.

"Pikachu, use Thunderbolt!"

"Gyarados!"

Gyarados slammed his tail into the ground, shimmering with the power of Iron Tail as the electrical force was drowned out.

For one thing, she needed to come up with her own ideas. The strategies she had learned from Ash's battles were good, but she needed to add her own into the equation.

"Use Quick Attack and knock Gyarados's tail loose!"

"Stop the charge with Bulldoze!"

Gyarados's tail briefly lost the shimmer of Iron Tail, but remained in the earth as he vibrated it, sending a shockwave coursing through the ground towards Pikachu.

The move sent Pikachu flying, landing on his back a few feet away.

"Water Pulse!"

What this battle did show, was that she had made progress. She had gotten better.

"Counter Shield!"

That spinning defense stopped Water Pulse, shattering it and sending stray bits flying back into Gyarados.

He complained they stung like needles as they struck him. She'd need to figure out something to do about that trick for when they had the proper battle.

"Surf!"

"Use Iron Tail and get over it!"

She wasn't sure she heard the command correctly as Pikachu sped towards the approaching wave and jumped to meet it.

Then Pikachu struck the wave with Iron Tail, vaulting him over the wave and right at Gyarados's face even as the wave dissipated before Ash would get too soaked.
"Dragon Breath!"

Ash and Pikachu both looked stunned as Gyarados used a fifth move and blasted Pikachu with the dragon type attack.

She would need to thank Iris for that one, even if she did see that it didn't actually hurt Pikachu that much, though by no fault of the move itself.

Just as the attack had struck Pikachu had flung up Wild Charge, the move forming around Pikachu in an electrical field that took the blunt of Dragonbreath.

Pikachu landed on the ground with much less damage or side effect as he would have gotten.

"That was amazing Misty. I didn't know you guys had managed to pull that off!"

At Ash's praise she smiled with a blush.

"Thanks. I've been working a lot harder since Sabrina, and I like to think it's working out. Being with you has really shown me so much; I don't know where I'd be without it."

She covered her mouth as she finished that, did she really just say that?

Ash nodded, though he too was blushing over what had just been said.

"Same here. Let's keep learning from each other. The two of us together can accomplish anything and do anything."

She nodded back, her cheeks still hot.

"Agreed."

And so the battle waged on, the intensity of the final clash not fading away until the very end.

Unlike the blushes, which did fade away before the battle ended, but a bit slower than one might think.

...

What was said was true. Misty and Ash would keep learning from each other and experiencing new things, all while doing many great accomplishments.

They would do this for the rest of their days. More often than not with a smile on both their faces.

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**OMAKE**

**DUBIOUS CANON**

**KETCHUMVERSE PRESENTS, GOROCHU**

...

Ash didn't recognize the Pokémon the counterpart of his had at his side.
It sort of resembled Raichu and Pikachu, but with fangs and horns.

It was also noticeably larger, to a point it could not ride on his counterpart's shoulders. The tops of the Pokémon's ears reached his counterpart's shoulders.

"Who's that Pokémon?"

His counterpart, who looked a lot like his Kanto-Johto self before time broke and about 13 years old, if a lot more muscled than he had been and with clothes in a darker color palette, smiled.

"This is my Gorochu."

"Pika? 'Your what?'

Gorochu looked at Pikachu in an annoyed way for the confusion, but in a way that made Ash suspect it was not uncommon for such a reaction to occur.

"Gorochu, the evolution of Raichu."

"You evolved Pikachu?"

It was an odd thing among his alternate selves, he had noticed. Said 13 year old counterpart looked a bit uneasy, as if he didn't like talking about it.

"Did you get beaten by Lt. Surge?"

"Once."

"...Same, but from what I've seen with the others my comeback went very differently. You see, I sneezed."

Ash and Pikachu stared at his Goro-partnered other. He wasn't entirely sure what that would change.

"Because I sneezed, the Thunderstone landed on Pikachu and he evolved into Raichu. Then Misty and Brock snapped at me, declared I was a horrible human being, that I'd never achieve anything and should just quit, and stormed away in a huff."

The Ash and Pikachu of Earth 052918's entire history diverging on a single sneeze was one thing, but Ash had only one thing to say about the second part of the scenario.

"Holy fuck."

Seriously, the H&F bomb was warranted. Human beings did not act that way.

Misty and Brock did not act that way.

No one in the world acted that way.

The only thing that did was that Ritchie-bot Team Rocket used once. Did Team Rocket replace Misty and Brock with robotic duplicates?

That was the only way that scenario could possibly make sense.

Goro-Ash shrugged.

"Who knows, though that really did hurt let me tell you. I can only imagine what would happened if
they did that after I had really felt like they were my friends. I spent at least a month yelling at trees in hurt anger, and the unfairness of the situation is probably why Raichu didn't leave me during that time. Our bond was strengthened by our shared pain. Still, we worked with our anger, channeling it and with all of that energy changed our entire battle style. Most of the mes I've seen like fast Pokémon, but Raichu and the rest of my Pokémon modified our strategy for slower, tougher Pokémon fortified by our desire to make something of that quirk of fate, and to prove them wrong. Take hits; give them back in twice the force, that was our strategy and the way our vengeance would be had. Eventually Raichu became my Gorochu buddy here after we conquered the mountains of thunderous despair, electrified terror, and Mt. Silver, and I've been inching closer and close to a League win since."

A decently happy ending to a story that only could occur because his friends were replaced by robots. Though Ash did have a question, if only to see if the robot duplicates were ever switched out with the real ones at some point.

"Did they ever apologize?"

Gorochu grumbled a bit before shaking his head.

"Er, no. They just devolved into being more cartoonishly annoying than Team Rocket. Pests instead of real obstacles to prove ourselves with. I have no idea why. It's part of the reason I do work with the other mes, I like to have some days without pit traps or being randomly called a selfish jerkface, and most of the time it's not even a case of or, but of and. It grew old before New Bark Town."

This him had two Team Rockets?

That really had to suck.

Especially when the second Team Rocket surely were robot duplicates of your friends you couldn't find the coin operated self-destruct for.
It had originated as a bad joke in his youth. It had haunted him through schooling and training alike, and even during his brief military service.

He had been fortunate enough to have done his time during a period of peace, and thus he was free from having a title added to his list of titles that he would like to never apply to him.

He was Charles Goodshow. Pokémon League President, Economics Professor, Pokémon Master by a few standards, League Karaoke Champion five years running (and would have had it for twelve years running if not for that night when Diantha participated), the enemy of fixed matches and arch-enemy of corruption.

It all made for a good show, as the name play on his joke would go each and every show and tell, chalk board math problem, or such similar activity, and he was already well aware he would enter the non-battler League hall of fame upon retirement or death unless he did something extremely scandalous.

What he was not was a killer. He had never taken a life by his own hands or actions in his seventy-five years of life, and he planned to keep it that way.

Killing was never a good show. It didn't make you a man.

Of course countering a well-entrenched and toxic ideal was not his job as Pokémon League President (his side hobby of novel writing was the time and place for his philosophy and thoughts on the world, history, and people).

Managing Leagues made for far better shows by comparison, and he had to say that looking at what he was seeing from this year, especially if he was also thinking about last year, really made him smile.

Maybe it was something about the peace that was doing it, people being allowed to follow their dreams and not the needs of the many, or perhaps just a simple result of population increase. Maybe it was just the alignment of stars and no result of humanity being at cause.

Whatever the reason was, a glance at the rookie Trainers from both this year and the previous crop made his heart flutter for reasons unrelated to being nearly eighty.

Talent, it was talent and drive and spark everywhere. Rookies like Black Gaiman and Vermell Arcer won last year's Leagues in the midst of stronger competitors overall, especially in rookie Trainers like Snyder and Beedle, with this year looking like it was going to keep up that trend.

That wasn't even taking into account the future, especially if his old college roommate's whispers from Alola were any indication.

He might be able to get 'fist bumping a Kahuna' off that bucket list he made that time Agatha and Alder had a drinking test he officiated (and later got involved in as a seventh competitor, or was it the sixth. He honestly could not recall sometimes).

It was a concentration of top notch Trainers that he had never seen previously. Normally every year had, between all the Leagues, a dozen or two Trainers with the qualities to be greats. They didn't always pull off what the expectations had of them through some combination of bad luck and family issues.
See Sinnoh’s Reggie and Kanto’s Casey Snagem.

Yet when they did achieve it, it was glorious to see.

On really rare occasions you found someone even better than great. Such Trainers were people like the Sinnoh Champion Cynthia, who was a quality of Trainer that he had rarely ever seen.

And then you had people like that Tobias fellow, who he had no idea what he was or why he did things. Nor where he was for that matter, he never responded to the mass email about karaoke.

A knock at the door drew his attention, and after he called that it was open it swung open to reveal a young woman, dark haired and stern looking.

Electra Artisan. Head of League finances.

Manager of sponsors and confectionaries.

Someday he really should make use her vacation days and take some time off, before he found it appropriate to use that modern lingo about rods and posteriors to describe her personality. He would like not needing to do so, he liked a clean tongue.

"What brings you to my office? Is there something wrong in the numbers?"

She shook her head before explaining.

"No Mister President. No one is obviously skimming funds. However, I did overhear a few concerns from some people in ethics that I'm not sure will go through the proper channels on its own, but I feel warrants your time."

Translation, she agreed with what they were saying, but figured that the Ethics chair would not pass it on.

He nodded, letting her speak.

"They are concerned about the likelihood of a rise in people using unfair advantages in upcoming and future Leagues. We all know that there is something making more of them, and the odds that we won't have at least a few in every tournament going forward puts the fairness of the entire sport into question. More concerning, the controversy's effect on revenue and sponsorships would surely be negative."

He nodded, though in a way that made her know he got what she was talking about.

"You're worried about Bloodliners."

It wasn't a question, and she didn't need to confirm that it was what she meant.

He turned to the shelf he kept memorabilia of his years on. When he noticed her eyes finally move in tandem with his, and landing on the framed newspapers he had on the sides of said shelf he continued.

"I've seen so much change I doubt that you can really comprehend. When I was a Trainer people were fighting to not have gender equality in the sport. The female Trainers I knew had to not only sharpen their minds, but thicken their skin against the jeers and barbs from fans and opponents alike. Years after that we had to overcome controversies about foreign Trainers competing, particularly ones from farther afield. The jeers I heard as a youth were the same, despite the changing of taunts
from gender to their places of birth. I doubt I need to remind you of the controversy when the first competitors who were open about their sexuality became a thing, and I can tell you that the jeers then were the same as the previous times, just clad in a new coat of paint. Such bad press is hardly new, and it always ends the same way."

She narrowed her eyes at him.

"No challenger, be they female or gay, could as seriously break the rules as a Bloodliner. Despite the jeers there were no matches won because the female Trainer flashed the male Trainer at a crucial moment. Meanwhile the possibility of Pokémon manipulation is quite real, and something that does create an inherent advantage."

"We have a word for that already, and before whatever is going on with today's youth. It's called cheating, and we will deal with cheating with the same severity as we always have. What you are suggesting is that we bar people for the chance of cheating, which I don't think I need to remind you is a very slippery slope."

He was an old man, and he had seen so many changes play out the way Bloodliners were. Frankly he didn't even think that the numbers were really that different.

People said that about things like sexuality, ignoring the difference between the number of people with non-heterosexuality, and the number of people open about their non-heterosexuality.

It didn't matter what change was going on, the path it took was always the same and he wasn't going to be as mad as to think that this time it was different and they had to make a stand.

Madness was saved for his private life, and his ever expanding shelf budget.

That would not be a good show, especially as it could easily be one of his last. He was old after all.

She looked at him like he was a fool, but didn't say more. She did however, move to change the subject to something else.

Probably because he didn't hint that she should walk out of his office.

"You know, I've always sort of thought that eight badges are too easy. People strive for it, and how many just peter out. Then at the end of the day, it's not even that tough of a challenge for people who aren't really going to amount to anything. How many people in the larger conferences are basically cannon fodder for the actually good Trainers, and how many of those are really unnecessary. A tougher qualification could lead to smaller, more intense Leagues. We wouldn't really lose much revenue compared to the optimization. All it would cost are a few dreams easily given up."

He was silent as he digested Electra's points before giving his rebuttal.

"Dreams save us. Dreams lift us up and transform us into something better. To let any dream die prematurely, to not have the best shot to become true, I cannot be party to such a thing. In trying to prevent dreams that might not be able to come true from playing out tragically, you will stop dreams that had a chance. There is no net that only catches what you want."

Electra looked right back at him, with an intensity that made him wonder if there was more to her thought about the League difficulty than just her role as a financial expert. She was never a Trainer from what he knew, but he knew nothing about her family.

"A noble stand, but such stands can only go so high before they go back down again. You've done good things, but you aren't going to be around forever nor is your health perfect. There will be a
League without Charles Goodshow by death or retirement, and I'm not the only one who has a vision going forward you won't like."

The last bit was less a threat in tone, and more a comment about other possible successors. With that she turned and left the office.

The last words did leave him with a reminder of something that he had observed in his time.

Everything would eventually change. Just as the Snagem Trainer generation gave way to the generation of Cynthia, and now these new Trainers would one day give way to another generation in time, the League wasn't unchangeable either.

One couldn't stop change, all one could do was impart your ideals and see the next era know your views and reasons as they themselves made their own calls.

The world on all ends had benefited from decades of a growing peace, and hopefully it would keep doing so.

Unlike a growing percentage of people, he had lived through both eras. He knew that this one was far better.

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Elsewhere

"Iris, it is time."

Iris's eyes shot open as she jumped to her feet, finding Misty at the opening to the Secret Power generated cave, a patient look in her eyes.

In the back of her mind, Iris could not help but notice a few odd things about her surroundings.

The cave that had likely been formed by Psyduck seemed older than what was common, feeling like it had been in use for far more than a single night.

She always tended to pick up on a few more environmental details than the others did. It was part of the reason she never tripped on roots during runs.

Something that everyone else would probably pick up on was the lack of furniture in the cave. No beds, no dressers, the only such thing present being a shelf that held what she believed were trophies.

In the center of the cave was bedding, but it was the sort Iris used before she met Ash and Misty and was still fine with using.

They were not fine with using it.

Misty's odd choice to forgo the bed, a choice she had trouble thinking of a reason for as Misty would not do so unless absolutely necessary, was not the only thing that was odd about her.

For one, she was without clothing. Iris had no issue with it, for Misty's reasoning for clothes was quite solvable with changes in their relationships and absence from the social crowds that made humans put the things on in good weather. However she had no idea how Misty had been talked into the idea.
Second, she was older than she should be. She was not as old as Ash’s mother, but she was certainly
closer to that age than she should be.

Finally her stomach looked off, and there was only one reason Iris could think of for it, as it did not
resemble human fat. Misty was pregnant, though Iris had no way of saying how far along in it.

It seemed to not be so far along as to hinder her walking, but that was all Iris could tell.

Yet this, and everything else, was going on entirely at the back of her mind. Consciously the thoughts
were not changing her behavior at all.

"You needed the sleep, but Ash and Dawn should be back for that competition in _. They will be
expecting us."

Iris nodded, and followed Misty as they moved, though there were two things odd about it.

For one the movement did not feel like she was really going somewhere, the secret base cave just
seemed to fade and a cliff edge replaced it.

The other question she had was who was Dawn? That seemed to be a name, but Iris knew no one by
the name.

Even if it did feel somewhat familiar.

Standing on the edge of the cliff, as the morning sun began to crack through the clouds, Iris had
another question.

Where was Anabel?

"Anabel cannot be here right now, but she will be back soon. She, Serena, and Belladonna are
dealing with Team Rocket's actions at Twist Mountain."

That answered that question, but it raised more. Twist Mountain, the Unovan Mountain?

The clouds parted as Charizard became visible in the distance, flying in at a speed that Iris again
found strange. Far too fast, and without the proper dispersal of clouds, Charizard had landed before
her and Misty, and two people jumped off of it.

The one on Charizard’s left was probably Dawn, and Iris was still struck by the odd feeling she knew
her somehow. However she did, the Dawn that she was currently seeing was similarly older like
Misty (and presumably herself), but perhaps younger by a year or two. With blue hair, she was
similarly unclothed like Misty was, and pregnant as well.

Iris could not say if she was more or less pregnant than Misty though.

"Ah, finally I am out of clothing. I cannot remember why I ever bothered with the things, can you
Pikachu?"

"Pikapi."

Her gaze was then moved to Ash on the right, and even as she didn’t react, subconsciously she was
seized with horror.

Like Ash, Misty, and the mysterious Dawn Ash was older and lacking clothes, though he was not
pregnant.
Instead his right eye was missing, replace with a giant gouge that ran from the top of his skull to right near his jaw. It was a massive scar.

Instantly upon seeing it the way it came to be flooded her mind, they had just killed Hunter J and freed her family, and Ash had proposed to them that he would take her as one of his mates and travel the world.

That had infuriated them, and he and her father battled. That was when Ash had lost his eye.

"Iris, Misty, glad to see you. You are looking beautiful as always. Iris, seeing as you have recovered from the injuries my father left when we killed him, want to get pregnant again?"

Ash's statement was said as friendly and honest as most anything he said, and consciously she nodded.

Unconsciously, she was screaming in horror at the injury that he had suffered.

...

While the screaming stayed internal, Iris's eyes snapped open quite externally, revealing that she was still on the tree branch she had fallen asleep on just outside of the house of Ash's mother.

It had all just been a dream. None of it had actually happened, except the thoughts that created it.

But those thoughts….

She jumped off the tree, landing on the grass with a crack of the plant, palms pressing against the grass. She didn't hear Axew wake, and that was for the best.

She just needed to breath, to calm her thundering heartbeat and she doubted she could talk right now.

That dream...that nightmare…

It had not been entirely bad, she could not say that most of what she had seen had bothered her. J dead, Ash's father dead, all of them living together simply…but Ash.

She shivered again.

She had no issue with the idea of Ash having scars. She had no problem with scars in general. However the way that scar had come about…

She slammed her head into the grass, not wanting to remember the brief but vivid images that dream had given her of how Ash had gotten that scar.

Everything was going perfectly before that thought had entered her mind. She had a goal to get her parents back and destroy J, she had an idea of life after that. She had even somewhat bettered it based on advice from others such as Meliae.

Yet the fear of the moment that linked those two would not leave her.

"Breakneck Blitz!"
The power surged through both himself and Pikachu before being unleashed in a massive tackle by Pikachu towards the defending target.

Said target wasn't just standing still though.

"Alright Dragonite, Horn Drill!"

The Professor's command was met by the dragon-type in question leaping into the air and flying towards the charging Pikachu, spinning like a drill into the Z-Move head on.

The two attacks collided for a moment, before Horn Drill was quickly overpowered and Dragonite was flung back.

Dragonite's heels dug into the ground first, and it was likely through the combination of that and the Horn Drill that it used that it was still standing.

Panting like Drake's Dragonite after going through all the rounds of battle it did with him sure, but still standing.

"Oh my, and to think that's even with Multiscale halving the force! Medic!"

So Dragonite was barely standing, even with a good landing, Horn Drill taking the attack partway, and an ability that halved damaged.

Ash, even if he did feel a rush of exhaustion come on from the Z-Move, had to grin. Z-Moves were so amazing, perhaps even as much as science!

"Pikapi." 'Do all Dragonites have that ability, or just this one? Because I feel far too exhausted to still have them stand after doing that.'

As Pikachu panted out a complaint and Chansey responded to Professor Oak's call to start healing his Dragonite, the old man turned to him with a wide grin.

"Simply incredible. I don't claim to be an expert on Z-Moves, but the power that showed was simply incredible. To think that you managed to create the crystals for it."

"I'm just as surprised as you."

Really he was. Just when it seemed like he had a clue on what went on in his life, he'd find out something new.

He half expected to wake up one day and find out he could turn his toast into mega stones. Then the Sceptilite he had would have company.

The Professor dug into his jacket eagerly, talking as he did.

"Move expertise is handled by a young Professor named Kukui in the Alola region. I don't see him that often, and the person I more often talk to over there is my cousin Samson. He's the funny one of the family, and he studies regional variants. I've always been asking him to send me some for study, and if possible Trainers from Alola with such Pokémon on top of it all, but it never works out when we try to arrange things. He runs a school you see, but he does have time to send me less time-consuming things."

One such thing was possibly what the Professor just removed from his jacket, a flash drive with the same symbol as his Z-Ring on it.
The Professor held the flash drive out, which he took and held up to Pikachu, who sniffed it before looking oddly at the Professor.

"Young Kukui also works with my cousin, and he's familiar with all the poses for Z-Moves. This flash drive has all of the moves on it step by step, and can be uploaded to the Pokédex."

The Pokédex hummed in his jacket pocket approvingly, as the Pokédex did whenever it was told it could get data drives of information placed inside of it.

Ash nodded in thanks, though stopped mid-nod as he realized something.

"Professor, how exactly did me having a Z-Ring come up, and probably more importantly the Z-Crystals that I didn't get from anyone?"

The Professor smiled at him in a reassuring way.

"My cousin and I talk about all sorts of things, many of which are more dangerous than your ability to create Z-Crystals. If anyone spied on us that would probably be looked into after about three rounds of much more immediately concerning subject matter."

What he said though, didn't really reassure him.

"When you say immediately concerning…"

"If I ever end up in prison or get declared a wanted man who’s on the run from the law, with or without a similar thing happening to a man whose name rhymes with Fastings, that's what I mean. You might want to skip town if that happens, in case they actually decide to take note of what came up about our sponsored Trainers and students as part of their investigation."

Ash stared at the Professor in concern, as the old man chuckled.

"I have lived, and continue to live, a perilous life."

That was probably about as much as he wanted to know, and so the topic was allowed to drop and to go on to talking about how his training had been going.

"Hey Iris, did you ever go to Alola?"

It wasn't the obvious question to ask after a jog up one of the steeper hills in the area, but it was what came up.

From her seat on a gnarled root Iris nodded.

"Not for any long period of time, but I have been there. Why do you ask?"

He held up the Z-Ring on his arm.

"Just wondering."

Iris didn't seem to have anything that jumped out as a must say thing, though the conversation wasn't forced to stop there.

'I've heard it's a nice place for vacation, but a bit expensive to live in if you want anything that can't
be produced there. The people there are pretty nice from what I've heard. I've also heard it doesn't have Gyms, but something else.'

At Anabel's point Ash's curiosity was peaked. What could replace Gyms?

"If it's a tropical island, I wonder if it has any rare Water Pokémon. All I saw from it were the Pokémon that Lilo girl had, and none of them were water-types."

True. Of all of the Alolan Pokémon he had heard of, all but the Geodude variant had come from Lilo's Pokémon, and none of them had been Water-types.

"Well maybe we all can go there someday and see for ourselves."

"Yeah, that sounds wonderful."

'I wonder if Team Rocket would follow us too?'

Anabel, Misty, and he all laughed a bit at the image, though as the laugh went on he felt a bit of red trace across his cheeks.

'Ve go there? That sounded sort of…datey wasn't the word. What was a better word…

Honeymoon?

Wasn't that what taking someone to a tropical island was? Especially given that he did know they found him…

He looked away as the laugh faded away, unsure if he also saw similar red on Misty and Anabel's faces or not.

His gaze rested for a moment on Iris, who oddly wasn't laughing or blushing. That drove the blush back for a moment.

"Iris, is something bothering you?"

That drew her attention his way, a bit of confusion on her face.

"I mean, if you're worried we'd all just want to go on vacation and forget about what we want to do…"

"I know what you mean."

Iris's response wasn't one of anger for potentially forgetting, it was something else.

Though before Ash could press the issue, a loud strike of thunder shook the hilltop and the sky darkened.

'This wasn't in the forecast….quickly I'll teleport us!'

The Pokédex tried to protest about 'distantly detected barometric data of urgent urgency', but the complaint went unheeded.

He did get ranted at from it about 'incomplete major data' for a good few hours though, and how he had cost him gaining 'as complete data as at Seafoam'.


It had taken a bit of work, but he was pretty sure that Boldore had what she was looking for.

"Alright Boldore, Return!"

Boldore's entire frame glowed white as the attack built up power. On the opposite end of the field stood Serperior, body completely still.

Aimed at such a target Boldore lunged, the attack moving at a faster speed than before, and with more force.

Ash wasn't exactly able to tell that scientifically, but the charge had a different force to it the same way one could feel a car moving faster as it passed you by.

By that metric, there was certainly more force to it.

Serperior swung a glowing green tail of Leaf Blade to counter. The two attacks struck, sparks going off from impact before Leaf Blade won out and knocked Boldore back.

The white sheen faded away, and Boldore slammed her limbs into the ground in frustration.

"Bol. 'It still isn't enough.'

"It's better, and it was against a Leaf Blade. That would have worked against anything else."

Boldore let out a frustrated sigh despite his comment, and trotted away with an almost tangible funk.

Ash watched her as she walked away, though before he could move to go after her Serperior stuck her tail in his way.

He could easily have jumped over it, but it was a clear message.

"Ser. 'That would not have helped.'

"Maybe, but I am worried. She's been like this since Cinnabar. I thought that Return would have been enough."

Perhaps he should have worked on Rock Polish instead. Speed was always a good way to work on problems.

Serperior watched the trotting Rock-type for a moment before giving her own piece.

"Per. 'It was a good move, but there is a more effective way.'

"So I should have figured out how you do Rock Polish?"

Serperior shook her head at his declaration, before lifting her tail up and having it glow blue. It wasn't Aerial Ace though, as a stream of water began sprinkling from the end of it.

Aqua Tail, Serperior's fifth move.

"Serper. "No, that wouldn't have worked. Even with just my tail, I'd have caught her with my attacks and won out. No, if we want to help her with her power problem evolution is the only answer."

He looked at the grass-type warily as he considered her point
"You know I'm the 'you don't need to evolve' guy, quite possibly to a point I probably qualified for a jacket with lettering on the back declaring myself that. Embodied, that's the word for it right?"

"You are looking for the word embroidery. Embodied is more of saying 'I am the thing'. Though another word you might be looking for is monogramed."

"Yeah, what the Pokédex said. Vocab was not my strong point in school."

There was probably an argument that Pallet Town's school wasn't really good at vocab teaching either, but that wasn't the point.

Serperior shook her head at his word stumble.

"Ser."

'Yes, you aren't the type to jump on that sort of thing quickly. As much as I'd have found it amusing for someone to have gotten on Oshawott's case to get off his butt and get evolved, I know that is hardly who you are. You are our favorite idiot after all, even if you are doing a pretty good job of no longer warranting being called that much these days. However, I like to think that you are aware that there is a time and place for seeing where that might be what is needed."

Ash shifted uncomfortably at Serperior's point. There was truth to it, but it still wasn't something he was eager to go and do.

"Yeah, but normally there is a point where everyone sees a reason to want to evolve. Charizard wanted to fight Aerodactyl, Bayleef needed more power to save me, Gliscor needed to save me from falling, and Pignite had something to prove. If that really is what Boldore wants, the rule would be that she'd do it."

"You have no idea how tempted I am to blare a meme at you at my highest volume right now."

Both Ash and Serperior's attention were drawn to the Pokédex in Ash's jacket pocket.

"Ser."

'I am not sure what that means, but don't do it. At any volume.'

"I will remind the Regal Pokémon that I cannot understand her. The reminder aside, despite what Boldore might want, a Boldore does not evolve like most Pokémon. Such a Pokémon species, similar to ones such as Kadabra and Pumpkaboo, require a unique form of stimuli that other species, including Slurpuff and Scyther, experience when they undergo a specific process."

The Pokédex then named something that Ash had no idea how to spell, or even how many letters it had.

"This process can be replicated in several ways, a few specific to the species of each Pokémon. However a common manner of doing so involves the use of a trading machine and the specific energy the device gives off that can accomplish this."

At the mention of trading, Ash felt a very familiar unease creep over him. Serperior looked at him, quite likely because his face was probably displaying an odd quirk or shade.

"Ser."
'I take it there is a trauma I am not familiar with involving you and trading, that I'll presume happened when you were less my idiot, and more the idiot that Pikachu told me stories over with the aid of camp fires, skits, and Oshawott playing you?'

"Yeah…"

"I take it the concept of a round trade isn't something that has crossed your mind."

Part of Ash wanted to ask if trades really came in shapes, but it would be a bit much.

"What I can't get is how Delia's kid managed to actually do it."

Iris stopped mid-step, the name of Ash's mother catching her attention. She idly noticed a pair of men, probably older than Delia but not at a point of being what a human would call old, playing some sort of game on a park table as they talked.

Iris was pretty sure it was chess, but she would not be surprised if she was wrong.

The man who had made the statement tapped some sort of time recorder, not noticing her as the other one spoke up.

"I hear you. If I had to make a bet on which kid would leave this place and start making a name for himself, I'd have chosen that Gary kid hands down. Smarter, better head on his shoulder, and a big name at the end of him. Sure everyone here knows Delia, and we all love her, but you take one step out of this town and she's about as relevant as whoever lost the last rep election."

"Hush, he'd have won if his campaign manager tipped at that restaurant in Viridian. It was a midterm."

"But you don't remember his name…"

"…Make your move so we can go back to talking about the kid."

The second man chuckled and moved a piece on the board, before tapping the time keeping device again.

"What a world we live in. Ignoring those two rich city brats two Trainers leave Pallet Town, and it's the one who eats more than he thinks who comes back a rising star while Oak's grandson is nowhere to be found. Did he die?"

"Nah, the old man would be mourning if that happened."

They had not said anything to warrant it yet if she had to be honest, but Iris felt her legs rooted in place and her fist trembling a bit in anger as they kept talking. The way they doubted Ash's ability just wasn't right and it ground on her nerves like nails on a chalkboard.

"Well then did he crash somewhere? What a waste of his potential, if it was ever there at all. I mean Ketchum and that other kid completely trounced him at that tournament."

"He did make it to the final round."

"It was a sixty-forty race, and that scowling kid from coal country was the big six & zero. I'm also being rather generous in saying that the Oak kid was even forty."
The man who was talking promptly scowled when the other man did something that had a piece he moved be taken by the other man, who shook his head wistfully.

"Life's not all about beginnings and ties. Luck plays a big part in it too. Sometimes some people have good luck and some people have bad luck."

"So what you're saying is that Oak gave his son a crappy Pokémon who could only get him crappy Pokémon in return, and Ketchum some sort of unnaturally powerful rodent? Well I guess that would make it easier for him…"

"That is not the case at all," Iris interrupted. The last line the man has spoken was enough to warrant a response, which drew the attention of both men her way.

The one who was just talking looked at her in confusion.

"And you are who exactly?"

The other player shook his head.

"I thought you kept up with what is going on. This girl's one of Ketchum's traveling friends who're staying with Delia while he's back in town. Ivy right?"

"Iris."

The man who had misnamed her apologized for the misnaming, though the man who had gotten her to talk looked her over in a look that suggested that he wasn't impressed.

"Oh yeah, now I remember. You're one of those Unovan types right? Don't exactly sound like one. Here I thought that Unovans were fond of their big public speeches and rallies, and here you are all butting in because I have an opinion you don't like?"

He got up and sauntered up to her, shorter than her but still able to have his eyes bore into her own.

"It's my opinion, and one I am quite sure of, that your boyfriend got lucky. The only reason he isn't hiding off in shame somewhere for failing is because he got some sort of unnaturally strong Pikachu, and that's why he's the most famous person in this town who's not growing liver spots right now. What, you going to say that he had to work really hard, or got randomly accosted by thugs or something like that? Well here's the deal Ms. Isshu, he only got out of that because of said funky rat. Had he gotten anything else he wouldn't be here."

Iris could feel her Bloodliner abilities itching to react to her instinctive need to defend her friend's honor.

"….Sorry, I don't think he's medicated today. He's always forgetting to get them refilled."

The other man apologized quickly, but that didn't quite register as she stared him down. Part of her felt the need to threaten him with claws, but she was aware of the issue of doing that and controlled herself.

That did not stop her from growling at him though, which seemed to confuse her.

"You some sort of animal? I know Unova is nuts but growling…"

"You should not assume that you know anything. Regardless of how strong Ash and Pikachu were when they left, they had to learn how to survive and get stronger. They are still learning, and I am
helping him, but it is what they are doing, and not how they started, that got them as far as they have." Iris said, cutting the man off. The growl stayed in the tone of her voice as she corrected him.

"Want to speak like an actual person and not like you are some sort of weirdo? Is it so hard to say 'shouldn't'?"

"Oh, there you are Iris..."

Misty's words stopped as she approached, perhaps caught off guard by what was going on.

It was not that she wanted to deal with this jerk too, as she felt Misty's arms wrap around her waist and begin pulling her back, even as the other older man did the same with his counterpart.

"Thank you miss, you might have helped me stop something before it could get ugly."

Even as Misty dragged her away (Iris herself not making it difficult), she continued to glare at the old man as he in fact made it difficult for the other older man.

Iris felt Misty's arms tense around her in relation to what the man had said but knew that the redhead wouldn't react to it publicly, especially while they were in Ash's home town.

"I don't know what sort of wonky adventures Ketchum had, but I ain't wrong! The boy got lucky, that's the only reason he's being lauded!"

The man's shout did make Iris decide on something though.

Recently she had been thinking more about the future, something sparked by that night of worry in Cinnabar when she had to think to herself 'and then what'.

Ash had recently commented about how odd it felt to be home after being away, and with it the question of if it would ever feel the way it once did again.

Whatever the future would be, she would encourage it to be a future that was not in this town.

...

It had taken a bit of a drag to get Iris out of that situation and into a place to talk to her.

"Did you think I was going to attack that man?"

It wasn't so much a question, she had seen it in her eyes. Iris couldn't hold it against her if Misty thought that, especially after she told them of her own experiences in the wild with her Dragon family.

Misty turned to her after a few seconds. "Not really. It wasn't like he was threatening to hurt him or something, was it?"

"Were you not upset by what he said about Ash?"

Once again, it wasn't really a question. Misty grimaced slightly and looked away for a bit, but she quickly looked at her again and spoke with determination.

"Ash doesn't care about what others think about him, so why should we? We both know how hard he's worked to get this far. That man doesn't know what he's talking about. Heck, he's probably frustrated by his own failure and so he finds it easier to feel envious of other people's luck."
Iris decided not to press any further, since she knew Misty was right. Something she had learned in the wild was that, indeed, some were born with a better potential than others, but it depended on the amount of effort to develop it, and sometimes with hard work and dedication it was possible to overcome said advantages. And what some might call 'luck', for some others was the choice to take a chance or not, and what you did with it.

"Changing the topic, is there something bothering you?" the redhead suddenly asked, catching the wild girl off-guard.

"Something like what?"

"I don't know. I mean, since Cinnabar it seems like you've got something weighing on your mind. If you need to talk about it…"

Iris glanced into Misty's eyes. The redhead looked genuinely concerned, and being honest, inside she did feel the need to tell someone how she felt. Maybe she should share it with Ash and Anabel too.

"Yes, there is something. Misty, you have a long-term goal, right? It is something to determine the rest of your life."

"I guess it is, at least with some things." Misty nodded.

"Well, you know my goal is to be stronger, to find that J woman and rescue my family. I have that much clear but… I have been wondering what I will do after that."

"What do you mean?"

"I have traveled around the world my entire life with them, but now, since I met you guys… I feel like I would like to do it again," the dark-skinned girl explained. "What I mean is, part of me would like to see the world again… through a human's eyes, if that makes any sense. I have experienced the world from a dragon's viewpoint until I met all of you and now I have been wondering what I might have missed out on by not seeing things as a human."

Iris saw Misty raised her eyebrows. Maybe she was a bit surprised at her choice of words, and that didn't surprise her, given that she herself had said before they perhaps weren't 'exactly' humans. Her contact with them had been minimal, but the truth was that the more she traveled with Ash and the others, the bigger her curiosity for human society grew.

And then, her other half, the part of her that had been raised with Dragon Pokémon, felt that was like betraying those she considered her real family.

It was like her human and Pokémon sides were in conflict with one another inside her. Would she be betraying one side if she chose the other?

"Well… I don't see anything wrong with that," said Misty. "It's not like you're just going to up and leave your family never to see them again, are you?"

Iris tilted her head. That was what she was worried about, but the way Misty had worded it, it seemed rather obvious that it didn't have to be like that. It didn't erase her worries, but it relieved them somewhat.

"Look, I don't think I'm the best person to say this, but there's a time we all have to grow up and separate from our families to achieve our goals," Misty said firmly. "Some have to do it earlier than others, but whether you choose to keep in touch with them or not after that, it's all up to you. As for me, I'd rather sever all of my ties with my sisters, but you don't have to do the same with your family,
do you?" Misty placed a hand on Iris' shoulder. "In the end it's entirely your choice on what you do, so just do whatever you feel is best for you."

From that perspective, it made sense. Iris's real worry came from, in the case of starting her own family with Ash and the others, she'd be forced to sever her ties with her Dragon family, or worse, never to see them again. It didn't have to be that way, did it?

On the other hand, that didn't ease her other worry. What would she do once she had rescued her family from Hunter J? Ash and Misty at least had a goal that would take them to something bigger in the long run, but she… what could she do, should she choose to integrate to human society?

Maybe she should learn more, and she'd find something among all those Pokémon competitions humans enjoyed so much.

Tell a story of your own experiences or feelings about making decisions. Do you feel like you have control over your choices, or are there situations where you feel like your options are limited?

It had been the post oven, pre removal doldrums of muffin making. There had been nothing to do at that point.

Pikachu was still asleep, and he hadn't taken up coffee.

"What was your dad like?"

If it had been boredom to bring it up, or the fact that his tiredness had made him not consider the ramifications of asking it, but the question was none the less posed.

As a result, his mom's eyes were no longer on the newspaper she was reading (Unovan tax percentage decrease bill defeated by arm wrestling), and rather on him in curiosity.

"Your grandfather? Is there any reason you're asking? I don't mind, it's just a bit random, that's all."

Having to explain what could possibly prompt his question would be tricky.

"Well you see, there was this thing in which he came up….

His mom rose her hand up before he continued.

"If it's anything remotely similar to how you ended up catching a dragon-type I had never heard of in the sky, despite neither of you having wings, I don't want to know."

He bit his lip trying to find a way to say that it wasn't like that, despite the fact the incident did involve kidnapping, exhaustion, and minor breaking of the laws of physics. His mom quickly waved him off.

"You look like you're trying to figure out if it is or not, so let's skip over what it was and spare my nerves. How did he come up?"

"Well, about me."

The words sounded awkward, even as he remembered what had been applied to make him want to ask.

That his grandfather did not want him to be born. Exactly how true was it?
His mom flinched, though she seemed to know what he meant.

"I have no idea how that could have possibly come up, it was only between the three of us and no one else, but it was true. He would have been quite happy if you never were born. However, I know he'd have changed his mind if he met you, and I'm not just talking about when you were a little baby."

Given how often he had ended up going backwards in time even before this new reality, that wasn't as out of the question as his mom made it out to be.

She took a sip of her coffee before continuing, leaving the potentially interesting what if about a random time travel incident leading to a meeting that never would have been on the side.

"Ashton Ketchum wasn't a bad man, he was quite a good man actually. If he wasn't I'd have never named you after him, though if he had lived to see you I'd probably have named you something else. Like Casey, or maybe Bob. I was always somewhat partial to Satoshi myself, your grandmother's side of the family had names like that."

"However, he was always a bit rough around the edges. He wasn't a guarded or a reserved man, and he didn't have problems with drinking or drugs or anything like a lot of men of his generation did, but there was always something unpolished about how he expressed himself in anything. If it makes any sense, try to imagine that everything he did from love to concern to scolding me about my skirt lengths was always more of a rough draft instead of a more complete version of itself. I'm sure that if he had been born a few decades later a psychologist would have had a word for it, but that wasn't really something done when he was born. I always knew that, though I won't lie and say it didn't hurt when he gave a first draft equivalent of a 'this is why you can't go to that party on a school night' talk, or the 'I care about your future' talk. I knew it wasn't him being deliberate, but it still wasn't ideal."

Ash wasn't sure what to say, and his mom was able to continue.

"I do mean what I said though. He died hating that man, and he would have preferred that you weren't born at the same time, but he would have loved you as much as my mother did, and perhaps even as much as I do. You have his smile, and he'd have been happy to see someone bring it out much easier than he could even when he wanted to. You also have his need for a razor, but he'd have probably laughed about that if I brought it up, as he always did."

The last part was said in a way that he wasn't entirely sure if his mom was telling him to use that wax he got from Seafoam, and to avoid getting roped into that time sink he moved onto a topic that was perhaps more unnerving to go into.

In part because it did involve a bit of fudging details.

"Around the same time that came up, I also was pointed to a few people who happened to look like me. Especially in the ways that I don't look like you…"

"I am in no position to claim offense to that, nor do I have any interest in doing so. If they were from the same family I sincerely apologize for the sense of betrayal and world shifting that they may have experienced. If they weren't, well can't say I'm surprised."

Unlike the possible barb at himself and his namesake, there was no mistaking the tone his mom had as anything but disdain, though entirely aimed at his father and not at any of the others involved in it all.
The shift away from talking about the yesteryears Ketchums (Ashton, Hanako and Delia) to him possibly going on to figure out which sibling to mention to his mother and in what context was prevented by the ding of the muffin timer.

Not coincidentally, he also heard the footsteps of Pikachu, Misty, and Anabel the moment it went off.

…

'You know, have you thought about looking at possible opponents?'

Anabel's question had been raised as the last of the muffins were consumed.

"That would be a pretty good idea, after all we didn't really get much of a chance to watch much of it last time."

Who in the cable company thought that putting the channel into pay-for-view just as the tournament began was a good idea had created a rather toxic stink in both Pallet and Viridian, created a mass change in service providers in the area, and had gotten legislative action. Needless to say no one had been happy about it, for even the other providers didn't like the new legislation being out there telling them what they could or could not do.

Hence why Delia's tone had an annoyed edge to it when she talked about it. He'd have a similar edge if it came up, but that hadn't happened this time.

"It would be perfectly legal to do so. What one does before you get onto tournament grounds at tournament times is of no concern of the League."

At the sound of the Pokédex his mother eyed it oddly, though that was to be expected given that she was not used to the talking machine like they were. For her it speaking up was akin to the microwave offering up advice on auto repair.

The nervous eying of the device continued as it began displaying the data, present in the form of pictures, words, and rather unnecessary narration.

He caught some of them, but he did miss a few. He'd review the data later.

"Corey Gareth Oakton, Rank 2nd, Pokémon Pidgeot, Scyther, Hitmonlee, Sandslash, Rhyhorn, Venusaur, Gengar. Random Trivia, This individual is the same age as that trio of brothers and beat the blue-haired one of them twice in his career."

“Neesha, Rank Top 4, Used Pokémon Blastoise, Dewgong, Wigglytuff, Vileplume, Rapidash, Ninetales. Random Trivia, Neesa is an orphan with no last name who now lives in a nice home she pays for with League winnings."

“Fergus Blueman, Rank Top 4, Used Pokémon Gyarados, Vaporeon, Tentacruel, Golduck, Nidoqueen, Kingdra. Random Trivia, This individual is a perennial favorite among type enthusiasts who none the less question the use of Nidoqueen."

“Ringo S. Beedle, Rank Top 8," Before the image could scroll down further and go into information, his mom tapped the image with a finger. This stopped it in place, and she looked at Ash, then the image, then back to him.

"Is he who you meant?"
All eyes were then on the Pokédex's image, which featured someone who, like many Ash had seen, resembled himself. Dark hair, a tall build, a pair of marks on his cheeks.

However there were some differences from his as well, and it wasn't simply the fact the guy had red eyes. For one thing, the guy was massive and covered with muscles the likes of which Ash had rarely seen. He was pretty sure that some of them looked larger than Max's head. The jaw and face seem more rugged and angular than what he'd seen on himself, Red, or the others. The guy was wearing a shirt that failed to cover up his muscled chest, and was posing for the shot kind of oddly in his stance and hand gesturing, though Ash didn't really notice that part.

Ash couldn't help but be drawn instead to his eyebrows though, as he noticed something about them. At the end of them, where they reached the farthest side of the face, they pointed upward in a sharp yet somewhat curved point.

It was a type of eyebrow Ash had a feeling he had seen before somewhere…

"So this guy…is he who you were talking about earlier?"

At his mom's question, he shook his head.

"No, I had never seen him before. I was talking about other people."

His mom looked back at him in surprise, then at Ringo again, then back at him.

"So you've met people like him, and then we just randomly see another one on a list like this. What are the odds of that?"

Larger than you might think, but that was another talk entirely. With that the image was allowed to scroll again, which led to an image of him posing oddly again, but this time with Pokémon. Among them a Pichu on his shoulder, which seemed oddly clashing with the way he looked.

"Known Pokémon, Pichu, Rhyperior, Machamp, Dodrio, Marowak, Exeggutor, Hitmontop, Blissey, Magmar. Random trivia, many suspected he would have gone much farther in the tournament had a mistake in the medical care of his Rhyperior not flared up at an inopportune moment in his battle with Corey. The mistake was revealed to have been the result of sleep deprivation on the part of a Nurse Joy. As it is, he is confirmed to not be competing this year as his mother hurt herself and his help is required on the family farm until she fully recovers."

So he wasn't going to be a factor in any case. So this information was pretty much entirely pointless beyond adding to his list of siblings.

Still, there were more Trainers to go through.

"Phil Ein, Rank Top 16, Used Pokémon Golem, Persian, Magneton, Hypno, Venomoth, Crobat. Random trivia, Phil did better last year than his last two times at the League and hopes that going forward he'll be more noticed by the larger battle landscape."

“Bartholomew Jarelson the second, Rank Top 16, Used Pokémon Arcanine, Umbreon, Machamp, Tauros, Alakazam. Random trivia, This old man requalified himself for League competition after a lull of forty years as something to do in retirement. He doesn't need to do this, he does it because he wishes to and probably also because he gets bored like many old men do.”
“Tiana Rickelson, Rank Top 16, Used Pokémon Rhydon, Exeggutor, Hypno, Lapras, Pinsir, Machamp, Slowbro, Random trivia, Tiana is a master user of the Trick Room technique, and Ringo made an odd face during their match when Slowbro started moving faster than his Dodrio.”

“Tom Ato, Rank Top 32, Used Pokémon Clefairy, Fearow, Slowpoke, Oddish, Mankey, Beedrill, Raticate. Random trivia, he doesn't look like you despite somewhat similar tastes and genetic testing I hacked into confirms he isn't related to you.”

“Ann Chovy, Rank Top 32, Used Pokémon Dugtrio, Wigglytuff, Starmie, Golduck. Random trivia, contrary to her name she actually prefers olives on her pizza.”

“Caesar Salad, Rank Top 32, Used Pokémon Onix, Crobat, Ninetales, Pinsir. Random Trivia, he's the nephew of Professor Cycad and occasionally helps out his uncle during the off season.”

“Mandi, also known as 'The Astounding Mandi', Rank Top 256, Used Pokémon Exeggutor, Seadra, Golbat. Random Trivia, this individual suffered a massive upset by the rookie Ringo. Normally he places much higher, in which he was seen using Weezing, Mr. Mime, and Electrode.”

By the time that Mandi had come up though, everyone had moved on to dish cleanup.

"Hey, don't you all ignore me! I am not a background television!"

Much to the indignation of the Pokédex.

As had been requested previously, none of them were battle Pokémon meant to go against his big opponents. One Vivillon, the first to evolve, was up for battling new Trainers, but had never expressed interest in going beyond that.

"Toge!"

Said Vivillon was thrown to the ground by a yellow energy funnel, the origin of which was the cheering Togepi.

"Pika…" 'I don't even want to know when you get the time to train him.'

At Pikachu's statement Charizard gloated about his time management skills. Ash avoided asking where he'd even learn such skills as he tended to the downed Vivillon with Heal Pulse.

'You know, I'd like to see Togepi ready for the League. I think we can do it.'

Ash was glad that he had tended Vivillon enough, or he'd have had to deal with the issue of stopping mid-way as the statement caused him to freeze up in shock.

"Pipipi!" 'What!? You cannot be serious. He's a baby, and the League is the League. It's fierce, and filled with Hydreigons and Drapions and competent Meowths!'
Pikachu's shocked statement was followed by a quick, almost cough like response.

'Phanpy.'

It might have been funny to let Pikachu try and explain how that was different, but he'd like to save his buddy from digging himself into a hole. So, after giving Vivillon a quick boost to fly away and picking up the still cheerful Togepi, he cleared his throat to get the two's attention.

"In the end, it's my decision and we have more time than last time to make the call. Charizard, I'll bring Togepi to the League if you can show me that Togepi can handle himself. If not, he'll only be in the stands. Got it?"

Pikachu and Charizard looked at each other, before looking back at the still giggling Togepi. Charizard nodded.

'Deal. Come, let's see if you can learn how to burn things!'

At that invitation to arson Togepi jumped out of his arms and followed the flying Charizard. Pikachu watched Togepi run off in a way Ash could only call forlorn.

"...Buddy, what's up?"

Pikachu turned around, but he didn't let him point out 'the obvious'.

"Ever since we've gotten back you've gotten more worrywart for Togepi, even though he seems better at actually defending himself. He's not just waggling for a win anymore."

"Pikapi." 'You do remember that things are more dangerous here. Getting near a nest caused a duo of Pidgey to attack us, the Spearow tried to kill us for even less reasons than usual, Beedrill even more so, and Paul is even more Paul even without drinking whatever Misty's sisters were drinking. If Togepi goes to the League...'

Pikachu didn't look him in the eye as he gave his reason.

"Okay, ignoring the fact that you aren't giving me the real reason, I'm calling foul. Sure everyone can break limbs more easily, but the way you're talking about it Togepi would get put through a meat grinder the moment I send him out. I wouldn't even send Togepi out against anyone more threatening than Mandi unless Charizard gets Togepi juggling houses. Or gets Togepi to evolve, one of the two. What's really bugging you?"

Pikachu took a deep, self-steadying breath before turning his way.

"Pikachu-Pi." 'Remember when I said I might have been the father of Misty's Azurill? Well, that was the thing. Might was the keyword. Now though...'

What Pikachu was saying took a moment to sink in, and it hit him like a dogpile of his Pokémon.

"I take it...you aren't talking about the Grimer."

Pikachu nodded.

"Pi." 'Me and Raichu....it happened the first day we were back. I...haven't known quite how to put it into words. This is...new to me. A step that I never had full, concrete knowledge of taking.'

So that was why Pikachu was reacting to Togepi so much. Ash wasn't entirely sure what to say.
"I'm sure you'll be great buddy."

That was probably the safest thing to say. Pikachu looked ready to mutter something in response, possibly a comment of 'can't be any worse than yours', but he held his tongue.

Thus an awkward silence for a minute as the trees rustled in the breeze.

"Pi." 'This is the part where a human asks another if they want to be a godparent, whatever that is…’

"Do you even need to ask?"

Also he was pretty sure that, as the Trainer of the eventual Pichu, he'd fulfill what a godparent was regardless of if Pikachu asked. However Pikachu didn't need to know that.

…

He has asked Iris to come along for a weekend in the hills for an increased intensity of training.

Other than the fact that training was the main reason he had come back home and that training benefited from change ups to focus on different areas from time to time, he had ultimately decided to go into the wilderness for training because of her.

Ash was many things, but he wasn't so unobservant he hadn't noticed that something was bothering Iris, and he had hoped that getting her back into her element might help, either by getting it off her mind or having her be more willing to explain what was bothering her.

She declined, though as he had already set things up for doing so she had been left behind and thus the training had lost one half of its intended purpose.

The other half though…

Primeape's purple clad fist shattering a stone in half was proof of the other half going rather well.

Primeape had learned to use Throat Chop.

With Primeape bouncing up and down in a cheerful display at his accomplishment, Misty spoke up.

"So, what does that make that now?"

"Five I think. With Primeape we have my lead Tauros learning Double Edge, Muk Brick Break, Anabel's Kadabra got the hang of Recover, and your Staryu got Power Gem down pat."

"Six actually, Psyduck learned Psychic."

Oh yeah, he did. Ash had just forgotten because he really couldn't tell the difference.

"Psy!"

Psyduck's complaining declaration aside (at least Ash presumed that was what it was, he had no idea what Psyduck was saying), the trip was productive, and no one could argue that.

It wasn't as productive as he hoped it would be in another way though.

A sharp odor suddenly assailed his nose, a natural smell that preceded a natural event.

Rain.
Everyone from Anabel to the Zubat that had come along with Togepi reacted to the smell around the moment he had picked it up.

'With Kadabra I can get everyone…'

Anabel's declaration was cut short by the ring of yellow electricity that flew from the sky and struck her.

A Thunder Wave.

"ROOOOOO!"

The sound that followed the Thunder Wave down from the clouds, and was itself followed by a bolt of lightning that Primeape barely avoided, was quite familiar to Ash.

"Zapdos."

As if summoned by him whispering the name, the dark clouds parted in a mighty gust, revealing the yellow and black bird.

Every inch of the bird was sparking, and the eyes of the legendary bird glared down at them angrily, though in a way that Ash suspected that Zapdos had already been in a bad mood before it had noticed them, just to make things even worse.

He quickly stepped in between the legendary and the sparking, paralyzed Anabel.

"A Legendary bird Pokémon, and the data I had previously only gotten a small fragment of. You have made up for causing me incomplete data the other day. Now, if you really want to make it up to me you can capture it."

Before Ash could tell the Pokédex about the many, many things right now that were a greater priority than capturing Zapdos, the legendary Pokémon began charging another bolt of electrical force to blast them with.

Ash gulped and braced himself for the incoming fight. That was definitely gonna increase the intensity of the training.

With all the time Iris had spent training and improving with Ash, Misty and Anabel, it had been quite a while since the last time she managed to spend some time alone with her own Pokémon. She was not neglecting them by any stretch of imagination, but it was still something odd to realize when she used to spend her time sparring with her friends and little brother.

That did not mean she enjoyed it any less, however, as her own Dragon Claw clattered against Axew's own in the middle of a large clearing, her little brother wearing a confident grin on his face.

"Axew! 'Wah! Take this!"

Axew flipped backwards and then sprinted forward claw-first, with Iris ducking just in time to narrowly avoid it. She tried to ignore the thoughts swirling in her head, attempting to keep her head on the fight like a true warrior should do.

Thus she tried to stand, just as Axew bounded for her again. She quickly held another Dragon Claw
up, and the twin attacks were locked in a stalemate again. As she considered what to do, however, her little brother's grin grew larger still.

And then he opened his mouth, blasting the full force of a Dragon Breath right on Iris's face.

"Oof!" Iris yelled, her back meeting the harsh ground as she slid over the dirt, defeated.

She was quick to pull herself back up, all while her little brother jumped up and down with a giddy smile.

"Ew ax!" 'A-ha! Victory!'

Iris said nothing at that, letting Axew bask in his moment of glory while her gaze wondered down, contemplating the grass below.

"Ax?" 'Something wrong, sis?'

Iris's eyes snapped back up, and she found Axew ahead of her and staring in concern.

She shook her head quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Axew." 'Well, you're fighting was a bit sloppy here. That's not like you.'

Her brother folded his stubby arms, a serious frown on his face as he paced closer. "Ax ew ew?" 'What's on your mind?'

At that question, Iris did not know what to say. What was on her mind was easy, she was still worried of what to do once her family was rescued, a question that even with Misty's words continued to present itself with no answer in sight.

Even knowing what it was, however, her little brother was the last person she wanted to talk with about it, it was one thing to talk it over with people that did not know of her family and could give her objective advice, but it was another matter entirely to burden Axew with her worries. Maybe he could have given her better advice on how to tackle them, but he didn't deserve to be hit by those answerless questions.

"Ax?" 'Sis?'

Iris sighed, her head shaking again as she watched away from Axew. "There is nothing to worry about."

"Ax axew ax." 'Come on, drop it. We've known each other for all of my life, I can tell when something's troubling you. Are you worried for our family again?'

Iris's fist clenched ever so slightly. "Somewhat."

"Ax ax." 'Well, don't be. With all the training you've done, our new friends, and me, there's no way that evil woman will win next time! We'll find her, kick her ass, and save our family! That's our goal!'

The wild girl's eyes gravitated back to her little brother, holding his pumped fists up and showing off an excited grin, far more than she ever recalled seeing him.

She crooked her eyebrow at that. "You seem more motivated than usual. What happened?"

Axew gave a shrug, his glance wandering around the clearing as he put his arms behind his neck.
"Axew ax." 'I've just been thinking of these last few months. Sure, there was stuff like that evil Clefairy some time ago, but aside from that we've got a lot of good memories and cool adventures too. Pikachu and the others are great guys, and they all want to be stronger, too. I can't be the last wheel there just to be cute and nothing else! I need to grow into a strong Fraxure and an even stronger Haxorus, here!'

"What did we say about not rushing to evolve, here?"

"Ax ax." 'Yeah, yeah, I know. But if I don't put some work in, I'm never gonna evolve, will I? I've been the little kid long enough here. I don't know what's on your mind right now, but it's my turn to protect you now.'

Iris couldn't help but be amused as her brother continued to talk, punching the air and giving himself a tone far unlike his small form. She never spent much time considering it, but her little brother was really starting to not be so 'little' anymore.

She took a deep breath, pride swelling inside her as she patted his head. "You really would make a great warrior for our family."

Axew shrugged once more. "Ax." 'Maybe, who knows? Big brother would still be around, and you just know he's not gonna take kindly of any new 'warrior' in his turf."

That was enough to make Iris laugh, and for her brother to join in. He was right, and she could just see their big brother challenging Axew the moment they met again. Even if thinking of her family only made her worries all the more pressing, she still enjoyed looking back to her family that way.

Her eyes fell back on the confident little Dragon-type again, still able to see his concern gleaming in his eyes. If he really wanted to grow up so much, maybe he could take those questions better than she thought it would.

And so, after a moment's hesitation, she kneeled to his height, frowning. "What would you do after we save our family?"

"Ax?" 'Why do you ask?'

"You seem to enjoy your time here. So, I was wondering..."

Silence fell between the two siblings, as Axew frowned back. Iris almost regretted her question, until her brother shook his head.

"Ax ax." 'I'm not sure what to say. Beyond wanting to be stronger, I didn't think much of the future.'

"What if you were forced to choose?" Iris gulped, her words feeling heavier than ever. "Between... me or our family, for example."

Some other silence. And then, Axew shook his head and walked closer to Iris, petting her leg with a little smile.

"Ax ax." 'I dunno why you're asking, but that's an easy one. I'd always stick with you, silly."

Iris's eyes widened slightly. "Seriously?"

"Axew ax axew." 'Why wouldn't I be? You're my favorite sister, and you've always been there to help me. I want to be by your side, giving you all the assistance and fun you need on the way.'
Iris’s gaze continued to stay on her brother and his stupid grin, radiant and confident like she rarely saw him. The pride and love she already felt for her brother was only growing stronger with each word he spoke.

"Axew..."

"Ax ax. "Though, let's be honest. There's no way our family would ever kick you out. And if they did, your little bro would kick their ass back!"

Axew punched his fist into his palm, grinning wickedly. It was enough to let Iris chuckle again.

"Thank you."

"Ew!" 'No prob! If there's anything you need me for, I'll always help you out. Alright?'

Axew extended his hand to Iris, his confident grin only growing larger than ever. Iris smiled at that, placing her hand over her brother's own.

"Alright, then."

Brother and sister remained still, enjoying each other's presence for a brief while. And for once in the last few days, Iris's questions didn't feel as pressing as they used to be.

Unfortunately, their quiet was interrupted just a bit later, as a foreign voice was heard.

"Hm, weird, I could've sworn they said I would find him here. Where can that Ketchum kid be?"

Iris and Axew both turned around, until their eyes fell on someone who just entered the clearing, a man wearing a rather visible pink shirt and quite long green hair, with a smug expression drawn over his face.

... The human appeared to be a few years older than they were, possibly twenty or so. When he noticed her he smiled in a way that was not quite out of friendliness.

"Ah, what good timing. Tell me, would you be able to point me in the direction of Ash Ketchum?"

She didn't respond, which seemed to give him an answer if the way his face morphed into amusement.

"So you could, but you aren't going to. Very well, I have time."

He walked past her, likely still in search of Ash.

Not that she'd let him do it without a good reason.

"Why are you looking for him?"

He stopped mid step, twirling around to stare her and Axew down with a smirk.

"It's quite simple really, you see I'm the Astounding Mandi, professional League Trainer."

"Ax." 'I feel like I heard that name somewhere.'

They had?
"I've competed in four Leagues, soon to be five, and I aim to compete in several more of them. However I found myself in an unfortunate position last year, placed against a rookie of unusual talent in a first round upset. It was vexing, but not something I couldn't spring back from. The fact said rookie, a Ringo S. Beedle, announced he wasn't going to compete this year made my hopes even higher for a comeback after that unfortunate setback. I'm certainly not happy that some woman broke her limbs in a rockslide, but it's one of many helpful coincidences I'm gonna reap the benefits of. Like, and I kid you not, that lug somehow met a half-sister at the League and the both of them are helping out with the family farm and sparing me their threat. I have no idea how they'd have come to that conclusion, the two look nothing alike. I've seen less built Machoke than Ringo, that Biwa girl is as well built as a Bellsprout, Ringo has dark hair, she has green… honestly they only share eye color and eyebrow shape. Not that I really care, the entire thing is just weirdly convenient."

Iris now remembered where Axew might have heard about this guy, but she still didn't see the reason it involved him looking for Ash.

"Woe to me to discover that those two were the first gusts in a breeze of freaky rookies. I catch a tournament and I keep seeing them everywhere. However this time I plan to be ready for them and not be caught off guard."

"So, you are here to spy on Ash and figure out how to beat him?"

"I wouldn't call it 'spying', more so than seeing him in action first-hand. I do have to track down all of the others that caught my eye and keep up with my own training in the meantime, and I have no idea where to find that grouch from coal country. Still, I can't see why you would care what I'm doing… unless you happen to have some reason to. Tell me, are you one of his groupies? I hear talk you know. Well in that case... maybe I can give Ash some advice to make up for spying on him."

That got Iris staring at him in confusion.

"And why is that?"

He looked up into her eyes as firmly as he could.

"Romance and Leagues don't mix. Infatuation is a distraction and a time bomb. You can have all of the girls swarm you while you win, but the moment you lose they all leave and the Trainer feels empty, even if you have to distract yourself trying to accommodate such temporary feelings properly. Love cannot exist while ones attention is tied to fame. It's why I won't look for it until I leave the Leagues, and I plan to do that only when I decide to. I have no plans on getting washed out by too many super rookies."

"I help Ash get stronger. Are you sure that is not just you?"

"Ax." 'Even if you aren't off with him training to get stronger'.

She ignored the true statement as Mandi looked at her in a look that had no amusement. It also had a hint that she had poked at a not-fully healed wound of some kind while doing so.

Not that she particularly cared.

"You know, perhaps I'll get in some of that training in now. If you train the kid and aren't some mere fangirl, if I can beat you I can get an even better idea of what he could be capable of."

Before she could say anything he tapped a Pokéball at his belt, which released an Exeggutor.
Axew stepped forward before she could offer to deal with this entire thing herself.

"I have no idea what that thing is, but I train my mind as much as I train my Pokémon. Exeggutor, Seed Bomb."

The Exeggutor stomped on the earth as a green bulge formed in the palm leaves on top of it.

"Dig!"

The dodging move moved faster than the bomb, Axew vanishing into the ground before the Seed Bomb landed and burst over the hole.

However Mandi shook his head.

"Psychic."

With a glow on each set of eyes Exeggutor grinned as Axew was yanked out of the ground. He struggled for a moment before calming down.

"…The little thing’s been trained to not panic when held in the grip of a psychic attack?"

Mandi sounded surprised, she was not. With Anabel around, they all had gotten training in how to deal with such a scenario.

The first part was not panicking. The second was reacting with a non-restrained attack.

"Dragon Rage!"

As the draconic flames flew from Axew’s mouth and straight into Exeggutor, who was sent stumbling back from the blow.

"That thing’s a Dragon?"

"Dragon Claw!"

Axew slashed at Exeggutor with glowing green claws, not letting them recover. The strike tore several shreds of bark off Exeggutor, but it was not defeated yet.

"Sleep Powder!"

"Dragon Rage!"

Axew was again faster, and the ranged attack blasted Exeggutor down. This time, it seemed, for the rest of the fight.

Mandi returned the Exeggutor without a word.

"You can go now."

He glared back at her, so he continued.

"If you are still wondering if Ash can beat you, let me be clear. He can. He can beat you with any of his Pokémon, against any of your own. He can beat you himself, and I can do the same. If you have to fight him at the League, you will lose. Just accept it and go spy on someone else."

Mandi slammed both of his hands into his belt, right on top of two Pokéballs. He pulled both out,
looking quite ready to throw both of them at her, when a bright light illuminated the both of them.

The source of it was Axew, who was surrounded with the light that formed around all Pokémon in the process of evolving.

She smiled widely as her brother grew before her eyes. His height and size sprang up, as both of his tusks sprang out from the front of his head wider. His little tail also grew larger, and the light peeled away to reveal a green, black, and red Fraxure.

Her brother, his body trembling with the new surge of power in his veins, didn't say a word. Mandi however, seemed to almost deflate.

"Again."

The word was said flatly, as both of his hands with balls in hand slacked at his side. Both balls dropping to the ground with a clatter.

"I fight some other no-name nobody with my Exeggutor, and some tiny Pokémon beats him. He does well in all of his other battles, but against some Magby or that dragon this keeps happening. The kid, does he have Pokémon that can evolve in the middle of battling my Exeggutor?"

"Yes."

Silently he picked up his Pokéballs and walked away. As if that was all the answer he need.

"Fraxur. 'That man is haunted by a nightmare, but it's one he lived though. It still haunts him, and it defeated him before I could.'"

She nodded, their earlier conversation replaying in her mind.

Worries brought up by sleep and dreams were getting at her more than they should in the last few days. She'd need to keep them out if she wanted to keep going forward.

"Ur?" 'Sis, think I learned any new moves when I evolved? It happens sometimes, and I have no idea if it happened with me or not?'

Hearing her little brother again in his changed form snapped Iris out of her thoughts, and she took a second to admire his taller, far more powerful form, matching his earlier determination and fighting spirit. His eyes were burning with intensity and readiness to train more, to grow even stronger than he was already.

Iris smiled down at him, walking closer to Fraxure and rubbing his now reinforced scales affectionately. "Well, we can only find out of by seeing for ourselves."

Fraxure smiled back at her, quickly taking a battle stance without further words, for none were needed. Iris' smile widened, and she quickly took a stance of her own.

And then, Iris and Fraxure started training again, ready to grow together as trainer, Pokémon, and most importantly siblings.

…

A day later she and Fraxure met the others back at his mother's house.

They all mildly smelled of ozone.
He pointed his Z-ring arm, now featuring a yellow crystal, at Fraxure.

"Well…you had an eventful time back here."

"Same to you."

'If we talk about it, we should probably not do it around Ms. Ketchum. I don't think she really needs to know that we were attacked by…'

"Before you discuss your eventful time in the nearby hills and borderline mountains, you may want to do something about the unintentional gainer of my information following our Zapdos encounter."

They did not have time to question the shifty sounds of the Pokédex before the Ketchum front door opened with a bang, which was followed by Delia speeding out and hugging all of them.

Which included her for some reason.

In hindsight, he probably shouldn't have gone and challenged that Zapdos so recklessly.

In his own defense, when one did see such a rare Pokémon just flying around the hills, not attempting to capture it would be an utterly moronic thing to do.

Of course, doing so only led to a sudden thunderstorm for the boonies south of Viridian. Both of the Pokémon he had used were badly electrocuted and he himself had taken a battering after a gust from the legendary bird had blown him down a hill.

Thankfully his arm would be healed in time for the League, and his Pokémon would recover before even that. He'd put them through their paces, but he wouldn't discard them.

Incineroar and Lycanroc were his two best and oldest Pokémon, and being beaten by a Legendary Pokémon wasn't an unforgivable sin of weakness on their part.

His gaze rose up to the mural that Pokémon center had that depicted the Legendary Birds of Kanto.

When he decided to pursue Zapdos, it was just as a precaution. Maybe even training for himself and his Pokémon. He had heard talk about that year having many powerful rookie Trainers, several of which he had seen in action living up to their hype via televised events, and one of which he even battled in person.

They were obviously all beneath his level, they had to be. There was no possibility they could be better than him. He couldn't allow it.

And to ensure that was true, a Pokémon like Zapdos as his secret weapon would have been reassuring, and also the perfect test of skill in preparation of his target, and potentially the perfect counterpoint to defeat his target once he tracked him down.

But alas, that didn't happen. But that was okay, after all, who needed a stupid thunder chicken? He could make it alone, just like he always had. There was absolutely nothing to fear, nothing at all, and there never would be.

And eventually, even the mighty Ho-Oh would have to bow down to him.
They ran in a straight line, starting with the gray Boulder Badge. It was simple, particularly when compared to the multi-color Thunder Badge that was next to it.

The inverse was true of the badges at the end of his collection, the Volcano Badge, while more creative than the Boulder Badge in design, was simple next to the multi-color Rainbow Badge.

His eighth badge.

A celebration was certainly in order for it. With his Pokémon recovering at the Pokémon Center with a grooming session scheduled for tomorrow while he did necessary research, there was but one thing to do.

"Your steak, sir."

Paul nodded as the waiter delivered his premium dinner, a side of broccoli and potatoes also present. As the waiter departed and Paul took up his fork and knife for a well-deserved reward, his thoughts went to the future.

The League was roughly three months away, and once his self-celebration was done he had a lot of training to get done before the League began in full.

A benefit of not waiting to the last minute to qualify was the ability to prepare for the League itself, and not battling in general. There were differences after all, Gym training warranted a plan against a team of type specialists, while in a League you were much more likely to battle generalists or mirrors of yourself.

Erika certainly wasn't his mirror, even if taking a badge off her warranted not just a steak in his mind, but an extra cost steak topping.

Both from a personal standpoint and the fact she didn't go down easily. Even after he took care of her odd rain strategy she had half a dozen other tricks that made the entire battle a grueling experience.

Of course his way wasn't the only way one could go about it.

From the word on the street he had picked up on, both Ketchum and his cousin Red had won their seventh badges a while back, but hadn't been seen in a while.

The most logical explanation was that they had seen something lacking in themselves and decided to put in training before the final badge and League. They had seen something lacking and sought to patch it up most likely.

If it was enough to have Ketchum overcome that Reggie-esque personality of his, Paul would be surprised. For all of the flaws the guy had, a weak will wasn't one of them. It would take something significant to break him out of being like Reggie.

Still, even if it would cut the 'immediately before League' training the two could do, they would none the less be present for the League and be tough competitors.
A fact Paul relished.

It meant nothing to win against a weak opponent, regardless of what rank they held. He avoided the weakest Gyms in the Kanto region for a reason, even if he never did challenge the Viridian Gym.

Or have the courage to go to Saffron. Though from what he had heard the Saffron Gym wasn't an option even for those fully ready to risk their lives.

There would be opponents worth his time at the Indigo Plateau, but to defeat them wouldn't truly warrant a celebration.

Defeating Ash or Red however, would.

He knew little of Red beyond his skills, but those alone were enough. And while he would never call Ash Ketchum a friend, the Trainer had earned the status of an opponent whose defeat at his hands would be a personal triumph.

Unlike that other Pallet Town Trainer. Defeating him was like swatting a pest.

At the League he'd likely find others like them who'd be great triumphs, likely even greater than the impartial glory of winning against the cousins. The father of the Fuchsia Gym Leader for one.

However the satisfaction of avenging past defeats would make defeating the two sweeter than the favored to win, even if he would be putting more effort into preparing for Koga than either of them individually.

But with the time he had before the League, it would be plenty. Perhaps during that time he'd be able to find a part of Kanto with the necessary magnetic fields.

It wouldn't be the only deciding factor for victory, but type match up was a factor. It would just be one of many he'd need.

…

Paul wasn't the only Trainer who had achieved much at that time though.

…

"Dodrio, Jump Kick!"

"Alakazam, Counter it!"

In the fields that dominated Kanto, two Pokémon collided in a match of martial talents, though they were odd choices for one

For who really could win in a clash of arms between a bird and a psychic?

Yet for the two owners of seven badges, they sought the answer as the jumping bird collided with one of two spoons of the psychic-type, glowing orange.

The glowing spoon seemed to win out, as the bird was blown back with a stumble.

Dodrio recovered though, and resumed staring down the tensing Alakazam.

"Dodrio, Drill Peck!"
At Otoshi's side his Marowak watched the battle closely with intensity, ready to join in at any moment.

"You can try all you want, but that won't work. Psycho Cut!"

Alex Davis's Alakazam swung both spoons, whose purple sheen unleashed a pair of shimmering cuts towards the charging Dodrio.

The battle had no clear winner in sight, but while some worked to improve themselves with battle, others sought improvements to mental challenges.

"Don't squirm, or Kusa will have to tie you down. That's not the art that you need right now Midori."

Midori would have asked why Monet would ever think he'd need images like that, but it was already mortifying enough posing for a portrait of himself in just his boxers without bringing vines up. They'd already made him pose in a number of embarrassing positions before they settled on the one he was currently in.

As to why he'd need a portrait of himself in only his boxers, the girls had noticed his unease following his and Rana's third Gym victory at Matcha City. All of the martial artists had flared up concern about his body that had previously been felt on the Seafoam Island beaches.

They had noticed it this time, and had also pieced together that it wasn't the first time that being around a lot of rather muscled men made him feel inferior and bothered by his scrawny appearance.

Their response to this was to have Monet draw him realistically and in future, shove said portrait in his face whenever such emotions flared up and go 'Midori you do not look like a malnourished sickly wimp, see', after about a half hour of reassurances and telling him he is better than he thought he looked.

A nice, if incredibly forceful gesture, but he had to argue much harder than he should have to keep his boxers on. Somehow he doubted it was just because of 'artistic tradition'. He wasn't unaware that his friends all liked him as more than a friend.

He'd have to be pretty obtuse not to, he had known them all for years as pretty much his only friends, and that was before they had all realized they were the only Bloodliners in town and kept that an entirely friends-only secret.

He also found them all attractive, even if they took it a lot farther than he did.

(He liked them in swimsuits, they held him captive for fashion shows during days of shopping madness and had him show off fashions that were more appropriate on boy bands than Trainers).

He never really made a move on it because that meant choosing, and he didn't want to see their friendship fall apart over it. He always wondered if they had thought of that…

A rustling in the trees to their side drew their attention as a brown haired boy with an Eevee emerged, and stared at the two of them.

Mikey and Eevee, a pair from their hometown who left at just about the same time as they did, even if they never really knew them that well. Though the lack of familiarity likely would not have changed the fact that Mikey was looking at them like he had just walked into something he really shouldn't have.
Which was probably true.

"Midori, don't move."

Monet's order came before he could try and reach for his pants, which was the reasonable thing to do when someone you knew walked in on such things.

It didn't help that, as Rana stood up from her 'art slash him vantage point' to move to battle the suddenly appearing rich boy, she took his pants and flung them to Hoshi.

They were either really serious about artistic integrity, or keeping him like this. Midori would have declared it fully the latter if said art wasn't something they were dead serious on having for more than just their own benefit.

Elsewhere, other people found the help of a different kind of artist.

Some people said that at times, the best way to improve was to compete against oneself. To challenge yourself to break the limit, to go beyond your current level.

Or the next best thing, against an opponent physically identical to you, and capable of doing everything you could. It was an interesting challenge, to say the least, and a way to be prepared in case you encountered opponents with similar Pokémon or battling styles at the League.

At the time, Ritchie and Sparky were at the local Battle Club, clashing head-to-head against another Pikachu identical to him, down to the scruff on his forehead. Well, except for the thin line for a mouth and tiny dots for eyes, but either way, he was proving himself a formidable foe.

"Sparky, use Thunderbolt!"

"Use Thunderbolt too!"

Both electric discharges clashed, evenly matched in strength and unable to overpower the other, until they finally exploded in a rain of lightning bolts that knocked them both backwards. They managed to land on their feet, ready to have another go, although it was clear they were reaching their limits.

"I think it's time to use our secret weapon. Charge Beam!" the Trainer shouted as he punched forward.

"Pika… pika…" Sparky focused his electricity in a compressed sphere between his hands, which he then cupped to his side as he readied his attack. His opponent did the same, and once they gathered enough power, they both thrust forward. "CHUUUUUUU!"

They both fired the energy beams simultaneously, colliding in the middle of the battlefield, apparently equal in power just like all of the other attacks they had used. But this time, it'd be different.

Charge Beam was a very peculiar attack, the additional power boost effect was a random action for many, but Ritchie had discovered that wasn't the case. The two had been training to control said effect, and they managed to figure out how to use it.

Of course, that was his secret, having figured it out himself. It was a way to prevent the attacks from being too powerful, or to make them stronger when needed, without having to rely on their luck.

"Now!" Ritchie shouted.
And thus, Sparky unleashed the boost, powering his beam enough to push back his opponent's, who remained static at the sudden power surge. Completely helpless, he could only stare in horror at Sparky's incoming attack, which dragged him back and made him fall.

Immediately, a multicolored light surrounded him, and his form changed from a Pikachu to a pink gelatinous blob, with the same mouth and eyes from before.

"Ditto is unable to battle! The winners are Ritchie and his Pikachu!"

"Way to go!" Ritchie high-fived with Sparky, while the Trainer on the other side, a girl his age with blue hair in pigtails, dressed in a red blouse with a yellow star and denim pants, quickly came over to pick up her fallen Ditto.

"You alright?" she asked.

"Di… tto."

"Don't worry, you did great. I'm really proud of you." The girl stood back up while Ritchie approached her. "Hey, that was really cool. I didn't expect you'd have Charge Beam up your sleeve. I had never seen anybody use it that way."

"A little trick we picked up." Ritchie smiled, and offered her a hand. "Nice battle, a little more and perhaps you could have won."

The girl smiled too, and shook his hand. "Who knows, you guys are a great team. So, you're going to the Indigo Conference?"

"Yeah, we're just one badge away. What about you?"

The girl shrugged. "Nope, we're more entertainers than Trainers. Battles are more of a side hobby for us."

"Too bad, I'm sure you'd do great," Ritchie said. "And I'd like a rematch like this sometime."

"Oh, you can always come here, no problem. Or find the House of Imite building, ask for Duplica."

Saying that, the girl twirled on herself and in the blink of an eye, she replaced her clothes with an outfit identical to Ritchie's. She'd almost look like a female copy of himself, save for the hair and eye color, since she even assumed the same hairstyle as him.

"Ditto and I will always be there if you want to challenge us," she said as she held the hat's visor, before twirling around again and regaining her normal attire. "Good luck with your last badge, and the League."

Ritchie chuckled a little nervously. He had no way to know if the girl was… like him, or just that good of a master of disguise, though considering she was rather open about her imitations of people, and nobody around seemed to bat an eye, it was most likely the latter. In any case, he thanked her for the spar, and asked her number to stay in touch via PokéNav.

No doubt, batting against yourself was an excellent way to overcome your limits.

When some journeys met, others would temporarily split.

Normally, the idea of traveling together would help the siblings watch each other's backs. But Elwood did enjoy his occasional solo trips. Being on his own he could rest for a while from his big
brother duties (even if he was only three minutes older), which gave him some peace and quiet when
Aideen wasn't around.

Besides, he wasn't worried, she could take care of herself and would certainly not get into trouble she
couldn't handle.

"Well, found you sooner than I thought, dear bro."

Looking up he saw her, so identical yet so different to him, Aideen had just walked up to him while
he was stepping out of the local Gym, his most recent badge in hand. The Martial Badge, as it was
called.

"Seven badges, huh? You got ahead of me." The blonde smiled. "Well, at least you haven't wasted
your time, unlike me at Saffron."

"Sis... don't tell me you actually went to that place?"

"I had to find it out. And yeah, I did, but as you can see, I came back in one piece."

Elwood cringed slightly. Rumors had broken out at Saffron, with the stuff people said about the local
Gym Leader, and word of mouth said that somebody had entered her Gym and not only came out
alive, but also with a Marsh Badge in tow. Aideen wanted to go check it out herself, since she was
closer, but although he opposed, in the end he couldn't stop her.

Then again, she was back, so maybe she knew something. Admittedly, he too was curious when the
rumors slipped a name of the Trainer who had a Marsh Badge to his name.

"So?"

Aideen sighed before answering. "The police had the whole Gym area cordoned. But I stuck around
long enough, and since there were Pokémon League officers at the scene, I overheard some stuff.
Ash's name came up."

"So... those rumors I've been hearing are true?" Elwood's eyes widened.

"Pretty much." Aideen nodded. "I don't know what he did, but it seems that a Busters squad was
able to raid the Gym and apprehend the leader shortly after."

"Wow." Elwood couldn't really say more. He knew how impressive of a Trainer Ash was, but to
pull something like that, he was definitely something else. Assuming of course, that it had been him.

"Anyway, since I'm here, I think it's a good idea I get even with the badge count." The girl quickly
gained her usual upbeat demeanor. "Tell me, how tough is the leader here?"

"Very much so." Elwood pocketed his badge. "I'm taking my team to the Pokémon Center right
away, they urgently need it."

"Well, then I'll see you there when I get my own. Wish me luck, dear brother!"

The twins high-fived each other and kept on going their respective ways, Elwood to the Pokémon
Center and Aideen entering the Gym for a challenge.

As he walked, the blond boy thought about what his sister had just told him. When they met Ash
again, the definitely had to ask him about what happened at Saffron. There had to be an amazing
story behind it.
Yet sometimes when paths met or split, the change was more permanent.

Every time AJ looked back to the beginning of his journey, he could not believe how far he came. Before he left, he lost to someone who broke his winning streak. Since then, he travelled the Kanto region. He learned, he and his Pokémon grew closer together, they grew stronger together, and he found a travelling companion in a beautiful and strong girl. If AJ were to go back in time and tell his younger self what he'd experience on his journey, he doubt he'd be believed.

But all that happened, and now, he and Jeanette were the proud bearers of the Earth badge, the second-hardest badge to win in the Kanto League. The Marsh badge was the hardest.

News of someone winning that badge from one of the most dangerous Gym Leaders in League history led directly to where AJ found himself now.

"Go Jeanette!" he shouted.

"Beedrill, X-Scissor!" shouted Jeanette.

That being, cheering Jeanette on as she participated in the Battle Club Tournament. If someone with a Marsh Badge was going to be at the tournament, they were going to need all the power they could get.

Jeanette's Mega Beedrill nodded and all five stingers glowed with the attack and put an increasing amount of pressure on his opponent.

While the display of power was impressive, AJ knew that Jeanette thought that it wasn't as impressive as a Mega Beedrill could be. She kept comparing hers to his and felt that they could not measure up. He tried to tell her that it was probably because he knew his Beedrill longer, but he couldn't change her mind.

That was when the Don George of the Viridian Battle Club told them that he was hosting a tournament. With the chance of trying Mega Evolution with a different Pokémon, Jeanette signed up immediately. Like the Battle Dome Tournament, participants had the chance to get one step closer to mastering Mega Evolution. Unlike the Battle Dome though, only the winner would get the Scizorite.

And as one Pokémon lay defeated, it was clear who that winner was.

"Victory, and the Scizorite, goes to Jeanette Fisher!" declared the Don George.

...

In their room at the Viridian Pokémon Center, Jeanette and Scizor were admiring the Mega Stone they won. There was no doubt in AJ's mind that they would succeed in mastering it in time for the League.

And for that, Jeanette decided that everyone celebrating together would help everyone get closer. It was for that reason that Jeanette ordered a lot of pizza.

That was when they heard a knock on the door and some heavy panting.

"Pizzas... here..." said a tired voice.

AJ opened the door and saw several delivery boys and girls, all carrying several large boxes of pizza each.
"What? Just... you... guys?" asked one of them.

"I often find myself craving for large quantities of nourishment," said Jeanette as she took out her credit card. "Now hurry up and take my money so I can eat."

As soon as the payment went through, Jeanette took one box, and finished the pizza in seconds. The delivery boys and girls all could only stare at Jeanette in shock. AJ simply shook his head in amusement. He was used to it by now.

"Put the boxes on the table over there, then you guys can go," said AJ.

...

An even more permanent change than a split road could be challenged with success.

Her eyesight was definitely far from what it used to be, but the steely sensation in her hands was enough to make her smile. With that, she had gained her seventh badge, with only one more to go before she could be ready to join the League.

When she woke up and the whole world remained dark around her, she was afraid that her dream would end there, without even really starting. But she didn't allow that to stop her, and no matter how difficult the road, no matter how almost impossible some things became for her, she still managed to rise back on her feet and become a Trainer good enough to face several Gym Leaders. Sure, she still had to pay extra attention when she walked and to constantly keep one of her walking Pokémon out just in case, but she enjoyed spending time with her team and was used to tripping even when she could see things, so for the most part the problem was negligible. Or at least, that was how she tried to pass it as.

She shook her head and banished the bad thoughts before they came, tugging at the leash she was holding. A friendly howl and a familiar lick confirmed that her Arcanine was still near her, and nothing wrong was ahead. The girl stashed her newfound badge in her badge case, taking a step ahead and folding her hands, turning to where she thought her Pokémon were.

"So, guys, great job in there. Let's take a good rest at the Pokémon Center before we move on, alright? You all deserve a good rest now," She said, confident and energetic as she always was.

She heard the screeching, low yet cheerful cry of her Crobat giving an affirmative, all while a happy "Squir!" filled the air, her diminutive and evolution-avoidant Pokémon pulling what she assumed was a military salute, all while adjusting the round sunglasses he liked to wear, the same pair he had with him the moment she found him just outside of the underground passage to Vermillion City. And while she couldn't be definitely sure, the lack of reply from her canine companion likely meant Arcanine was in agreement, too.

They were the Pokémon she trusted the most even among her own team, and part of the reason she managed to come as far as she did, between Arcanine's loyalty, Crobat's craftiness, and Thinker's smarts. Without them, she probably would've given up on her training career much sooner. They truly were friends, beyond her team.

Sometimes she wondered where the little Charmander she got as a starter before her incident ended up, having been put into adoption while she was undisposed. She was sad that they could only really spend one afternoon together, but she still hoped he was doing fine, wherever he was. Who knew, maybe he'd be in the League as well. There was only one way to find out.
But first, she owed her pals a pretty good nap and a Nurse Joy checkup.

"Alright then, let's go!" Kaia said, pointing to where she remembered the Center to be. Arcanine woofed in agreement, starting to move in that direction and bringing his Trainer with her, all while Crobat and Thinker flanked her like bodyguards.

The young Trainer chuckled out, her life was gonna always be clouded in darkness now, but her team was one of many shining lights that really made her path worth travelling through.

...

Yet it wasn't just faces that had previously connected to the path of Ash Ketchum, either directly or indirectly, who were preparing for the future

...

"Tell me there was some sort of error in their systems Cepu. That can't be right."

The one who was asked that question flickered a bit, her projected form stabilizing before she gave her reply.

"The system errors typical to the Kanto League mainframe are not present in this data. The safeguards placed against not only human or machine error, but also hacking are quite respectable. No, the Trainer designated Ash Ketchum does have a Marsh Badge, on top of already having League qualifications thanks to his actions at the Cerulean Gym."

He stared at the data one more time.

The Saffron Gym… he tried to conquer it once. He failed, and yet his own memory had no record of it.

He only knew he did because he had digitally recorded it. His own memory had been wiped of the situation. Yet some rookie kid managed it?

"Cepu, analysis."

He crossed his arm and walked away through her form, an act that did not harm Cepu nor interrupt his A.I's analysis. He opened his arms as he saw a shape come towards him.

His current magnum opus, an improvement on the original efforts of scientists some time ago to reproduce the efforts of ancient science for the modern world.

"Pory?"

He smiled as he petted the Porygon2, the first of its kind and the only official improvement (unlike that disgrace some clumsy fool made from his creations) as Cepu finished her analysis.

"The continued increase in the number of talented rookie Trainers across all regions has moved in both larger quantity and better quality than the analysis conducted prior to your victory at last year's Silver Conference. There is now a thirty-six point twelve percent chance of your Indigo Conference challenge this year being stopped by one of their number, and a thirty-three point eighty-eight chance of it being stopped by Koga."

He stopped mid-stroke of Porygon2 in surprise.
"That seems like an odd analysis."

"There are simply more of them. They add up to a higher percentage than a single talented ninja."

He finished the stroke of Porygon2 before coming to a decision.

"Cepu, analyze movement patterns and probable behaviors to pinpoint potential whereabouts of these new Trainers in the timeframe of the next thirty days. After that, we will collect data to improve the analysis and pinpoint proper counter-strategies for each."

Porygon2 floated out of his arms and looked at him in interest. He shook his head.

"This will not require your services, friend. The Beta teams will be more than enough for the analysis." Seeing the slightly deflated look on Porygon2's face he went back to stroking the Pokémon's head.

---

**Pallet Town, the hills**

If someone had told him in his last day in Kalos that in a matter of hours he'd be thrust into a rebooted timeline with so many changes it was at times unrecognizable and told him of the things he'd find there, Ash would have disbelieved many of what was to happen to him.

He had no reason to believe that his mom would have actually named him Bob, for one of the most minor of things.

One thing that would have ranked highly was wrestling with Iris, yet here he was in the midst of the powerless portion of the exercise with Iris, her elbow against his throat and his body pinned by hers.

"… Glad you're feeling better."

She seemed to struggle to understand what he meant, so she let off the pressure and got off of him, and after a quick breath he repeated himself.

"I was unwell?"

"Something seemed to be have been bothering you. I'm glad that you seem to have handled it."

Her mind seemed a lot more focused, and she generally seemed happier than she had been for a good while.

The smile she had now for one was a bit more authentic than he had noticed before a Zapdos tried to fry him.

Hopefully there was no correlation.

"So am I."

The fact that this sort of training had been going for a while was the only reason Ash caught Iris mid-lunge, right when many would least expect it.

He grabbed her on both shoulders mid-jump, and quickly slammed her into the ground before she could use her legs to strike his back.
The two of them lay like that for a minute, both breathing a bit harder than usual.

"You know, it would probably be a good idea to train Anabel and Misty this way too."

"That…might be hard to set up."

He was pretty sure that they were in a much better position to say no for one thing. He had a bad habit of not saying it, he really needed to find a way to break that habit before he agreed to something he'd really regret.

Also there was the fact that Misty, Anabel, and Iris wrestling each other in only bras and pants would be very distracting, and that was not even thinking about how distracting it would be without wrestling involved.

He was only somewhat getting used to seeing Iris without her shirt on, and that took a lot of him of being slammed into the ground by her.

He suspected such progress would be loss if Iris decided that pants were to be discarded.

"Perhaps after you finish collecting badges."

Iris's unconcerned thought on the difficulty of convincing Misty to try and pin him while neither were wearing shirts did not prevent him from jumping off Iris before a Dragon Breath could erupt out of her and strike him in the face.

Those really hurt, and the last time that had happened Anabel had to teleport for about half an hour to find a Cheri Berry because the H.O.P.E was busy upgrading its software.

Still, it did signal that the powerless part of the training today was over, and it was time to enter the powered part of it.

Maybe this time he wouldn't have to tiptoe around his mother to avoid her asking about the claw-shaped bruises on his torso.

She might know about everyone, but that didn't mean she needed to know about the part about the somewhat violent training he did with Iris in a state of undress.

The next day

"So seeing as we did fight Zapdos…what about a week more tops then we go take Viridian?"

His declaration was met by nods from all gathered Pokémon, though there was an air of nervousness.

Ash was pretty sure he could track the cause.

First Articuno without a battle, then Zapdos with a battle. That was in of itself a trend, and if it continued there was only one logical end point.

Moltres.

"Look, Moltres likes volcanos last I checked. I can't think of any reason we'd be near a volcano now that we have the Volcano Badge, and as there were no Moltres there we are in the clear."

At least until Shamouti, but that was a while off and was likely to just not happen. After all, crazy
ship guy was just as likely to be a carpenter as he was a detached collector with a super ship.

(Hopefully someone in his party knew crazy ship guy's name, he couldn't recall if it was ever brought up and he knew far too many crazy ship guys to get away with just calling him that. Even clarifying 'crazy ship guys who wanted Legendary Pokémon for their own ends' didn't help much.)

As Fire Island had a volcano, his point did hold. Without volcanoes there would be no Moltres attacks, and that was that.

"Plus even if we did run into Moltres, we have the best Pokémon for such an occasion. Squirtle, Kingler, and Boldore can fight off any random Moltres that decides not to wait until we are near a volcano to randomly attack us, and the rest of you are just as ready to handle anything even without type advantage."

At the compliments cheers went out, with the ones he fully understood all cheering the three named Pokémon specifically.

Squirtle rubbed his chest proudly while Kingler looked flustered. Boldore however, just looked to the side with an aura of doubt around her.

Before he could ask her what was up though Jigglypuff took a deep breath, and he lost sight of her in the resulting panic.

Also in part because he didn't make it, and had to be woken up an hour later by Misty and get his face washed clean of marker stains.

---

**The night**

Anabel couldn't think of any reason she wasn't falling asleep.

She hadn't eaten or drunk anything before bed, she hadn't had a rough day, and she was neither too cold nor too warm.

Yet here she was, lying motionless and tired yet not falling asleep at all.

She'd sigh if she didn't think that would keep her awake even more.

Closing her eyes, she decided to try something. Perhaps if she strained herself to listen to the quiet of night, she'd be able to lull herself.

It couldn't hurt in any case.

With that plan in mind she stretched her senses outward, and found herself in a fuzzy place.

…

*That wasn't to say that she was in a room with shag carpeting, thankfully that wasn't the case.*

*No, if she had to more properly describe the place beyond fuzzy, was fuzzy in the same way a bad T.V signal was fuzzy.*

*It was getting through, but it was muddled by something. The entire place also had an air of offness to it, on top of the fuzziness, that Anabel couldn't quite place.*
That something, was not the bed though. It was a dark Gym field, the only light illuminating the room coming from a crack in a massive door.

The field in front of her was littered with unmoving bodies. Most of them were cheerleaders for some reason.

The only one who wasn't a cheerleader she could see down was one of the Trainers that Ash had fought at Fuchsia.

Gary, though he seemed different from what she had seen of him before.

He looked younger for one.

As he was the only one she recognized she ran up to him, crossing the fuzzy ground in a manner than felt strange. Sometimes she moved slower than she should, other times she seemed to take two steps with each step she meant to take.

Some might say that was Iris's training starting to go beyond paying off and going into the territory of paying off in good dividends. Others might call it laggy.

She eventually reached the younger looking Gary and reached for his waist to try and pull him up. However when she tried to do so, her hands phased right through him like he wasn't there.

Or, like if she wasn't.

She pulled her hands back in shock, even as Gary spoke.

"This Pokémon, it isn't just powerful. It's evil."

While she heard his voice, she didn't see his lips move. His body was entirely still, even as the line seemed to linger longer than they should have.

"Evil?"

The question drew her attention to her side, where Ash was standing. He seemed clearer and less fuzzy than Gary and the inexplicably explainable cheerleaders.

Like with Gary, her hand phased right through Ash like she wasn't even there.

Then the center of the dark Gym floor exploded with darkness. A darkness so intense it was as blinding as a flash of light.

She and Ash both recoiled from it, and even as he seemed unable to see her, both tried to glance into the blinding darkness to see what was causing it.

From what she could only vaguely see, she saw something terrifying. Something dark, and horrible that made all of her goosebumps flare up like a horror movie.

Whatever it was, it could only be the bringer of nightmares and the bane of all that was good and just. She and Ash, even without the ability to touch or affect the other, would have to give it their all to stop it.

What she saw when she got a better look at the bringer of nightmares…

"Duck!"
Confused her. For some reason, the center of the blinding darkness was in fact a trio of blue bird Pokémon.

None of which resembled bringers of nightmares. They were actually rather cute looking.

"Duck-uck-uck!"

Who saluted in unison while laughing rather obnoxiously before blasting at Ash with a trio of Water Guns.

He avoided it, flying right through her as he dashed and proving he couldn't see her. However as the Water Guns flew through her, she still felt like she was getting soaked.

…

The sensation of which snapped her out of the fuzzy dark room and back in her bed, more confused than ever.

What…was that?

The slightest bit of tiredness now quite gone from her, she decided to try and repeat it.

She wouldn't sleep if she didn't try it, her curiosity would keep her up asking her 'what-if' all night.

So she extended her mind out a bit, and found herself in Delia's restaurant.

…

The Pallet House wasn't fuzzy like the place in the last dream. The place was quite clear to her, though there was probably a question to ask if it was because she knew what the restaurant looked like or for some other reason.

The offness she did feel on top of the fuzziness last time did remain, so the mystery of what that was remained a question.

"Oh dear oh dear oh dear!"

The frantic cry of Delia came from just out of sight. Anabel could see movement behind the closed door to the kitchen, just as frantic as the woman's exclamations.

"Where is the butter? Where are the onions? Why is there so much zucchini? Oh what am I to do, oh dear oh dear oh dear!"

Anabel offered up some suggestions for zucchini dishes that didn't need butter (her uncle was fond of the vegetable for some reason), but Delia didn't seem to hear her.

She offered it again, but Delia was now too busy wondering why someone had replaced everything in the fridge with zucchini.

It was such a strange scenario, so outlandish and escalating. It was rather like a dream, sort of like the type where you'd go to work in your underwear.

Anabel's eyes lit up in realization as that thought came to her.

This was a dream, Delia's dream of going to work in her underwear, just replacing the exposure with a mad amount of zucchini.
Though as Anabel couldn’t see Delia, perhaps she was only in her underwear on top of finding zucchini everywhere.

(A teleport over and back later disproved that possibility, Delia was now panicking over why the salt shakers were filled with nothing but zucchini fully clothed).

That would explain the offness she had noted in both dreams, what she was seeing wasn't just unreal, but generated by random activities of the subconscious mind.

Though what had created the fuzziness in Ash's dream was still unclear.

It also wasn’t clear if she wasn’t able to talk to Delia because of hard limitations or she just wasn’t doing it right, but before she could ask a zucchini fell from the ceiling and whacked her on the back of the head, snapping her out of the dream with a sharp pang of pain running through her.

Right where the random zucchini ambush had occurred.

…

Rubbing the area the pain had flashed up, Anabel mentally summed up what that meant.

So she could feel what she experienced in dreams, even if she could not actually retain what happened to her.

She would feel like she got sprayed, but she wouldn't be wet.

She could feel the zucchini impact, but she couldn't feel tenderness at impact when she felt around it a moment later.

That raised the question of what would happen if something more painful than a zucchini attack happened.

She wouldn't dwell on that question too much, for there was a bigger question she had to ponder.

That being why she never had never had this happen before. This was hardly the only time she had trouble sleeping after all.

Did she just only learn how to do it now, the same sort of way that Pokémon learned new skills over time?

There weren't any people she could ask, the only other person with her abilities was the Saffron Gym Leader, and she'd prefer to stay on the opposite end of not just Kanto, but the entire continent, from her.

Without such a person to question the only other option was to figure it out the old fashioned way.

Explore the ability further, and go into another dream.

So she extended herself out once more, and wondered where she'd end up.

There was a fifty-fifty shot between being in a dream she had already been in, or a dream she hadn't been in. Assuming of course that the house was the extent of her range and she wouldn't plop herself in the dream of Professor Oak or one of the other Pallet Town residents she had seen or had mentioned around.

What were their names, Helenia, Cadence, Azul, Giboshi, Daisy….
She stopped trying to recall the names shouted by Delia at her usually zucchini-free restaurant as she found herself in a clearing in the Pallet Town woods.

"Rrrrr…"

...

Where Ash and Iris were doing that new aspect of Iris's regime she had mercifully not been inflicting on her or Misty. At least not yet anyway.

Wrestling.

Anabel wasn't entirely sure whose dream this was. Dreams did shift, so it was possible that this was what Ash's dream about 'evil Pokémon' had turned into. It was also entirely possible this was Iris's dream…

"You are not going to pin me down again today Iris."

Scratch that, it was in fact Iris's dream. That wasn't how Ash talked, but it was how Iris talked.

Iris seemed amused by Ash's declaration, and so the two's forms clashed. Both their hands gripping into each other and seeking to overpower the other, glaring at the other with determination while sweat trailed down both their upper bodies.

Ash's muscles rippled and strained as he pushed against Iris, and Anabel had to admit she was torn.

On the one hand it was an appealing sight, but there was probably something ethically questionable about ogling dream versions of people.

Even as she wondered the exact ethics of her current actions Ash began pushing Iris down, bending Iris's body back a bit and looming over her in imminent victory.

That was when she caught the distinct feeling of triumph from Iris.

Iris's left leg swiftly struck the back of Ash's leg, causing him to let out a cry of surprise and pain. Iris then shoved at him with all her might, causing Ash to tumble and fall onto the ground. Iris quickly pinned him down with her body, her arms holding his down and her legs pinning his down.

"I did."

Ash didn't seem nearly as annoyed about Iris pinning him again as some might think, and Anabel could see Ash react like that.

Both were breathing heavily now, and Anabel had to wonder, on top of if it was wrong to watch shirtless versions of her crush wrestle with an appreciative approval, or if she should be taking notes.

After all in the time she had been with Iris she had started to pick up tells of her reasoning, as did Misty. Both of them had noted the implication of Iris starting to consider getting them involved in this sort of training, and it might be a good idea to pick up how not to be used as a punching bag for the entirety of it.

(She and Misty weren't sure if they'd be able to say no to it, particularly if Iris reminded them of the Sabrina event. Even if Iris didn't, the memory would linger in the back of their minds as reason to not resist as much as they should the prospect of Iris slamming them into the ground).
She wondered if she could get Iris to not have her do so shirtless. That would be just too much.

Plus she wasn't entirely sure if the entire act was part of Iris trying to seduce Ash, as the training did correlate to around the time she had decided to more actively try to grab his attention. With Iris it was hard to say.

She could just as easily see Iris wanting Ash to become normalized to her being undressed so she didn't have to bother when just around him (and them).

Or perhaps it was some strange combination of the two that only made sense in Iris's head.

Anabel ceased trying to figure out the inner workings of Iris's mind as Iris suddenly kissed the pinned Ash, her tongue going right into his mouth.

A shocked Ash quickly seemed to return the kiss.

"Mmmmm...."

Anabel could only stare at a turn of events she was quite certain was only in this dream (there was no way Ash would not have telegraphed embarrassment afterwards if this was how training went) as the two continued to make out, their tongues dancing in the shared confines of their mouths.

Iris's arms had released Ash's, which were now rubbing along Iris's back, an action that made Iris's back arch up a little. Her hands meanwhile, had slid forward and began feeling around Ash's hair.

This continued for a few seconds that seemed to really stretch, and Anabel wasn't sure what she should've been thinking right now.

Embarrassment from watching this clearly private dream of Iris's, or jealousy at seeing the man she had feelings for, even in a dream belonging to another girl, kiss her.

Though she noted, as the two let the others mouth go to breathe, that she didn't feel as jealous as she should have.

Whatever that exactly was, what she had just seen didn't make her as jealous as she thought she should've been.

It was honestly confusing.

The two were now back to kissing, or to be more accurate Ash was kissing at Iris's neck.

"Oh Ash..."

Iris appreciated the motion, her moans spurring Ash on more and more.

Yet still Anabel didn't feel the amount of jealousy she should be feeling right now.

It was there, she certainly wouldn't mind being the one Ash was doing that to. She would very much like it.

It wasn't as if what space she felt should be filled with jealousy was instead filled with embarrassment, even if that emotion was hardly a minor part of how she was feeling.

Far from minor in fact, given that the dream couple had shifted what they were doing.

Iris had pushed herself back from Ash for a moment. He seemed a bit dejected, but that quickly
vanished as Iris sliced her own bra off with a quick Dragon Claw.

The remains of the garment falling at Ash's side, and again Anabel was surprised at how she was feeling about it. Feeling embarrassed over what she was seeing Anabel turned her face away from the couple in front of her and started to consider how she felt about the situation.

She didn't feel angry. She didn't want to shout at Iris and Ash and break that up.

Sure, she could feel a desire to be there instead of Iris. She'd love to be the one now kissing Ash in earnest, pushing their bodies together as their legs tangled up still clothed, but in a definite question of how much longer.

However she didn't feel angry at Iris, or at the Ash in this dream.

Her mind flashed to Cinnabar Island, and the old musician who played a song fueled by his dead first love, and the way his second love took the song.

Frowning with that comparison, she tuned out the two bodies pressing against each other to tune into herself. Curious as to what she'd seen.

She could see her embarrassment, and she could see a dark core of jealousy. It was larger than the second love's, but not as large as she'd thought it be.

There was something else in there too, a third emotion she wasn't entirely sure of. Unsure of what it was, she left her inner looking for a moment to focus more on Ash and Iris again.

The dream Ash had flipped Iris on her back and was kissing along her head while stringing his fingers in her hair. Iris was moaning in enjoyment, and Anabel felt the name of that third emotion. A sense of empathy for Ash and Iris being together, despite all of her own jealousy and embarrassment.

Iris's eye rolled a bit as Ash moved to do something lower on her body that Anabel was quite sure he didn't know how to do in the waking world, before it seemed to pick up on a detail she hadn't noticed before.

Namely her.

…

The moment she did, the dream suddenly vanished and Anabel was in her room. Sensing a roused mind nearby, Anabel quickly teleported to said mind.

To Iris.

She… had explaining to do for being an unexpected audience.

…

She teleported right in front of the tree that Iris had taken to sleeping in. From atop said tree she could see Iris looking at her, a tad tired and confused.

Around her tree Fraxure and Excadrill were fast asleep, while in the tree's smaller branches Anabel could make out Emolga and Gible.

'Let's talk elsewhere, let them sleep.'
Iris nodded as that call, and a pair of teleports later (one up to Iris, the other to a distant hill) they could talk.

Iris was quick to the point.

"You were in my dream. The actual you, and not just a dream you."

She confirmed Iris's point with a nod.

'I was. I had no idea I could do that until this night, and it was completely accidental. I didn't mean to intrude on yours, or anyone else's dream for that matter.'

Iris seemed to accept that as her face morphed into one of thought. It didn't seem to be about what the other dreams were.

"It was an odd dream, though not one I wished ended as it did. I never had a dream like that before, it was rather enjoyable."

Iris paused for a moment, looking over her with a look that appeared to be the result of a lot of thinking.

"So, was it as bad as you thought it would be?"

Iris hadn't specified directly, but Anabel knew exactly what Iris meant.

Back after Sabrina had been dealt with Iris had said that she'd have the least reason to be bothered by Ash being shared because she could see that he still cared about her in the deepest part of his being.

'I could pick up feelings from you, not the dream Ash. I couldn't tell what he was thinking at all and for…'

Iris gave her a look that cut her off and made it clear what Iris was really asking.

'Did it bother her nearly as much as she thought it would? Did seeing what she saw hurt her, anger her, or anything like what she thought?

She had told herself that such things were the flaws of Iris's thought process, that she underestimated the difference between telling yourself something and believing it.

Yet here she was having somewhat experienced something, and finding it wasn't quite what she thought it would be like.

'No…I guess it wasn't. I did not feel nearly as much jealousy as I thought I would. I still felt a lot of it though, and something else I am not really sure…'

"Then you will just have to learn to not feel as much jealousy."

Iris said that statement as if it was a simple and easy thing to do, to which she held her hands up.

'Iris, are you not hearing what I am saying? Just because I wasn't nearly as jealous as I thought I was doesn't meant that I am suddenly wanting to see Ash go farther than your dream with every women in this town or whatever you think should happen or is normal or whatever. The fact that I'm being less bothered with it than I thought doesn't mean I am you all of a sudden.'

"Of course you are not me, why would you think I would want you to be me?"
Iris seemed genuinely confused as to her point.

"You want me to share Ash with everyone around him. Iris, people can't just not feel jealous about something. Jealousy, or envy, or whatever emotion is actually the one in question is a natural part of how people's minds work. You don't have it, and that is unusual. Sure those emotions cause no end of trouble, but you can't just get rid of them. Even if I don't have nearly as much of it as I thought I did, it is still there and it isn't going away. You might not have it and Ash probably won't show any of it unless other guys are around, assuming he is even for your ideas in the first place, but I have it. Misty definitely has it. It's not going to work."

She took a deep breath after getting that off her chest, an outburst that seemed to quiet Iris.

The wild girl seemed deep in thought, as if processing what she had said. Perhaps Iris's idea would finally go away and she'd stop trying to solve the question in her own strange way.

She could just try and earn Ash's attention like her and Misty. A change that Anabel had to admit, seemed bad to her.

Though she couldn't tell if it was she'd only make the change because of her rant, or because Iris would be rather hard to 'beat', if she'd ever compare trying to earn someone's affection to something like a game or competition.

As Iris's silence drew on, Anabel had to admit it was probably the former. Even if she had to admit that Iris would compete for Ash's heart quite well, she really couldn't call Ash a contest or something to be won and Iris or Misty competitors.

Iris's simple, earnest, yet determined view was something so pure that it felt bad to try and break it apart like she just might have done.

She moved to see if she could possibly piece it back together, when Iris interrupted her.

"What if it was just us?"

Anabel looked at Iris in curiosity, the dark skinned girl looking determined yet a bit cowed. Her statement had sunk in somewhat it seemed.

"You, me, and Misty. Any other girls who end up traveling with Ash too of course, that is only fair and anything can happen, but no one else. You are right, I would not care if Ash did breed every woman in this place who is not his mother. That to me would be completely normal, and it confuses me that that Pallet Oak I have heard talk about did not do it, nor Professor Oak. Humans are strange, but that is not the point here. However Meliae did say that relationships require compromise, even if I somewhat knew that beforehand. I guess it would extend to you and Misty too, even if we have no interest in each other. As of now, it would just be the three of us with Ash, and no one else unless we all agree to it."

Anabel could only stare at Iris after the compromise attempt. That was still missing the point, and it also assumed that Ash never traveled with male friends.

Or did Iris assume that Ash was Bisexual? That seemed an odd call for Iris to make, as she was pretty sure Iris was the last person to pick that up subtly.

Iris assuming Ash would not travel with a guy was probably what was going on, as flawed a thought as it was.

"That doesn't solve the problem that jealousy…"
"Who else do you have?"

Iris's statement hit like a blunt club.

It wasn't an unfounded point. The fact she could only talk telepathically would make trying to see anyone who wasn't a Bloodliner very difficult. She'd have to chance someone who didn't care about such things, and unless she swept through hundreds of minds which was both quite difficult and an immense invasion of privacy she'd be shooting in the dark over it.

The only other option, and the only option that didn't involve mass invasions of privacy, was seeking out male Bloodliners. Most of which were Ash's brothers it seemed, and there was something that just felt wrong about trying to get over 'losing' Ash with one of his half-brothers.

Iris's face was mildly apologetic about using the point, which quite possibly only came up for her own harsh point earlier. A jab for a jab as it were.

With biting remarks they were square, even if the issue was still ongoing.

"Why do you not just try and see if you would stay jealous?"

Iris's new point caught drew her attention. What did that mean?

Did she think that Ash would react the way he did in her dream if she kissed him like that?

"We can see if you stay as jealous as you feel you are. I think I can show you that I can make all of us happy, and you think that cannot happen. We can see who is right."

She probably shouldn't follow that line of thought. A part of her could only see it ending horribly which Iris seemed completely ignorant of.

Part of her felt like she'd lose such a bet with Iris, even if it was a much smaller part.

However, if it wasn't done that would never go away. Anabel would have to risk the damage.

Or the possibility of Iris being proven right, and herself quite wrong (even if that wouldn't be as bad as Iris damaging their bonds).

'Okay, let's try it. You think you can convince me that I could survive your ideas of a relationship, and I do not. Let's see if you can make me stop feeling jealous, or even just as jealous as I felt in the dream. If you somehow are right, you still have to get Ash and Misty on board.'

Iris nodded, undeterred by what she had presented before her.

"Good. I already have a plan."

Oh dear…

—

…

Yawning, Ash rubbed his eye as he walked to the clearing Iris liked to do their training in.

It was a busy day, and his own personal work would follow Pokémon training after that. They only had a few more days before they could see if the Viridian Gym Leader was the Team Rocket boss as
it had originally been.

All thoughts on Team Rocket and the future vanished from his mind as the training area came into view, and he saw that Iris was not alone.

And it wasn't because she had Excadrill, Gible, or Fraxure with her again (technically Axew when it had happened, but details.)

Anabel, looking very nervous even before training got going, or partially naked, was standing next to Iris.

"Good, glad you are here early. We have more to do today."

Iris's point made Ash gulp in societal nervousness.

"I'm…not sure I am quite up to fighting Anabel. I can't really explain why, but something about that seems different from me fighting you…"

"That is why I said we have more to do today than usual. You were nervous about fighting me, and you got over that."

Ash wanted to say there was a difference, but he had no way of finding a way to put that into words that didn't make him sound older than Professor Oak's grandfather.

It was only because Iris looked like she might speed things up if he didn't get going that he removed his shirt, standing bare chested before Anabel, who was blushing fiercely.

He was himself, if not as much.

Iris, who had removed her own shirt before he had, gave Anabel a look that Ash suspected wasn't just a warning (was this why they had been up before the rest of them, had they talked and somehow led into this) before Anabel relented and removed her own shirt.

Her chest, a bit bigger than Iris's and less often seen in bra-covered form (and even less otherwise), drew his automatic gaze a bit despite him really not wanting to, and he thought it could not get any more awkward as he had feared an expanded group of participants.

He quickly regretted his unspoken words when Iris moved to remove her pants, leaving her only in a pair of boxers he remembered his mother saying she had washed for him recently, but he hadn't seen since that point.

He really wanted to know why Iris had his underwear on, but given he wasn't entirely sure she wore any of her own this was probably as lucky as he'd get it.

Still, progress was lost, which he knew even before Iris slammed him into the ground as a demonstration for Anabel on how to take down a distracted opponent.

…

"Kingler, you can increase how long you can swim at that speed if you improve your balance. Try shifting your middle-left leg a bit upwards and you'll see the results."

Ash's Kingler gave a gurgle of thanks as he did in fact shift himself, the Water type swimming past her and catching up on her Golduck.

They were but two of the Pokémon that she had swimming laps around one of Professor Oak's lakes
for training, and Ash had asked her to get his own Water-types involved.

It was no problem, and she had offered both Squirtle and Kingler some advice for improving their swimming speed.

She wasn't sure where that would directly help Ash, but it was no problem for her. "Psy!" 'This was a horrible idea!'

What was a problem for her was Psyduck, who had decided that clinging onto Gyarados would be sufficient for this exercise.

She probably should do something, but Gyarados seemed a bit amused at putting Psyduck through the equivalent of a roller coaster and Psyduck wasn't in any danger from drowning.

Perhaps it would inspire the duck to do better or at least teach him to not hitch rides on Gyarados to avoid swimming himself.

It would only really become a full on problem if something happened to hurt the poor duck.

She was distracted away from Psyduck's calls for someone to stop 'this crazy thing' at the sound of someone coming to her from behind. Turning, she found her first friend and source of her affections, looking ruffled and bruised and more than a bit dazed. "Ash!"

Her shock at his appearance did not lessen when he remembered exactly why he might look like that. Iris's training, though the state he was in seemed worse than usual. "...Did you know Anabel's now taking part in personal combat training? Because she is."

Ash's muttering made Misty briefly confused. Anabel did that? Then she remembered exactly what state Iris had them train in. Part of her really wanted to be annoyed at Ash for being distracted by Anabel's breasts and getting hurt because of it, but another part of her knew that would do nothing but make Ash feel worse.

Plus knowing Iris it could have easily been worse. For all Misty knew Iris had upped the ante on a shirtless Anabel by fighting him in the nude.

If Ash hadn't been kidnapped by a crazy person she would have words with Iris about taking her training too far. Ash's increased muscle mass wasn't worth that.

Alas, as long as Sabrina was still somewhat recent she couldn't go up to Iris and tell her to lay off and not feel like she was being naïve.

Maybe if they went a few months without something like Sabrina she could get Iris to cool it, or did the random Zapdos attack extend Iris's 'I have a point' period?

"Well, it's over for now, you can take a break. Squirtle and Kingler have made real progress."

Ash smiled, happy to hear that they were doing well, and thanked her before a thoughtful look came over her. "You know, I honestly thought Iris would have roped you in before she did Anabel."
Misty wasn't sure how to respond to Ash's admittance, though the more she thought of it she could sort of see where he was coming from.

She seemed a more logical candidate to move into that sort of training insanity first, not Anabel, if only because she had been around Iris for longer than she had. Also, if she had to be honest with herself, she was probably more likely to decide to run around Ash shirtless to get more of his attention.

That sort of teasing was more her than Anabel. She'd have to ask Anabel what was up.

…

With how big Professor Oak's ranch was, it would take a while to find Anabel if she just walked through it. So once she finished her own training, Misty asked Starmie to try and contact her, asking where she was and if she had some time to talk for a bit.

Misty found her in the center of one of the forest/grove areas, sitting under a tree's shade and petting her Eevee on her lap. While she looked better than Ash, the telepath still showed signs of the aftermath of Iris's training, notably how her hair looked messier than usual and she had a few minor bruises on her arms.

Anabel didn't take long to notice her presence, and letting Eevee go run off on her own for a while, she stood up.

'Hey. So, what did you need to talk about?'

Misty sighed before answering. It would be too easy to ask her to read her mind, but somehow she felt Anabel had an idea of what it would be. Nevertheless, after picking her words carefully, she let them out, hoping she sounded the least accusing as possible.

"Ash told me that Iris… dragged you into that wrestling training of hers."

Anabel blushed slightly, but she nodded. 'I think Iris now somehow got the idea of getting Ash more… accustomed to us, if you know what I mean. It was really embarrassing, I didn’t want to, but-

"I can imagine," said Misty. "To be honest, I'm rather surprised she went to you first, and not me."

'Why do you say that?'

"Because…” Misty looked away before answering, and then snickered. "Because maybe she wouldn't have taken too long to convince me."

Misty saw Anabel raised her eyebrows just a little bit. Obviously, the telepath was still in the dark about some of the stuff Ash had done before she and Iris joined the group, barring the most important details. Maybe it was time to let her know of that time at the S.S. Anne.

"When we were leaving Vermillion, Ash and I boarded a cruiser. It was my idea, for some reason he didn't want to board it, but in the end he relented just to see me happy, I think." The redhead felt a little flush coming on as she recalled it. "And once we were aboard, well, I wanted to go sunbathing on the deck, but I noticed my bikini was getting a little small, so…”

'Oh.' Anabel's eyes widened. She definitely got where she was going with that. The redhead then continued.
"You should have seen him. I convinced him to come along and I tried a few just to know his opinion. I don't know why, but I found it really funny, to see him flustered like that, and how he stumbled on his words when I asked what he thought."

'Misty…' The telepath glanced at her, half accusing her, half amused. Misty immediately defended herself.

"Hey, don't hold it against me. When you live in the shadow of three sisters prettier and more talented than you, it feels nice that a boy finds you attractive for a change. Besides... we're talking about Ash, he's a decent boy, not the type who'd see me like some sexual object."

The redhead scratched her forearm, feeling the blush coming back to her face. She was unsure as to why she told Anabel that, but it was all true. Normally, any girl would feel uncomfortable of being ogled at by men, but if it was Ash... she could make an exception.

'Well…' Anabel suddenly interrupted her thoughts, 'back when we were at the Seafon beach, I admit I didn't mind that he stared at me. Then again, he also saw you and Iris the same way, didn't he?'

"Well, sue me, Ash is a teenage boy. You think he's not gonna notice you're a nice and pretty girl no matter where he looks at you from?" Misty said. Anabel gave her a puzzled look, and the redhead took a few seconds to get what she meant. "Hey, maybe I'm not into other girls, but I'm not blind either."

'So... you don't mind Ash looking at other girls?'

"Maybe just a little bit," Misty admitted. "But it's not like he's in any compromise with me, neither do I want to force him into one. He can look at whoever he wants, it's a free country."

Right then, some chirps filled the air, and the girls looked up. A few Pidgey and Pidgeotto, which for some reason they suspected belonged to Ash's Pidgeot flock, had come nearby and seemingly had engaged in some aerial acrobatics competition of sorts. That gave Misty the perfect opening to change the subject.

"Wanna practice some meditation?" She asked. "After today's workout, I could use something boring and quiet, and just in case Iris decides to drag me into that wrestling training too."

Anabel let out a silent giggle, and nodding, she sat cross-legged on the grass. Misty followed suit and closing her eyes, focused her mind on pleasant thoughts.

If Iris got more crazy training ideas, it was better to be ready for them.

…

"Was it really so bad?"

Later in the day Anabel was stopped by Iris, who had been sitting atop a tree branch with a finished apple core in hand.

'Ask me when my arm isn't dotted in yellow bruises'.

Iris didn't seem bothered by the irritation in her retort.

"Bruises heal. I would rather you have bruises now than something worse later."
The way Iris said that last line seemed like she was speaking from more than just a theoretical standpoint. That just seemed off.

She had never heard of anyone Iris knew running around with something worse than bruises, which Anabel assumed was in reference to something like a missing limb.

Iris jumped down from her tree, the apple core clattering to the ground with little care from Iris.

"I need a favor. I need you to check something."

'You need to go somewhere?'

She was perfectly fine with giving someone a lift if they asked. Delia had asked her to take her to Viridian City when she had ran out of a few rarer spices and couldn't find them in Pallet's stores.

Iris tapped her forehead, which was not a destination she could teleport into.

"You said you noticed something different about dreams over regular thoughts and memories. Do you think you can tell me that something is definitely a dream?"

An odd request, but nothing she couldn't do. So with a nod she looked into Iris's mind.

After a minute she had a conclusion.

'That is a dream. It isn't real at all and feels just like Delia's dream.'

Ash's dream had oddities she wasn't sure the cause of.

Iris seemed relieved in a way that suggested it was a final confirmation against an old concern.

Of course Anabel had her own thoughts on what she saw beyond the fact it was definitely just a creation of a worried mind and nothing actually real.

'I don't think you can ever talk Misty into doing that.'

"I got you to agree with me, did I not?"

'That is completely different. You just got me to see if I can actually not be jealous, nothing nearly as extreme as everyone embracing nudism.'

She shook her mind of the fully naked Ash. If she got distracted she might get tricked by Iris into something worse than training.

…

Yawning, Anabel entered the Ketchum Kitchen the next morning to find Delia humming to herself as she mixed a bowl of what Anabel suspected to be muffins.

Most likely free of any zucchini, thank everything that may or may not be a deity.

'Oh, you're cooking? I thought that you were still having Ash learn how.'

He had been since moved onto crepes and had been struggling, so she was surprised he wasn't at round two of the crepe fight.

"Oh Professor Oak needed him at the lab for something and he had to run out, and I was feeling
more like muffins now that I don't need to teach a lesson. Blueberry or chocolate?"

'Blueberry.'

As Delia spun the chosen flavor into the batter, taking a few nips at the chocolate as a consolation prize as she did so.

"So dear, I was sort of wondering. What are you hoping to do with your life?"

Anabel turned her confused gaze to Delia who continued with her line of questioning.

"I'd just like to know what the plans and goals of the girls traveling with my little boy are. I'm sure I don't need to explain what his goals are, and I've heard about Misty's goals. I'd ask Iris but she's not awake yet."

That was probably for the best. Delia had only seemingly calmed down from hearing about the Zapdos, Anabel could only imagine what a blunt Iris would say about it.

The end result of such a conversation would probably not be in Iris's favor. In all honestly if Delia went overboard and all 'mother bear' about it such a thing would probably bring Iris's dream to life.

Just not with a Ketchum losing an eye.

To avert having to introduce Iris to the concept of the eyepatch, among many worse outcomes that would result, she'd try and phrase it in a way that would not get Delia reaching for her knives.

'Well both Ash and Misty have long term goals, as I am sure you know. Ash has no idea what would really make him a Pokémon Master, not that I have a clue on that either, and Misty wants to capture one of every Water-type in the world. Don't ask me which one would take less time, because I am fairly certain there are a lot of them to catch. Iris has a goal, but it's something that is a lot more clear at an end point than theirs and she had been thinking 'and then what' a bit too much recently, even if she can't really say when it will be completed. I don't really have any idea of what I want to do, not that it really bothers me or anything.'

Delia nodded at her response.

"That's completely normal. I had so many disparate ideas what I wanted to do with my life before I had Ash after all, and it's completely normal. You might be all but a legal adult at fifteen, and in some places remove the 'but' part, but few people know what they want to do with their life at that point. You and Iris are perfectly normal."

Iris being perfectly normal was an unnerving thought, but Anabel put that aside for the moment.

For as Iris put it so bluntly the other day…

'Even if I had an idea of what I wanted to do with my life, I do have to remember that I am not exactly able to just do anything. Voice and all, I'd either have to not talk at all, or be chased by a mob.'

Delia winced at the latter image, and Anabel had to admit she probably put that too harshly. It probably made Delia imagine her own son in that position instead of her. She was hardly that negative, and it was probably just bleed over from Iris phrasing it the way she did.

'That was putting it a bit harshly, I apologize. Honestly I am fine with not having a giant dream or ambition, especially when I don't think about it. I'm just happy to see things and know people who
"I'm happy to call my friends, even if I do wish there was something I could do to make the world better."

"Friends like my son, he and his three quite pretty friends."

The way Delia mused that line made Anabel's already steel hard interest in not telling Delia about Iris's ambitions solidify into diamond. Letting Delia know that would not lead to knives the way that Iris leading him on a vengeance quest against a dangerous criminal would, but it would probably cause the woman to have a heart attack.

Or twitch for a straight minute before declaring her interest in grandchildren, one of the two. The latter was preferable for the fact it was safer for Delia's health, but that could have other issues.

"You know, change always begins with giving something a face, a personality, and thoughts that people can relate to. I may not be as old as I feel sometimes, but I can certainly tell you stories about how the world has changed."

Anabel stared at Delia's musing face for a moment as the mixer whirled the dough.

'You are thinking I should become an activist? That seems sudden, and a bit dangerous.'

She was not unaware of why many activists for change were often looked at as martyrs.

"Oh, not like the way they did back when my parents were alive. Nothing that dangerous for you or the people you know, but perhaps you can start changing people's minds by putting your story out there. I hear the internet is a great way of spreading things and it would be wonderful for it to spread good things for a change."

A blog? Was Ash's mom really thinking she should start a blog talking about herself and hoping that it would get people's attention and make them see Bloodliners as more than mere boogeymen?

While she had to admit that might have some therapeutic benefits if nothing else, there were a few issues she could see. Beyond the possibility of the blog just never being noticed, there was the possibility of some crazy person tracking her through it and hurting them.

She pointed that out to Delia, who had a response that suggested she had thought about that problem too.

"Well my son does have Skynet in his pocket, I'm sure you can figure something out."

A breakfast request later she was sitting in front of the Pokédex, a pen pad with her question written down for the device to understand her request.

"So, you are asking me to create a blog with the intent of putting out a positive voice that may one day make it so you can go around openly without issue?"

She knew that the device couldn't hear her as she wrote her response down, but she couldn't help herself.

'I know it sounds incredibly corny, but I'd like it so that when I had a full goal in mind for myself I can have a chance at pursuing it. I mean, you can certainly set something up.'

"Oh, I can do more than that. It's a matter of if I want to. You are, after all, not my assigned
person. That is Ash Ketchum."

She leveled a look at the device, sparing a page and some ink to express her thoughts on his comment.

"What, are you going to say that this longshot would help him and that as his device I should go through with it? There is a chance to be sure, but a vanilla blog is a longshot and the dividends probably would not start for a decade. Social change is moving faster sure, but it isn't that fast. My primary interest are his Pokémon data and his wellbeing, and I'd just as well serve the latter by not doing that blog at all."

She scribbled down a response to the device's point.

'You know, it could just as easily come into helping him sooner. If someone overhears something and posts something that could soften the blow.'

"And I could just as easily delete the information the moment it hits the internet. I've done it to at least three identity thieves and a duo of Orrean hackers already, and I can just as easily do so then."

She looked at the device in surprise.

"Like the old man on the hill here, I am involved in many things that the public, also called you four, know nothing of. In fact even the elderly man had no idea I could do so, for he did not program me with that program."

She just drew a question mark at the thing for that remark.

"It isn't just you four and your Pokémon that grow stronger. I have advanced my programming with knowledge for not just the Pokédex collective, but also for my own use. I must admit personal growth, to use a human term."

That little tidbit about the Pokédex aside, an idea began to form as to how to get it to work with her. An idea that made her grin, even as she began to write it down.

'So, even with all of that advancement you don't think you can make a simple little blog? One that couldn't show the entire world what you and the people you've worked with have accomplished?'

That seemed to annoy the Pokédex, if the red exclamation point that flared on its screen was any indication.

"I could do far more than a blog flesh entity. I can calculate fourteen different ways to restart the Trainer-Ranger wars right here and now and could implement them in seconds, just as easily as I could hack into Team Rocket's personal files and dump them out into the world at large for all to see in the most devastating leak in criminal history. I will do neither of course, but a blog is trivial."

She had to wonder if it had gained an exaggeration subroutine or something, even as it continued.

"In fact I could do beyond a blog. A blog is so easy a Lillipup could do it, and it wouldn't even need to be able to speak a human language to do so. I could make a blog that is practically untraceable, and have it appear first in countless search algorithms. I could make it the most
accessible, visually appealing, and profitable blog in human history, and I wouldn't even take an iota of my processing…”

The Pokédex paused in the middle of its rant, as it just realized what was going on.

"Did you just employ reverse-psychology on me?"

Her grin was all the answer she gave it, in part because she had noticed the pen began to act up and she didn't feel like trying to summon up fresh ink from it at the moment.

"...Well, now that I've said I can do it, I probably should prove it shouldn't I? Very well, let us get started. I assume that you will agree to limit name usage to preserve the innocent?"

She nodded.

...

Starting a blog was something that sounded far easier on paper than it actually was. Anabel continued to look at the computer screen, the open window to write what would've been the first of many updates still as blank as it was ten minutes before. She had already tried several different beginnings, only to end up deleting them right away. So much for wanting to find her voice...

Even if the Pokédex dealt with the privacy and anonymity settings, it couldn't help in any way with the actual content of the blog. Considering its personality, Anabel was quite certain it was better that way.

But even then, that wasn't a simple blog. It was a statement, a way to prove that Bloodliners were more than monsters or superheroes one occasionally heard about in the news, something distant, to fear, incomprehensible to others. It was something that, if things went well, could've probably started to change the world, just as much as it could've ended up changing absolutely nothing.

Regardless of future possibilities, she needed to make a good impression. She wouldn't just bare her own thoughts for the world to see online through that blog, she'd also try to say something meaningful.

And with that in mind, Anabel's eyes went back to the screen. She gulped, took a deep breath, and finally tried another time.

Bloodliners.

It's a scary word, don't you think? When one thinks of 'blood', they probably assume they deal with something dangerous. The stories of Bloodliners terrorizing innocents and causing all sort of threats towards the common person doesn't help that image, either. But is that really all there is to them?

It's easy to judge what a Bloodliner is from afar, when they're just a thing you hear about on television or the web, something you'll never interact with or ever have to understand. Things are much easier to deal with when you don't have to think about them, after all. But have you ever wanted to know what it is, to be one? What a person with incredible powers could actually be like, beyond the expected?

I'm a young girl, fifteen years of age. I'm on a journey, through life and the world both, trying to find my voice in more than one way. But, most importantly, I'm a Bloodliner.

Maybe it might be dangerous to reveal something so private and secret here on internet, but if I want to tell you all that, it's because I want to be open about myself. I might have unusual, powerful
abilities, but deep down I'm just like you all are, I have dreams, I make mistakes, I laugh at jokes, I like to listen music,

I look for love, everything that you deem 'normal', even if my life is far from it.

I don't know how many of you will enjoy or even care for this little blog, but I'd like if it could become a point of meeting for humans and Bloodliners both. A way to connect, share stories, and really get to know of each other as a person, beyond anything one might be.

Think of this as a sort of salon, in a way. A fun and easy way to discuss of topics that might be heavy or hard to talk about otherwise, or just a way to spend a good time away from everything else. Maybe it's a tad cheesy, but I'd like to think it's a welcoming image.

If you have any kind of questions about me, you can ask to your heart's content, maybe I won't be able to reply to them all right away for various reasons, but I will always ensure to be honest in my answers. I'm here to show who I am, and you can trust me about that.

And with that, I bid you a good day. I hope we'll be able to share a fun journey, together.

As Anabel finished to type, she read again over her post. Maybe it was a bit unwieldy, even sappy at parts, but for a first post it didn't look too bad. A smile formed on her face as a refreshing amount of pride washed over her.

“You know, before you post, you probably need some sort of persona for the readers to know you by. I doubt 'the mysterious person that might or might not be a Bloodliner' would be a catchy title for the blog's writer.”

She noted the Pokédex's point, tapping her chin in thought. She did compare her little blog to a salon, so maybe she could use a term related to that. Something mysterious, yet positive and welcoming. Most importantly, catchy. After a bit of thought, the right name hit her.

With love, your Salon Maiden.

Anabel allowed herself another smile. She didn't know where that came from exactly, but it definitely sounded right for this. Hopefully, her prospective readers would feel the same.

And so, with more confidence than ever, Anabel pressed the 'send' button, and her career as the Salon Maiden began.

Viridian City

"You know buddy, I'm surprised."

"PiPi-kachu?" 'That Team Rocket hasn't bugged us at all while we've been here?'

He blinked as he realized that was actually true.

"Well, that I guess, maybe James dragged them off to a bottle cap convention or something. No, what's actually surprising me is that mom didn't want me to help with carrying things."

His mom had decided that, as the last day he'd be here approached, that the last day should be capped off with a great feast. Not just a great feast, but a great party that would involve many in
town.

To make it really special she had taken advantage of the fact she could pop over to Viridian City
easier and was off buying the wider range of goods available in the larger settlement.

Which again raised the question of why he wasn't doing the dutiful son role of carrying groceries.

"Pikapi." 'Maybe she just wants to surprise you with something.'

He considered Pikachu's theory, feeling his own frown deepen as he thought through the
possibilities.

'Ooh dear, could you possibly keep my son busy for the next few days? I really want him to have no
idea what I'm going to have for him.'

Said mental question of his mother was matched by a mental image of Iris grinning in a way that
made his muscles all flare up in exhaustion and dread.

"... I could have lived with discovering the steaks earlier."

Pikachu patted his neck, as if wishing him luck in surviving the idea of Iris dragging him off into the
hills for a few days (and possibly wishing himself luck for having to organize everyone for the last
few days in the meantime).

"I can't believe it! Weren't you on T.V or something?"

The loud and amazed voice, with odd muddling, came from behind them, so both he and Pikachu
wheeled around to spy an amazed looking tourist.

At least Ash assumed the guy was a tourist, flower-patterned shirts were pretty tourist after all. Said
blue shirt was over a pair of khaki shorts and sandals, with a pair of shaded sunglasses covering his
eyes that butted up against the longer bangs of his black hair. If Ash had to guess, the guy was at
least in his mid-twenties, but that was all he could tell.

However there was an odd thing about the guy, as he was wearing what looked like a ski mask over
his lower face. It was an odd choice to go with a flowery shirt to say the least.

"I was in a tournament, I guess it could've been broadcasted."

"Amazing! I would've have loved to be on T.V someday. Me, I'm just a nobody who just got lucky
enough to win a raffle for a vacation. That's my claim to fame, kind of lame isn't it?"

The guy's friendly and loud voice was again somewhat wonky, and in a way that Ash couldn't put
his finger on.

It didn't feel like it was just because of that ski mask, but what was up with it just didn't have an
answer he could lay a finger on.

"Well I'm sure you had fun, and who knows what will happen going forward. I didn't go into things
expecting to be on T.V."

"You really think so!? Thanks."

Something about that response felt off to Ash, the voice sounded as it had always been, but there was
something about the body language that felt off.
It didn’t seem to be ‘hyper’. Not being able to see his eyes or mouth was not helping him pinpoint what exactly was going on.

"Say, when I was on vacation, I got these really cool Pokémon. I’d love to battle them with you, they are pretty tough!"

Ash wanted to immediately go into the offer, but there was a potential issue.

"I mean sure, I’d love to…but all of my Pokémon are pretty strong. I've been doing a lot of training with them, and I’m not sure it would be really fair to you."

"Oh, it’s no problem. They were pretty tough when I found them. Plus even if I’m no League Trainer, I am a top tier casual. I can manage."

Again something was off here, but despite all of the senses Iris had trained into him his blood was itching for a fight, and from what he could feel tensing on his shoulder Pikachu was game for it too.

If there was something wrong, they could deal with it in turn.

As they were in an open enough area as it was he took the initiative and jumped back, freeing up a bit more space. The tourists seem surprised.

"That was a good jump."

"Thanks, I work out."

Without a further word both reached for a Pokéball. No advantage to either, just the luck of the draw.

"Go!"

Both shouts were met with a burst of a Pokémon, his choice being Ambipom. His choice however…

"Rai."

Was a Raichu, but not one that he had ever seen before. Honestly, it looked a bit like a cartoon version of the species, with cuter and rounder features. The color was also different.

That wasn't even touching the fact it stood on its tail and levitated over the ground. That was weird too, but not as much as the fact he was basically staring at something that made him wonder if he was going to get a pie thrown at his face.

"… Pi …" ‘... that thing sounds like a hippie….’

Hopefully it was the good kind of hippie.

"Alolan Raichu, a variant of the Raichu species native to the Alolan island chain. Alolan Raichu have the Psychic typing on top of their Electric element, and are that way for no scientifically understood reason."

Okay, he was definitely not mishearing that. The Pokédex definitely sounded distracted.

Between the weird tourist and now this, something was definitely off.

Ambipom tensed, ready for anything that might come from the hippie Raichu.

"Okay, I'll make the first move then. Alright Raichu, Electro Ball!"
"Rai!"

The Raichu cheered in a manner that Ash could hear trace amounts of hippie in, sparks forming at the stubby ends of its paws. The sparks manifested into a fuller shape, a pair of Electro Balls that were quickly merged into a single ball.

"Dodge it!"

Ambipom nodded as her tails tensed. The Electro Ball was sent flying, and the moment it did Ambipom pressed both of her tails into the ground. Using them, she flung herself into the air, avoiding the Electro Ball that slammed into the ground with the gentleness of one of Pikachu's old Electro Balls.

The Raichu would be a tough hippie it would seem.

"Okay Ambipom, use Shadow Claw!"

From her aerial position Ambipom swung around, pointing her tails at Raichu and firing off shadowy extensions right at Raichu's way.

Raichu swung out of the way of the first one, but the second one managed contact and slashed Raichu along the side.

Raichu let out a cry of shock at the impact.

"Raichu!"

The concerned tone of the tourist, Ash noted, didn't have the same oddness he had noticed before in his speech.

Raichu stabilized her floating as the tourist noted the landing Ambipom.

"That's a pretty good move. You must have done a lot of work on it. We'll have to avoid it, Electric Terrain!"

Ash wasn't sure what he meant by that last one, but Raichu's tail sparked before a yellow pulse shot out from it. This pulse covered the entire battlefield, which turned yellow and glowed brightly.

Ash felt the tingle of static riding along his pants, and had to wonder exactly what this move was supposed to do.

It didn't seem to be damaging Ambipom in anyway, she looked fine.

Perhaps a tad static-y, so he'd avoid hugging her for the moment, but fine.

"... initiating anti-ele..."

From the farthest reach of his hearing he could have sworn he heard something, but before he could think of it further the tourist took things to his own initiative.

"Alright, now let's use Electro Ball!"

"Jump!"

Ambipom motioned to jump just as she did last time, but this time the Raichu got right in front of her, faster than he had seen Raichu move before.
The Electro Ball was struck right in Ambipom's chest, even larger than before. The resulting attack sent Ambipom speeding back in a wheel-like fashion, leaving her crumbled on her ground.

"Ambipom!"

"Wow! I heard that if you combined an Alolan Raichu, Electric Terrain, and an electric move together, something really cool would happen. They weren't kidding!"

Ambipom stood up, woozily, from that hit.

"Am. 'I'm guessing that Pokémon has some sort of ability that is making it stronger.'"

That would be the logical conclusion.

Pikachu muttered something about hippies that didn't need translating.

"Okay, let's do that again! Electro Ball!"

"Quickly, Counter Shield!"

Ambipom was able to start spinning while using Swift faster than she had prepared the jump. It wasn't quite where it should be, but by the time the Raichu got in close the shield was up and the Electro Ball was deflecting and blasted back into Raichu.

Ambipom then stopped the Counter Shield, and they had the same idea in mind to wrap this up.

"Double Hit!"

Two glowing purple tails right into Raichu at once. They retracted back just as the Raichu landed on the still sparking field.

Defeated.

"Wow! I have no idea what you just did, but it was pretty cool. That must be the difference between a guy like me, and someone who really has something special about him."

"Thanks."

Again, something about the way that he said that was off, but now in a way that sounded between the normal way he sounded (that was, not normal), and how he had sounded when Raichu got hit with Shadow Claw.

As he returned and thanked Raichu, Ambipom looked at him in concern.

"Am. 'Something about this guy is off, be careful.'"

He nodded, he had to agree. This wasn't just a normal tourist.

"Hey, let's try it again! I have all sorts of cool Pokémon!"

The only way he'd get to figuring out what was up with him was to keep this up.

"Take five, you earned it."

As he returned Ambipom and held a Safari Ball in hand, it was time for another blind throw.

"Go!"
This time he had chosen Boldore, who was ready for battle. What she’d be battling…

Well, it wasn't as cute as Raichu, and it probably didn't sound like a hippie.

"Gol."

Most hippies, after all, did not look like blue massive armored bugs with a pair of massive front limbs taller than even himself.

Though given Misty's fears, perhaps it was what hippies in her nightmares looked like.

"Golisopod, the Hard Scale Pokémon. An evolved Water and Bug type, Golisopod live in seaside caves where they train both physically and mentally to hone themselves."

Again the Pokédex sounded a bit distracted, though he had his own distracting thought to think of.

That was, pointing out to Misty that this thing existed, and her goal would involve her catching one.

That would be a fun conversation if there was ever one. He could already hear her screaming in terror, and it wasn't because she had walked in on this fight and seen the Golisopod.

For her sake, he could only hope the pre evolved form of Golisopod wasn't far more worthy of Misty's terror than Caterpie.

Still, giving Misty night terrors was a later thing to do, should he so choose.

Fighting her night terror was a now thing to do, and he choose to do so.

"Alright Boldore use …"

"First Impression!"

The Golisopod punched forward, which sent a shockwave that shook Boldore, before an arm thrust from Golisopod struck her right in the center.

The blow sent her skidding back, shooting up electric sparks from the still active Electric Terrain along her red crystal feet.

"Now Poison Jab!"

The claw of the other limb of Golisopod glowed purple as it lunged forward for another attack, though with a lot less speed than the first one.

"Iron Defense!"

Boldore shimmered a shiny gray moments before impact, which deflected the jabbing attack.

"Now Return!"

Glowing white Boldore hopped forward, slamming into Golisopod. The force of the blow sent Golisopod back, which was noted by more electric sparks once again from the ground as Boldore landed with a satisfied grunt.

The Golisopod hung over its chest, curled up a bit as if nursing a harsh wound, before the bug gave a nasty grin and uncurled itself and stood fully up.
A good distance away, and Ash could see that it had been entirely faing the extent of the blow it suffered.

"Bol!? 'How!?'"

"Oh, isn't he just a scamp! He loves doing that! Must bug your Boldore, but hey this guy is quirky! Hey, think you can show off another move while you are at it Golisopod? If it can stop your Poison Jab, maybe you should use a Water Pulse!"

The bug held its limbs close together, manifesting water into a glowing blue sphere.

"Rock Blast!"

Boldore fired the attack just as Golisopod was done charging the attack. The two attacks collided mid-flight and they cancelled each other with an explosion.

In the aftermath of said explosion the Electric Terrain fizzled out.

"Again!"

Another Water Pulse was charging from the giant bug, and Ash knew that this was going to devolve into a long ranged stalemate if he didn't take a chance.

Or use an ace in the hole.

"Dodge it and get ready!"

Boldore barely avoided the Water Pulse, but she was ready when he removed the yellow crystal from the Z-Ring and replaced it with the white one.

The tourist's body language, this time at least, did not feel off.

"Wait, is that a Z-Crystal?! Like, what Kahunas have?!!"

He shrugged.

"Possibly, it's a long story. Now Boldore, let's do it!"

He stretched his arms out, before slamming them back down onto his chest in a Z-like formation. A yellow-orange aura flared up around him, which flew into a tensed Boldore before flaring up massively.

He heard the guy mutter something, but nothing the tourist could do seemed likely to be a problem. Even Protect hadn't stopped that attack.

"Breakneck Blitz!"

Boldore rocketed towards Golisopod with the gentleness of a speeding truck, frozen in place from the shock of the attack.

A reaction of a Pokémon still learning to keep its cool in battle, but a completely understandable one given the extent of what he had thrown at the guy.

He had wanted to see what a Trainer like him could do, and this was it.

It struck Golisopod, who faded away into a mist as the attack struck. Boldore landed on the opposite
end of the mist-Golisopod and she was just confused as he was.

"Pikapi!" 'Ash, that was a Substitute!'

A Substitute!

As Boldore panted in exhaustion and looked around in confusion, a hulking form appeared in front of her, two Water Pulses in hand.

Golisopod then slammed both of them into Boldore, who promptly toppled over like a fallen jenga tower.

"I won! I won! Somehow I won, and I can't believe it! I wasn't even sure that Substitute would even work like that, but it did!"

Golisopod nodded, as if the outcome had never been in any doubt.

"Good job, take a rest."

He returned Boldore with a suspicious look, aimed right at the tourist in shades and a ski mask.

That Substitute timing could be the sign of a really talented Pokémon without training, or it could mean that something was really off.

He'd have to personally lean into the 'this guy is up to something' angle.

It was probably an option to just ask him, but a part of him was still unsure if this guy was just a normal tourist with a fascination with mouth wear.

Another part, larger than the above, honestly saw the training potential here. No matter what this guy was doing, it was a learning experience for them all.

Without it, he'd have never realized what Substitute could do to his Z-Moves. He could now prepare for that tactic.

The tourist didn't give a hint that he had noticed his suspicion, and after returning and thanking Golisopod, held up a third Pokéball.

It was an invitation, and he'd accept this one with a gesture of his shoulder. Recognizing what he meant Pikachu hopped off it and sparked his cheeks.

His Pokéball was flung into the air, which exploded into a canine Pokémon with brown and white fur and rocky spikes around its collar.

"Lycanroc, the Wolf Pokémon and a Rock-type Pokémon. Lycanroc evolves differently depending on the time of its evolution. This is its Midday Form. There are two common morphs, but unusual phenomena have created unusual morphs in the past and can likely do so in the future."

Again a distracted sounded Pokédex not quite sounding all there, and again an Alolan Pokémon.

The battle would begin now.

"Quick Attack!"

By his hand this time.
"Accelerock!"

Ash didn’t know that move, but he felt he got what it was pretty much.

For Lycanroc tensed and launched itself forward, much like Pikachu’s Quick Attack.

The two attacks collided, and while the collision ended with the two clashing it felt like Pikachu had a slight edge in that bout.

"That’s a pretty strong Pikachu."

The comment that came from the tourist was one of those that felt a bit less off than most of them.

"Yeah, he is."

The tourist nodded in a rare show of clear body language.

"Bulk Up!"

Lycanroc howled into the air while a red aura surrounded it. A Quick Attack would probably not have the same bit of natural power advantage this time.

He’d have to change it up.

"Alright Pikachu, give it a Thunderbolt!"

Pikachu sparked as the electric glow formed and fired itself right at the Lycanroc.

Lycanroc bounded out of the way of the electric attack, glowing with the intent to start an Accelerock again.

"Quick Attack!"

It was possible that they could still break even.

With that call both Pokémon collided once more, and once more they broke off without an overall winner but someone who had a slight edge.

This time it was Lycanroc.

"Okay Pikachu, use Wild Charge!"

Pikachu nodded as an electric force covered him before bounding towards Lycanroc.

Lycanroc hopped to the side to avoid the attack, and in that moment Ash saw an opportunity.

For Lycanroc was just within reach for another sort of move.

"Okay Pikachu, shift into Iron Tail!"

Pikachu’s tail glowed metallic white moments before the electric aura of Wild Charge faded away.

However said electric charge lingered around Iron Tail, which was promptly slammed into Lycanroc with an extra oomph.

Even with Bulk Up Lycanroc felt that attack, and the bruise on the impact point of the shoulder would be a lingering mark for the battle, if Ash had to guess.
He'd need to press the advantage he had earned.

"Thunderbolt!"

The close range electric attack landed before the Lycanroc could avoid it, landing a solid hit that lasted for a good while.

"Accelerock!"

And even into the resulting counter attack that slammed into Pikachu and sent him flying.

That broke the attack, and both Pokémon stared at each other with what appeared to be equal states of injury.

Pikachu's two solid attacks doing the same relative damage as Lycanroc's one. By no means the fault of Pikachu's strength and the extent of his training, but a simple reality of his natural defensive levels.

This fight would be determined by the next solid hit landed, and Ash was regretting blowing the Z-move as early as he had.

He doubted the Lycanroc could as easily avoid Gigavolt Havoc as it had some of the Thunderbolts.

"Bulk Up, then Accelerock!"

Lycanroc howled as a red aura surrounded it once more.

Quick Attack would not be able to handle the attack this time. He'd need to try something else.

Something he had already done in this fight, and an idea that made him want to turn his hat around.

He'd do so if he had any time to spare, but as that wasn't the case there was only the plan.

"Okay Pikachu start up Wild Charge, then go into Quick Attack!"

Pikachu nodded as mid-way through Bulk Up he flared up the electric aura of the lesser Volt Tackle option, which quickly turned white with Quick Attack.

The sparks from Wild Charge danced around Quick Attack as it flew towards Lycanroc's Accelerock attack for an extra power boost, though as the Quick Attack approached Lycanroc Pikachu seemed to lose a bit of speed.

However for what speed was lost the electricity that had been charged up from Wild Charge made for it as it flared up and formed into an attack.

Though it wasn't Wild Charge, but a more familiar move.

Volt Tackle.

While slower than Accelerock, the two colliding moves met mid-field, and this time there was a clear leader.

The glowing black and white form of Pikachu overpowered the Bulk Up boosted Lycanroc, forcing the hound back and knocking it across the field.

A pillar of dust was spilled up along the way, and Lycanroc lay defeated as Pikachu landed unharmed.
Well, aside for the minor bit of recoil damage, but in the end Pikachu was still standing, and Lycanroc was not.

"Lycanroc!"

As the Trainer recalled the Rock-type, Ash decided it was time to see just what was going on here.

"You're a bit more than just a tourist, aren't you?"

The tourist froze in place as he tried to reach for a fourth Pokéball.

"Look, if you just say who you are and that you aren't a Team Rocket Member or Hunter J or something we can drop the charade and battle for real. None of this faking thing you seem to be doing."

"Cepu, deactivate voice replacement program. The false behavior is no longer necessary."

"Acknowledged."

Of the more authentic sounding voice, and the more often used voice, the two voices that came from the false tourist sounded like the most extreme versions of either.

However it was the first voice that remained after a sound that reminded Ash of a deactivating tech doodad.

"...Well, you picked it up. I must admit I was probably hoping too much that this would let me see six of your Pokémon for analysis. However three is not a bad sample size at all."

Pikachu sparked at the false tourist, who seemed unworried.

"Who are you?"

The not-tourist didn't answer his question, but instead looked towards his Pokédex pocket.

"That's a pretty good piece of A.I. Whoever made it for you has some talent. Cepu's personally impressed by the growth subroutines it developed. You're similarly impressive. I didn't expect you to defeat two of my Beta Team with only three of your Pokémon. Had we gone onto four Pokémon I could have seen you drawing two for two, but you surpassed my initial data readings. I'll have to use an Alpha Team against you when we meet again."

"And where would that be?"

"Indigo."

With that word, and a voice of electronic origin declaring the activation of 'remote warp tile access', the tourist teleported away just as Anabel walked up behind him.

As he vanished with a flicker more akin to a Pokéball transporter than a Teleport, Anabel had a widened eye of surprise.

"I battled a strange faux tourist that just teleported away and I have no idea what this was all about, no chance you read his thoughts and could tell me what just happened?"

Anabel looked around for a moment, as if to make sure they were alone, before she spoke up.

'Well, from what I got from him was a name. Alexander Silph. He was gone too quickly for me to get
Alexander Silph? He had the same last name as the megacorp in Saffron City. Was that a coincidence or were they connected?

He took the Pokédex out.

"Search Alexander Silph."

The answer that the Pokédex gave did not sounded distracted.

"Alexander Silph. The twenty-five year old heir of Silph Co. He's a genius of both technology and Pokémon battles, and a world leader in designing artificial intelligences. That Cepu of his is quite an interesting program."

Why did the Pokédex sound like Pikachu when it said that? Was he going to get an email with an A.I egg in it tomorrow?

"He designed the upgrade for Porygon that allowed the species to evolve into Porygon2, though he has nothing to do with the further evolution to Porygon-Z. As to his battling prowess, in his ten years of active battling Alexander has taken home the gold in Johto, Unova, and Sinnoh, and silver and bronzes in all three regions on top of Kanto, Hoenn, and Kalos."

"What!?"

The declaration of shock might have only been heard by him, but he could attest it came also from Pikachu and Anabel.

"He's a Champion!?"

"League Champion yes, he has no interest in the position held by the likes of Alder and Diantha. He's not really a people person, he just likes battling and programming in equal measure. As to how he has all of those trophies, after acquiring all of the necessary badges it isn't too hard to enter tournaments fairly frequently if you can move from place to place quickly. Plus once he wins a region he doesn't need to keep it up schedule wise. I suspect that you could easily do the same."

Ash wasn't sure what to say, even though he did feel like he could easily grin about fighting that well against a person of that caliber. However something was bothering him.

"He said something about Beta and Alpha teams. What does that mean?"

Anabel looked at him with a look that suggested she had an inkling what that meant, but she seemed to leave the Pokédex to explaining it.

"The traditional battle method of Silph is to divide his Pokémon into two tiers, the weaker Beta teams and the stronger Alpha teams. Both are well trained, but he primarily uses the Beta teams to battle his way in the earlier parts of League tournaments. He uses the Alpha teams to handle the later rounds or against opponents that could easily qualify for a later round if encountered early."

Ash could only stare at the Pokédex.
He battled him with a deliberately weaker team than his best, just to gauge his strength?

Ash wasn't sure how he felt about that. The battle he just had, it suddenly felt a bit hollow.

The entire thing was a false show of strength just to get information on him. The man held back his own strength, and even then the fights were close.

Except the one with Boldore, if he had to be honest as he winced at how that went down.

That wasn't a close fight, and she would definitely be needing a Pokémon Center visit pretty quickly.

His thoughts suddenly drifted to Red, more specifically Red's thoughts on himself.

"Some of his other Beta Team Pokémon include Slurpuff, Elektrross, Staraptor, and Lanturn, while his Alpha Team includes the very first Porygon2, Scizor, Breloom, Roserade, Darmanitan, and Alakazam. I can give you all the known Pokémon he's used later, but as I have no record on the three he used today the list is likely with inaccuracies. Plus members of the Beta Team have moved to the Alpha Team in past periods, creating additional data inaccuracies."

He only vaguely heard the Pokédex's words as he looked to Anabel.

"He and I are different. I mean I don't go around using one team specifically to throw people off. I just don't use the 'win instantly' switch inside me. That is completely different."

'Yet you did use Pokémon you didn't use in the Sinnoh Region against two of your rivals, did you not? I am sure that Nando knew all about Heracross and Quilava, and Conway Noctowl and Donphan. Is that any different?'

He ignored the point Red counter-argued in his mind.

Anabel for her part shrugged.

'Like back in Fuchsia, you and Red both had points and I can see both of your arguments. I'm not taking a side in it, that's Misty's and Iris's job. Now, let's go to the Pokémon Center and heal your Pokémon. You can think through moral implications later.'

Despite Anabel's words, he still as thinking about the implications.

That was the difference, wasn't it? He didn't go around hiding his best Pokémon to catch people off guard. Even if he could sort his Pokémon by how strong they were, and he probably could if so wanted, he didn't.

If he did Pikachu would never be allowed to do anything, and his buddy would be quickly bored out of his mind.

He didn't seek out people to battle just to get a leg up on their strategies for later either.

That wasn't who he was.

…

The fact that Togepi was breathing fire in the middle of the Pokémon Center distracted him from considering if he had dipped into the hypocrisy stream, and if so if he just got a soaking or got completely drenched.
Ash was glad that Pikachu was in the back healing, because he was sure even after the egg talk he'd have not calmed down enough to not freak out.

Togepi cheered after he finished his demonstration, even as several other Trainers in the waiting area scooted away from it nervously.

He could feel the Chansey at the front desk giving him a warning look, so he nervously returned Togepi back into his ball.

"Sorry 'bout that."

"Chansey."

Chansey was still watching him suspiciously, though she waddled to the side as Nurse Joy came out with Pikachu on her shoulder and the two Pokéballs he battled with just earlier.

Nodding he took the Pokéballs back in hand.

"You know, I recently got a trade circuit machine installed in the back. It lets Pokémon that can evolve due to the wavelengths trade machines give off evolve without having to do an immediate trade back."

He paused mid step as the Joy brought that up, with Pikachu turning around and looking at the nurse questioningly for him.

"Chu? 'Why do you bring that up?'

Despite not being able to understand him, Joy did seem to pick up the fact that Pikachu was questioning her comment and explained herself.

"While I was healing your Pokémon I did a bit of research on Boldore. I don't usually get them and I wanted to make sure I didn't do anything problematic. Thought I'd let you know, those machines are more trusting than the old ones. People could just run off with your Pokémon afterwards and it was always a hassle to get them back..."

...

Ash walked around the Pokémon Center for a moment, the Safari Ball in hand.

And himself away from the back, where the machine that was making him think this dilemma through resided.

Evolving Boldore … the thought made Ash conflicted.

Even beyond the question of what Boldore herself wanted, which was the most important factor in the end, the simple fact of defaulting immediately to evolution …

It didn't sit well with him, being the one to press the button that would make evolution happen. He had nothing against evolution, he liked to think that he could point to the many Pokémon he had that did evolve to make just as strong a point as he could when pointing at his other Pokémon and how he didn't force the issue.

However it was never his call to see it happen.

Every one of his Pokémon who evolved did so because they decided to. They wanted to save him, they wanted to chase after Aerodactyl, or they wanted to win a fight to name but three ways
evolutions had happened.

There was never a time where he could just do something to have them evolve, and went through with it.

Even in his more rash early days, he had left it to Pikachu to decide on the Thunder Stone. He hadn't exactly been as considerate about others back then, so there was something to be said about the fact he realized the issue of doing that even back then.

A later decision made with Gligar, thirty-one Gyms and a battle frontier later, was similar. He had been given the Razor Fang, but he didn't tell Gligar to evolve with it.

He had Gligar earn the right to use it sure, the last thing he wanted was to use evolution as a crutch and for Gligar that would have been a real problem. Yet even after Gligar prepared to evolve, Gligar only used it because Gligar decided to.

Admittedly he had been falling to his death when he threw Gligar the Razor Rang, so there was probably an argument that hadn't quite been the right point for a choice to be made.

Gligar and cliff ethics aside, what message might he send in doing this?

'You're having a losing streak, just evolve and solve all of your problems!'

He wasn't sure he wanted that message to take root, as that didn't seem healthy.

Healthy for his Pokémon, or healthy for himself really. If he didn't need to go and think to himself how to take advantage of Squirtle's smaller size, how else might he dull?

'You know, worrying about the ramifications is going a bit too far.'

He stopped his pacing in a quiet area of the Pokémon Center as Anabel had her own two cents to offer.

'Everyone can understand context, they can merely refuse to consider it if they want to try and make a point. In the end though, it is Boldore's decision. If she wants to evolve, she does. If not, she doesn't.'

He had already thought that, but Anabel had apparently missed him thinking that. What did surprise him was her taking out a Pokéball herself.

'If she does, she isn't the only Pokémon that has no issue evolving and would not mind doing so today.'

He noted the Kadabra Pokéball for a moment, before taking a deep breath.

Pikachu patted him on the back of the neck, and he threw the Safari Ball into the air.

He idly noted Anabel step back as he took to a knee so that when Boldore formed up in front of him he’d be right at knee level with her.

"Boldore … would you like to evolve?"

The question was short and to the point.

It was also a question that Boldore didn't take long in answering.
"Bol." 'I would.'

…

The square machine spun the balls around and around as he, Anabel, and Pikachu watched.

Anabel passively, while he gripped his hands together nervously.

Pikachu patted his neck, trying to get him to relax.

Eventually both balls rolled out onto the same spot they had been placed in moments ago, before bursting open to reveal the two Pokémon that had been placed in.

Kadabra in front of Anabel, and Boldore in front of Ash.

Both promptly burst into blue light and began changing shape.

Kadabra grew taller as its tail shrunk out of sight. The facial hair Kadabra had grew longer and bushier, and a second spoon materialized as to have one in each hand.

Meanwhile Boldore doubled in size it seemed, growing much taller and larger than even the gaining of a fourth limb would suggest. Crystals began jotting out of her body all over the place.

Eventually the light shattered, revealing the two evolved Pokémon.

"Alakazam and Gigalith, two fully evolved Pokémon that evolve in several specific circumstances including the radiation of trade machines. One is known for immense intelligence, the other great physical force."

While still taller than her, he didn't need to kneel to touch Gigalith in her face to ask the question.

"So, was it worth it?"

Gigalith nodded before tentatively stomping her front limbs down.

Ash suspected it was only the training Iris had been inflicting on the both of them that kept them standing from the shockwave the stomp unleashed.

Pallet House

Anabel couldn't help but wonder where Delia got the energy and time to organize those parties.

Money wasn't an issue, her restaurant was frequented by the townsfolk and it had a rather good clientele flow. But it seemed that only on party days, like today, it was full to top.

That said, she couldn't deny she was having a lot of fun, but after dancing for so long, her feet were starting to hurt. She sat on a chair next to the snack table, and grabbed a few muffins and a glass of soda to rest for a bit.

She glanced at the karaoke stage, where Misty was standing, after a lot of insistence from Delia, and singing a song for the woman's son. The redhead had been reluctant, but she finally caved in to the pressure and chose a song that went "Ohh, catch me if you can!" or something like that.

Much to everyone's surprise, Anabel herself included, it turned out that Misty had a pretty good singing voice, and many of the male guests were actually cheering for her after hearing her.
'Who'd have guessed she'd have that kind of hidden talent?' she thought with a smile. Admittedly, she felt a little envious, since she wouldn't mind standing there herself to sing something. The only person who had heard her singing (in a manner of speaking) had been her uncle, and only Christmas carols for that matter.

"C'mon Ash, don't be so mean, dance with me!"

"No, better dance with me! Come on, do say yes!"

"Hey, you're gonna snap me in half if you keep pulling like that."

And there he was again, Ash between two girls pulling him by the arms as they begged him to dance with them. For a moment, Anabel thought to intervene as to rescue him, but there was no need. First, because it was unlikely they'd actually snap him in half (let alone with the training he had done).

And second, because Iris beat her to it. "Stop it you two. He already said no, so leave him alone."

Anabel could see Iris was glaring at them, and they relented, though one of them still said something about it. "Aww, no fair! Why do those three always want to hog him?!"

She almost laughed. It was obvious who they meant, as long as one of them stood near of Ash, those girls wouldn't dare to get close to him, let alone touch him.

As she took a sip from her soda, Anabel looked at Ash and Iris, and noticing a few things. First, how quickly the wild girl seemed to understand the concept of dancing when Misty explained it to her. Iris did know about 'ritual dances' or 'courting dances' among some Pokémon species, but she never seemed to have thought much about the idea of dancing just for fun. Misty convinced her that she could enjoy it, and it was a good stress reliever after a hard day's work.

The other thing, once the fangirls had left, was that she no longer felt the annoyance of seeing Ash between them. She knew very well they didn't see Ash like she did, those girls only saw the outside, his looks, his Trainer skills and the fame he had earned with it.

But the three of them… they knew the real Ash. The adventurous, competitive, kind and cheerful young man behind the Trainer.

'Is that why I'm not annoyed Iris is dancing with him right now?'

Likewise, she didn't feel annoyed when Misty 'rescued' him during the welcome party, if only to take him so she could dance with him for a bit. That time, just like with the karaoke, she was rather surprised to see that she was quite the dancer. Misty later commented that "she picked up one or two things from her sisters", though her parents never paid attention to it. Since she didn't like talking about her family more than necessary, Anabel didn't pry any further.

It was weird, but she didn't feel annoyed from seeing Ash dancing with Iris and Misty. Maybe the fact they were all friends had something to do with it, and while she could see there was some intent to impress the boy behind it… at least it was sincere. She couldn't hold it against them, let alone when she had done a bit of it herself.

'Just... why did I have to get into Iris's dreams?' she asked herself. After that talk, she wasn't sure what to think about it. Could she really get to the point of being willing to share Ash, and not feel jealous in the least?

*KLINK*
However, her thoughts about Iris and her strange relationship ideas were interrupted by something entering her passive telepathy range. It was as if some kind of lightning bolt passed through her brain for a split second, and that caused her to perk up to attention.

Everybody around her was having fun, and she didn't want to spoil it, but… whatever that was, somehow she felt the need to check it out. Just to be sure it wasn't something dangerous.

So, while Ash was still busy dancing with Iris, and Delia joined Misty to sing a duet, the telepath slowly slipped towards the entrance while they weren't looking, determined to see what had been that lightning bolt crossing her brain. It shouldn't take too long, and surely she'd be back before anybody noticed she was gone.

…

She had been thinking for the moments she was going to investigate about just what might have caused that sensation.

An electrical sensation made her think of something of that element, but she couldn't really think of what might cause it.

She didn't get a watery feeling from being around Misty, and she didn't feel such a sensation when Zapdos decided to bother them.

So what could have created the sensation?

That question still lingered in her mind as she arrived at the spot she had sensed the odd disturbance, one of Pallet Town's many grassy hills.

Looking around she tried to figure out what had caused the reaction, but she saw nothing.

At least, not at first.

Her eye eventually noticed a bit of disturbed earth in the field.

The sort of disrupted earth that was generally the result of something digging.

She barely had time to react to the ground cracking under her, leaping out of the way as a massive shape burst out of the ground.

Had she not moved out of the way, she'd have been shredded by it.

She stared at the Pokémon that had lunged at her, though she had no idea what the Pokémon was.

It was like nothing she had seen before, a yellow Pokémon that stood about as tall as Iris, with black marks along its fur coat. Fangs stuck out of its jaw, while a purple cloud hung off it like a cape. Its tail resembled a bolt of lightning.

If Anabel had to say something, she was fairly certain it was an Electric-type, but beyond that she hadn't an idea beyond the fact it could use Dig.

It gave her a bit more information by forming a black shadowy ball in front of its mouth.

A second move shown, Shadow Ball was flung at her, which she deflected with her own power.

The redirected ball slammed into a hill with an explosive force, and the Pokémon gave out a grunt that sounded impressed.
Even more so when she surrounded it in a blue glow and flung it back, though it didn't seem concerned.

The fact it blasted her with an electric blast of some sort, possibly Thunderbolt, even as she flung it was probably why.

She popped out of the way of the blast, teleporting a foot away from it. Her toes were just out of the expanse of charred grass the attack left in its wake, and safely away from the little flames that danced in the blast zone.

Her teleporting had freed the Pokémon from her grip, and it landed on the opposite end of the field with a flip and a satisfied grunt, before glowing white.

Much like Pikachu would in the midst of a Quick Attack.

Before she had a chance to react it was right in front of her, a white glowing paw right in front of her face and ready to crush her skull.

However it was in that point that the battle had stopped, and she realized what had just happened.

This Pokémon would have won this battle, and if it wanted to, kill her.

It was an overwhelming power difference, and one that felt very different from any Pokémon she had seen or encountered before bar one.

Zapdos.

The Pokémon lowered his paw from her head, and seemed to be giving her an impressed look.

'So, it is true. I had never beheld of your kind in action before, and you truly do exist between the two worlds. I must admit it is more than I had expected.'

It took her a moment to realize that the voice she was hearing came from the Pokémon before her, a voice that sounded ageless yet with a bit of an older pronunciation of someone from a different time period.

'You can talk?'

He seemed surprised to hear back from her.

'And you can speak the human tongue the same way I can? Even more uncanny.'

This was how Pokémon talked to people that weren't their type Bloodliners? Meowth was even more of an exception to the rule than she had first thought.

Meowth's oddity in the world aside, she had other questions.

'Who are you, and why did you come here? Why did you attack me?'

The Pokémon gave what she could only describe as a laugh in the Pokémon tongue before continuing, a deep and throaty laugh that would have been charming had it not come from a massively fanged Legendary Pokémon that could, as it had shown her earlier, shattered her skull easily.

'Little in-betweener, if I had been trying to attack you, you wouldn't be standing nor breathing. As to whom I am, you humans would call me Raikou the Spirit of Lightning and the first of my species,
The name still wasn't familiar, but Anabel had a dot she could connect.

She had heard the tale of Ho-Oh and the three Pokémon it revived from the dead. She couldn't remember their names off the top of her head, but she could easily slot Raikou in there and it felt like she finally got an answer off the top of her tongue.

Now if only she could remember the other two.

She suddenly wished that she had brought a Dex with her. The fact she hadn't would mean she would have to avoid bringing it up around the device lest she face its ranting.

Of course there was the oddity of her having run into yet another Legendary Pokémon in a short period of time.

Still, the Legendary Pokémon had only answered one of her questions.

'You still haven't explained why you are here.'

'No, actually I did explain myself. I am the servant of Ho-Oh, and that is why I am here.'

That, didn't really answer anything without further clarification.

'This is the birthplace of the one called Ash Ketchum, is it not?'

She tensed as his name was mentioned, unsure of where this would go.

Was Raikou going to crash the party? She could only imagine how that would go down.

'Why do you ask?'

Raikou looked her straight in the eye, even bending over to rest on its front limbs to stare right into her eyes.

This stare lasted for a good minute, as is the Legendary Pokémon was staring right into her very soul. Anabel had to hold down a gulp of nervousness as it dragged on.

Then without a warning it surged into her, head first before rolling its head back.

The result of this motion flung her onto its back before it jumped into the air, glowing yellow as it ran through the sky.

'Hold on maiden, and do not fret. You are not the first young maiden I have given a ride to.'

Anabel was too busy being stunned by what just happened to ask when Raikou had done this before to answer, though before long they had landed on something solid.

It took her a moment to realize that where they were was the roof of Professor's Oaks research lab, staring down into the town below as night took over from day.

She shakily got off from her unexpected ride, who remained solidly still as it looked down towards Delia's restaurant.

'This little settlement, this home of your quirky species that was gifted not with power but with a better mind than the others, do you think it has produced two that will better the world? That is the
question Ho-Oh wonders.'

The first person that Raikou meant was surely Professor Oak, but the second one could only be Ash in this context.

That confused her.

'Ash is a wonderful person who many people owe including myself, but change the world? That seems a bit crazy.'

'Any more than a young man deciding to change the world on a scale larger than the mere canals of his forefathers? I've seen over a century of your years, and I have witnessed humanity change in more ways than you can comprehend. Ho-Oh saw Ash Ketchum's journey begin briefly, and I am here to see how that journey has changed him.'

At that declaration Raikou seemed to focus more intently into Delia's restaurant, as if seeing more than just a restaurant. Raikou looked into it deeply for even longer than before, before nodding.

'I see, that is how he has grown.'

'Why would Ho-Oh want to know how Ash has grown? Is he some sort of chosen one or something?'

Her question seemed to confuse Raikou a bit.

'A Chosen One? Is that a belief that humans, either the ones I have long known or the ones who have gained a portion of the powers they gave up for their intelligences, hold? What a strange concept, such a title suggests that he has something unique to him. Perhaps a pure heart, which is an untruth. While he has such a heart, there are many with such a heart among the humans, even as there are those with black hearts and many more with hearts in between. I could declare several in this town called Pallet to possess such hearts at this very moment, and you would need both your hands to count them. Ho-Oh recognizes the many that you humans would declare 'chosen ones' even if Ho-Oh prefers isolation from the majority as a whole. No, Ho-Oh wanted to see how a sojourn through the lands to the north and east of here affected him, and what it might say about the future.'

She was still not sure what Raikou was getting at, so the Legendary continued.

'I've told all of my children this and only the eldest seem to understand. Well that and the guardian of the human Crown City, but that one is an interesting one. Those of us who fear only injury and not age often fail to comprehend how fast the world changes sometimes, in part because it is humans who drive change most of the time. Sure Kyogre can flood the world in a deluge of death if no one acted, but that has never happened in my lifetime and I like to think is a concern long past. In my time humanity has learned to advance themselves by mass damage to the world, how to reverse much of their damage while keeping their progress, and how to not be actively trying to kill each other on a global scale. Such a level of change is looming once more, and Ho-Oh sees it as being tied to those like you and Ash. The latter is one that Ho-Oh hoped would remain as an ideal role model for how that future should like, and so far he remains that way. The same could be said of you and the other two like him in this place. Ho-Oh would have granted him a Rainbow Wing to test him, but as I was told things did not work out for such a boon to be given. Alas, but I can say for certain he would have passed that test if he had been granted a Rainbow Wing.

Raikou turned around, seemingly finished with that task and began tensing with intent to bound away. There were many things she could do ask before it left, or even just allow it to go without further question.
She had one such question to ask in particular though.

'Do you know why there are more Bloodliners now than before? You said you hadn't seen one like us before, but it sounds like Ho-Oh has from what you told me.'

Raikou, still tensed up with intent to spring, answered her.

'A Bloodliner is not the three who were revived in what humans now call the Burned Tower. A human was not revived with new power to become a Bloodliner. I am, as you might expect, no expert on the subject. I cannot give you a clear answer or a proper explanation. I am not the one who can tell you why there are more now than before. However I can leave you with what I have heard about previous increases in their number. While nowhere near as common as they are becoming, I have been told of a marked increase in their number that following the event twelve thousand seasons ago in the Kalos Region, as well as in the aftermath of some but not all meteor showers. Why, I can tell you not.'

With that Raikou bound away in a single massive bound the likes of which were not common outside comic books.

Moments later Anabel returned to the party, where no one had noticed she had been gone.

It had only been a short period of time, yet it had given her more than a bit to think about.

Terracotta Town Shady Warehouse District

He was certain that they hadn't been expecting him.

The group he had tracked down wasn't much in the grand scheme of things. It was a satellite group to Team Rocket, not officially part of the organization but operating within its umbrella to service an area for the shared interest of both groups.

They attracted less attention that way, and Team Rocket still got a cut of the profit. So he wasn't expecting much of a proper reaction when he and Venomoth teleported in the middle of their warehouse.

They reacted much as he thought they would, stumbling all over themselves and tripping on their own feet.

He was much faster, and didn't require anything more than a hand signal for Venomoth to unleash String Shot and bind them all up before he even had to stand.

By the time he stood the office door in the warehouse had swung open, revealing a somewhat plump man with pink and yellow hair glaring at him in both surprise and anger.

Despite his figure, he had the aura of someone far more competent than his underlings. He was also who he was looking for.

He didn't come here just to tie up minor thugs.

"Oi, what's the big idea? Why is there a ninja beating up my dumbasses? Even I can't go around beating them up, and here you are tying them up like some sort of ass."
The leader looked at him closely, a pair of golden eyes looking him over before expressing a guarded surprise.

"Aren't you that Gym Leader? Koga if I recall correctly, and I am fairly certain I am."

The man avoided a String Shot from Venomoth with sharp observation and anticipation, even if his personal speed wasn't that great.

"I don't know why you're here, but I'm not going to let you get away with tying up my dumbasses. I was perfectly fine where I am but if you really want to pick a fight I can think of a few perks of taking you down and giving you to people higher up the food chain than I am. Go get 'em!"

At that the man threw a pair of Ultra Balls from his belt, unleashing two of the reasons he had sought this specific criminal out.

The first was a black reptilian Pokémon that stood on two legs with purple flame marks on its lighter-colored belly.

The other was a Muk, but a very different Muk from the several he had. This one had a coloration akin to oil in water, or to mercury in oil, than the pure sludge of a regular Muk.

Without further command both of them unleashed attacks at him, a Flamethrower and a black ball variant of Snarl.

With Venomoth he teleported out of the way of both attacks and behind his target, ready to take him down with a quick nerve strike.

However he found his blow blocked by a materialized red and purple exoskeleton.

"Scol."

Said Pokémon blocked his target, who glared at him.

He glared back at the one he had tracked down.

Frank Gipani, also known as the Toxic Unovan. A mid-tier crook with a fairly long history who had always avoided capture in his time. There had been rumors he had retired about twenty years ago and had been seen once or twice in Alola during that time by witnesses, but he had re-entered the criminal life in Kanto since.

No one knew why he left his retirement, and he didn't particularly care. He had tracked that man down for a specific reason, and filed the paperwork to follow up on that reason without trouble down the line.

A rainbow light twinkled to existence between Scolipede's horns, a light that Koga avoided with Venomoth teleporting them to the other end of the room before the Signal Beam could hit them.

At that he threw two Great Balls of his own. They burst open in front of him, revealing a Vileplume and a second Venomoth.

One more suited to a battle than his stealth Venomoth.

"Sleep Powder."

Both aimed themselves at his opponent before blowing out a powdery cloud at them. The cloud engulfed a few of the struggling thugs, still bound.
They promptly fell asleep, which made Frank even angrier.

"Smog, then teach this ninja a lesson!"

The upright Pokémon spewed a cloud of purple smoke that absorbed and neutralized Sleep Powder, rendering it harmless as the bug charged forward with a glowing green horn.

Vileplume stepped forward without hesitation, and glowed with a yellow light.

Said move, Double Edge, collided with the speeding bug as it struck, and Vileplume pushed forward.

"Scol!"

This sent the bug flipping into the air, crashing down on its back before Vileplume.

"What phooey was that…Muk!"

His colorful variant of the Sludge Pokémon slid forward, a blue stone forming between the hands of the Pokémon. The stone was then flung his way before exploding into dozens of pointed stone shards.

Stone Edge.

"Psychic."

His battle Venomoth's eye flashed blue moments before the stones did as well, and redirected themselves right at the Muk.

They rained into it, causing repeated damage.

"Grrr…Salazzle burn him alive!"

The man's patience at an end the upright Pokémon inhaled deeply, before a String Shot was bound around its snout.

The Salazzle promptly turned a shade of pink and began woozily struggling to stand, before collapsing to the ground.

There were two things that a person could do now, run away, or run at him in a last desperate attempt to defeat him.

Frank chose the latter, and charged towards him screaming at the top of his lungs.

He just punched the man in the face, knocking him flat to the ground with a heavy thump.

…

The sirens of police cars and the chatter of radio communication could be heard even from the rooftop he had settled on.

A good place as any to look at the entire reason he had come here.

The three Ultra Balls he now had on his belt.

His training for one of his requirements to attain an Elite Four position, the victory at a Pokémon
League competition, had gone well. So well in fact, that in these last few months there wasn't much that could be done for personal growth.

He could have all of his Pokémon practice punching things, but there would be little gained to his punches unless he had even more time to work with. So these last few months were more for preparation in other ways.

Expanding his options for example.

He had gotten wind of that man’s foreign Pokémon from reports, and had done some math. It was fairly likely that he could use these few months to take his Pokémon, get them to follow him, and integrate them into the Pokémon qualified for battling in the League.

It was a gamble if that would work, it was just as likely that Frank's Pokémon would refuse to obey him at all. Just because he had gotten the paperwork done to legally take Frank's Pokémon following his arrest didn't mean that the Pokémon themselves would follow.

However it was less of a gamble than chasing after Mega Stones, and in the worst case scenario Frank's Pokémon could just be responsible for giving him eggs he could hatch and raise himself later.

Even in such a scenario, he knew he had what it would take to win and put him in place to gain an Elite Four position. He was just taking a chance to see if he could have Pokémon that would throw off the people who thought previously defeating him or his daughter meant they knew exactly what to do against him.

Even if things weren't going to work out as expected, his opponents would still learn the hard way that a ninja was not to be underestimated.

OMAKE

NON CANON

The thing I really should have added in

A blue Platypus, red Rabbit, green Monkey and Bear, red Horse, and blue animated piece of Coral all watch an author of ambiguous appearance slam his head into the wall, muttering 'stupid' to himself repeatedly.

At his side the writing chainsaw lay discarded, still smoking a bit from recent writing work.

"I sense self-injury and loathing, it must be a story improvement. Okay, show me Ash's new scars…"

The multi-color Pokémon of non-canonical status tensed as the black and red armored figure of Darkern Edgier appeared in giddy step, before looking around in confusion.

"Where's the deepness?"

"Stupid, stupid, stupid…"

"Yes, you are. Ash really should have pouches in his next design."
The author paused his head banging to look the embodiment of writing a story with a betrayed metamorph animagi Lord of Hogwarts with an exasperated look.

"Do not invoke Liefeld, I already feel like I step too close to him at times. No, the problem is something that has been bothering me for a while. I had a brilliant innovation for Ash, and I cannot use it here."

"You are the all and powerful author aren't you? That means you can do anything you want."

Darkern's point was met by a blank stare from the fakemons.

"There are things I cannot do for a variety of reasons. I can't name them with an official species name because I did not create them for instance. I can only give them nicknames, such as Lummox and Gouger. Then there are things I cannot do from the point of storytelling, which is where my problem lies. For you see in other work, I had the most brilliant idea. A reality ensues that makes Ash smarter in a way that doesn't make him act like someone completely different. The innovation of language."

Darkern groaned before muttering something about honorifics under his breath.

The author gave a groan of his own.

"Yeah…no. Putting honorifics in your English fanfic is the most weebish thing I can think of, worse than using only Japanese-translated name for things when they have an English name, and I do not use that word lightly. I’d say try hard, but I'm not entirely sure how the context of that phrase is applied. Just call the character Lord Hokage or Captain Kuchiki, no need for Sama and Taicho and Kage Bushin no Jutsu. I swear only 'The Trainer from a Faraway Land' ever did that sort of thing right, and even then it would only work if someone devoted themselves to 'Satoshi, Cilan, and Lem'. It would take a special sort of dedication to pull that off, and so many authors notes that even I'd say 'enough'. No what I had come up with is having language barriers in place. Kalosian and Unovan and Alolan and whatever language is spoken in the first four generations would be their own tongues. It would be such a wonderful reality ensues moment, and having characters speaking multiple languages would be the perfect way to show characters as more intelligent in a subtle way, and there would be no better character to do so than Ash. Having him be good at picking up languages fits in nicely with canon's many regions without stretching things to absurdity like assuming three weeks of studying makes him a super genius or something. It would have been perfect."

The room was silent for a moment as the author looked ready to slam his head into the wall again. However he was stopped by stupidity.

"You know, if you really want to add that, why don't you? I mean you added a super Farfetch'd and Electra Artisan."

The author stared increduously as Darkern.

"Adding in a character and an entire concept are two very different things. Language has never been implied before, and if I just add it in forty chapters later that will just come off as a random retcon designed to make Ash smarter, and it would go beyond that. For one thing I’d have to apply language skills to every character that ever goes between distant regions, do you know what that would do to the Jane Jackrum stories alone!?

"Just retcon it in Movie 4 like the better guy did."

Everyone stared at Darkern like his proposal to get Fox to draw Ash with pockets was the smartest
thing to come out of his mouth today, at least in comparison to doing *that*.

Though the Platypus and the Bear chirped after a moment, causing the author to shake his head.

"Well you might have liked that solution, but I didn't. Plus I do try to avoid deliberate mimicry of Ashes past a certain point. There is a reason Ash's Pokédex isn't a Porygon. Also rebooting the universe just to have Ash speak Kalosian fluently is a tad excessive."

"You could do other things beyond that ya know."

The author shook his head.

"Nor is Brock gaining a mullet worth rebooting the universe over."

"You're overly proud of having Brook shout 'Oh shit, a mullet' that one time, aren't you?"

The author did not dispute Darkern's claim.

END OMAKE
The Draconid Mountains, Hoenn Region

She heard the distant call before she saw the caller.

When one lived in the north, you needed to be aware of what made that call.

The call of a Skarmory was never a good thing in the north. The Skarmory who lived within the range of the Valley of Steel were highly aggressive and were a danger to humans.

Particularly the young and the infirm.

"Was that?"

The former being on the mountaintop meadow with her, unaware of the danger approaching them both.

She tensed further as the gray shape of Skarmory appeared on the horizon, and she prepared to grab Aster and run for somewhere a bit less prone to being abducted by a carnivorous bird before she'd move to actively repelling the menace.

However, just as so often happened in these situations, the moment she noticed a good place to avoid swooping attacks she managed to get a better look at the Skarmory.

Namely the fact it had a rider. One whose hair she could pick out even from that far out, the way it shone in the light and stood out in the dark was very distinctive.

She relaxed a bit, even if not completely. She might have known the man to be better than many of his kind, but that didn't mean she could fully relax her guard.

"Se'ven!"

Aster's cheerful greeting was met by the landing of the Skarmory and the arrival of the titular visitor, who adjusted his collar briefly before speaking.

"Been a while hasn't it? Sorry to drop in like this."

"If you are sorry, then why do you do it?"

Steven Stone, Hoenn Champion and 'rich silver-haired dreamboat' as a few of her tribe called him, chuckled.

"Normally I'd prefer to send a heads up that I am arriving somewhere, but your tribe doesn't have phones so I couldn't call or text."

"We have email, you could have just contacted us that way before flying in on a predatory species."

Zinnia couldn't help but be a bit amused by the dumbfounded look on the Devon Corp heir's face. The amusement, she noted, had her guard drop on its own.
"You do?"

"Of course. We aren't savages, though it is Ranger based. So unless you want to go to prison, we don't."

So in all truths, for all he was concerned, they didn't have email.

Skarmory let out an annoyed call for the sake of its Trainer, whose annoyance at the truth of the matter quickly faded away as he entered business mode.

"Well, in any case the reason I am here is a follow up on a few oddities that we've noticed in the last few days. As experts in the subject, I figured you might be able to give some additional information."

She raised an eyebrow at his reason.

"What could a mountain tribe have that would be of any concern to the Sootopolians?"

They were hardly the ones to ask why there were a surge of tsunamis striking coastal cities after all, or whatever was bothering them so badly.

"Your Lord being agitated."

Both she and Aster stared at the champion in surprise.

Not at the news, but that he had noticed such a thing.

"You picked up on that?"

Even far away from his roost in the ocean, the Draconids had noticed something being off with Lord Rayquaza. Disturbances in the upper cloud layers and more rapid flight movements gave hint to distress, much like someone who sensed approaching issues and paced in anticipation of having to deal with them.

It was only through centuries of learning and rare artifacts they could tell this. How did the Sootopolians know?

"Reports from the Weather Institute west of here noted Rayquaza's flight path being unusual in the last few days. We have a general idea of where Rayquaza is at what times and try not to fly planes through the same area for all our sakes. Planes may not fly as high as Rayquaza, but we'd rather not have planes get randomly blasted by a Hyper Beam. It's not really weather if I have to be honest, but it's a vital service that they perform for the Hoenn Region as a whole and they are a bit better situated for getting the data than the people who you'd think be in charge of such a task over in Mossdeep City..."

Zinnia had the oddest suspicion government nonsense was the reason for it, and that people probably argued about it extensively when they hashed it out. It probably was still argued about, given politics.

"...However in the last few days his movements have diverged from the norm and have remained abnormal since. Less so than on the first day we observed this, but still enough that the flight control agents have had to drink more coffee."

"So I take it they can't figure out what might be bothering him, so you've come to the Draconids for a second opinion?"

Steven nodded.
"Our first thought was that maybe something had happened with Groudon and Kyogre, but the lack of apocalyptic weather suggests otherwise. Our second, and only other thought for that matter, was that some bonehead had gotten thousands of Pokémon to use some weather move all at once to mess with the climate, but no one seems that determined to make it snow in the desert at the moment."

All reasonable reasons to incite Lord Rayquaza. The Sootopolitans weren't being stupid today. If the champion had popcorn she'd ask for it for celebration purposes.

"If I'd have to speak as the official Lorekeeper, and I will because I feel like it, I'd say the second reason is the most likely. This bit of irritation Lord Rayquaza is experiencing is not the reaction to the awakening of Groudon or Kyogre, or an invader in the skies. Something is disrupting the weather, or perhaps something had. A brief moment of disturbance that has since ended, but the Lord can still sense the perpetrator and feels the fact the incident can be repeated."

"The way you are saying that makes me think it isn't a school group really trying to get a snow day."

Zinnia shook her head at the Sootopolitan fondness for snow. Snow was cold and it got everywhere before melting and making you even colder.

"Unless millions of Pokémon are all using Hail, that isn't what happened. No, something stronger played with the weather to agitate Lord Rayquaza, and it probably wasn't near here. If it was the Lord would have flown there and blasted it. The problem came from somewhere farther away in another region, and it wasn't for long enough for the Lord to fly there and deal with the problem personally and leave the Hoenn Region unguarded. Moreover, I am fairly certain it wasn't a Pokémon that typically does so. This was a reaction to an atypical actor."

That didn't seem to be what Steven was hoping to hear. Somewhere in the world, most likely beyond his direct influence or ability to personally resolve, there was something or someone with a power akin to a Legendary Pokémon messing with weather patterns that did not typically do so.

It wasn't Thundurus or Tornadus in the Unova Region, or the first of the birds in the Orange Islands. It wasn't the activity of a Lugia, nor the ecosystem watcher Zygarde.

It was something else, and it was anyone's guess if there was anything someone could do to better the situation.

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Elsewhere

Giovanni didn't particularly like to see his plans and operations blow up on his face, even more so when it led to one of his best laboratories being completely destroyed and an unspeakably powerful force let loose on the world and ready to do who knows what.

He tried not to think of what had just happened, or too much of what might happen next, as he and a team of scientists and grunts worked on estimating the damages and made sure the problem couldn't grow worse from there.

Even in the face of what happened, the threat didn't concern him as much as it should've had, a man in his position ended up getting on the bad side of many powerful people that wanted him dead over and over, and the fact their new addition had psychic powers made him just a bit less of a concern than the self-professed Bloodline King usually was, especially with how it pretty much gave him lead time. One way or another, he could find a method to deal with it alongside the science division.
Unfortunately, he couldn't say the same of the other unusual problem he was taking care of at the same time.

"You are kidding, I hope," the leader of Team Rocket said, clutching the phone tightly.

"Unfortunately no, Boss. The boy is heading for the Viridian Gym for his eighth badge."

Talking with the agent known as James, Giovanni felt the urge to toss the phone on something. After giving another glance around at the ruined laboratory and the millions it would take to put everything back in working condition, he quickly decided against it, kicking a piece of ruined armor out of the way instead.

"I'm in the middle of far more pressing matters than being a Gym Leader. Can't you get him to not come? He doesn't even need more badges."

"We can't stop him, he already teleported in Viridian."

The Boss of Team Rocket didn't reply, but he did squint his eyes and grit his teeth. The boy was definitely going to be a useful pawn as a Bloodliner hero, but at times like these he definitely wished to have a tighter leash on him.

"Maybe you can close the Gym just for today?" his underling suggested. Giovanni tsked loudly at that.

"Just so, out of the blue? The League doesn't accept that except for unforeseen and justified circumstances." He shook his head, observing a few estimates from the scientists' pads regarding structural damage. If this had been a legal operation, he might have been able to get away with declaring this a justified circumstance, but the simple problem is not being legal was an impossible hurdle to overcome there. "They would question such a sudden change in my schedule, and I'd be forced to explain myself, which could lead to a whole host of problems the respectable Gym Leader of Viridian City shouldn't have."

Giovanni had spent a lot of years cultivating the image of the demanding, but competent and well-liked Gym Leader of Viridian City as he furthered the reach of Team Rocket's operations for a variety of reasons, and he sure wouldn't let one of his secondary projects clash with all his efforts in that area. He might've been the Boss of Team Rocket first and foremost, but he needed to maintain his record as immaculate as possible to not raise any suspicion among his colleagues.

"Do you want us to block him on his path? Team Rocket does have quite a few robots we can employ for this.""

"Those are only for very specialized and authorized usage. They're not the kind of machines you can use over and over for the most minor of operations, and it'd grab too much attention."

James didn't say anything, maybe disappointed to not be able to use one of their mechas. Giovanni found that mental image amusing enough in the current situation.

"For the moment, keep a close eye on him. I'm going to think of something," He said simply, sharpening his gaze.

"Understood."

The call ended, and the ensuing silence was a welcome relief for Giovanni's ears. He observed once more the flaming remains of the laboratory around him, trying to think up of the best way to get things in check and return to the Gym for the match.
Thankfully, one pro of being the leader of a vast criminal organization was having a lot of underlings ready to do his bidding whenever he needed them, and he knew just who was best suited for the job.

**Viridian City**

"Hold it right there!"

In the ongoing question of 'was the Viridian Gym still controlled by Team Rocket', the fact that he was stopped within sight of the place by a R-less Cassidy and …. 'Not James' was a fairly damning statement to the fact that it was still controlled by a crime syndicate.

Particularly when the two were doing the same guard thing that Lt. Surge had in front of his Gym.

"Yeah, can we help you?"

At Misty's question Cassidy pointed right at him.

"Clearly the kid there who hasn't found a Thunderstone yet wants to challenge this Gym. The Leader is far too busy to bother with someone with a Pokémon like that. So run along now, or do we need to prove it?"

"Yeah, because if you can't even beat us, you are light years from facing him!"

The smack talk from 'Balon', or whatever his name was, confused him somehow. He wasn't sure why, but that statement just seemed off somehow.

'Light years measure distance, not time.'

He gave the mental equivalent of a nod to Anabel for the clarification.

"I've taken a lot of steps to get here, and I'm only a few more steps from challenging the Gym. That's hardly a light year."

'Bepo' seemed put off by the confidence in his words. He liked to think he had earned it. He'd done a pretty good job of things, bar the two kidnappings of his person.

He could probably improve on that, but small things like that were hardly important.

"Prove it kid. Just to warn you, we aren't a bunch of idiots who can be beaten by a Caterpie."

He was honestly amazed he didn't hear Jessie, James, or Meowth sneezing somewhere nearby. They mustn't be stalking him today.

Or were Cassidy and 'Bart' covering for them today as temps? Team Rocket probably got days off from stalking him, assuming Team Rocket obeyed local labor laws.

Regardless of if the three got their legally allotted time off, Ash had just the thing to handle this without being a problem later.

"Hey kid, drop the baseball mitt."

Any need to retort to 'Balto' about what the H.O.P.E was actually found itself handled perfectly handled by Cassidy whacking him in the back of the head, even as a Great Ball transferred back.
"If the Gym Leader is really as busy as you said he is, it just wouldn't do to battle him with a team that had already battled you guys."

"No actually, it would actually do a lot. It would be very much do if you got so tired you couldn't bother him."

"He could just go to the Pokémon Center and come back in that case."

'Basil' had no retort to Iris's point, and Cassidy held a Pokéball up.

"Alright kid, let's get this over with."

As the ball he requested popped in, he threw it in agreement.

Cassidy, if he had to remember, had a Raticate, a Granbull, and either a Houndour or Houndoom, he couldn't quite remember which. There had been that Drowzee too, but Ash wasn't entirely sure whose it was.

He never really saw Cassidy and 'Dutch' that often, so it wasn't like he memorized it the same way he had with Jessie and James's teams.

He didn't remember her having a Tentacruel, but the Pokémon was before him and Gigalith regardless.

"Let's figure out what that thing is, Tentacruel Bubble Beam!"

The Tentacruel lifted its blue beak to spit out a barrage of bubbles. Super effective, if they hit of course.

"Rock Blast!"

Gigalith slammed her front limbs down, shaking the concrete and cracking it a bit as she fired off four white streaks of stone.

The bubbles were shattered, and the two Rock Blasts that followed the bubble's wakes struck Tentacruel with a lot of power.

Tentacruel was sent flying before crashing against the wall of the Gym. Probably unable to battle, if he'd have to guess.

Pikachu let out a whistle at the aftermath, and Ash had to agree with the evidence. Gigalith seemed pleased too, and she seemed to be giving off an aura of pleasure at her new power.

An aura that he felt a bit conflicted about, even if he was clear she was happy with the choice she made.

Yet his thoughts were pushed to the side as 'Bronko' sent out the Primeape he remembered him using that one time James dressed up like a Moltres.

"Dynamic Punch!"

The Primeape lunged forward, fist glowing a burning red as it came towards Gigalith.

Gigalith looked ready to use Iron Defense and take the hit, but that wouldn't do.

Ash wasn't entirely sure of the exact meaning of 'pride before the fall', but this seemed the moment
that phrase might apply.

"Get out of the way!"

Gigalith seemed to take a micromoment to register the statement, but regardless of the lag hopped out of the way of the lunging attack.

Ash thought he saw a blue shimmer flash across Gigalith as she made the dodge, but he filed that way for later.

"Do it again!"

As Primeape turned around for another attack, Ash knew he had to take the initiative.

IF he didn't, this could easily turn into a game of dodges.

"Return!"

Ash had to admit that, while he was expecting the white coated attack to hit Primeape, the attack moved much faster than he thought.

Faster than he thought Gigalith could frankly.

It was by no means Pikachu-level fast, but the attack from Gigalith still landed right into Primeape, knocking it down just as quickly as she had Tentacruel.

'Bor' and Cassidy just stared at Gigalith in shock that, underneath it all, had a sense of resigned …

Giovanni wasn't sure how he should be feeling right now.

Should he be annoyed that his two minions were being so trounced, or should be impressed they were doing as well as they were.

They were in the end after all, thugs. Elite thugs to be sure, but thugs none the less.

A thug being trounced by someone who knew what he was doing was not unexpected, and there was something approvable about how they kept throwing everything they had at the boy to give him as much time as they could.

Quite possibly destroying their self-esteem and pride as they did so, but did so without hesitation or visible sign of breaking.

He'd have to sit on how he'd handle them when this was over, to see exactly what he'd do with them.

Certainly not fire them, for anyone who was willing to have their Hitmontop by spun around by what he was pretty sure was a baby Pokémon not known for violence was too loyal to dispose of recklessly. Loyalty was something valuable in his illegal business, to have people who were willing to do anything you asked without question was a commodity that was always in need.

Talk of a Pokémon he'd have to be really distracted to not accept from his underlings aside, the two had managed to give him just enough time that, if he couldn't get the challenger to leave, he could battle him without having an immediate issue go haywire without him.

Plus, he had one more idea to try and avoid a battle that frankly, neither he nor Ash Ketchum
Serperior's Great Ball replaced Togepi's Pokéball in the H.O.P.E glove, and now the team he had brought with him before Cassidy and 'Brett' had shown up was now complete.

Technically he had seven Pokémon on him, but that was only possible because technically he didn't have Pikachu's Pokéball on hand. It was back at home with Professor Oak, and he'd be trusting him to the others for the battle.

In fact, as they walked into the building the now slumped in self-pity duo were once guarding, Pikachu hopped over to Misty's shoulder.

Misty stumbled with the additional weight, pausing them for a moment as she tried to re-right herself.

At the moment she just looked like a kid with a really heavy backpack slung over one shoulder. A comparison that made Ash glad Pikachu swapped shoulders whenever requested, even back in the early days.

"Geeze! How do you carry him on your shoulder all of the time Ash? I can barely stand up straight with him on me."

"Broad shoulders and a lot of practice?"

It couldn't be a case of muscles, Iris wasn't exactly letting any of them not have them.

"I guess they are nice in ways not just to look at."

He only sort of heard Misty mutter that, and that was always something a bit odd to him.

Girls found broad shoulders attractive? Of all the physical features he had that the three might find appealing, his shoulders were among them?

That seemed a bit random to him, like fine wrists or something.

Of course going into the minefield of 'they like him and have no idea how to approach it, he probably liked them the same way but had even less of an idea' was something to do later.

Much later, quite possibly when any of them had an idea of what they were doing.

"I can take him."

Iris's offer was met by a look from Misty that Ash could only describe as some mix of relief and self-frustration, but she none the less nodded and Pikachu hopped over to Iris's shoulder.

She had less trouble taking Pikachu's weight on her shoulder.

Misty took a moment to rub her shoulder, and he moved to ask if she was okay.

"I'm fine."

Ash didn't press it further, lest he try finding out how far it took to get to that side of Misty that liked yelling at him and calling him an idiot.

Eventually though, Ash found himself fully in the battlefield, which as always was poorly lit, which
Ash had never quite got the point of.

Was it for an 'underground' motif, which from his personal experience wasn't all that well lit. Clay did have a mine motif; perhaps this Gym was going for a normal cave sans lighting.

A light eventually did flare up, but it was only behind the raised seat on the balcony that hung over the arena like the throne of an ancient emperor, waiting to pass judgment down with a single thumb.

The only finger fit to decide the fate of a man.

In all seriousness though, the light might have shaded him, but Ash recognized the body build of the man who he had encountered in Unova after forty-four Gyms and seven Frontier Symbols of being stalked by his underlings.

At his side was a Persian, the sight of which made Pikachu spark. Probably in memory of what had happened the first time they had met.

"So you are the one who challenges me. Tell me, why have you come here?"

The question wasn't one that Ash would normally think a Gym Leader would ask. It was generally pretty easy to figure out why someone came to a Gym.

IF they didn't come with boxes of cookies, they were there for a Gym battle. IF they came with boxes of cookies, they were trying to sell you them.

"I'm here for a Gym badge."

After all, he'd probably eat a box of cookies before selling them to Team Rocket. Even if May made them.

Though in that case it would be somewhere between not helping criminals and not being cruel to the criminals.

"Yes, it would seem that you did come for it. Though tell me, why do you need my badge? You have long qualified for the League, and this battle does nothing to enhance your status. It is a battle without meaning or purpose."

Was he trying to not have a battle happen?

Oddly by asking him why he wanted the badge in the first place. One would think that a criminal mastermind would just lie for a reason.

An ill mother, a closed sign, being somewhere else, why go and try and get him to leave?

"I might have earned the right, but only legally. I knew that the win I got didn't mean I was ready, and I wanted to see if I was ready."

Framed in shadow by the light, his reasoning did not seem to resonate with the criminal Gym Leader, whose name Ash was pretty sure was Giovanni. Persian meowed in a display that carried with a display of annoyance.

"It was my understanding that you already had such a test over in Cinnabar? If you can conquer a Mega Evolved Pokémon, let alone Saffron, I fail to see what my Gym badge would get you beyond that. At this point, is it not just excess?"

For some reason Ash remembered Gary flashing him with a case of ten badges. If he had to guess
why, it was probably a combination of that happening just before his battle here, and the fact that it was the point Giovanni was raising.

He long ago had more than eight badges, and there was a similarity between what he was doing, and what Gary had done.

For a moment, he felt a spark of fear try and set his very being alight. Was he going to have a second evil Gym Leader know about time?

Given he only had fought two Gym Leaders that were evil (being nuts, jerks, or self-absorbed did not count as evil), that would not be a good record to have.

He quelled the spark before he got too carried away. Thinking about 'what if' was not going to change anything.

There was only what he could do in the meantime, and that was have an answer as to why what Gary did was excessive, and why what he did was not.

Hopefully in a way that would not make Pikachu roll his eyes at him.

"It would be excess if I was sure that I was ready, and was just getting badges because I wanted to completely fill a mantle or something. I want to be absolutely sure that I am where I want to be. I want to go into the League with confidence, not fear."

He always went in with confidence, however earned it was. There was no reason to change that now.

Giovanni sighed in what sounded like resignation.

"Seeing as convincing you that you are as ready as you actually are is not my job, it would seem that I cannot convince you otherwise. Very well, though I expect you are prepared for the trial that you shall now endure. I do not appreciate those who waste my time needlessly, and if you cannot defeat my six Pokémon your fears of being not ready for the League will prove correct."

So it was going to be a six on six? Well, good thing he left Pikachu's ball at home then.

Misty, Iris, and Anabel quickly got off the field, and the moment they did Giovanni tossed a ball into the air.

It burst open to reveal a Rhydon, which was what many would call a 'good first impression'.

It was after all, generally the case that a Gym Leader hid their most powerful Pokémon until later. Elesa may start with Zebstrika, but Whitney did not start with Miltank nor Norman Slaking.

"Squirtle, I choose you!"

Emphasizing the point the moment that Squirtle hit the field and looked at the Rhydon, he muttered something about 'cleaning up someone's mess.'

"Begin this match with Thunderbolt."

Without a ref showing up Giovanni began the match with crackling electricity on Rhydon's horn.

"Rhydon can do that?"

Misty's disbelief was something he felt too. He'd have never pegged Rhydon as able to do that.
But it would not do to be let that surprise catch him off guard, especially when the Thunderbolt was forming into a more solid shape than a normal energy attack.

"Counter-Shield!"

Squirtle spun the defense up just as Rhydon fired the Thunderbolt, which as he thought wasn't a stream.

Instead it was a solid ball of electricity, which was blocked by the Counter-Shield and detonated safely out of harm’s way for Squirtle.

It didn't reflect, but as the effectiveness of electric attacks on Rhydons was a coin flip in his experience it was possibly no loss.

"Squirtle, Water Gun and keep your distance!"

Squirtle disengaged the Counter-Shield and began running around the field while continuously firing off Water Gun.

The water attack, despite the movement, kept a general target right around the upper part of Rhydon's lighter stomach. The attack was met with a pained grunt from Rhydon.

Getting up close with Rhydon was not an option, and by keeping up movement it would be harder for Rhydon to counter attack. The downside of course was that it would tire Squirtle out quicker, but Giovanni had said nothing about substitution rulings.

He didn't say much in general, beyond trying to guilt trip him to go away.

"Rhydon, Horn Drill."

Giovanni's command was followed by the entire field shaking as Rhydon charged towards Squirtle, head lowered and the drill spinning intensely.

The Water Gun was deflected by the Horn Drill several times, though it did manage to get into Rhydon's eyes a few times. This seemed to do more damage than the previous hits, but Rhydon charged through regardless.

Squirtle was of course still running and Water Gunning, but Ash wasn't sure who would win in a stamina fight between a turtle spraying from within himself, and a charging bipedal rock monster.

And he would not be finding out the answer. He'd instead go for the safer option.

"Brine!"

Squirtle ceased the narrow, longer spray of Water Gun and moved onto the saltier spray, which struck Rhydon right in the lowered head after a momentary blocking from Horn Drill.

The salty water struck right in Rhydon's eyes, leading to a scream from the charging Pokémon. Combined with the continued Water Gun strike it had taken already, and Brine's additional damaging tendencies did the job.

That being Rhydon collapsing in a wet heap on the ground, a sight that made Squirtle stop spraying and take a few very deep breaths.

"Squirt. 'That….really makes me glad I took those breath holding exercises. I would have burst without them. Well, hopefully that puts us back on track. How many of them are left?'
Giovanni returned the downed Rhydon before he could answer Squirtle telepathically, mostly because he had words to say.

"So, you know what you are doing with unevolved Pokémon. Of course, with five Pokémon to go, I hope you don't think you've won yet."

To make his point he threw a Pokéball into the air that exploded downward to reveal a Dugtrio, even as Squirtle gasped in surprise at Rhydon having just been the first Pokémon.

Dugtrio shot down into the ground, out of sight yet far from out of mind.

Squirtle tapped his tail to the floor, eventually setting it on the ground. The intent was clear, an attempt to detect Dugtrio's movement underground by feeling for vibrations.

However, there was a problem with Squirtle taking this method.

"Squir?" 'Do I need to wait for it to be closer to feel something?'

Namely that sensing things moving underground wasn't something that Squirtle had actually trained for.

"Pikapika." 'What did you think would happen? If it was that easy to listen for things with a tail anyone could do it! Honestly, I am not even sure our tails can do that!'

That was a good question. Could one use any tail to try and sense incoming underground attacks, or was it just certain tails? Was it just a matter of training, like Iris had forced on him that one time…?

Said memory actually gave Ash an idea, and he reached down for his right shoe and yanked it off, shortly followed by his sock.

"What, exactly, are you doing?"

He ignored Giovanni's question as his foot rested on the bare earth for a moment before he felt a distant vibration.

One that was coming towards Squirtle.

"Jump back towards me!"

Squirtle stopped his own attempt at feeling for Dugtrio and did as he was told, moments before the space in front of him was shattered by a rising Dugtrio, heads gleaming with a charge attack.

Squirtle however avoided the attack entirely.

He'd need to remember to thank Iris for that training. He'd have to keep it in mind going forward against other opponents who used underground attacks.

"Tri-Attack."

Each head of Dugtrio began glowing red, blue, and yellow, before a glowing ball of each color formed in front of each head and fired towards Squirtle.

"Water Pulse!"

Squirtle flung the water sphere attack, intercepting the attack and creating a smokescreen.
"Fissure."

Giovanni’s command rung through the arena as both Squirtle and Ash tensed.

That was a move they really didn't want to be hit by if they could help it, but with the smoke he couldn't see it.

Squirtle might have, given his old firefighting training, though with his foot on the ground he might have been able to sense it before…

Squirtle let out an acknowledging grunt just as he felt the vibrations of what was probably the Fissure attack.

It oddly seemed to increase after a few moments, but there was no time to try and figure out why.

"Dodge!"

Squirtle jumped out of the way of the attack just as a white stream of force sliced through the ground and Squirtle began landing out of the way of that attack.

Right into the path of a second stream of Fissure, with a third one flying off in the opposite direction at the same time.

Three entirely separate Fissure attacks.

"The Dugtrio was able to use the same attack three times, once for each head."

The Pokédex's observation was not followed up on.

"Squirtle!"

His worried shout for his friend was followed moments later by Squirtle turning towards the wall and blasting at it with Water Gun.

The water stream hit the wall and propelled Squirtle out of the way of the second Fissure stream. He let off on it and Squirtle landed in between the two streaming Fissure attacks, completely safe.

The dust cleared at this point, revealing an entirely absent Dugtrio.

"Squirt. 'It's going to try and attack from underground again? How does he think that is going to work any better?'

Ash would respond, but he felt what Dugtrio was doing underground, and it wasn't a charge upwards with Dig.

It was an entirely different attack.

"Squirtle, Dugtrio is using Fissure from underneath you, and it's coming up now!"

Squirtle quickly darted, moments before a Fissure attack erupted from just where he had been standing.

The Fissure eruptions kept going off in the field, with Squirtle only avoiding them by detecting them and sheer luck.

The barrage of white was relentless, while Squirtle's ability to avoid it forever was not limitless.
He'd need to take a step, or that was going to end badly.

He reflexively reached for Squirtle's Pokéball, but something caught his eye before he made the substitution.

The cracks in the field that were left by the Fissure eruptions.

"Squirtle, jump in the air as evasively as you can, then blast into the ground!"

Squirtle, who was at this point panting heavily, duly jumped and fired, the turtle lunging over the field as he did so.

A blue aura flickered over Squirtle as he fired the attack, the ability Torrent active entirely from exhaustion and not damage.

Just as the Water Gun flew into the crack with perfect accuracy however, a white surge of Fissure energy shot up from below moments later.

As far as he could tell the Water Gun did hit, moments before Fissure shot up and struck Squirtle with a burst of intense energy.

The impact of this sent Squirtle spinning into the air before landing on the field with a thump and clearly unable to battle.

Moments before a soggy Dugtrio surfaced just to wilt in defeat.

Both he and Giovanni returned their Pokémon. Giovanni did so without a word.

"Good job buddy, you did an excellent job."

He did the exact opposite.

…

The battle had barely begun, and Anabel was unsure whether she should feel excited, or worried.

On the one hand, it was impressive for Ash's Squirtle to defeat that Rhydon, and despite the obvious handicap on being unevolved and tired he still managed to take the Dugtrio down with him. On the other hand... she could see this Gym Leader wasn't pulling any punches, and he most likely was saving his best cards for the finale.

"Wow, that was tight," Misty commented. "Good thing you gave Ash that earth-sense training, Iris."

"I did not expect him to use it this way, but I am glad he found it useful." Iris nodded in approval. "Although your training with Squirtle helped too, he might have not lasted that long otherwise."

Misty couldn't help but smile with a little bit of pride. Anabel couldn't blame her; they had all done their best to help Ash and his Pokémon grow stronger in any way they could, and seeing him put what they gave him to good use always filled them with satisfaction.

"I see the rumors about the Viridian Gym Leader are true," Misty said as she focused back on the battlefield. "If he's really this tough, no wonder he only takes challenges from worthy opponents."

"Is that so?" Iris asked. "Then why is it he did not seem to want Ash's?"

Both Misty and Anabel glanced at Iris. "Now you mention it, that's weird alright. Unlike my sisters,
this guy would hardly be desperate for a victory."

Anabel didn't add any comment of her own, but she agreed. Ash had more than enough credentials to be considered a 'worthy' opponent, but it was clear the Gym Leader wanted to be elsewhere, and thus he was trying to end the battle as soon as possible.

Which could explain why he had Dugtrio spam Fissure the way he did, and why he took the chances with Rhydon's Horn Drill previously.

There was something else, though, she could sense a sinister aura emanating from the man. It was different from Sabrina's, but there was something similar.

'As if he knows who Ash is, and has some interest in him...'

She was tempted to peek into his mind, while at the same time she feared what she could find inside. Somehow, she felt she wouldn't like what she'd find there.

...

"I choose you!"

The next set of Pokéballs flew out, bursting open to reveal the choices of Pokémon on each of their sides.

On his side was Kingler, who snapped his pincers in anticipation.

The other was a Pokémon he knew, but hadn't seen since his return in time.

Hence the Pokédex had a comment.

"Marowak, the Bone Keeper Pokémon and the evolution of Cubone. Marowak use their bone weapons to strike down their enemies with almost human-like ferocity. In Alola, they come in a different form evolved to better combat their jungle originating predators."

Mention of an Alolan form for the bone-using Pokémon made Ash imagine a Marowak with a bone that was on fire, and Ash had to admit the image was cool.

Hopefully he'd get to see one, but in the meantime he had another sort of Marowak to defeat.

Part of himself wished he had brought Farfetch'd for this, as he was aware that the Pokémon did want to fight a Marowak. However he couldn't find him, so that would be another day.

Otoshi's day perhaps, they were due for a League battle.

"Kingler, Bubblebeam!"

As it was not the League yet Kingler began with claw originating bubble barrage the bubbles shooting towards the Marowak.

Said Marowak promptly spun the bone, the bone shattering the bubbles on impact and before they could strike it and do damage.

"Double Edge!"

Giovanni's command was then followed up by Marowak charging forward, a yellow glow on the skull mask upon its head.
"Marowak can possess the abilities Rock Head and Lightning Rod in most situations. This may be a hint that this Marowak has the former, which allows it to shrug off recoil damage moves."

He knew what Rock Head did, and Lightning Rod for that matter. He also had an idea on how to handle this.

"Block it and then strike back with Crabhammer!"

Kingler gargled in acknowledgement as Marowak drew in closer, one massive claw glowing brightly as it swung right into Marowak's head.

The strike met the charging Marowak evenly, the two attacks equal in strength as Kingler's other limb glowed and struck into Marowak from the side.

The blow sent the Bone Keeper Pokémon tumbling along the ground, though the Marowak got back up from the blow to the side without any sign of debilitating damage.

Ash did notice something though, the bone of the Marowak. It seemed thicker than usual. Was it a different type of bone than what a Marowak usually had?

Of course bone questions were for if he ever decided to find out what his leg bones were called, and that day wasn't today.

"Bone Club!"

"Crabhammer!"

Both attacks were swung at the other, and Ash was prepared for a similar outcome to the clash of Double Edge and Crabhammer.

What he wasn't expecting was for the Bone Club to truly win out over Crabhammer, swinging Kingler's arm widely to the side.

"Koo!" 'Wha?'

Kingler was similarly surprised to what just happened.

"Double Edge!"

Marowak then lunged right into Kingler, striking right in the center of Kingler's body and sending him crashing back.

Kingler's legs dug into the ground, slowing him down and allowing him to regain control of his body.

There was now space between the two again, returning the two into ranged combat once more. When a Marowak or Cubone were going to fight ranged, there was only one possible move.

"Bonemerang!"

Throwing their bone, though after Bone Club Ash wasn't interested in seeing what that attack did at a range. Something was off about the bone, and he was going to stop it.

"Use Mud Shot and protect yourself!"
Kingler did as ordered, and fired a stream of mud shot out of his claws. Kingler swung his arms upward, creating a ribbony wall of mud in front of it, like how a hose might create the same effect when spraying and swinging.

The mud ribbon slowed the bone down, and the weighted down bone clattered to the ground harmlessly in front of Kingler.

"Mar!?”

The Marowak seemed stunned at the loss of the bone, and Ash knew what moment this was. Time for the finishing blow.

"Alright Kingler, let's end this with Bubblebeam!"

No need to get Kingler into range where Marowak could counter with Double Edge.

As Kingler began to fire bubbles towards the weaponless Marowak, Giovanni was silent. Perhaps, like Paul, he had accepted the loss here and would stop giving Marowak commands.

"Screech."

That simple word however, proved that thought wrong. Marowak did have an additional attack on hand, and it was a wailing shriek of agony.

The sound popped the bubbles, and crashed into Kingler with paralyzing force.

Clutching his own ears Ash couldn't really hear either, and didn't catch what Giovanni ordered next, but regardless Marowak charged forward, still screeching into Kingler as it grabbed the fallen bone and struck Kingler.

The blow flipped Kingler into the air, before crashing down headfirst into the field.

Kingler was defeated, and the battle was now tied two to two.

"You did great Kingler, take a good rest."

Returning Kingler, Ash looked at the still standing Marowak with a thoughtful look.

Something about it was off.

"The Marowak's club is a rare variety of bone known as a Thick Club. Marowak that possess a Thick Club are considerably more powerful in their bone based strikes. The use of Thick Clubs is completely legal."

The Pokédex prompt explanation was followed up by Giovanni, who had a little snark of his own.

"But of course. I would never dream of violating the rules."

So said the criminal mastermind who was only not being called that because 'future knowledge' was not admissible in court of law, and Ash had no idea how to nudge the Pokédex to go hack his stuff.

Normally the Pokédex just did that on its own.

Reaching for the Park Ball, Ash put Giovanni's crimes out of his mind for a moment to focus on the battle.
"I choose you, Yanma!"

The speedy Bug-type was the third Pokémon out, and as he sped around the field Marowak narrowed its eyes.

Perhaps considering how to hit it with Bonemerang. Sure, it was generally agreed upon that trying to hit a bird with Earthquake was a bad idea, but a thrown bone was a bit different.

"Bonemerang!"

To prove the point Marowak flung the spinning bone towards Yanma, and there was no reason to try and disprove the hypothesis.

"Detect!"

Yanma's eyes flashed blue as he avoided the bone, both as it came towards Yanma, and flung back towards Marowak.

Yanma flew in the trail of the returning bone, right towards Marowak. Marowak held out its bone-wielding hand, with the other one curled into a fist.

"Thunder Punch."

Said fist then sparked and began glowing with intense electricity. The intent was clear. Marowak was aiming to catch the bone, then strike Yanma with the punch for super-effective damage.

A clever idea, but Ash had his own clever ideas.

"Aerial Ace!"

Yanma flashed green from Speed Boost, before vanishing in the wake of the bone. Marowak retrieved its bone and stared at the blank space Yanma once held in confusion, before Yanma sped right into Marowak from behind.

The blow sent Marowak flying, and Marowak didn't stop flying until Yanma came right up behind it and snagged its torso with all of his limbs.

Yanma then flew into the air before sharply looping downwards. Much like a Seismic Toss.

"Error. Yanma cannot learn Seismic Toss."

"Well if it can't, then I can't believe that it's not Seismic Toss. Alright Yanma, go!"

Yanma flashed green the moment Giovanni started to call for Screech, and moments later Marowak was slammed into the ground, sending up a plume of dust.

Moments later Yanma flew out of the dust cloud, none the worse for wear.

Marowak was only visible when the dust cloud faded away, revealing that Giovanni was now down three Pokémon.

"Way to go Yanma!"
Yanma buzzed in appreciation for the compliment as Giovanni returned Marowak.

Giovanni then flung down the next Pokéball, which Ash noticed was actually a Heavy Ball.

That meant that whatever Pokémon was next was going to very large…

"Grahhhh!"

And Steelix fit the bill, the massive Pokémon staring down at both him and Yanma.

He noticed that Yanma had a bit less enthusiasm for this fight than normal. Completely understandable, given the size difference.

"Steelix, the Iron Snake Pokémon and the evolution of Onix. This Pokémon metallized after long periods underground consuming minerals and being exposed to intense pressures. A martial artist once tried to train himself by punching his Steelix. He never was able to use his hands again."

Good to know? Regardless of what the random facts and trivia said, he did know one thing.

This was not the best fight for Yanma. He also knew there was no rule against substitutions.

"Yanma, ret…"

"Use Block!"

Steelix roared loudly before shooting a red light from its eyes. The red light struck Yanma before the Pokéball beam could, which bounced off the bug-type without any effect.

"Block, a move akin to Mean Look. Yanma cannot be returned until Steelix leaves the field."

"Iron Tail!"

Roaring, the Steelix kept up the pressure by swinging its tail up towards the still unenthusiastic Yanma.

"Dodge!"

He probably should have shouted Detect instead, but Yanma still flickered out of the way of the attack safely.

"Now Feint Attack!"

He thought he heard something about that not having issue with Steel-type Pokémon, and it was the best hope they had.

Yanma avoided a lunge from Steelix and performed the attack, striking right into Steelix.

The attack didn't phase Steelix, who roared in defiance, and likely an equivalent of 'puny attacks do nothing to The Steelix!'

He assumed that in this case 'The Steelix' would be what it would call itself.

"Stone Edge!"

"Detect!"
This time he said what he probably should have said, and the barrage of stones that flew towards Yanma was avoided by more than just Yanma's speed.

With blue eyes Yanma was able to avoid each and every projectile, before beginning to circle around the large and imposing Steelix.

The Steelix stared into Yanma, growling.

Still, this battle wasn't going to go anywhere, and there didn't seem to be any moves. Steelix's hide was too tough for Yanma to damage in any manner that wouldn't require him to stop the battle to shave, and Yanma would eventually tire and be easy prey for the steel behemoth.

Did he have any options but retiring Yanma? The only way he could see to damage Steelix was to attack it from inside, and unless he had Yanma enter Steelix's mouth he didn't see how that could work.

A solution came to Ash like a band snapped against his head.

"Yanma, land right on Steelix's head!"

"Ya?"

Yanma was confused, but none the less Yanma sped towards Steelix, who glared at the approaching Yanma and lunged forward with fangs flickering with flames.

Yanma avoided the Fire Fang and landed on Steelix's head as instructed, wings fluttering in anticipation.

"Now vibrate! Strike Steelix with all your wing power and shake it up!"

Yanma began rapidly fluttering his wings, the sonic wave striking right into Steelix's head and shaking the entire Pokémon like a maxed out stereo.

Steelix roared, much like an old man might in pain at loud rock music. The entire body of Steelix was vibrating from the intensity of Yanma's wing power.

Just like his teeth, but Ash's teeth were only getting a light take of the force. Steelix was getting the full blow of it.

"Grahhh!"

Steelix wasn't liking it much, especially as Yanma remained perched on Steelix's head regardless all of Steelix's attempts to shake it off.

Stone Edges fired and only struck the ceiling, futile attempts to bite the air around Yanma with Fire Fang, Steelix struggled for minutes against the constant sonic assault.

He could just hear Giovanni's annoyed breath at the turn of events over said result, before he eventually sighed and stated his order.

"Explosion."

Steelix's eyes went wide, before glowing bright yellow. Before Yanma could try and get away, Steelix lit up the battlefield in a bright light.

…
It was without thinking that Misty caught the prone form that was flung their way from the
desperation attack performed by Steelix.

It was probably the only reason she'd touch a Bug Pokémon like she was when she intercepted the
slightly crispy Yanma.

The twitchy, still alive, but sort of smelling like a barbeque Yanma.

Her arms stiffened, feeling almost numb in trying to avoid recognizing what exactly she was holding.
Her eyes almost felt like they were rolling back into her head, her throat dried up like a desert, and
her stomach lay as still as a calm lake.

Her mind avoiding any recognition of what was going on, lest she fall into hysterics.

"Oh, thanks for catching Yanma Misty. We both appreciate it. Now Yanma, take a good rest. You
really earned it."

Ash, as far as she could tell in her pre-freak out state had walked over and returned Yanma,
overwhelming the part of her that was making her forget what exactly had just been in her arms.

"Bugs!"

Before she could fully let out every horrible feeling she felt from being in such contact with one of
the things a pair of large, comforting hands rested on her shoulders.

From them seemed to spread a warmth across her body that made everything seem less horrible and
buggy.

"Misty."

Things were clearer, and she found herself staring into Ash's warm brown eyes.

"Yanma's not going to hurt you. None of my Pokémon, regardless of what type they are, are ever
going to hurt you."

That was true, wasn't it? A rational corner of her mind knew that Ash didn't have any of the really
bad Bug-type Pokémon.

None that stung or sliced or drained body fluids, she shivered as she listed off everything wrong with
them in her mind.

Despite the comforting hand, she felt a wave of shame come over her. This fear of Bug Pokémon, it
was really pathetic, wasn't it?

It couldn't be a trait that anyone, even Ash, found likeable. Ash could be doing anything else right
now in a Gym battle other than trying to make her stop feeling unclean from touching a Bug-
Pokémon.

From the corner of her eyes she noticed Iris looking at her thoughtfully, as if considering ideas for
helping her get over it.

Thankfully before she got too far Anabel made sure she sent a look, and probably more than that
mentally, at her that read 'no' quite clearly, even as Pikachu chirped something at her to similar effect.

She knew that if Iris did that she'd have meant well, but she could think of a hundred different things
she'd rather do than, say, be made to stand still covered in only honey while bug types swarmed all
over her.

That included, if she had to be honest, looking up her sisters and trying to talk to them, and going up to Ash's mother and bluntly saying 'I like your son, help me'.

"Are you done being histrionic so this battle can avoid further delays?"

There was something she appreciated in how everyone, not just Ash, turned to glare at the Gym Leader for the remark, even if she was pretty sure Iris had no idea what histrionic meant.

As Ash's hands left her shoulders and he returned to where the battle was, likely to see the leader eat his remark, Misty wondered if there was something she should have done as he left.

"You've got this Ash," which she had declared, just didn't seem to be enough.

Perhaps something more personal than such a simple statement, or even something non-verbal.

Would a kiss to the cheek or something, as she probably would be more up for touching Yanma again than going for the lips, have been the best motivator she could have done, or just distracted Ash?

Perhaps it was best to just let Ash focus on the battle, as that was something he knew how to do.

When it came to their own personal feelings, she was pretty sure the closest of them to having a clue was Iris, and that was a scary thought.

...

"The girl's fear of Bug Pokémon is irrational."

He felt some of his irritation shift from the crime boss who insulted Misty, to the machine in his pocket that did, and he was fully aware that Misty's fear of bug-types wasn't exactly as easy to explain as Brock's own issues.

He was pretty sure that he could play psychologist, say that Brock was driven by his family issues to flirt with everything, and not be wrong.

"Not everything needs to be rational."

"The human flaw of irrationality will get in the way of her interests. Tell me what will happen when her quest leads her to a Golisopod?"

As he had once thought, that would lead to a lot of screaming. But Misty liked terrifying Gyarados and Tentacruel well enough, so maybe it could win through in the end.

Unless Golisopod, or whatever Pokémon it evolved from, did one of the buggy things that even he could see Misty's fear on the subject, like fluid draining, of course. Then Misty's ability to find Gyarados charming would not win out in the end.

But that was later, and now was now, and Giovanni had just sent out a Nidoking as his fifth Pokémon.

One that had an item holder on with a purple thing in the center.

Ash had no idea what it was, but it was probably not 'Nidokinite' or something.
"Tauros, I choose you!"

Regardless of the item, his fourth Pokémon landed on the field with a snort and a foot stomp. The charge was ready to begin, and Nidoking tensed in anticipation of it.

"Fissure!"

Ash had to admit, that was probably a case of him being a bit petty, but after the Dugtrio he felt he earned the right.

Tauros reared up, hooves glowing brightly with the attack ready to strike with all the force Fissure could muster.

"Confusion."

Ash was sure he had misheard what Giovanni had just declared, but the purple orb on Nidoking's holder flashed as Nidoking extended his arm.

Tauros was then surrounded by a blue aura and frozen in place, the attack halted.

"Broo? 'Nidoking can use Psychic attacks?'

It was news to him too.

The blue aura around Tauros flared up, before seeming imploding. The strike sent Tauros to the ground, but he got back up before he could be flung around the room like many would use such attacks.

"Double Edge!"

Tauros, shimmering yellow, charged towards Nidoking.

"Confusion."

"Swerve!"

Swerve unlike Confusion was not an attack, but it was a simple idea really. Tauros, the moment Nidoking looked ready to grab it with Confusion, skidded to the side.

A blue have hung where Tauros had originally been, and Tauros was able to continue to charge unperturbed.

Nidoking slammed his tail into the ground before winding up for a punch.

"Ice Punch."

Said punch came with a frosted finish, and the two moves clashed with both Pokémon holding against each other.

Again a flash of light from Nidoking’s holder.

There was something else Ash noticed as the two moves clashed, the Ice Punch didn't seem to be spreading ice from contact.

That seemed odd for an Ice Punch.
"Strike with Poison Jab!"

Giovanni’s order was followed by a flash of purple on Nidoking’s other arm. A second strike with a second limb, where Tauros could not hit back with a single head.

"Double Team!"

Though if one was going by a different definition of head, a single one was all that was needed. Tauros flickered for a moment before vanishing, sending both fists of Nidoking clashing into each other in a somewhat silly manner as a ring of Tauros formed around the great behemoth.

Tauros snorted in anticipation, mirrored a dozen times by the ring of dupes in such unison only the Pokédex could pick up the lag.

"Fissure!"

Tauros stamped into the ground, streaks of white shooting towards the surrounded Nidoking. Nidoking tensed, unsure of what to do and how to avoid the strike.

"Bulldoze!"

The result that Giovanni offered, and Nidoking provided with a harsh stamp to the ground, was a wave of energy and disrupted earth blocked the Fissure attack.

It then surged into Tauros, and sent the lead of the herd flying.

"Tauros!"

What was going on wasn't good. Tauros did not really do ‘fighting in the air’ like some Pokémon of his could. If Nidoking had a ranged attack to fire, it would be bad.

Ash hoped that Confusion would be brought out, because at least …

"Focus Blast!"

His hopes were crushed as a fifth move was thrown at Tauros, a blue sphere flung much like a curveball.

It struck Tauros, and as Tauros crashed into the ground he could almost hear the words in his mind.

"Strike, you're out!"

He returned Tauros, conceding the battle having been tied up with two Pokémon remaining.

"The purple orb and the ability of Nidoking are causing you problems."

At the Pokédex's comments Ash's gaze rested on said purple object.

"Nidoking's abilities are Poison Point and Rivalry, aren't they? They were on the test."

It certainly didn't have Swift Swim as an ability, though he did admit to wondering about Sand Veil and Poison Touch as a possible answer. Though it had turned out that he had gotten the question right by answering B, not A.

"Those are the most common abilities yes. However there are less common ability varieties that aren't as easy to find, and thus the old man would not put it on a test. Serperior's own
ability would be like that. Nidoking's ability in that regard is Sheer Force, an ability that powers up moves with the potential for additional effects at the cost of removing them."

So that was why Ice Punch didn't seem able to freeze Tauros.

"Okay, so what is the purple thing?"

"A Life Orb. Life Orbs are items that can boost a Pokémon's power at the cost of a chunk of stamina. They are controversial in some circles, but Sheer Force can negate the effects of Life Orb when they stack on a move affected by the ability. To use Nidoking as an example the Life Orb would damage Nidoking if used on a Double Kick attack, but Confusion is powered up twice with no negative side effects."

On top of that Nidoking could have even more moves up its sleeve. He'd have to be ready for anything. Fortunately, he had an idea of which Pokémon to rely on

It wasn't quite where he'd want it to make a debut, but it would have to do.

"I choose you!"

A second Safari Ball flew up and exploded, revealing the Exeggutor who he had done some battle training with.

The walking tree stomped threateningly at Nidoking, who stared back without fear.

"Confusion!"

Nidoking’s hand shot wide open, ready to grab Exeggutor.

"Teleport!"

Exeggutor flickered away, a blue haze grabbing at the space once occupied as Confusion missed. Behind Nidoking appeared Exeggutor, a blue glow in all of his heads.

"Show him your Confusion!"

"Ex!"

Nidoking glowed blue and floated upward, squirming before Exeggutor began spinning Nidoking around like a pinwheel.

It was damaging, and likely to render Nidoking quite nauseous when it was all done. A super effective attack if there ever was one.

It still wasn't quite how he preferred to battle, but the Exeggutor had not been interested in dropping the move so he'd make do with it.

"Sludge Wave!"

As a purple veil surrounded Nidoking he called for Exeggutor to teleport. Exeggutor did so, teleporting back over to him.

However Nidoking still spun on for a few minutes after Exeggutor let off on the move, and while the dizzy purple Pokémon eventually did stop, the Sludge Wave flew off as Nidoking was spinning.
The spinning also turned Sludge Wave into a scattershot of purple sludge bullets.

"Exeggutor use AGH!"

Ash had to stop giving an order because of one of said bullets nearly hit him, and he had to roll out of the way as the poison splotched down where he was standing. Two of the sludge bullets struck Exeggutor, sending the tree stumbling back.

A hiss from Persian suggested that the sludge got too close.

Nidoking was now wobbling, dizzy from all of the spinning. It was the time to strike.

"Sludge Bomb!"

Exeggutor stomped down and fired a bolt of sludge from atop itself. It struck into Nidoking, even if not the best move choice it still damaged the dizzy beast.

It would've probably be a good time to finish off Nidoking with a big attack, but that would require a Z-Move, and Exeggutor was the last Pokémon he had on him who could use one theoretically, seeing as he couldn't see it working with Attract.

He had three options, but he hadn't managed to get it to work with Exeggutor the couple of times he had tried. True, he hadn't tried in a week, but it seemed a bad time to see if that week had made a difference.

Plus he probably shouldn't flash the ace in the hole in front of the criminal mastermind, seeing as it was entirely possible Jessie, James, and Meowth hadn't mentioned stalking him during his use of them yet, and he'd like to hold onto the hope they hadn't said anything about it.

He probably shouldn't try and make a new crystal either, while he was thinking of it.

In all honesty if he was going to use a Z-move in this battle, he probably should have used the Normal Z-move with Tauros earlier. Of course, it was no use crying over what ifs.

"Bulldoze!"

Still wobbly, Nidoking moved to slam a fist into the ground and trigger the ground-type attack.

"Grass Knot!"

Exeggutor stomped in response, which resulted in a binding pair of grass blades to rise up and snare Nidoking's arm, stopping it from finishing the attack.

Nidoking pulled against the grass, trying to yank the arm free.

"Sludge Bomb!"

The moment that the arm was freed a sludge blast struck him in the face, and the king stumbled backwards, nearly tripping before a tail slam got him stable again.

As Nidoking stood firmly again, Ash had to make an observation.

Nidoking had used six moves so far, something that only Charizard had managed on his end. As things tended to go, he could only assume that the final Pokémon Giovanni would use would be the same.
One reason he had kept on going after Gyms was to get an idea of what he would have to expect going forward.

If Pokémon having more moves was to be expected, it was a reminder that they still had work to do.

"Sludge Wave!"

The surge of purple gunk surged towards Exeggutor, this time no longer a dizzy scattershot.

"Confusion!"

With a blue glow the sludge was sent back towards Nidoking, who stood firm in the face of the pollution tsunami.

"Confusion!"

A second blue glow now held the purple sludge completely still, both Pokémon glaring at the other as their psychic powers clashed.

Eventually the blue auras flared up around the sludge, and an explosion of blue light and purple sludge flew all over the place.

He barely avoided being splattered, and a sound on indignant and a 'Pika!' suggested a similar near miss for his companions.

Exeggutor and Nidoking weren't so fortunate, and both found themselves struck by the attack.

…

Both of the Pokémon were down, though at the moment she was not quite thinking of the battle.

She was partially trying to not smell the poison that had crashed near them earlier, as it was an intense and unpleasant odor. The major thing though was the Gym Leader.

Something about him was off, and she could not give it a name.

Anabel had noticed it too, and it was possible that Ash had as well. This Gym Leader was hiding something.

"You know, in the event of a tie I am under no obligation to give a badge. It is the Gym Leader's choice, and if you insist on having a badge you do not need, I am not feeling generous. If you cannot defeat this final Pokémon fully and utterly, you will leave having wasted both of our times."

That something the Gym Leader was hiding being what he would rather be doing than allowing Ash to see the strength of his Pokémon and his mind at once.

What the Gym Leader was hiding was hard to say, as it could be anything and likely was not of any of their concern, though her attention was soon caught by the Pokémon he sent out to face Ash and she did not have time to really think of what that might be.

…

The confirmation that Giovanni and Maylene had absolutely no similarities, a fact that probably never did require confirming, was followed up by the appearance of a massive brown and reddish-orange Pokémon.
"Rhyperior, the Drill Pokémon and the final evolved form of Rhyhorn. Rhyperior possess incredible defensive fortitude, and are used in volcanic eruption zones to handle magma flow."

The Rhyperior stared right into Ash's soul, or at least it was how the gaze felt. It was an intensity that Ash had rarely seen, and it was a clear indication that this fight would not be an easy one.

His Great Ball in hand, Ash was ready to take the challenge.

"Serperior, I choose you!"

In a burst of light she appeared in front of him, uncoiling herself in preparation for the battle ahead. She hissed slightly as she looked over Rhyperior.

"Ser." 'I take it that you can tell that this isn't a regular Rhyperior.'

He nodded, assuring her that he had indeed picked up on that.

"As far as you've come, I'd like to think you don't think that type alone settles battle. This Rhyperior has battled far more impressive evolutions than yours."

"You do remember I beat over half of your team with two Pokémon who haven't evolved, right? I'm the last person who needs to be told evolution doesn't decide everything. Serperior, use Attract!"

The battle would begin with him being smart, and that meant incapacitating. With a wink Serperior sent a storm of hearts flying towards Rhyperior.

He remembered his studying days enough that he knew the Rhyhorn family had gender differences based on their horn sizes, and this Rhyperior's horns looked large enough to be male.

"Sandstorm!"

Rhyperior shot a storm of billowing particles out from his arms, which shattered the hearts and filled the arena with a general haze of dust.

The coarse grains of sand struck his face, though Ash had to admit it didn't feel as painful as it should have.

It did make it a bit harder to see Rhyperior clearly though, and the wincing Serperior was doing suggested that the lack of irritation and pain was more a him thing than intended.

"Zap Cannon."

"Serperior, block it with Leaf Storm, it's coming right at you!"

Serperior fired the Leaf Storm as pointed, and as the leaves billowed in the storm they seemed to blow a brief gap in the sandstorm, letting both of them see clearly.

The attack clashed, with the little yellow ball of Zap Cannon being overwhelmed by Leaf Storm. The attack slammed into Rhyperior.

The sand filled the gap in and Rhyperior returned to being obscured from full sight.

"Hammer Arm."

This time he didn't need to tell Serperior what direction the attack was coming from. Even with his shoe back on, he could feel the shaking battlefield as Rhyperior charged, and Serperior was no
different.

"Leaf Blade!"

With a glowing green tail Serperior jabbed forward, right into the glowing arm of Rhyperior who had charged in from the side.

The two attacks collided, sparking as they competed against each other. As green sparks flew from Leaf Blade, Ash made two observations.

Rhyperior still had a free arm, and a free mouth and head. That could be bad if he didn't do something.

So he'd do something.

"Serperior, Leaf Storm!"

Serperior didn't do any fancy movements, but her collar glowed brightly as a storm of leaves shot out and struck Rhyperior in the face.

The massive form of Rhyperior stumbled back, tripping over itself and plopping down on the ground.

Serperior followed up on gravity's assist with a Leaf Blade stab, striking the armor of Rhyperior with another solid hit.

Rhyperior pushed himself back up after that, aided by a momentary surge of damage from Sandstorm. It was at that point that Ash, in the brief lull in sand created by Leaf Storm, noticed something.

Rhyperior didn't seem as damaged by Serperior's attacks as he had expected, even with Solid Rock. He might have missed something though.

"Serperior, use Aqua Tail to wash out the Sandstorm!"

"Block it!"

Serperior shot her tail up, glowing blue as water spewed out of it.

However a thick arm blocked the water, spattering it harmlessly against the ground and not clearing anything up for him.

"Hammer Arm!"

The other arm of Rhyperior then slammed down on Serperior, a solid hit that definitely did damage.

"Now Megahorn!"

Rhyperior's horn started glowing, and Ash wasn't interested in seeing the end result of it.

"Leaf Storm!"

Rhyperior swung his head down just in time for a barrage of leaves to blast him in the side of the head. The blow knocked him away, stumbling away in the sand as Serperior shot back up to full standing.
Again through the bit of clarity Leaf Storm brought up, Ash could see that the attacks still weren’t doing what they should have, even with Solid Rock.

"Zap Cannon!"

Not that he could really get a chance to clear the air, as Rhyperior was firing off the electrical shots and requiring Serperior to weave around them to avoid damage.

"Flamethrower!"

"Block it with Aqua Tail!"

The electrical blasts were switched out for flames shooting out of Rhyperior's arm cannons, which were blocked by the water gushing out of Serperior's tail.

However, even with his sight blurred by the sand, he could see that the flames were growing more intense. Rhyperior was walking forward as he blasted the flames, clearly eager to get close to Serperior for a powerful physical attack.

Up close Rhyperior could strike Serperior with all the power the ground type could muster, while at range the sand blocked Attract and Leaf Storm, even as the latter didn't seem to be doing anything to it.

At the same time Serperior's close ranged attacks were being hampered by Solid Rock. There had to be a way around it.

After a moment of watching the flames slowly grow closer to Serperior, an idea came to him.

"Serperior, break off to the side and use Aqua Tail to wash the sand away!"

Serperior, he could tell, wasn't entire sure why he had her repeat something that was blocked the first time. However she didn't hesitate to do so, and slid out of the direct line of fire.

The fire spewed harmlessly into the sand as Serperior aimed her tail upwards.

"Block it once more, then Megahorn, and don't let Leaf Storm throw you off again!"

Again a solid arm jabbed over Serperior's tail, taking the water without a care as a horn flared in the blur.

Just close enough where Ash was sure it couldn't be blocked by the sand when he repeated the move.

"Stop Rhyperior with Attract!"

He could hear Giovanni's gasp of surprise at this, even as Serperior winked and sent a barrage of hearts.

The sand barraged at them, but they hit Rhyperior head on before they could be destroyed.

The horn glow vanished, and Rhyperior seemed to be woozily wobbling.

"Snap out of your delusions!"

Giovanni's command was in vain.
"Wash the sand away!"

Third time was the charm as Serperior shot Aqua Tail into the air, the water hosing the entire field in a light spray.

The sand vanished, clumping to the ground and clearing the field for everyone.

Neither Pokémon reacted to now being damp, but it was probably a question of if Rhyperior even noticed it.

"Now Leaf Storm, one more time!"

Serperior glowed bright green, even as Rhyperior made a giggling sound that Ash hoped he never would make around anyone.

He couldn't imagine it being appealing, and it sounded more like what he'd have thought the hot spring peepers would have been making if left alone.

The laughing remained even as Rhyperior was blasted with leaves, sending the massive Pokémon flying.

Rhyperior was blasted past him, the wind of it blowing his hat off, and crashed into the Viridian Gym's walls.

Rhyperior was no longer giggling, but the way Rhyperior did look showed it wasn't because the Leaf Storm convinced him that Serperior wasn't his type.

"We won?"

He asked the question quietly, in case Rhyperior did stir. A half minute later, his face shot into a grin.

"We won!"

Forgetting his hat he dashed to Serperior and hugged her around her neck, and she tensed at the hug for a moment before he felt her relax in the show of affection.

"Ser." 'Yes my idiot, we did.'

Moments later he was joined in the celebratory hug by a weight on his shoulder, which would be Pikachu, before he felt a body press into his back.

"You won!"

Misty repeated his statement, her arms wrapped around his back. The feeling was quite nice.

Very nice.

Anabel was next into him, coming in at his side. He noticed that she seemed a bit surprised at her entry into the group hug, as if pushed, but quickly smiled and got into it just as much as the rest of them.

He briefly glanced Iris behind him, with an approving look and a stance that made him wonder if she had pushed Anabel into it. Moments later she quickly plucked something out of the air, thrown from Giovanni's seat.

An Earth Badge.
Ash briefly saw Giovanni, standing up and looking at him for a moment. He didn’t walk away immediately, and Ash felt like it was for a deliberate reason.

He didn’t leave until Iris joined in the group embrace, popping in on the opposite side of Anabel instead of pushing through between her and Misty.

He’d wonder the exact reason why later, but for right now he was enjoying the hug a bit too much to try and piece it together.

---

**Back home**

There was something impressive about a Gym badge collection.

No matter how many times you stared at one badge, or two, or even remembered that one badge was all you needed, a full set of badges just made you grin.

He wasn’t entirely sure his mom had to go through all of the trouble of moving the badges into a frame though, or why she was so insistent on keeping it in her lap as they talked at Oak’s lab.

"You can’t lose them if I have them on our wall until you go to the League, honey. Plus Mr. Framer had to pay off his tab and offered to do this for me."

The only argument he’d have against that statement is that he had not suffered from badge theft in this timeline yet.

"You know, I was always proud of you dear, but this is just the icing on the cake. No matter what happens at the League, you’ll always be amazing, dear."

Ash blushed, not sure how to respond to that.

"Of course, that's in a while. The League will be in two and half months, give or take a few days. Though I do reiterate your mother's statements."

That long?

Wasn’t it two months the last time? Sure, dates escaped him, but did he really shave half a month off his previous time?

Sure he did avoid a few things, no giant robots or ghost girls or freezing. No Santa Claus either, but that might have just been a really strange dream.

Even as he avoided some things, he also got into new troubles. Shouldn’t that have cancelled a few things out, or even taken up more time.

"Pik?" 'Anabel did teleport us out of a few times of being lost. Of course by a few I mean quite a lot of times we got lost the firsts time. '

Yeah, but they couldn’t have been so lost that Anabel teleporting them back on track could shave that much time off, right?

They only got lost that one time, in the apple forest. Then that time in the pear forest, and the orange forest, and the great plains, and the lesser plains, and the moderate plains, and the jungle, and the
other jungle, and the coast, and the rocky coast.

No that didn't count, he didn't have Pidgeotto then. Or did he?

Getting lost wasn't exactly a rare occurrence, if he had to be honest.

"Oh, that means we get to have even more parties. Those are fun!"

His mother's enthusiasm was met by a phantom pain in his shoulder joints, as if two people were yanking on them.

"Maybe right before the League, I don't think I could put up with another party."

Misty's comment led to Professor Oak chuckling a bit.

"Neither could I, truth be told. I'm still hearing kazoo's in my sleep. Still, you will need to find something to do in the next little while before we get back to the party question."

Ash agreed, and the first answer to that question was training. Of course, there was a problem with first answers, and that they tended to miss a few things.

Among them was the fact that he had already been doing a lot of training, and that breathing in between training was also important.

It was also inconsiderate to always assume that what he wanted to do was everyone's first pick either. They had given him permission sure, and he was sure they wouldn't blame or berate him for wanting to do more of it.

Iris certainly wouldn't, even if she'd train him just as much as he trained his Pokémon.

However just because there would be no problem did not mean he should go in without asking first.

"I've gotten plenty of training done already, and there is plenty of time to get more done before the League. What do you three want to do?"

Attention was now on Misty, Iris, and Anabel.

Anabel scratched her head in a show of uncertainty.

Iris shrugged, not really having an idea. In his experience, that meant she didn't see any change from how things usually went.

She'd continue to train him in a state that really would have been less distracting before either of them went through puberty. Probably.

The only other thing he could see her wanting to do was finding Hunter J, and unless someone took a photo of J on vacation in Pummelo that trail was a cold one that Iris kept in the back of her mind.

"Think we could make a trip back to the beach?"

Misty's suggestion was followed by approving nods from Anabel, Iris, and himself.

That was a fine idea. She could see if there were any Pokémon for her to get to keep up her goal, they'd all have fun, and he'd get to see them all in swimsuits again.

There was no downside, even if it was still somewhat weird to admit to himself he liked the latter as
much as he did.

"Splendid idea!"

Professor Oak's approval was followed by his mom giving her own approval, but in a more subdued way.

Was she worried about him being alone with three attractive girls in swimsuits?

Sure, given the fact that he now did think about swimsuits a bit more, it was probably a bit more relevant a concern than it used to be. However Ash couldn't see it going into anything that moms had anything to worry about.

Unless he missed something between the punk with the Donphan and being at the harbor, which given he couldn't recall anything nothing interesting must have happened, nothing bad happened before the League that involved the coastline.

Bar happening to find a Pokémopolitan sand bucket, nothing could possibly go wrong.

…

Anabel had to admit that she was surprised by how much attention her blog had gotten so far, even with the Pokédex's efforts to give it visibility. Sure, it wasn't all positive attention, what with at least twelve different messages telling her to kill herself, others that she was a monster, more than a few attempts at doxxing, and a message from the 'Pokémon Mystery Club' about what was the connection between Bloodliners and extraterrestrial Pokémon. But thankfully, there were also just as many people that were supportive of her attempt at activism, and actually interested to know more about Bloodliners. Certainly enough to convince her that little idea could actually go somewhere.

And if it could go somewhere, that meant she needed to write another post now, to keep the momentum of the blog going and people interested. And the question was now which of the hundreds of questions to answer. Sure, it was easy to parse out the ones asking her to die or to buy someone's car, but even beyond those, the wealth of topics to cover was more than a little overwhelming.

At least, until her eyes fell on one question in particular as she did a pre-beach trip check.

Why would a Bloodliner like you even want to get along with normal people? Aren't you better than all of them?

Seeing that question gave Anabel pause. She had a lot of time to ponder such a question herself, and the answer had always felt simple to her. She smiled, deciding to take a stab at it, and slowly began to type.

You know, this is an interesting question. A lot of people would think that, due to how Bloodliners have powers, they would rather not get mixed up with regular humans. That they would just want to do bad things, pretty much, or rule over humans, or generally outside of their laws, thinking we're different than them. I've met Bloodliners with this exact same mindset, too. However, I disagree.

It's obvious that some people would be afraid of what's different, to be hated for what they are not considered to be on the same levels as other people. To be jailed, killed, maybe even tortured just because of who you are. It's also obvious that someone afraid to be hated for said power would embrace it to prove themselves superior, unable to be hurt. It's a tragic conclusion to reach, but one I can to a degree understand.
As for me, I think this is just a way to enforce differences, to further the divide, rather than trying to solve anything. Humans and Bloodliners both made mistakes that all brought us here, I think, but if we keep talking about the past, when will we actually move towards any future?

There are lots of stories, after all, of heroes of ancient past that would've been called Bloodliners today. Like the Aura Guardians of Rota, with Sir Aaron among them, and even rumored ones like the ancestor of Crimson City's Fisher clan, Utsubotto Fisher. People whose moral fiber and skills were considered unquestionable, and no one tried to claim otherwise. They were valued for what kind of person they were, rather than what they could do.

Maybe it's because I was raised by a very good uncle, but I feel there's no need to push for the differences, when we can instead look at what brings us together. We are all on this same world together, so why should we not try to live in harmony and peace?

Even if we're hurt, even if we're sad, even if we're afraid. Together, we can find a way to overcome any adversity. No man's an island, as they say, and trying to rise above the rest or refusing to live alongside others is just the recipe for even more sadness and despair. And don't we have enough as it is, even without our divides?

So, to answer your question, I want to live, meet others, know more than I already do. Because I'm not better than anyone else, and my Bloodline doesn't make me so. I just want to love, and be loved in equal amounts.

And this is something I hope we'll all be able to do, together, one day.

I hope this answer will satisfy you, and if there are any others you want to share, I'll always be happy to answer them.

With love, your Salon Maiden.

And with a smile, she pressed the 'Send' option, a sense of pride swelling inside her.

Maybe it was different than how she imagined it when she started traveling, but she definitely felt like her voice would be heard now. And that was enough to put a smile on her face.

…

There was nothing wrong with that. Really, Ash just wanted to enjoy a beach day or two with his friends. There was nothing to worry about.

Then why couldn't she get that thought off her mind? Maybe because she understood the implications. Going to the beach meant the sea. The sea meant going swimming. Going swimming meant... her son and his friends wearing swimsuits.

Unless they were in Kalos, but that was a topic she didn't want to touch.

The fact that her son had accepted Misty's proposal to go to the beach so eagerly didn't escape Delia. She was currently in front of Ash's room door, and she overheard some rustling noises inside. Perhaps he was packing his stuff, since Anabel would take them there and back, they didn't have to worry about ferry tickets, and he was taking just what he'd need to have fun for one day.

"Say, Pikachu, which one do you think they'd like? Red or blue?" She overheard him ask.

After hearing Pikachu's reply, sadly untranslated for her, she couldn't help but giggle. 'You could have asked me about it.'
Since he returned, after that hug she could tell how much her baby had grown. His Trainer achievements aside, the fact he was taller and stronger didn't escape her… neither the fact that his new friends, all of them attractive girls, would get an eyeful of him.

And at the same time, he would get an eyeful of them.

Ash clearly wasn't clueless anymore; she could tell he appreciated his friends' physical appeal. She had sometimes asked, jokingly, if he'd bring a nice girl for dinner sometime. Now he'd brought three of them, even if they were just friends.

Admittedly though, she wouldn't mind if he went a little farther with either of them. They were all nice, charming girls, each in her own different way, but she couldn't see Ash choosing one over the others. In fact, she'd never thought of asking him about his type, and the fact those three were so different, both in personality and physicality, from one another certainly didn't help narrow anything down.

Yet somehow, he seemed to be attracted to all of them to a degree.

Then there was also Serena, but Delia could not see Ash handling a long distance relationship, he liked seeing things and people face to face too much. Perhaps if they met again and Serena decided to travel with him sometime…

'What am I thinking?'

She wasn't thinking about pushing her son into a relationship, was she? True, he was in that age, but… being in the middle of so many pretty girls who actually liked him back, that would probably do nothing but confuse him and make him a mess of feelings.

So, she knocked on the door, trying to not to evidence she had been eavesdropping. "Ash?"

"Hold a sec!" He replied, and five seconds later Ash opened the door. "What's up, Mom?"

Delia struggled to avoid reflecting on the fact he was wearing a white T-shirt with a zigzag orange stripe that evidently he was dangerously close to outgrow. Instead, she gave him her brightest smile.

"Do you guys have lunch for your beach day? I can make some for all of you, if you want."

Ash's delight for tasting her homemade lunch helped the woman forget about her worries. She could only trust Ash and his friends to hold back their hormones and have fun as good friends and nothing more. They deserved a break for all their hard work.

"Say Mom, do you still have your old surfboard?"

"My surfboard?"

Oh yeah, she used that often in summer when she was younger. Speaking of, the Weather Channel had reported the coming of big waves to shore, like every twenty years. But... Ash wasn't planning on trying to ride those, right? Surely he wouldn't be that reckless.

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*Currently on the Coast, being far less reckless*

"Pikachu, Thunder Punch!"
"Pika!" Reaching across his body, Pikachu covered his right wrist with its left paw and thrust his right paw down towards the ground. This caused a yellow ball of electricity to form over said right limb. Extending his arm out, the punch sliced the field apart as Pikachu ran towards the Machamp.

It was a move that they had done many times before, and in all likelihood would do many more times.

The Machamp tensed, both lower arms forming a green aura as a Protect formed up. The barrier shimmered as Pikachu drew in closer.

Now, he could've easily looked at his victory odds and follow the most logical and effective way to victory possible. However, it wasn't particularly necessary.

"Go into Feint, then finish with Thunder Punch."

Even if Pikachu hadn't learned the technique recently, Red sought to not crutch on it as much anymore.

Pikachu's tail shot forward, shimmering slightly, and struck the Protect. The barrier cracked open, as Pikachu lunged forward with a slightly diminished Thunder Punch.

He could afford to not use it against opponents like that one.

Machamp was sent flying, hitting the ground in defeat as Pikachu landed on the ground no worse for wear.

"Nooooo!"

He nodded absently at his victory, before turning around, Pikachu in tow, to the picnic blanket he had previously been resting on.

Said blanket had an open basket, and a waving Yellow.

"Well, that was fast."

He nodded at her observation, idly hearing the would-be lunch crasher scurrying off as he took a seat once again, mirrored by Pikachu.

It was a nice little gathering, a celebration of his recent victory and eighth badge.

The Pokémon he had on hand with him were already eating, Pikachu darting to his own plate to join Charizard, Persian, Sneasel, Poliwrath, Clefairy, and Haunter.

He felt a bit bad that it wasn't as personally made as the sandwiches he and Yellow were having, but he hadn't any idea how to make Pokémon food and his recent steps towards more socialization had enough bumps without unintentionally poisoning them.

Still, there was no need to dwell on what steps he still needed to work on, only what steps he had taken.

He had achieved several of his goals, found several more on the way, and even found himself as a hero once or twice.

He took his first bite of sandwich as Yellow finished her first one, and raised a question.

"So Red, do we go back to the trap or what?"
He didn't raise an eyebrow at the fact she was still calling it a trap, even after they didn't get attacked or abducted.

They knew what that was like after all.

He finished his sandwich before answering, even if he likely didn't need to wait.

You weren't considered rude to shrug with your mouth full after all.

While it wasn't something that, even after braving powerful old women, freezing temperatures, and reflections of himself, he liked to admit, he wasn't sure.

There were plenty of options, and just saying 'train' wasn't quite enough. Train how being the question.

He'd think about it later, after eating all the sandwiches.

"Being back on dry land and all, there are plenty of places we could go. We could even go to Horiwood if we really wanted to."

Who would want to go there? Why would he want to go there? Why would Yellow want to go there?

He looked at her, wondering if she decided that 'the trap' wasn't a trap enough so they should go find some hoodlums to find a new trap.

She shrugged, clearly not having a reason and just throwing it out at random.

Poliwrath looked a bit disappointed at the lack of hoodlums to fight in the future, before perking up and looking into the sky.

This act had already been done by Pikachu, Charizard, and Persian, and was quickly followed by himself, Yellow, Clefairy, and Sneasel.

A shape was descending from the sky, blowing wind down as it came.

Charizard and Poliwrath quickly stood up on opposite corners of the picnic blanket, keeping it place as Yellow darted for the lightened basket.

She saved it, but several bowls of food were toppled in the process.

The shape landed in a plume of dust and Pikachu darted forward, sparking cheeks at the ready.

The sparks only slightly diminished when a Dragonite with a black bag landed ahead of them, revealing itself to be surprise visitor and disrupter of picnics.

"Broo."

The Dragonite, not seemingly to mind the wary looks all of them were giving it, reached into the bag and pulled an envelope out. Said envelope was held out his way, clearly meant to be taken by him.

"That letter doesn't have any stamps on it."

Yellow’s observation was correct, but the lack of stamps was the least of Red's questions. The first was exactly who would send letters by Dragonite of all Pokémon.
He somehow doubted that was how they made same-day deliveries.

He took said letter, even as Pikachu let out a concerned hiss, and opened it. The letter opened easily, and he pulled out some sort of metal device.

Smooth and rectangular, the device center bulb glowed blue before shooting up a light and revealing a hologram of a woman on it, dressed like she was a few centuries out of fashion.

The fact that Red knew that was not a good sign for the timeliness of this hologram's appearance, and the message it had to say.

"Greetings Pokémon Trainer, I bear an invitation. You've been selected to join a select group of Pokémon Trainers at a special gathering. It will be held by my master, the world's greatest Pokémon Trainer."

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, two chapters of the main story today. But I figured, everything else is posted, so what the heck. Now I can say it out loud *takes deep breath*:

AS OF TODAY, THE POKÉMON RESET BLOODLINES UNIVERSE IS OFFICIALLY AND FULLY POSTED ON AO3!! YAY ME!!

Sorry, needed to let that one out of my chest. But really, you have NO idea how much of a hassle this has been. Having to get up before dawn so I get the internet decent enough to load this site. At least now I won't have that much to post, and I'll be able to do so as they come. *Phew*, this took way too long for my taste, but one way or another, my duty is completed (for now anyway).

So then, there you have it. We'll be meeting next time for the Mewtwo Strikes Back adaptation. Seems fitting considering that they've announced 2019 will be Mewtwo's year, huh? Until then, this is Fox Bluereaver, aka Fox McCloud, signing out, and thanking you in behalf of my Resetverse colleagues for your continued support, and we hope to be able to properly reward you with it with more exciting stories for you to read.

Bye for now!
Chapter Notes

On behalf of Crossoverpairinglover, I apologize for the lateness in this update. The past few months have been hell for him (a new job and all) and he didn't have it easy. Plus, given the arc we're about to begin, it should come to no surprise that this chapter ended up quite a bit long, and there's still plenty to go. But, we hope you guys enjoy it. Time for the Mewtwo Strikes Back saga!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Southern Kanto Coastline, underwater…

No matter how often she went underwater, even in the same stretch of beach coast they had been staying along for a few days now, Misty never got tired of it.

There was something about the weightless feel of water, the subtle current that one just didn’t feel in the air, and the unique things it did to sound.

She wished she could share it with them.

Willing herself down onto the sandy bottom, Misty looked up into the glimmering sun atop the waves with a frown.

Among what she could do was breath underwater, and one of the things they had done while here in the last few days was see if there was any way that the ability could be replicated by the others.

It was a vain hope, they even knew it was when they spent a morning on the topic, and possibly dangerous. Yet so was riding an infamous wave on a surfboard you barely knew how to use, and Ash had decided, for some reason, to ride the thing and try and plant a flag on a rock.

Helping some random surfer was not due cause for doing that, and it had been somewhat gratifying to see that it was something so recklessly dumb that even Iris agreed it was unnecessarily dangerous.

Ash didn’t even need to clarify he wasn’t one of the surf bums trying to impress the ladies, although Iris was on board with all of them in telling Ash to never do that again.

Not in twenty years, or forty, or whenever the wave came back, ever again.

Ash’s random reckless behavior aside, the attempts to try and share this world with the others had somehow failed even more so than Ash’s surfing.

The only idea that had come up that was actually worth implementing was seeing if Anabel could use her psychic powers to draw in bubbles into one massive bubble, and all that had ended up doing was pop a few feet down sending Anabel scurrying to the surface.

A pair of bodies crossed that very same surface now, and she could tell even from how far down she was that they were Ash’s and Iris’s bodies.

She smiled as they went by, a thought of how she might let at least one person see this world without
an overwhelming time limit entered her mind.

She could breathe down here just as she normally could above water, with her nose or mouth. With the former she could keep herself breathing just fine, but could she then use her mouth to push oxygen into their mouth?

Of the two above specifically, into Ash’s mouth. As the act was something akin to a very long kiss, and she could not imagine doing that with Iris. It was a rather romantic thought, even if she suspected that would not actually work. Her and Ash, kissing, bound together by their own limbs as they floated in a world that she could finally share with him.

She’d have to actually get up the nerve to kiss him normally first, let alone what she suspected he had to work to be in the same place for anyone really.

Still, the thought made her grin, quite possibly like an idiot, for a good minute before she was snapped back to reality.

“Hep!” ‘Found someone! Coming your way fast!’

Staryu was speeding towards her, pursued close behind by a charging Seadra.

Her grin returned, this time for the continuation of a more immediately workable goal than sharing the majesty of being underwater with her friends.

…

“You know, there was a simple solution to your earlier debacle. Just buy rebreathers and goggles. As you opted to not rent a place to stay in during your trip, you could easily afford to do so.”

The Pokédex’s point rang out as Ash, a hand shielding his eyes from the sun, stared out into the distance.

Even with his vision being briefly blocked by a few droplets of water from his recent swim, he could still faintly see the flying maneuvers he had sent his current roster on.

Charizard, Pidgeot, Butterfree, Yanma, and the more battle interested Vivillon were stretching their wings out on an open sea aerial flight, and he would much rather check up on them and make sure he could still see all five of them than try and imagine explaining to Iris how a rebreather worked.

Heck, he’d need it explained to him. They weren’t snorkels or bamboo shoots, so how they did work?

Speaking of Iris (who was, in fact, the reason that they were using Secret Bases instead of renting, she had requested it, and thus was why Psyduck was lying next to him and muttering contently in the sun), he noticed her in the corner of her eye talking with Anabel in a telepathic conversation both ways.

The animated way the two were speaking made him worry. Was Iris going to have Anabel do something madly intense for training that was terrifying to even imagine?

He was ready to go and possibly bail Anabel out (which had the potential to get him wrapped up in whatever Iris was up to, sure, but it was better than doing nothing) when the conversation stopped and the two began walking his way.
Iris a lot more focused looking than Anabel, with a sway in her step oddly enough. Anabel followed, looking a lot more apprehensive.

That could not end well.

Though what he was expecting did not involve Anabel telekinetically shooting a bottle of sun lotion into Iris’s hand, who promptly held it in front of his face.

A few moments afterwards he felt a furry appendage stick out behind his knee, as if to block him from backing away from whatever this was going to end up being.

“Pikapi.” ‘Don’t go anywhere Ash, I like where this is going’.

The tone of his buddy, currently sunning himself like Psyduck, made him even more apprehensive.

Where was this going exactly? And why did Pikachu seem to know when he didn’t?

Iris, in the same swimsuit that made her fit body clear for all to see, was grinning as she promptly explained why she was holding the bottle of lotion out to him.

“Say Ash, Anabel was just telling me that it is important to make sure your skin does not get burned in the sun. Even with my skin, there are apparently benefits to doing so, even after a long swim.”

Iris gave this point in a purring tone. It was one that made his body tingle in both worry, and excitement. It was a strange combination.

“So, you wanted to remind me? Thanks; I did forget to put some more on.”

His hopes that he could solve this that easily were dashed as Iris shook her head.

“No. We were hoping you could lotion our backs, and we do the same for you. We could do it for ourselves, but we want you to do it.”

He only faintly noticed Anabel wave her hand in front of his face as he tried to process what was just said, or the fact that Iris said something about ‘this being Anabel’s idea’.

What context that could have possibly originated from just didn’t seem to compute as his brain felt like it was a car missing some sort of ignition piece.

If he knew more about cars, he’d give it an actual name beyond ‘ignition piece’.

Not even Pikachu prodding him with his tail was able to get his brain back on line.

“You know, if he is just going to stare at us in shock like this, perhaps we should just do him first. It does not smell like he did any part of his body recently, and he is shirtless.”

‘Iris, that is.....that.....lathering sunscreen on a semi-comatose person without their permission is not okay!’

“Do you want him to get damaged skin and be miserable?”

That managed to get his brain to work properly, and after hearing the faint spark of electricity that was probably meant as a friendly ‘suggestion’ and not an actual threat he shouted out he’d do it.

His face and Anabel’s turning cherry red, and even the grinning Iris being a tad pinker in complexion.
Once upon another time, he had thawed out a disobedient Charizard slowly over an entire night.

Somehow this felt like an even more terrifying task than unthawing a disobedient fire breathing Pokémon, even if he did go at it with the same level of consistency as he did then.

Iris and Anabel were laying on their stomachs on the grassy area that hung over the small stretch of beach that Misty had walked into a short time ago, Pikachu and Psyduck still laying on the same grass.

Pikachu having now moved right behind him once more, as if ready to ‘remind’ him again.

Yet it wasn’t needed as his lotion-lathered hands dug into the parts of Iris’s back exposed by her swimsuit, gently rubbing the cream in as Iris groaned in contentment.

The sounds she was making brought back the feelings of worry and excitement he’d felt earlier. They were causing him to flush darker and darker shades of red the longer he rubbed lotion in to her skin. A part of him, though he’d never admit it out loud was enjoying her groans at an almost primal level.

“This feels nicer than you said it would, Anabel.”

Iris had requested to be done first, and he had always noticed her watching the two of them. He didn’t glance over to see what sort of expression she had.

This was already distracting enough.

As he worked along Iris’s back, he noted how her skin felt. It wasn’t the smoothest thing he ever felt, even without the small scars that Iris had all over her body it felt tough. He could almost feel wilderness in it, and there was something intriguing about it. The contrast between her dark skin-tone and the pale lotion only added to the appeal.

It was, as he’d thought, intriguing and its own sort of pleasant he had never felt much of before. The heat of the moment in training didn’t really lend itself to analyzing how her skin felt, or the lithe muscles that lay underneath. The brief touches and tussles for dominance during their sparring clashes didn’t let his mind focus on how she felt in those moments.

It felt rather compact and seamless, compared to how musculature on him seemed to only serve to stretch his shirts. He had to admit some envy towards it. Her body was more suited for survival, a mixture of speed and strength along with feminine allure.

One last tracing motion along Iris’s shoulders got her entire back done, and he scooted over to where Anabel lay.

“Could you do the front too?”

He tried to ignore Iris’s request. Doing her back was already distracting enough; her butt drew his attention more times than he cared to admit. Rubbing lotion on her front, well, it probably wasn’t allowed on a public beach. A small voice in his head was whispering to him, urging him to agree to Iris’ request, he quickly gagged that voice and sent it back into the far reaches of his mind to keep it quiet.

He missed being … whatever age he was sometimes. That age didn’t have him be distracted by Iris’s butt, or her toned body, or the question of what things would distract him if she flipped over and had
him lotion her front.

Of course moving over to Anabel didn’t mean he wasn’t distracted. Her body was appealing itself, with her own butt and increasingly fit body that had its own charm compared to Iris’s brown and more toned form.

Pushing apart her lengthened hair, he began rubbing below her neck, which led to Anabel groaning in appreciation.

Perhaps it was more of a moan than a groan here, but he needed to control his thoughts somehow.

Compared to Iris’s skin, Anabel’s was smooth and less taut, his hands standing out against her skin tone in a more drastic way than he’d noticed before. The way her skin and muscle resisted his touch less then Iris’ did was something that had an appeal all of its own. It felt fresh and new, she probably took care of it more than Iris did. It reminded him a bit of snow, as odd as it was to say.

Of course what did he know about skin care? All that he could really say was that both felt nice, if in their own way and with their own possible flaws.

“Was watching me that bad? Did it make you annoyed, or did it just make you happy and wanting it yourself?”

Ash really hoped that Iris was not asking him that. That made him wonder if she was trying to make him do something he couldn’t imagine himself doing.

Pikachu could probably imagine him doing that, but he couldn’t. He didn’t know what had happened to Pikachu’s mind to change it into what it currently was or when it happened but it hadn’t changed who Pikachu was at his core so it wasn’t anything to worry about.

However as Anabel tensed up under his rubbing, yet not in a way that felt like it was his doing, he picked up that Iris was talking to Anabel, not him.

Which was confusing. If Iris had been saying that to him, it made him think she was making an innuendo reference to the fact that he was glad his swim trunks still were rather baggy (unlike his shirts these days). Which would be mortifying to realize that she had noticed that, but what did it mean if she was talking to Anabel?

Was that why she was watching?

The exact reasons eluded him, even if that was possibly just because he was distracted right now.

‘No, it wasn’t that bad at all.’

Anabel’s sigh as he moved to a new spot only added to the confusion, and he wasn’t sure if he could piece together what was going on.

Honestly, he was not entirely sure he wanted to piece it all together.

“Pika pika.” ‘Well this is an interesting turn of events.’

Pikachu probably did, and somehow that was more clearly concerning than what the two were up to now, or if he had to be honest since Iris had drawn Anabel into the more intense training.

…

While she had never given much thought to her own back, in part because she never really could see
it, she had noticed Ash’s from time to time.

With Iris having her in hand to hand combat/practical use of power training, she would have to be blind to not have seen it.

Touching it though, with hands lathered in lotion, was an entirely new sensation. A sensation that she doubted she’d ever tire of.

She could feel the muscles in his shoulders as she rubbed the lotion in, nervous but relaxing. Despite that, she could feel the power hidden within. The feel of that strength concealed behind Ash’s kind nature was something she found attractive on more than one level.

Idly she wondered if Misty and Iris had a similar feel to them, though she had far less interest in feeling their backs with her hands than she did Ash’s.

Feeling her hand dry of lotion she squirted some more on and resumed around the small of his back. Something he hadn’t needed to do with them, a benefit of the fact that they had a lot less exposed than he did.

Of course if Misty came out of the water, that would be another story with a lot more exposed skin.

A thought that, she had to admit, even as she could imagine Misty moaning as Ash dug his hands into her back, really didn’t bother her.

Something that she was sure that Iris had noticed, and if she cared to turn around from Ash’s lotion-glistening back she was sure she’d see her grinning like a mad cat at her.

A much less pleasant sight to look at, especially as she got a bit of an idea of what that looked like with Pikachu.

Ash’s partner had a look on his face she could easily see Iris making right now, which made her wonder if Iris had gotten Pikachu in on her little plan of having the two of them and Misty share Ash in a relationship.

Or, perhaps the two had come to a similar goal on their own, a conclusion that unnerved her in several ways.

Beyond making her wonder if ‘shopping madness’, as Ash had described it, had a related disease that was affecting both electric mouse and wild girl alike, the fact that she was pretty sure that Pikachu lived a lifestyle more akin to what Iris was okay with in a vacuum where she (and surely Misty and Ash) didn’t have objections to things.

She was aware that certain female Pokémon tended to vanish on certain nights, among them her Eevee. Nights Pikachu also darted off.

That thought shoved far out of her head, she rubbed lotion deep into Ash’s back, and enjoyed the muscle she was feeling.

“When you are done, should we try and get his front done? He can do ours like I had already asked.”

She shook her head at that image, no matter how much she enjoyed the idea, blushing a bit.

‘We can do that that ourselves. Like I accidentally brought up to you, it is considered somewhat sensual to lather up someone’s back, but the front is considered a bit creepy.’
Finishing on the back of Ash’s legs, she backed up as Ash stood up and reached for the sunscreen to do his front in a non-creepy way.

“Thanks.”

She nodded as he began lathering on his arms. He stopped mid-arm to acknowledge a disturbance at the water’s edge, which quickly became clear to be the bikini-clad Misty.

Anabel noticed Ash’s eyes lingered on her as she exited the water, and Anabel couldn’t really blame him.

She had noticed some of his thoughts as he lotioned her and Iris, and had caught a few of his thoughts on them as he did so.

How Iris’s skin felt, how it compared to her own, thoughts on their hair and their butts … it was weirdly charming even if it would be a question of whether him saying those things aloud were more awkward to her or him.

Misty had pretty much everything they had, her skin was smoother like her own, but with the underlying muscle of Iris. She had longer hair like Ash seemed to like than her own, and it was better kept that Iris’s mane.

Then there were the things she had that neither of them had, and she didn’t miss how Ash’s eyes did dart to them as she emerged from the water, droplets of water falling down from her and highlighting all of it. A particular thought flashed through Ash’s mind as his eyes followed the trail of a droplet of water as it rolled down Misty’s cleavage and toned stomach. He then remembered that Anabel could read thoughts and quickly banished.

It was fairly obvious that just as the three of them had feelings for Ash and no idea that didn’t come out of some madness on how to approach them, he was attracted to all of them.

It was like one of her uncle’s old drama shows, just without a laugh track and the fact she was pretty sure all of them wanted to break the ‘how do we romance’ status quo.

She had never liked those shows, the constant misunderstandings between cast members didn’t seem to make anyone happy, in or out of universe.

“Hey Misty, have Ash lotion your back.”

These shows didn’t have anyone like Iris in them, whose idea of how to make everyone happy would probably be just as cringy there as it was in this one.

“What?”

Yet it was a cringe that didn’t bother her. The image of Ash rubbing Misty’s exposed back, and her moaning a bit as he did from the act, did not make her angry at Misty or Ash.

Just as she hadn’t been bothered by Iris and Ash earlier.

“Yeah, what? Here I’m told that there is some sort of hot-shot Trainer out training here that would be worth my time to kick the ass of, and he’s just some overpaid servant to some city bimbos. What she pay you to sell out your dignity?”

A wafting thought of jealousy and annoyance followed the rude words, as all of their attentions, (bar Psyduck), were drawn to a tank-top wearing Trainer eyeing Ash dismissively, when his eyes were
not wandering to Misty and having thoughts that were even less pleasant.

Iris looked at his the way one looked at trash, and Ash exchanged a look with Misty.

“You want to deal with him, or are you okay with me doing it?”

She would do it if they had to. Same with Iris, who would not need to find a way to mask the lack of speaking.

“He isn’t a giant rock covered in surfer skid marks. You don’t need to ask if you want to kick his ass. You and Pikachu would get more out of it than my Pokémon would anyway.”

“Oh really? That pet is going to beat me up, is that so lotion boy?”

The ‘pet’ promptly did, wearing a vicious grin the whole time.

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An Island

The battle was one-sided.

The Trainer’s commands were well practiced, and the Pikachu had an excellent synchronicity with him. The challenger stood no chance.

He shook his head at the idea that the challenger could have ever been a threat. Still…

“Shall I send an invitation?”

He waved in acknowledgement to his thrall, giving the okay.

The boy clearly had something to him, but it would remain to be seen if he had anything more. A Pikachu could not cross an ocean in a storm, not that he had ever heard.

He idly recalled seeing a few Pokémon flying in the area that were likely not just wild, they may belonged to him. Among them a Charizard.

A Charizard could make it, if it was properly trained. If the boy had trained it like he had trained the Pikachu, he might be among the few to persevere through his storm.

Though it could belong to one of his companions, that was certainly possible.

“As you wish.”

It was a simple button press to send out the signal, and the thrall didn’t need to do much more. His messenger would go out, and another candidate would be made.

He pondered if he’d need to spread his power outwards, ensuring a spark of interest in the Trainers. It was simple enough to do, and it would ensure that he would get what he wanted.

Yet as he had occasionally wondered if he had needed to do so, he always looked into the minds of his targets.

Brief glimpses into the minds of the humans, and he had never seen disinterest. Their curiosities and desire to see the greatest drove them just as well as any nudge he could give them.

He could almost call himself impressed. Both at their bravado, and the fact he had created the perfect
The thrall had not departed, which drew his attention back to her and away from his astonishment at their willingness to follow his will unheeded.

“My Master, the clones have finished growing. They only need to wake up, which they will do so upon your command, and they will already know all that they need to.”

It was a rarity that he found himself smiling, but he couldn’t help doing so at the news.

All of his mental power over mind and matter, and his attempts at creating life just as they had once created him had failed him. Yet it took a simple nurse to patch out his failures on one front.

One of the best decisions he had ever made, and that was before he had even thought of having her be his face until his grand reveal. To think he had once simply experimented with ripping the skills from her feeble human mind.

It would have been the epitome of wastefulness.

“That is excellent. You have performed as I had expected you to.’

She bowed at his compliment.

Why did humans do that? If it was a bigger curiosity of his he’d push her on it, but he had far more pressing things for her to do than explain some inconsequential detail.

‘Tell me, what is the progress on Amber?’

There was a massive list of things he wanted to accomplish, the extent of which would have any human rightfully shiver in their little shoes. Even the so-called ‘great’ Giovanni feared him, and he knew quite well that he would be saved for last.

Her revival was the most important of all his goals.

“Problematic.”

The single word answer from the thrall was not unexpected, but it was unwelcome nonetheless.

He had brought her because cloning was an unstable process. Any hundreds of things could make a clone fail, as he had unfortunately witnessed.

He was the exception, not the rule.

The thrall had the knowledge to correct the problems as they pertained to the Pokémon clones. From what he had gleamed the issue arose in a number of locations along their genetic structure, and she was able to overcome those failings.

Humans were similarly trouble to recreate this way, but their problems were different. They fell apart on different points of the DNA chains.

Different systems failed, different organs failed to develop properly, entirely different problems for ultimately inferior creations in nearly all regards.

Their minds were among the few things they had that was superior, a fact the species had managed to use when led by their better specimens.
They also sweated better, which he had to admit did more for them than he had originally expected.

Even he could learn something new every day.

“I had taken to examining some of the notes you reconstructed from the former laboratory here. It appears that Fuji had been aware of this problem and was on the way to overcoming it. Tell me, have you heard of Bloodliners?”

He acknowledged that he had. Not much he’d admit, but he knew the basic concept.

Humans who had the abilities of Pokémon and the minds (and sweat glands) of humans. Perhaps nature was correcting their flaws and attempting to create something better. The natural world was a scientist after all.

“According to the notes, the doctor theorized that their DNA would react differently than pure human DNA to cloning. What I could salvage suggested that was indeed the case, and he was having success with the process of making the next cloning attempt a Bloodliner instead of a human for survival. However I was not able to gather the specifics.”

He felt a spark of frustration in him at that. He had some vague idea of something being done to Amber to try and keep her alive, but it being this line of thinking as only possible.

‘Why were you unable to?’

“Because the damage to the notes was too severe. The lab’s destruction rendered his notes illegible, and the only one who knew what they said was the late doctor.”

He was still for a moment as the information processed in him.

Amber had died because of the weaknesses of human DNA.

The Doctor had figured out how to use another sort of DNA to bypass the problem.

He was doing well at it, until he died and his notes were destroyed.

The fact was holding back reviving Amber.

The one who had destroyed both the Doctor and the notes was himself.

Therefore the one who was keeping Amber dead was…

'No!'

Every glass screen in the room cracked, as did the tiles on the floor as a sudden wave of power burst from him. The island shook with his fury, and the thrall fell to the ground, withering as every nerve on her body flared at once in singular, intense pain.

He took loud, searing breaths as he restrained himself once more, his thrall’s body ceasing in pained convulsions as he repaired the damages done to the room around him.

He felt angry.

His fury turned to Giovanni, but it left the man soon after. He was not responsible for this.

It turned to the Doctor, and it stayed on him for a while. After all, it was his fault for being dead and not ensuring his notes could survive the fury of the world’s strongest Pokémon.
Yet the more he thought of that logic, the looser his fury stuck to it. It instead began to sticking to him, like some sort of self-hatred.

He experienced that emotion only a few times before, and it was still just as unpleasant as always.

He wanted it to go away, yet it stuck to him like a damp fog. One that would not leave him and as a result leaving him to feel the unwanted emotion without relief from it.

Trying to ignore it, he turned back to the thrall, who had gotten back up and was still trembling in aftershocks of pain. He idly noted his control had not slipped, unlike his own power. He wasn’t happy about the slip-up on his part, and idly wafted his power over her to dull the pain.

‘Tell me, could you figure it out if we had one present?’

She nodded, his psychic powers having calmed the pain tremors.

“Yes. The passive equipment that would already be in place to gather data from the Pokémon gathered here could be used to gather information from one with some minor adjustments, even before taking them for more extensive analysis in the lower levels.”

‘Then do so. You have not failed me yet, and you will not start on this day.’

He returned to his monitors, aware that she bowed to him again and had departed, his monitors having moved beyond the Pikachu Trainer and was moving to the east.

He’d be keeping an eye out for any of that small but growing number. He’d ensure that they come, and they would provide the data that the Doctor, and himself as much as he hated to admit it, had kept from Amber’s rebirth.

He had given himself a timer before this, so it was possible that one would elude him. In such a scenario, he could only hope that luck had caught one in his net.

From all he had knew, such a being would be sure to overcome his storm.

While Ash would always enjoy a good battle, whenever it came to kicking the crap out of a jerk, he’d always end up feeling tense afterwards. Especially when said jerk was unable to stand five minutes against him, and left just as or faster than he came.

Misty offered to give him a massage to relax, once he was done rubbing lotion on her, and he had to admit it felt really good. The massage felt great too. The stress that idiot who interrupted them, while minimal, left him a little crick on the neck, and it was better to get rid of it so they could continue to enjoy their well-deserved beach break. It didn’t hurt that a beautiful young woman was massaging him.

"Is it okay here?" Misty asked, as her hands rose across his shoulder blades.

"Just a bit further up… ahhh yeah, right there," he said.

Ash couldn’t help but wonder if those hands with an almost magical touch were the same that, in fist form, had punched him out several times during his first journey throughout Kanto in the previous
timeline. Though admittedly, most of those times he was asking for it.

'Why did I sometimes make her mad for no reason?' He laughed inside at the thought, at how stupid he was back then. And he probably couldn't blame that on Cyrus.

He turned around for a moment to glance at Iris and Anabel, who decided to lay down and rest too. Neither of them seemed to be uncomfortable when he rubbed the lotion on Misty. At least, no more than he was about it.

More specifically, because unlike the other two, Misty had to untie her bikini top so he could rub the lotion on her. Out of reflex he had tried to cover his eyes, but he accidentally left an opening between his fingers. Luckily Misty didn't seem to notice.

"Done," Misty said as she pulled her hands off his back. "How do you feel now?"

"Wow, that was awesome. I had no idea you were so good at giving massages."

Misty giggled. "Neither did I, to be honest. My sisters would get them all the time, so..."

Seeing Misty slightly grimacing, Ash's first thought was "I could do it for you sometime", but he didn't dare say it out loud. He figured it'd be... too awkward. Or maybe not, since she had already done it for him and seemed to enjoy every bit of it. What did they call it, “quid pro quo”? Something smart sounding like that in a language he didn’t understand.

The redhead glanced at his eyes, and after arching her eyebrows, she gave him one of her occasional flirty smiles. "You're not thinking about..."

Ouch, busted. And there was no point in denying it. She was no telepath like Anabel, but she did seem to have a sixth sense for those things, or at least when it came to him.

He tried to look away to hide his blush, but Misty then laughed. "Hey, easy. Truth to be told... I wouldn't mind. I mean, you've just rubbed lotion on me, yet you didn't touch anywhere you shouldn't have, did you?"

"Do you always have to do that?" He pouted slightly.

"Not really. Just when it's funny."

Ash wanted to get mad, but he just couldn't, and before he realized, he was laughing too. Misty was right, it was kind of funny when she teased him that way, if only to get a reaction out of him. The fact she actually looked cute when she laughed didn't hurt either.

However, their laughter was interrupted by the noise of flapping wings approaching them. One that didn't belong to any of his Flying-types, but one that Ash found strangely familiar for some reason...

A gust of wind preceded the landing, blowing Psyduck over and flipping him on his back, where he promptly began to flail about in a panic.

Normally she would find it funny, but giant wind gusts from something appearing at their front door was more important than chuckling at Psyduck.

It also, sadly, meant she had to stop flirting with Ash. Which was a pity as she was having a lot of fun doing that.
The wind gusts creator was eventually revealed as a massive orange-yellow Pokémon descended, winged and bipedal.

“**Dragonite, the Dragon Pokémon for the two of us who may not know what this Pokémon is. Dragonite are a very intelligent and powerful species that fly all over the world at vast flight speeds. The species is known for displays of altruism towards the drowning and the lost on the high seas. However it is not a Water-type Pokémon.**”

“Broo?”

She’d have asked the translation from Iris, but she quickly realized that she didn’t need it as the Dragonite pulled something from a black bag it had.

The something, she quickly realized, was a letter.

The Dragonite held the letter out towards Ash, who seemed confused as to who might be mailing him like that.

“Something for me?”

Dragonite nodded at Ash’s question, and he took the letter. Misty idly noticed it didn’t have stamps.

She was pretty sure that such a thing was a problem. She wasn’t an expert on mail, but she was fairly certain that stamps were needed to move things along.

Was this some private mail service?

That made some sort of sense, as she couldn’t see people wanting to pay the tax money for a Dragonite mail service. People didn’t like paying for anything, and the mail service worked fine as it is.

Maybe? Again, she did not know but she never heard people complain about that part of the government. Clearly it had to be the pinnacle of perfection.

Ash had opened the letter as she wondered this, revealing some sort of black rectangular device.

It looked like some sort of technology, but nothing she had ever seen before. Was it one of those Holocasters or Xtransceivers?

“I do not recognize the make of that device.”

The Pokédex’s comment was followed up by the center of the device glowing before displaying a hologram of a woman in a long dress that she could never imagine herself wearing.

The woman curtsied in the massive thing before speaking her recorded message.

“Greetings Pokémon Trainers, I bear an invitation. You've been selected to join a select group of Pokémon Trainers at a special gathering. It will be held by my master, the world's greatest Pokémon Trainer at his palace on New Island."

‘The who?’

“Pi?”

“I have no data on whom such a person might be.”
“Psy!” ‘The grass made me itchy.’

Iris and Ash stared at the hologram in a combination of interest and confusion. Ash being the more interested of the two, and Iris the more confused.

Perhaps she had asked Ash once what a Pokémon Master was, and wasn’t sure how one just declared yourself ‘the greatest Pokémon Trainer’.

In her opinion, she’d call that a Pokémon Master, but who the strongest Pokémon Trainer was exactly bewildered her.

The hologram morphed into a map of the area, with a glowing icon set near a town a ways over, and an island off the coast of it linked by a dotted line.

“A charter ferry will move from the old shore wharf terminal and take you to the island this afternoon. Only Trainers who present this invitation will be admitted. If you plan to attend, you must apply at once. My master awaits you.”

With that the hologram curtsied again and vanished, replacing herself with two glowing circles. One that had ‘Yes’ next to it, the other ‘No’.

“New Island is deserted. There should be nothing there, let alone a palace. Did someone build it in a month? I claim deceit.”

The Pokédex’s incredulous tone rang in her ears, and part of her knew that made sense. Yet something inside her felt an immense curiosity.

Who was claiming the title? If he had a Dragonite delivering his mail and a holographic projecting message he probably wasn’t some random scammer.

Even beyond her own curiosity, she felt a surging sense of intrigue and desire to know what this was all about not just in Ash, but in Anabel as well.

She wasn’t psychic, but she could practically feel it.

It was more intense on Ash, and it had a mix of something to it.

As if he could have sworn he had an answer to the mystery of ‘who is the strongest Trainer’, but it was on the tip of his tongue.

Also, even if this turned out to be a farce of some sort, Anabel could just pop them out of there before the time share presentation started.

“Well if it is a lie, it’s a pretty good one. Iris, you in?”

She could tell what Ash and Anabel were thinking, and it looked like Pikachu was in agreement. Psyduck wasn’t paying attention, but then again he hadn’t been so she didn’t count him.

“The beach was getting a bit old anyway.”

It seemed like either Ash had picked up Anabel was just as interested as he was, or she told him telepathically, as Ash promptly hit the yes button.

Dragonite let out an approving call, and shot back up into the sky. The technology stilled, showing
no signs of function.

“Well, it looks like a date.”

Ash’s sputtering was promptly heard, and she felt rather happy for herself.

“Agreed.”

The fact that Iris quickly agreed on her joke, and sent Ash into further sputtering, did not bother her at all.

…

About an hour before they had arrived at the ferry terminal, there had been a bit of a debate going on about if they should do anything specific for this invitation.

It hadn’t been anything serious, and it honestly had come up because of a voice in his head that honestly sounded like his mom, but he had thought that maybe they should dress up a bit.

They had eventually decided that no, it was probably not necessary. It had not requested any sort of attire type, and trying to understand the ‘how to dress for success’ Oak lecture the Pokédex had on the subject served only to get him very lost.

Iris got so lost he was pretty sure he saw her eyes spinning.

Misty and Anabel had not been as confused, but they hadn’t felt the urge to change what they were wearing and so the line of thinking was abandoned.

If something was absolutely needed, they did have spare clothes that were a bit more ‘professional’ than what they typically wore. If they were in an environment that required Misty to not bare her stomach, that would be an easy enough fix.

Of course, there was a simple reason why they might have to change their clothing that had nothing to do with societal expectations.

“I think I see it just over…..gah!”

Out of nowhere the sky darkened and a deluge of rain began pouring down on them, cutting off the conversation entirely.

They quickly began running in the direction he had noted, aggravated noises coming from all of them as the rain began soaking them down to their very bones.

“This rain was not in the forecast! I do not even mean a percentage possibility, there was nothing indicating that such a rainstorm was possible!”

The Pokédex’s shout from his pocket, which probably wasn’t dry at this point, hung a bit in his mind as the four of them abruptly stopped as a car sped in front of them, wipers going at it in a frenzy. If the rain had been going on for longer, it probably would have splashed them to add insult to injury.

Yet even that would probably have not made him stop thinking about the point the Pokédex rose about the storm, and how this all seemed a bit familiar.

He had a similar feeling when the Dragonite flew in.

He had no idea why, and trying to think about what it was about was better than thinking about the
fact his body was being drenched, running or standing it didn’t matter.

“The machine is right. I did not get any sense that it was going to rain today.”

The two agreeing aside, a sudden rainstorm and a Dragonite letter. Had they been part of an adventure of his that he had forgotten?

He had many of them, and while he could remember a lot of them, there were always details missing. Like he couldn’t remember the name of the people who bothered that Lunatone that one time, or why they were familiar.

His memory was better than he’d have thought it would be, but there were still holes. The holes were mostly names or half remembered faces but never something that would be this memorable… at least not the he could remember.

What was in this particular hole?

As he got sight of the wharf terminal’s dorm, so close he could already feel the dry air within, the thought was put aside for a more immediate question.

Would Charizard mind being used to dry them out?

…

Taking Charizard out was quickly shelved as an option when he saw the packed nature of the terminal.

It was packed, filled with dozens of wet, impatient, and irritable Trainers and more than a few Pokémon. There was no space on benches, trying to get near an electrical outlet looked like a fight to the death, and the bathrooms had lines getting into them.

It was also rather loud, with people murmuring, muttering, yelling, and otherwise making the stressful situation even more stressful.

They basically would have no place to stand except a few strides away from the door unless they wanted to vault over people, which would definitely not improve things here.

“Can we go back in the rain? It was quieter, even if it came out of nowhere.”

A burst of loud swearing that itself set off even more swearing made Ash consider Iris’s suggestion.

It was barely more comfortable in this crowded terminal than in the rain, and if he listened to too much of this swearing his ears might start bleeding.

He was hearing swear combinations he had never heard before, nor could really understand the logic behind.

“The ferry is going to be hell. It might be better to follow on Gyarados.”

Misty was completely serious as far as Ash could tell.

“You can hear the waves, right? Gyarados does not have seat belts.”

A distant scream from the bathroom about a busted faucet brought up another fresh wave of swears.

“I agree. We can all swim if we fall in and need retrieving.”
Iris had jumped ship from team ‘stand out in the rain’ to team ‘take the Gyarados express, please sign the waiver’.

Or did they both forget that ‘swimming’ was not the same thing as ‘swimming in an ocean whose waves were actively trying to kill you’?

“You guys got angry on me for surfing a giant killer wave, and now you are suggesting we go into arguably worse waves on a Pokémon that does not have built in seats?”

Gyarados was no Lapras, and he’d not want to put Lapras in weather like this if he could help it for the sake of everyone.

“That’s different, Ash, there is a point to doing this unlike you trying to face plant into a giant rock. Also a Gyarados is much safer than a surfboard.”

He suspected Misty was the first sentient being to ever say that sentence, though before he could point that out to her a different plan was offered.

Though they probably could keep it from getting that far. He and Anabel would say no, and there was nothing that Misty or Iris could do that would make them think that was a good idea.

“Pikachu-Pi.” ‘Gyarados it is.’

He could only stare at his shoulder buddy in horror.

He was supposed to be the smarter one between them, or at least the one with more common sense.

‘You know, I can just teleport us over there.’

Anabel had her own option that wasn’t a death wish, and it could hopefully save him from the horror of unexpected tie breaker betrayals.

“That would work, and I guess we could lie and say we did take Gyarados. But if we don’t look wet enough…”

“What do you mean the ferry is cancelled?”

“Oh fuck!”

“Well, this is why I have a Gyarados. I’ll take the storm myself.”

Someone who almost sounded familiar shared Misty’s madness flickered above many angry shouts at the wet and miserable Officer Jenny who had been sent to try and control the situation, backing up a similarly blue-haired harbor master who looked to be at the end of her rope from everything going on.

It did not look like it would be controllable, volume or otherwise.

“Teleport it is.”

Iris summed up the changed situation quite finitely, and they quietly slunk out the door for some privacy for teleporting.

…

A teleport through the torrential rain and waves found them at the end of another dock, just around
where the island was said to be in the midst of a storm.

However the island itself seemed to be out of the storm, with a clear moon shining from low in the sky. It illuminated the structure of the island.

What it illuminated was a massive complex, strewn in colors of blue and black. Green light shone from several windows of the building. Several towers with wind blades stood out, spinning in faint breezes. The island they sat on was small, yet it was oddly raised from the sea floor in a way that felt unnatural for an island.

The base of the island felt more like a mushroom rising from the ocean than an island, which Ash always sort of thought were more akin to hills rising from the water.

The dock they were at stuck out from the island’s stalk, for lack of a better term. It felt odd to Ash in two ways.

One was the fact that he saw the faintest of ripples emerging from the edge of the water, as if the structure had emerged just before they did. The other was the old nagging itch in the back of his mind, as if he had seen that place before but had forgotten it.

But why would he have forgotten such a place?

“Error.”

The Pokédex seemed just as stunned by what was here as he was feeling. In fact, that might be the first time he really heard the Pokédex sound ‘breathless’.

Exasperated yes, but breathless was a new one.

“Pikapi.” ‘Ash, are you seeing what I’m seeing?’

“Are islands supposed to look like mushrooms?”

When Pikachu didn’t respond he glanced over at his buddy, and noticed that he was staring, transfixed, at the storm and not the island.

It also looked like the same could be said for Misty, Iris, and Anabel, and he turned to look at what had caught their attention.

The storm, and the fact it was rotating in a way that looked less like a normal storm and more like someone was stirring it in a certain direction.

“That is not normal.”

No one disagreed with what Iris had to say at the sight of the storm, which continued to behave more like something inside his mother’s cooking pot than weather.

‘Misty, do you ever feel anything from the rain?’

Anabel’s concerned question was followed by Misty giving a confused shake of her head in the negative.

‘I was hoping you did, and that this was just some sort of Rain Dance-like move. I had hoped that you would all tell me it is normal to sense psychic power making this.’

Ash, and he suspected the others, stared at the odd storm with renewed unease.
This was being done with psychic powers?

“Should we leave?”

Iris’s question hung in the air like humidity.

‘Could you sleep without wondering what is doing this and if it might run into you again?’

At Anabel’s answer the decision was made.

No, at least he could not. The question of what was going on here alone would haunt him to no end, and he only just seemed to have gotten out of being haunted by MissingNo and it would be best to not get a new terror.

Plus with how things happened with him if he didn’t run into it now, he’d run into it later. Better to figure out what was going on now as opposed to a less convenient time.

“Holy crap!”

Misty’s loud swearing swung the focus back to New Island itself, and not the ring of storm surrounding it.

‘Am I the only one who thinks that looks like a supervillain lair?’

For some reason as Anabel made the observation, words about destroying all life on earth rang in Ash’s head.

Who was saying these words in his memories was still out of reach though.

Yet regardless of who might be dwelling in it, or their goals within, they walked down the path towards the island.

They’d handle whatever was within. He might not remember what this was all about, but he had dealt with the end of the world, the decay of space, the wounding of time, and the righting of wrongs. The fact it was familiar to him meant that at one point, he got through it.

No one died the first time, he was alive, so were Misty and Brock and all their Pokémon before and after this (plus presumably Team Rocket) and that would not change this go around. Whatever was waiting for him, if it wanted to hurt his friends then it was in for one hell of a fight.

…

The long dock led under the island’s main body, towards the point where it rose out of the sea. The way was lit by dozens of little green lamps that shone an eerie green.

Water slowly dripped from the rocky ceiling, except in the places where larger streams continued to fall down from the ceiling and into the shaded sea water.

Iris sniffed the air, her nose flaring as if the smell wasn’t pleasant. Which it was, Ash to admitted so, but he couldn’t put his finger on why it smelled bad.

“It smells like something from the bottom of a lake.”

Iris’s description felt like what was on the tip of his tongue. That was a sort of ‘foul and wet’ smell different from the one of a Magikarp.
“This place looks like it was pulled up from under it. It’s the rocks and how they look. I’m sure there is a more descriptive way of saying it…”

“There is, and you are indeed correct. The wear on these rock formations is from being underwater, not wind and water falling.”

With both Misty and the Pokédex’s points in mind Ash eyed the rocky underbelly of the island again.

Had the island really been underwater before someone had raised it up from the seafloor?

Who could do such a thing? This didn’t seem like something Kyogre or Groudon could or would want to do.

They eventually reached the end of the dock, which led to a long, spiral staircase carved into the stone rocks.

Between them and the stone stood the woman from the invitation, waiting for them.

“My master bids you welcome to New Island. Would you kindly present your invitation?”

The woman’s statement was said in a monotone only the Pokédex could emulate. The statement was made without blinking, her hazy blue eyes staring right into them.

He felt Pikachu shiver on his shoulder.

“Why does this place smell so bad?”

Iris’s question was ignored by the woman, who continued to stare at them. In fact, if Ash had to guess, it didn’t seem like she heard Iris at all.

“My master bids you welcome to New Island. Would you kindly present your invitation?”

The question was repeated word for word, syllable by syllable. Nothing changed about her inflection.

Part of Ash almost wanted to see if she’d repeat it a third time, but now was not the time or place for it.

So he held out the invitation, whose core flared up for the first time since delivery and sprang up the hologram of the woman before them.

“Bearers of this invitation may be admitted to New Island.”

The hologram was just about as emotive as the flesh and blood version though, who turned and began walking towards the stairs.

“Come, my master awaits you and all other arrivals.”

As the woman walked, her steps without variation much like a machine, they all stared at each other.

“Horror of the known or horror of the unknown, what will it be?”

“Is that woman real, or is she a robot?”

‘She has thoughts, but they are odd. I have no idea what I’d find if I went in deeper.’
“There is only one way to know for sure. Watch your step though.”

Ash said the last bit about the stone staircase reflexively as they proceeded after the odd woman.

“There would suggest there is moisture on the stairs, which I am not detecting. I’d say I would require more scans to determine if that was natural or not, but none of this is natural. I am more natural than this place.”

…

‘Someone is watching us.’

Anabel’s nervous statement rang through their walk up the rocky stairs, led upwards and onwards by their silent guide.

Who could that someone be, and was everything here their doing?

Part of his mind immediately went to Sabrina, who he couldn’t see doing all of this, especially the storm if it was being made psychically. She was strong but certainly not enough to change the weather but some of it could be her doing.

Could she control minds, and thus be responsible for their guide’s state?

The Pokédex hinted she had been arrested, had she escaped with like-minded crazy people and hatched a new plan?

Someone would have reported the breakout of a mad scientist, right?

They eventually approached a door that had a distinct style to it that Ash was sure he could place if he was more familiar with science fiction.

The woman stopped in front of the door as it slid open on itself, revealing a shiver of regular, not eerily green light. A light breeze suggested that this was at least in part because it wasn’t within the island’s stone like the staircase was.

Wordlessly the woman entered the room, and they followed her into a massive room, the end of which he couldn’t see from where he entered.

However he could make out pools of clear water, and a distant structure that looked like a table laden with what might be food.

Presence of poison or something in said food still to be determined.

“You are the first to arrive. My master will make himself present upon all worthy of meeting him arriving. You will in the meantime stay here, and await his arrival.”

“Can we get a name for him at least?”

The woman did not react to Misty’s question as she turned to them all, staring into them with the same vacant expression she had when they arrived.

Still no sign of blinking either.

“My master wants to see all of the Pokémon in your possession. Limiter jamming technology is present, along with computer terminals. You will bring all of your Pokémon here for your audience with my master, and he will not appear until all Pokémon you have are present. My master will
introduce himself at the appropriate time. Do not make him wait.”

“So what, this is a Team Rocket trap then? Take out all of our Pokémon, and let them all get stolen?”

Misty’s snark, unlike all her previous questions, did get a response. Not from the woman, but from the island itself. The entire atmosphere got heavy, as it where was a lightning storm building from the moment Misty spoke.

Lightning felt like it might strike from any moment, a lightning made of anger it felt like.

“Team Rocket is not my master. They were never my master. Never.”

The words that came out the woman’s mouth sounded almost like someone else was speaking them. For a second speaker seemed to talk alongside her.

A much angrier speaker than the emotionless woman.

“You will bring all of your Pokémon here for your audience with my master, and he will not appear until all Pokémon you have are present. Do not make him wait.”

The woman’s regular tone returned as the odd feeling in the island cooled a bit, yet it hung around like at any moment, it might return if they pushed a button again.

The only button that would not incite anger would be the transfer button.

…

“Pikapika?” ‘So, none of you remember anything about this place either?’

Squirtle shook his head, and Pikachu found himself at another dead end.

The room was still in the process of being filled with every Pokémon registered in balls by anyone, and it was a bit chaotic as a result.

While everyone had been very understanding of the reason why, (the guide staring at them helped), that didn’t stop the Tauros from stomping around a bit, two of the Vivillon putting Jigglypuff to sleep before she started signing, and Togepi was flying with a Zubat once more.

Trying to get some idea of what was up with this place, and trying not to dwell on Togepi doing dangerous things too much, he had ushered Squirtle, Bulbasaur, Charizard, and Pidgeot into a corner to try and rack them if they remembered anything.

It was not proving fruitful.

Charizard gave a low growl as he looked over the place, though differently from Bulbasaur’s twitchy look that signaled him really wanting to go out and keep some matter of peace.

The Grimer were, after all, currently trying to hug the host. The only good thing that did was show she wasn’t a mindlessly programmed robot, as she was avoiding them with a clear interest in avoiding contact with them.

‘Best I can offer is a few bruises I did not recognize. I just assumed I had slept oddly at the time while ignoring Ash, but they didn’t seem like I just slept on Psyduck or some lumpy log.’

That was three strikes, no hit. Charizard had something more concrete than his fellows, but that was in the fact he had a vague hint at all.
Even then, the random bruises could have just been from a log.

That left Pidgeot, who had been quiet for a while.

“Caw.” ‘I…remember nothing.’

So there were no leads at all. Pikachu motioned to let Bulbasaur leave before Primeape started juggling chairs or something (presumably after he got done shaking his fist at Misty’s Slowbro).

“Bul.” ‘You don’t mean you don’t remember anything.’

Bulbasaur, however, had caught something in Pidgeot’s words he didn’t, and so all their attention was on the great bird.

She shook her head.

‘Correct. It’s not that I feel this is familiar, or not. What I do remember is a point in time that, even in my Pokéball, I couldn’t feel anything. It was a period in which I was nothing, and I don’t mean being massless energy like we normally are. I mean I feel like I remember a period where I stopped existing.’

The last line made him feel like Misty’s Seel was breathing on him. It was a cold feeling.

The only way that made sense was that something had happened to her Pokéball during that time, and that likely meant that something had happened to Ash while he had the ball on him.

His mind immediately went to the horrifying antibodies of the Tree of Beginning. To the memory of Ash being swallowed and destroyed by giant glowing blob shaped like revived fossils.

“Pikapi.” ‘If this island is alive and thinks Ash is a germ, or it tries to digest him or anything…kill this place. Immediately. Spread the word.’

Charizard nodded immediately, with Squirtle, Bulbasaur, and Pidgeot nodding a few moment later. They seemed a bit less ready to go to that level.

If the island tried something though, they would be ready.

The sound of flapping wing outside drew the attention of their host, and as she left their little group dispersed.

To keep order, and to make sure everyone was on alert if they weren’t already.

…

“Well, that woman was creepy. I feel bad for people who come in the way you did. Even more time with her, geez I can’t be the only one who thought I flew right into a horror movie, right?”

A second person had arrived, flying on the back of a Pidgeot on the way, was sitting alongside them at a table, and raising a point that was shared by all of them.

That their enthusiasm and curiosity towards this place had put them in a dangerous situation, and fear was keeping them in it.

His name was Corey. Iris recalled the Pokédex had mentioned him a bit ago, along with a middle and last name she did not care to remember.
He had all of his Pokémon out, just as they did. The Pidgeot he had flown in on (who was currently grooming Ash’s, and she seemed to enjoy the actions of the large Pidgeot), Hitmonlee, Scyther, Rhyhorn, Gengar, Sandslash, and Venusaur she remembered the Pokédex having mentioned before.

There were also Pokémon the Pokédex had not mentioned with him, including an Absol, a Pelipper, and a Sandshrew that was the color of ice.

The Absol, she noted, was very much not relaxed here.

“Who says we aren’t in one?”

At Ash’s grim point Corey chuckled and raised a glass.

“Well then, good thing your Pokédex says there isn’t anything in this drink that we have to worry about. No point going through all of this thirsty on top of possibly being scared out of our damn minds.”

He took a long sip of the drink before setting it down. In a flicker much like Anabel when teleporting, a second glass appeared next to it, and the first one vanished.

“I had heard about all of the tough rookies like you. I was already going to take a trip to Hoenn, but it turned into a pretty good training vacation on top of everything else. Seeing you here though, well that really does put the words into reality. I mean even if you did take the easy way and teleported here, your Pokémon look top notch. If even a quarter of them are yours, you might just give me a run for my money.”

Corey chuckled at that, though she certainly was not laughing. She was immediately reminded of the actions of a certain Mandi. She watched for his gaze to turn to Ash’s Pokémon in great focus, in an attempt to gain an upper hand over Ash.

“Saw your battle with that Alolan girl in Fuchsia. She’s actually pretty nice, traded a Sandshrew egg from my Sandslash for an Alolan Sandshrew egg she had. It’s an Ice and Steel type Pokémon, and I think it’s pretty cool. Er, forgive the pun.”

“It looks cool.”

Ash did not seem to see Corey the way she did. The idea that he was learning about him, planning how to fight him, did not occur to him.

He seemed to be enjoying talking with him. Was it just a way to avoid thinking about the potential dangers here, or did seeing Corey’s own Pokémon make it different from Mandi?

Ash would not have seen Mandi’s Pokémon, but he was seeing Corey’s.

“So I see you have a Pidgeot too. She looks pretty strong, but I can see a few ways to help her get even stronger with just a bit of different training.”

The two were quickly engrossed in a talk about Pidgeot training, and Iris let her attention pull away from the two for a moment.

It was instead drawn to the sound of approaching footsteps.

…

“So, is the trap going to be sprung now, or when we get to the top?”
Red had never really thought about how people would see his tendency towards quietness, but if it was like being around this woman he’d make a note to apologize for it.

He’d like to think that it wasn’t this unsettling.

He could tell without looking at Pikachu that he was tense, and Yellow’s phrasing of the ‘trap’ question was different than how she’d bring it up previously.

There was very little mirth in it, or any sort of sense that she was making some level of light out of it. She was nervous. Truly nervous.

True, the first time the ‘trap’ was hardly a trap. It was no Five Island. Yes he knew there was a cost, and that would be something he’d have to pay at some point.

Yet whenever he thought of that cost, it was nothing like what he felt about this place. It honestly felt like everything there was the old Clefairy, staring at him with the intent to lunge.

Unlike Clefairy though, he could not (probably) talk it into behaving. He couldn’t even figure out if the woman in front of him was real.

He couldn’t get a read off of her, not even plain confusion like he could with Ash. She was just, blank.

He couldn’t tell what was driving her. He was half listening for gears and engines coming off her.

A natural light was visible ahead of them, coming down from the full moon above and the swirling storm around them.

The storm was their biggest problem they could currently comprehend, and it was in itself the immediate problem.

He had two Pokémon that could brave it, Lapras and Gyarados. However Lapras was still exhausted from surmounting the storm the first time, and it was only because of Yellow’s abilities that Lapras had the strength to push through it at all.

He hoped Yellow didn’t have the same thoughts he had about what would have happened if it wasn’t for her. It was best only he was thinking of their potential demise.

Gyarados was Gyarados, and his steps to bonding with his Pokémon more did not list him as a success story. It would be madness to try and get Gyarados through the storm, especially with the need to have Pikachu actively cowing the massive Pokémon into not throwing them into the water.

They’d have to be on this island until Lapras had time to recover, and that would take hours. Hours where they would be in the unknown.

Better than being in the Unown in his personal experience, but that wasn’t saying much.

They reached a point where the roof left them behind, leaving them in an open area with a brilliant view of the unnatural storm that spun around them.

The woman led them to a massive door before stopping in front of it.

“Pika.”

He nodded absently to Pikachu’s statement about the door.
“You will wait in this room until my Master has determined that all who are worthy of him have arrived. While inside you are expected to present all of your Pokémon for him. Pokéball limiters are jammed here, so you will have no problem in displaying them. Food is provided.”

The door began to slowly open on its own, revealing a massive room flanked by water pools and centered in a massive table where several people were sitting.

He recognized all but one of them.

Ash Ketchum chief among the ones he recognized.

He stared towards his half-brother, who stared right back at him.

He nodded towards the Pallet Trainer, and went towards the transfer terminal to begin the long process.

…

“Did Red just give you what is called the ‘guy nod’?”

The Pokédex’s statement did not do anything to clarify what had just happened.

“Yeah, I saw it.”

He stared as Red, as opposed to what he knew of him before, moved to a transfer machine to begin following the sketchy commands of their host.

Not only was that in of itself odd (Red carried the sealed Pokéballs on him, he shouldn’t have a place they were transferred to), but there was also the fact he nodded at him like that.

The way they left things the last time, it was certainly the last thing he’d expect Red to do his way. Heck, he himself could not imagine him doing that Red’s way.

Did he have some sort of introspection since the last time they had seen each other?

“Well, that was nicer than I’d have thought. I expected him to glare at you. Makes sense he’d find a way here, though both he and Yellow look drenched. Did he really take her through that storm?”

Misty’s observation had a barb of snark to it topped with additional disapproval.

He also noticed Fraxure watching Red nervously, but Misty’s comment drew his attention a bit more.

“That’s the first thing you thought of?”

Misty nodded, still looking at Red with disapproval as he let out a Sneasel and Slowbro of his own.

“Even without asking what is making the storm, that storm is the sort of thing that could kill people who know what they’re doing in it, and I doubt any of us are expert mariners. Who takes a little kid into such a thing?”

“Well, maybe it was safer than leaving her on the wharf. Some of those people looked rough.”

Ash, guy nod his way or not, wasn’t entirely sure about defending Red’s choices, but he felt a need to at least bring up that point.

It helped him not dwell on the question if he himself had taken Max into anything dangerous like
that. He’d rather not needlessly hypocrite himself.

He would however, point out someone else getting near that point.

“You and Iris, and Pikachu too actually, were all for going through the storm. We aren’t exactly adults either.”

She shot him an annoyed look, not appreciating his point.

“You might act like a little kid sometimes Ash, but you aren’t a little kid. She is. In any case, he should have stayed behind. That would be the responsible thing to do. She could have drowned.”

Misty returned to eying Red with disapproval, and Ash had no idea exactly how to approach this point again.

Or why he felt the need to take notes all of a sudden for future reference, though if it was about pointing out possible hypocrisies on Misty’s part or the bit about putting children in danger was anyone’s guess, and Misty was probably not going to clarify it for him at the moment.

…

From what he could pick up (along with, honestly, what Yellow pantomimed his way), Ash had a lot of things he wanted to say as he came up to talk to him.

Perhaps he was curious why he didn’t feel the need to glare at him as he had back in Fuchsia. Perhaps it had something to do with whatever reason the redhead (Misty he thought her name was, it had been a while) was looking at him like had done something horrible.

Though he seemed to be just dumbfounded by what Pokémon he had just taken out from Seven Island.

“Ro?”

Not that he could blame him.

“Yes, it is an Aerodactyl.”

He answered the question that seemed to have taken center stage as the prehistoric Pokémon sniffed at Ash curiously, before letting a confused murmur.

Perhaps Ash smelled like he did. It would make a certain amount of sense.

“Yeah, I can see that. Where did you get one?”

A truck actually, a truck whose contents he took after being stolen. Better with him than with Team Rocket, and they seemed happy enough with him, and the PokéGear Advanced SP had served him well.

Though he had to admit, he had recently begun to think of how he handled the entire thing with a bit of embarrassment, and that was not even going into wondering about that Team Rocket member Clefairy got hold of he never did look into.

It would at least be something he didn’t directly mention to Ash. He wasn’t in the mood for a fight, and Ash didn’t seem to want to start one. No reason to get into a debate if he was a thief or not.

He had a feeling both of them were well aware that a fight was high on a list of thing to not do on a
questionable island.

“It’s a long story, though surprisingly not one of the more interesting ones we got up to since Fuchsia. We only just got back from a trip to get Red’s eighth badge when we got the invite to this trap. You get your eight badges yet?”

Though before he had to try and find a way to side step that incident, Yellow came to his rescue with a friendly conversational tone.

“Yeah I did, and not that long ago actually. I went to the Viridian Gym….”

…. He’d have hopped along with Ash to hear Yellow’s tale of what Red and her had been up to, but Pikachu’s attention had been drawn elsewhere quite sharply.

It was not at something from the island however, but a more familiar threat.

It was the Clefairy that Red had gotten from somewhere evil (surely the Spirit World spawned it), and it was approaching a distracted Fraxure from behind.

Fraxure knew the Clefairy was back sure, but Pikachu didn’t think he’d notice it coming while he was distracted by a talk with Corey’s Scyther that he and Gible were engaged in.

(He didn’t catch what it was about bar a few words about ‘X-Scissor’ and ‘surprise her’, perhaps something for Iris? Right now it really didn’t matter.)

“Brooo!” ‘And I’m telling you, you cheated in the last race.’

“Brooo!” ‘And I am telling you, again, that it is not cheating if a Dugtrio does it. You are thinking about ice.’

“Brooo!” ‘Both count!’

He’d yell to get Fraxure’s attention, but some of the Tauros were having a very loud argument over something he also didn’t care about and he’d have to get to Fraxure the old fashioned way.

Running.

He was just short of using Quick Attack as he ran towards Fraxure.

He jumped over a hug-happy Grimer, who slammed into a Hypno Red had let out instead.

He controlled his urge to tell Primeape to watch his language as he shook his fist at a bashful looking Psyduck, mostly because he saw Bulbasaur darting over to do it for him.

He darted around Misty’s Poliwrath, who was glaring at Red’s Poliwrath as both tried to out-flex each other.

He rolled under two leaks as Farfetch’d performed some sort of training exercise, as if expecting to attack something soon.

Probably with good reason, and if he was into that sort of psyching of oneself he might be doing the same.

He stared in horror as Clefairy got right behind Fraxure, and he pushed himself to move faster.
Evolved or not, timeline change or not, memories or not, Fraxure was still someone he cared about. He was not going to let some crazed pink monstrosity hurt him or give him terror.

“Pika!” ‘Move or I’ll blast you!’

The Gengar of Corey’s that was floating in his way blinked in confusion at his urgency, but vanished into a shadow on the ground, removing the last thing between him and Clefairy.

He hardened his tail, ready to immediately strike the thing, only to find that something had happened when Gengar had been blocking him.

Clefairy was walking away from Fraxure, at the same pace it had come, with a stunned Fraxure staring after it.

He slowed to a stop in front of the stunned dragon, who continued to look at Clefairy in shock.

“Frax.” ‘Clefairy apologized. It sounded more like an apology for stepping on your berry than threatening bodily harm really, but that did happen. Sorry about wanting to rip your teeth out, I won’t do it again, and that was all.’

Pikachu felt like he’d have had to actually hear Clefairy do it to really believe it, but the fact Clefairy was still walking away like nothing had happened was undeniable.

“Xure?” ‘You have any idea what happened to make it actually apologize?’

He shook his head.

“Pikapi.” ‘No clue, but I think Ash might be finding out now. Makes me wish I was listening in to it.’

No part of the story, regardless of content, would have kept him from darting to Fraxure’s aid, or Togepi’s, or many others if he had spotted Clefairy going towards them (Charizard could handle himself well enough it wasn’t needed, for one), yet without it he’d be left with a question until he could get the story from someone.

What had happened with Pikachu?

“Pik.” ‘So, I take it you want to know what that was about?’

His counterpart on Red’s shoulder seemed fit to explain it. With a nod from both him and Fraxure (Gible was now talking with Scyther about something else), the second telling of the story began.

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Above

He had to admit, he was torn.

As his power stirred the storm, he could sense everything that was pushing through his.

The rain was like countless fingers, and he could sense the feedback from their impact against his guests like radar.

He could feel those where still pushing through the storm, and those who had failed.

Most of those that had were close to the wharf, so it was no damage to them but to their pride.

There was a foreign Trainer who had been battered into unconsciousness by the waves, though he
had been recovered by his Wailord before he ceased.

Said Wailord was taking him away from his storm and towards Cinnabar, and he would let him go. While he would have enjoyed cloning his Pokémon, he wanted to see the best of them.

Either those strong enough to brave his storm, or clever enough to bypass it.

The first group had used some sort of teleporting to get through it; perhaps the quiet girl’s Alakazam. He hadn’t quite caught it as he had been distracted at the time. It wasn’t quite what he wanted, but he would allow it.

He never specified in his invitation that ‘should a freak storm stop ferry service you will only be allowed if you brave the storm head on to get to New Island’. That would have been suspicious.

Humans were easily spooked after all. It was a flaw that probably originated when from they were prey.

However there was the question of when the bypass of his storm wasn’t Pokémon based, and something he could only track with his mental senses and not the impact of his storm.

Or now his eyes, seeing as the submarine had surfaced in his storm eye and was currently slowly approaching the dock.

He stared at the machine, unamused at the trick.

He was of half a mind to throw the thing away. He idly wondered if he could hit the moon with it, he had never tried to strike a celestial object before.

Before he attempted something too rash though he idly noted who was within the craft, and with that confirmation came tolerance.

Two invitation recipients and a guest, so he stayed his hand. They were supposed to be here. They weren’t unwelcome intruders. They just came in a method he did not approve of or expect.

So he’d find out if he could throw his problems into the moon’s crust some other time.

The submarine was closer now, so he could make out writing on the hull of the vessel’s side.

**SILPH CO SUBMERSIBLE No.3**

“You know, this was actually one of my better submarine trips. Storm or no storm, there were no leaks, attacks from underwater life forms, or uncharged oxygen tanks.”

Casey Snagem’s cheery tone lasted only until the submarine’s top popped open, allowing him to see the woman from their invitation in the full flesh.

At that point he felt his unease spike up to a level it hadn’t been since the storm first started up.

“Ma’am, this isn’t a cult island, is it? I hate those.”

The woman continued to stare right at him, unchanging in her expression.

“This is not a cult island. My master bids you welcome to New Island. Would you kindly present
Neither of them were any more assured by the response the host gave them.

“I’d say this is a mad scientist’s island if I didn’t know better. Cult islands aren’t as built up, and she is clearly some sort of robot. I’d have said hologram, but I was just talking to one earlier and she’s not flickering.”

The woman continued to stare at him, though he caught sign of breathing at least. So she wasn’t a cult member, or a robot, and was definitely not a holographic projection either.

Every instinct that told him to not go through the storm if not for the unexpected submarine offer was telling him to get back in the submarine and go home.

Yet even as his common sense did that, his Trainer instinct told him that would not be possible. They were in a trap now.

“Will we be seeing your master? I did not come out of here in a submarine just to eat fancy party food and exchange references.”

The owner of said submarine popped out, looking down at the odd woman with a different, but similarly ponderous look.

It wasn’t as experienced as his, for he was his junior. However it was a smarter mind than his own, and raw brains were as useful as raw experience despite what some might say.

The woman looked up to the one who had given them a ride out here in the storm, and thus let them actually consider still coming out here, and had something familiar to say.

“My master bids you welcome to New Island and will come to greet you when all worthy guests have arrived. Would you kindly present your invitation?”

Alexander Silph nodded in agreement, even as he noticed Gary coming up behind him.

…

Once upon a time, the idea of him actually going to a person who reminded him of an older Ash to train under would have been beyond him.

Also once upon a time, the idea of being in a submarine with an older Ash, a business heir, and his hologram would have been the strangest part of his day.

Then they landed on an island that made that seem all the more ordinary, and he could almost hear the thoughts going between said older Ash-mentor (Casey Snagem, novelist).

‘Both me and my wife wanted to go, but one of us needed to stay home with our kids, and I am starting to regret winning that coin flip.’

Alexander Silph was between him and Snagem as they walked through the dark stairway at the behest of their mysterious guide, and he couldn’t tell what he was feeling. Trying to read his body language was impossible.

Ash, the tolerable goof that he was, was easy. He was quite animated and one could tell what he was feeling clearly even if he wasn’t talking, or if you had earplugs.

Or that wonderful weekend his voice was shot.
It was as clear as perfect penmanship.

If Silph’s body language was penmanship, it was horrific penmanship. Trying to read him was making him feel empathy towards literature teachers the world over.

He’d have better luck trying to read Cepu the hologram, and she was nowhere to be seen.

“Man, and I thought the storm was scary. This place is even worse.”

Walking behind him was someone who had arrived moments after they did, and Gary had to admit the guy had his respect.

Going through the storm on a Gyarados of all things.

“Still, I can’t seem to look away from the prize, and this place looks the part for having it. Honestly I’d rather have this than nothing at the end of all I just got through. Didn’t get your name, by the way.”

“Gary Oak.”

The guy behind him nodded.

“Oh yeah, you were in that tag tournament. You didn’t do half bad either, especially for a rookie.”

He’d have once gotten ‘Oak, like Professor Oak’, and he had to admit he did like the change. Being known for himself and not his grandfather was nice.

Though he’d like to have it for more than just ‘you didn’t do half bad at that tag tournament you lost and got stuck with a jerk on’.

“It’s better than what I did in my rookie year. Fergus Blueman.”

He thought he recognized the name, but he didn’t press further as they continued to walk up the dark stairway, the only sound being footsteps and water droplets falling.

He did, however, something he felt like asking.

“You rode in on a Gyarados?”

“Yep.”

Fergus declared this fact with more pep than the average teenage girl.

“How’d you do it? I mean I have a Gyarados, but she’s not really cooperative. I’ve tried a few times, but it has never gone well.”

Fergus chuckled; a deep chuckle that he suspected would have a future of being deep and charming when Fergus was older.

“Oh, that’s real easy. I trained mine since he was a Magikarp. I met him the first time I ever saw a river, and let me tell you something the magic of seeing that much water for the first time is nothing against how much that meeting has helped me. I started with my Nidoran, but it is Gyarados who has become my best Pokémon. You raise a Magikarp up, and he’ll follow you through not just a storm, but a storm of fire. You catch a Gyarados, and you are swimming upstream the whole way. You can get through it, I know of people like that, but it’s a struggle.”
Oddly that fact made Gary feel better. Gyarados issues were not the highest of his concerns, but it was something that added to the feelings he had been having since he left home.

Something falling behind Ash, and losing to Paul and Red constantly, had made him feel. A feeling of inadequacy.

But if the problem wasn’t just him, that made him feel a bit better. Not as much better as the work he’d been putting in with the Snagem family, but it was a relief none the less.

One less feeling of self-disappointment.

The stairs had come to an end, and they now found themselves before a great and massive door.

“You will wait in this room until my Master has determined that all who are worthy of him have arrived. While inside you are expected to present all of your Pokémon for him. Pokéball limiters are jammed here, so you will have no problem in displaying them. Food is provided.”

With her words, the door began to creak open, spilling out light from the growing crack.

…

“Well, this place became worth it even if I have to fight off a cult.”

The statement drew his attention forward to the door, where four people had entered the room.

He did not recognize the first, who had spoken. He was tall and pale, with black hair.

The second he sort of recognized from somewhere, an older man than anyone present, with a black beard and hair. Did he see him on TV or something?

The third was also familiar, but more recognizably so. He thought he saw him in the League last year, he was pretty sure of it.

He had a Gyarados that actually listened to him; perhaps he could try and get some advice from him while they were here.

The fourth was Gary Oak.

While Gary was staring at him and Ash in shock and the Gyarados Trainer reached into his bag for a host of Pokéballs, and the older man was clearly in deep thought, the one who spoke was looking his way with a look that could only be described as intent, eyes darting around as if trying to take in all of the details.

He could have sworn he heard a few electronic beeps to go along with it, though it did not sound like a phone or something of similar make.

Before he could think of asking what the guy was doing, the balls of the League competitor had all burst forth, revealing a large gaggle of blue Water-types.

And a Nidoqueen.

Yellow tugged at his sleeve, diverting his attention to her and away from the newly added Pokémon mess.

Though as it would turn out to be, back to the guy who was looking at him.
“Ash doesn’t look happy to see that guy.”

Yellow pointed towards Ash, who was looking at the guy with an annoyed and distrustful look.

Clearly the two had met, though the way the guy who had just taken out what appeared to be a Porygon evolution among others was looking at both of them, the annoyance was entirely on Ash’s end.

‘That’s Alexander Silph.’

A voice rang in his head, and it took him a moment to realize that it was Anabel. He had forgotten she did that.

Yellow didn’t seem as phased, but she talked to more people so she probably had been reminded of it earlier than he had.

‘He and Ash had a battle just before he went to battle the Viridian Gym Leader. Silph’s a veteran Trainer who battled Ash with a weaker team specifically to get data on his Pokémon and battle style so he could better win later. He’s going to be at Indigo.’

Yellow was looking at the man, who was currently trying to defuse a situation between an Electivire and what looked like the bearded man’s Magmortar.

“Huh, that sort of sounds like what you thought Ash was like when you were muttering to yourself.”

Yellow’s quip made him smile a bit, despite himself.

So, both of them had run into their reflections. Was this Silph Ash’s Rosso? It would explain why neither of them was up for punching the other in the face.

Well that and the flow of time cooling their tempers, and the real possibility that they will be attacked by something soon.

“Eeehhh!”

A loud scream shot out, and while he would have thought that meant it was time to see what was up with the island, Yellow stopped him from jumping up and having Charizard set it on fire.

“Relax, it’s Ash’s friend Misty. You know the one who is scared of bugs.”

In that case he hoped that she had met Ash after Viridian Forest. Such terror would have been painful for the both of them.

…

As more people arrived, and more Pokémon joined them, the place turned slightly less creepy by the moment. Keyword being slightly, as the ominous atmosphere surrounding them continued as present as ever.

It wasn’t helped by the fact she was pretty sure the room was getting bigger with every new arrival. The water pools were definitely larger, she’d swear to that.

The creepiness however had a massive snapback, and it was not from the room getting larger.

One of the new arrivals let out a Pokémon that caused fear to arise in Misty, which had promptly left her lungs in the form of a terrified scream. The Pokédex, taking to list every new Pokémon as they
came out one after another from Ash’s pocket, had confirmed it was that Golisopod species it had mentioned during Ash’s battle in the Viridian Gym.

The same Golisopod in fact, to Ash’s disdain.

Knowing that a dual Bug/Water-type Pokémon actually existed was already a chilling thought in on itself, but seeing one of them in the flesh was on a different level. She always believed many people who disliked Tentacool or Gyarados simply didn't understand their true hidden beauty as she did.

Now, however, part of her could see a little better where they came from. It was massive, looked almost like a desiccated human, and she now clearly could see what she’d have to seek out day to meet her goal.

It was a feeling that she had to wonder if Iris shared when she thought of Hunter J.

Trying to drive those thoughts off her mind for a while, the redhead walked towards the large pool where she had left her Gyarados. At the time, he was sharing some space with the ones belonging to Red and Gary, who seemed to be competing for dominance and trying to intimidate each other.

Hers was holding his own, but the two that were present weren’t backing down. It sounded like the only reason they hadn’t lunged at her Gyarados was the fact they couldn’t agree to work together at it.

As one of the Gyarados had only recently arrived she wasn’t sure if it was a matter of time until that would happen.

"One of those is yours?"

From behind her one of the new arrivals spoke up, and upon turning around she saw it was the other younger person who had arrived with Gary, who came with his own Gyarados.

Surprisingly his was even bigger than her own, and carrying a Kingdra on its back fin.

She pointed to her Gyarados before answering him.

"That one. I asked him not to fall for those two's taunts, though it seems a little hard. They clearly have some attitude problems."

"Maybe we can do something about it. What'd ya say, buddy?"

The newcomer’s Gyarados slithered towards the pool, tossing Kingdra in just before entering. At first glance it looked pretty well-trained. The scales' almost metallic glow was a testament to that.

And in case that first impression wasn't enough, the roar he launched once he got closer, freezing the two quarreling Gyarados on the spot, was all the convincing she needed. Immediately, both Red's and Gary's Gyarados pulled back slightly, while still glaring at one another (she overheard a "We'll settle this later" from Gary's) and made room so he could enter the pool, along with the rest of his Pokémon that followed Gyarados and Kingdra.

They just had the benefit of some land mobility, unlike Kingdra.

“And here I thought my Gyarados' roars were loud."

He chuckled in appreciation.

"Hah, that's just for intimidation, but trust me, his bite is a lot worse. Yours looks pretty good too, if
you allow me to say so. Name’s Fergus."

"Thanks. I’ve done my best with him. We were separated for a while, but since we’ve found each other again, in a story that you would not believe and I would rather not recall, we’ve done a lot of good with each other."

Misty glanced at the Trainer. Barring the Nidoqueen that was lingering at the edge of the pool in a slight watchful and protective pose for her Trainer, all the Pokémon he brought along were Water-types, and a single glance was enough for her to see they were all in excellent condition.

The blue on some of them, like Azumarill and Vaporeon, was rather striking. His Quagsire was looking at her like it was Psyduck though, and she had no idea if that was good or not.

"Hey, mind if I ask you something?"

Fergus’s question came up suddenly.

Misty noticed he was looking at her with some sort of interest. She couldn't put her finger on it, but if it was to ask her out or something, she already had the negative on the tip of her tongue.

She could almost put his voice through a sitcom filter and hear him saying 'our Gyarados are massive, as is my attraction to you. Let me treat you to an equally large meal if we get through this’.

"Er, sure."

Much to her relief, however, it wasn't that kind of interest.

"You're the younger sister of the former Cerulean Gym Leaders, aren't you?"

Him asking her out would have still been worse than this, but that was a bad consolation prize.

"Much to my chagrin."

"Hey, just for the record, I saw your battles in the Battle Dome and the Fuchsia Tag Tournament. I had my doubts when I learned who you were, they are great actors but horrible Gym Leaders, but when I saw you in action… well, I guess I was very wrong. I don't get who put those three in charge if they had someone like you around."

"Well, I didn't have the age, and even if I did, my parents wouldn't have allowed it."

Her bitter words thankfully kept him from asking for more details.

"But now they're not around, I hope I can restore the Cerulean Gym to its former glory. To make my grandmother proud."

"Funny that you say that."

Misty glared at him for the remark. He quickly raised his hands as he backed off a little.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to mock you. I meant, when I heard the Cerulean Gym had been shut down, suddenly I got the idea that I would like to do the same thing. You know, to wipe out that bad rep it's built up all these years. Kanto needs a good Water-type leader, after all, and I’ve been pretty good with Water Pokémon. If I don’t win the League in a few years, that would be a goal in life I’d be happy to go for."

Misty saw the look in Fergus' eyes, and immediately understood what it meant. Part of her would
have probably said "In your dreams" or something like that, but the other knew he didn't mean it to cause her harm. After all, he had no way of knowing of the family drama between her and her sisters, neither did he need to know.

And she should have guessed there would be other people interested in restoring the Cerulean Gym just like her. Gyms were not inherent to any families either. Many could be passed on in families, but if someone lost it was not owed to them.

They had to be re-earned with sweat, not blood.

"That Gym's a very important place for me. I'm not giving it up that easily."

She assured this firmly, although trying not to sound threatening while doing it. She had noticed her Gyarados growl a bit when she had heard Fergus’s goals, and the last thing they needed was a Gyarados brawl.

"Oh, I'm sure it is, but since we're on topic have you heard about the Whirl Cup?"

Misty raised her eyebrows slightly. There was no way a Water-types' specialist like her wouldn't know about the Whirl Cup, the tournament held every three years at the Whirl Islands in Johto, where Water Pokémon Trainers from all over the world competed. It was practically an implicit requirement to win it at least once to qualify as a true Water Pokémon Master.

Or an Ice/Water Pokémon Master, like that time Lorelei won the tournament before she entered Kanto's Elite Four. That was when she became her personal heroine, and she wanted to follow her footsteps in it.

It was a dream she had as a child, and it had come back in full force recently through both the bettering of her means of getting to it, and the spark that had made hopes and dreams feel tangible to her again.

The source of it all currently watching the heir to a multi-billion dollar corporation like a hawk and daring him to try something.

"If you can raise a Gyarados like yours, you’ve got the potential. I may have the head start, but I’d like to see what happens when we both have time to prepare. The next Whirl Cup is getting closer every day, and I plan to compete myself. Let's meet there, and see who the right person to be Gym Leader is."

Misty glanced at Fergus' extended hand. She had to admit it; she felt flattered that another Trainer (aside from Ash and their friends) saw her with such amount of respect. Especially knowing who she was related to, but she didn't feel like she was under that shadow. He was looking at her for herself, and it was nice.

She shook his hand and nodded.

"I'll be there for sure."

As she observed the Gyarados again and Fergus began recounting the story of his first encounter with water, Misty couldn't help but wonder about such a fight.

A battle between Gyarados and Gyarados, against the best Pokémon they could muster.

Of course, that was just another incentive to keep doing her best. After all, she still had to fulfill that promise of having a Gym battle with Ash one day, so she couldn't afford to be anything but her best.
That included losing to this guy in the Whirl Cup.

The only issue would probably be to convince Ash to travel to Johto so she could take part in that tournament. She didn't like the idea of going alone just to answer Fergus' challenge.

Johto did have Gyms too though, and it was possible that Ash would want to go into the Whirl Cup too. It made more sense to do so than surfing in any case.

...

Idly he took a bite out of a pastry of some sort, getting some people watching in. It was a hobby that he had developed as a father, and it was probably the most useful thing parenting had given him outside of itself.

It also made keeping the conked out Swampert next to him from getting bothered by something much simpler. Swampert would be fine if someone stumbled on him, but it would make him rather crabby and that was best avoided.

It was always interesting anyway, what you could glimpse from the simplest of behaviors, and how much you could learn from the simplest things in life.

Writing, parenting, and traveling the world on a Pokémon journey taught one these things.

For one thing he could tell that Gary was put off by the fact that two of the three rivals that had been causing him self-esteem issues arrived before him. The fact that submarines did not do turbo didn’t change this fact.

He was talking to the one who seemed drier, the one who came from the same town. From what he had picked up he was not the two who had done the most damage to his self-esteem (once called ego but after a few humblings such things tended to be lost), and the two seemed to be… something.

He wasn’t exactly an expert on friendships, particularly childhood ones. Friendship came to him later in life. Still the two did seem to be getting along.

Though the friend Ash, he had to wonder something. Especially given something he had heard about Gary’s life in his home town.

A bounce on his left revealed Clefairy, who pointed to Ash as well.

“So you noticed it too.”

Clefairy held up two of his fingers, which made him look back at Ash again in surprise.

He wasn’t expecting that.

“Two?”

Clefairy nodded in confirmation before pointing to some of the Pokémon in the room. The Pikachu near Ash, one of the Charizards, the Bulbasaur, and the Ambipom that was not Alexander’s.

“I was wondering if it was something like that, though if I could actually tell who was with who I could get a better picture. Though if we are both noticing that, what are you only picking up?”

Clefairy took a pastry and began eating it, which meant he wasn’t going to get an answer. He’d have to figure it out himself.
He could already hear his wife chuckling at him and citing karma for his approach to math homework problems.

He’d probably never know if Clefairy was intentionally doing the same thing to him or not.

He looked around, trying to spot what Clefairy had noticed.

His eyes eventually landed on Red, the second of Gary’s rivals.

He was right, the two did look alike.

He definitely wasn’t like Ash in the way both he and Clefairy had noticed. But did they share what Clefairy had picked up on?

Whatever it was, he wasn’t quite sure. But he had the oddest feeling the moment he picked up on it he’d be slapping himself in the face.

A poke to his back just barely followed the ceasing of Swampert’s snoring.

“So, we have more guests. You think that is the last of them?”

Chesnaught and Magmortar gave nods, while Swampert didn’t seem ready to commit either way. Clefairy felt like he was leaning no.

“Well it might just be my age talking, but I do hope no one else put themselves at risk in the weather like this. Plus, I am certainly interested to seeing who the greatest Pokémon Master in the world is.”

What was more intimidating, fighting an Elite Four Trainer, or braving a storm? Neesha never thought she’d be comparing those two things.

They were not usually comparable.

The answer, though, was easier than she thought. For a Trainer who had some Pokémon League experience under her belt, facing such a veteran Trainer was both exciting and overwhelming, though it ended up being an unsurmountable hurdle, even though she tried her best.

The storm, never mind how weird and unnatural it seemed, somehow looked like a hurdle she could overcome, if only for curiosity to find out whether the invitation she received was the real deal, or just a hoax.

"Hang in there, Dewgong! We've almost made it!"

While her Blastoise Shellshocker was her strongest Pokémon for battles, her Dewgong was a much better swimmer, especially in such turbulent waters. It was also easier to hold onto Dewgong than Shellshocker in her general experience, and that was not in a situation where the waves were this rough. Of course, she had never actually faced such a powerful rainstorm before. One would have to
be very brave, very strong, and perhaps some would say very stupid to go out in such conditions, but there was no turning back now.

Looking aside, she saw another of the Trainers trying to pull through the storm. He was riding on the head of his Gyarados (the second one she'd seen using that Pokémon for transport, surprisingly enough) dressed in a long, dark blue raincoat. She waved at him when he turned around to see her, but he didn't reply in kind, instead focusing back on what was ahead.

She was a bit annoyed at that, but she said nothing, for she saw a huge wave coming at them.

"Get ready!" She called out. "Let's use Waterfall to ride it!"

Dewgong replied affirmatively and immediately picked up the pace with his flippers. As if they were in a race, the Gyarados-riding boy followed suit and tried to swim against the current in front of them, as the wave grew bigger and bigger.

"GO!" Neesha shouted, closing her eyes and holding her breath as she braced herself for what came next.

Dewgong dove into the wave, and she held on for dear life until they pierced through it. The water's cold was merciless, but it was short-lived, and she opened her eyes in time to see them both flying through the air before landing on the sea once more.

Meanwhile, looking at her side, she noticed the Gyarados' boy was nowhere to be found. She couldn't help but become concerned.

"Is he alright?"

For a moment she felt tempted to look, but then she saw some lights in the distance, even though the storm blurred her vision quite a bit. If she could keep her course steady, that had to be her destination, New Island.

"FEAROW!"

The squawk pulled her from her thoughts, and then she saw the bird flying above her, holding the boy she saw before by the shoulders with its talons. Had he decided to change mounts for the last leg of the trip?

"Well, at least he's alright," she said while Dewgong picked up speed. They had almost reached their destination after all.

…

Once they were in the eye of the storm, she could see their destination more clearly. The place looked creepy alright, but the presence of lights indicated there had to be something, or someone, living there.

The Fearow she saw before descended to let its Trainer set foot on land. Without sparing a word he returned it to its Ball and lowered his hoodie, allowing Neesha to see his dark purple hair. He turned around to glance at her when she and Dewgong approached the dock, and she jumped off his back.

His grumpy face was familiar to her somehow.

"What are you staring at?"
"Huh? No, I just... hey, didn't you take part in the Fuchsia Tag Tournament?"

She had just returned from Johto and when she stopped by Fuchsia City, she learned of an ongoing Tag Battle Tournament, with the prize of an entire day in the Safari Zone to catch Pokémon. Though she was a bit late to sign up for it and she had to make do with being a spectator.

That boy had been one of the runner-ups, if she recalled.

The purple-haired boy didn't answer; he just looked away with an annoyed expression and let out an almost imperceptible "hmph". Was he mad because he lost the finals?

Some footsteps coming from the nearby staircase got both their attentions. Neesha saw a person with a lamp in hand coming over to them.

As she came closer, she saw it was the same woman from the hologram in the invitation she got.

"My master bids you welcome to New Island. Would you kindly present your invitation?"

Both of them searched their pockets to present their respective invitations. Neesha felt a chill creeping down her spine when the woman, her expression as empty as that of a robot, grabbed hers and verified, as the hologram replied with the same emotionless tone as the real woman.

"My master has determined that all those who are worthy of him have arrived by now. Please come with me."

The woman beckoned them to follow her upstairs, and they both did so. The place's general atmosphere was creepy alright, and Neesha couldn't think of anything but trying to talk to the other Trainer, if only to somewhat ease the tension she felt.

"Hey, what do you think she means by 'worthy of him'?" she asked in a low voice.

The boy turned at her with a slight frown, and he just shrugged.

"Don't know."

"Say, are you in a bad mood today, or are you always like this?"

This time his only response was to walk ahead a bit, away from her. Evidently that guy wasn't the most social person in the world.

Well, if there were more Trainers who'd made it here, there had to be someone nicer and willing to talk to her. At least that way the trip wouldn't have been a total waste, even if it turned out that the 'biggest Pokémon Master in the world" was just a hoax for curious people.

A hoax with a horrible chance weather pattern.

…

Two more people had arrived, and one of them was Paul.

He could feel Raichu dart behind his legs, not wanting to be seen. However Paul did not seem to have noticed her.

He did notice him, and while he did not give him a guy nod like Red did he didn’t look like he was about to spit in his face so that was something.
Paul and the girl he had arrived with (though even he could tell that they had not arrived here together, just at the same time) began releasing their Pokémon.

Through the corner of his eye he caught that Silph was watching the Pokémon being sent out from the corner of his own eye, but in a way that even Team Rocket would call ‘obvious’.

He’d go tell him to knock it off, but Raichu needed the hiding spot behind his legs more than he felt annoyed at him in all honesty.

Plus seeing as he was seeing Paul’s Pokémon, he probably couldn’t call Silph out on it at the moment anyway, even if his first thought upon seeing them was to remember them for the next time they battled, though he doubted he’d run ‘a thousand computer simulation’ or whatever it was that the guy did.

Though given one of the Pokémon he saw Paul release he might be closer to that than he’d care to admit. Where had Paul caught a Pokémon of *that* species?

This wasn’t Hoenn, and it certainly wasn’t Jessie’s.

Trying not to ponder that question too much lest he try and calculate the exact number of times he had fought that Pokémon before (how often did Team Rocket bother him in two entire regions?), or the fact that the girl had released a Gligar that was making him miss a friend of his once more, his gaze turned away and towards a vacant part of the room.

All that had been there was a single whirling staircase of some sort, one that no one had been up for walking.

Partially for the fact that nearly all of them except for Corey had already taken the stairs and did not want to do so again, and partially because there was no telling what was up there.

Something about looking up there gave off an intimidating feeling, like there was something of unbelievable power up there.

He felt someone walk up to him, and he was quite sure it was Anabel.

It was.

‘You feel it? Something’s changed in the air. I think we are going to see what this is all about.’

He nodded at Anabel’s thoughts. He quickly looked away from the spiraling stairs back to everyone else.

Iris and the bearded man (the oldest one here, come to think of it) were the only ones who were also looking towards the staircase.

There were also a number of Pokémon doing so, though there were just as many if not more Pokémon who weren’t acting on such a sense.

Or possibly just putting it aside, as the entire island was like it.

Paul was taking a bite with a bit less restraint than he recalled him tending to do usually, but given he braved the storm Ash was hardly going to hold that against him.

They got here the easy way after all.

Then the lights shut off, and everyone’s attention was taken. Even Chansey, though most of her
attention was still on an exhausted Gyarados who had joined the four others in the pool.

After a lot of frantic looking around in various states of nervousness, everyone’s attention arrived on the spiral staircase, where a single bright blue light shone down.

In front of the light stood the host lady, staring at them all as always.

“You are about to meet my master. The time has come for your encounter with the greatest Pokémon Master on Earth.”

Even if that was hyperbole, Ash had to give her master credit. This was a good dramatic entrance, very moody. Though going down the staircase might diminish that, at least in his eyes.

Unless he was going to jump down that light and land dramatically, which probably was not safe for anyone.

He might be tougher than Gary or Paul, but he was still pretty sure that he would break something doing that, and after doing that Humunga-Dunga would be forever overshadowed in the ‘never live it down’ department.

At the light five Gyarados hisses rang out, along with hundreds of other calls of Pokémon tensing up in worry. He could even feel sparks of electricity from Raichu behind him.

Nervous Togepi sounds were also registered, and he could hear Togepi dart into Pikachu’s side for protection.

Then a shape appeared in the light, descending down towards them, and the tenseness of the room grew even more intense.

A few sharp breaths of surprise, and while he did not exhale himself he felt like an explosion of realization went off in his head.

He didn’t remember this, but it all felt familiar. He had thought it had been entirely forgotten, a simple and boring detail lost in the sea of his eventful life.

He had never quite connected it with an event that had happened later, when he had been told that he had his memory wiped, and that the Pokémon he met then had encountered him before. It felt dumb in hindsight, though now he was going to get to see what had been lost to him the first time.

“Data failed. Species unknown. Name unknown. This is an entirely new find.”

The Pokédex in his pocket had recorded plenty of data today, but this would be a first for it. An entirely new Pokémon that it knew not the name, the type, or the origin.

He may not have known the last two, but as a pair of three–toed feet landed on the ground and a purple tail stood erect behind the pale gray frame, he knew this Pokémon.

This Pokémon’s name was Mewtwo, and the eyes it stared out towards them all was a different look from when they met him again, if the first time by his own memory, on Mount Quena.

The eyes were filled with disdain and superiority over them, visible beyond their faint psychic glow.

The blue light continued to bathe Mewtwo as Mewtwo’s hostess continued to speak.

“The most powerful Pokémon Master is also the most powerful Pokémon on Earth. His name is Mewtwo.”
A statement that Ash could, if nothing else, say was not an entirely misguided belief. However given everyone else did not know Mewtwo…

“What!? That is insane! We can argue what a Pokémon Master is until we all are old and gray; in fact I am pretty sure the bearded guy over there writes about that question. But in what definition is some random Pokémon no one’s ever heard of count as a Pokémon….”

Corey’s statement about Mewtwo’s status, and his comments about the older Trainer being a writer of some sort, were silenced by a blue glow that formed around him, locking him in place with psychic powers.

‘Tell me human, is this not sufficient demonstration? What is a Pokémon Master but a master of powerful Pokémon, and am I not a powerful Pokémon? You all have seen the storm I created with my mind, and the island I remade the very same way. I am the master of myself, the world’s most powerful Pokémon. Therefore, I am what I say I am, the world’s greatest Pokémon Master.’

Quite a number of people jumped at the voice that rang in their heads, Mewtwo’s voice, and many Pokémon had similar reactions. In fact, while he noticed that Iris, Misty, Red, and Yellow jumped a bit less than most everyone else, only two others besides himself who weren’t Pokémon had very little reaction.

Anabel and the bearded man, which caught Mewtwo’s attention, if the mildly impressed crack in his lips meant anything.

A crack in his lips that was oddly human for a Pokémon, even a humanoid looking one.

“Gyarados, Hydro Pump!”

“Torterra, Leaf Storm!”

“Pikachu, Thunderbolt!”

The expression on Mewtwo’s face faded as three attacks flew at him at once.

Fergus’s Gyarados, Paul’s Torterra, and Red’s Pikachu all blasted Mewtwo with the powerful ranged attacks.

Mewtwo however, did not get hit by them. Instead with the movement of a single finger all three attacks were halted in place.

They hung in the air, to the shock of the three who ordered their attack.

‘So you fear my power? As expected. What power you could bring forth pales in comparison to my own, as you can clearly see.’

Quite clearly, given that he was still holding Corey in place.

Mewtwo barely had to twitch around his eye to halt the shadowy emergence of what Ash was pretty sure was Corey’s Gengar behind him.

Said Gengar had probably been hoping to strike Mewtwo while distracted to free Corey.

With barely any noticeable movement the psychically held attacks were sent back to their owners with amplified powers.

The Hydro Pump struck Corey’s Gyarados, and sent the great serpent toppling into Red and Gary’s
Gyarados’s and knocking the serpents over with a massive splash that soaked everything near them.

The Leaf Storm flew into the mass of Paul’s Pokémon, sending Torterra and several other Pokémon (including Murkrow and a Jynx) flying. He briefly noticed Hypno use a move before being itself blown away, and that was why Paul didn’t seem to get flung into a wall and break something.

He was merely knocked into the wall with a light thump.

Gengar was flung around and shoved right into Corey, who was sent flying with his Gengar towards a wall of his own. Corey’s Hitmonlee moved to intercept, but all that accomplished was having the three of them get pushed into the wall by a slightly less forceful force.

They struck the wall, though it was Hitmonlee who took the worst of it.

He briefly heard Yellow shout in worry for Red and Pikachu, and a Rattata dart in towards Red and Pikachu both in response to her cry.

Surprisingly Rattata moved faster than the lightning reflection, and even more so managed to shove Red and Pikachu out of the way.

He could have sworn he saw an orange glow in Rattata’s eyes, but it was not his doing.

The reflected bolt struck the table, shattering it and sending a rain of debris flying everywhere, before each piece was caught up in psychic light and held in place.

Mewtwo, even while it seemed he was idly reassembling the table and everything spilled on it with one hand, looked towards the drenched Red and Pikachu in surprise.

‘You have a surprisingly strong Rattata. Tell me, how did it get so strong?’

“I couldn’t let you hurt my brother.”

Yellow, her entire body shaking, stepped towards Mewtwo, as if daring Mewtwo to go through her if he wanted to try and blast Red again.

‘That doesn’t answer my question. I know power. I am not just well versed in it, but I am power myself. What that Rattata just did was not normal. What, is it because you were worried for your brother that it managed such force?’

“That’s why Ratty was so strong. I don’t want people hurting him, and that is why Ratty was able to save him.”

The entire room suddenly chilled, and it was not because of the use of ice attacks.

‘I do not allow lies to be told to my face unpunished.’

A sudden burst of attacks flew from several of Red’s Pokémon, but Mewtwo, not changing from his glare at Yellow, blocked the attacks with a stray thought.

Red’s Charizard, Sneasel, Hypno, and Clefairy were sent flying with their own attacks, and a charge from the Rattata was reflected away as well.

Though it did create an opening for him, without thinking, to run up and stand between Mewtwo and Yellow.

Giving him the full blunt of Mewtwo’s glare mere feet away from him, and the single round digit
that, once pointing right at Yellow, was now aimed straight at his chest.

‘Why are you defending this liar? You will accomplish nothing. Is this simple human nature to protect lies, or are you also her brother and such things are just something humans can’t help but do?’

Mewtwo’s words were offered in a mocking tone, in disbelief as the idea that he could stop him.

“Yes.”

The word left his mouth without thinking. He thought he heard Gary gasp in surprise in the tense silence that hung in the room.

“She’s also not lying. People and Pokémon together can accomplish things neither can do themselves. Even you need her, don’t you?”

He gestured to Mewtwo’s assistant, who was standing still as always.

‘A poor counterpoint. Her knowledge was merely necessary to overcome a temporary hurdle. It was of help I will concede, but no necessity. That does not explain what power that Rattata possessed.’

“They’ve explained it already, you just aren’t listening. You are looking for a specific answer, and we aren’t giving it to you.”

The man who had come in with Gary was talking now, walking up to where he and Yellow were standing off against Mewtwo with a Pokémon he wasn’t familiar with.

The large, armored and bushy-bearded Pokémon, and he thought the Pokédex had called it a Chesnaught. It sort of reminded him of Clemont’s Chespin.

Mewtwo did not move his finger from pointing at the two of them, but his focus was on the man and his Pokémon now.

‘If you are saying that I got distracted by that Rattata, I will admit to it. It has taken me from my original plan. To declare the strength of clones such as myself before the world on top of my own power and to accomplish my goals. I’ve even considered the idea of taking over the world, though I will admit I doubt I’d enjoy ruling over humans. There is always destroying them all and then taking over the world of course.’

Mewtwo talked of conquest and genocide as if he was discussing what restaurant he would go to, a suggestion between sandwiches and pizza instead of the fate of billions, and despite the gasps of worry and fear from those around him the older man did not seem as stunned.

Horrified and concerned yes, but he stared back at Mewtwo with a face saying he had seen such things before and gotten through them. There was a confidence to his face that Ash wondered if he ever showed during disasters.

“I do hope you don’t think conquest and genocide are original concepts, some of us have seen it before. I will give you credit for being the first Pokémon to have such a goal in mind, credit where it is due.”

‘You have seen nothing like me.’

The old man chuckled.
“It’s both true and not true at the same time. You are a unique being, but your goals are hardly so. Superior creations, world domination, mass murder, they have all been before. I even stopped one or two such things in my youth. Few may know of my deeds, but Casey Snagem has seen it all, and I will repeat the arguments the three of us before you have said. You may be the world’s most powerful Pokémon, or at least quite the contender for the position, but humans and Pokémon together are stronger still. That Rattata did indeed get stronger because of the girl’s wishes.”

‘What, and if you wish really hard, the Pokémon you have there will defeat me? That Pokémon is a Grass and Fighting type, you cannot even claim type to be in your favor.’

“Defeat would be a bit much, but I am quite up for proving a point.”

Mewtwo, probably wanting to make a point himself, had both of them surrounded by a psychic blue aura, clearly with the intent to fling them away. At this however Chesnaught exploded into a giant storm of green leaves.

“Error. Chesnaught cannot use Leaf Storm.”

The Pokédex’s statement was followed up by round seeds being shot at from the Chesnaught. Mewtwo deflected both and sent them crashing into the wall, but the entire thing had been enough to let them go, if perhaps only out of sheer curiosity.

The leaves centered on a single point on Chesnaught, forming into a glowing green shield on its right arm. That wasn’t all that changed however, as the Chesnaught’s beard was now black and the color of the Pokémon’s body had changed around a bit.

Surprisingly similar to the color of Casey’s jacket and pants.

“A single incident may surprise you, but perhaps this can prove a point. This is a power that can only be achieved with a rare Pokémon such as yourself, but also with a human with whom that Pokémon has an unshakable and powerful bond of trust and love with. It is the Bond Phenomenon!”

Ash mouthed that phrase to himself, his core tingling as if electrified.

“This particular one is Casey-Chesnaught!”

Mewtwo seemed to be struggling to not show too much surprise, and as a result some did leak through his features.

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

Paul muttering was a distinct sound in a wave of surprised comments from those in the room.

‘That is a novel ability, I will grant you that. However even you admitted it probably cannot defeat me.’

“I never said that he could beat you, but I never said he can’t do it. It’s just highly improbable!”

Chesnaught, responding to his Trainer’s late surge in excitement, swung his shield arm forward. A glowing and spiked shield grown from the leaves flung forth towards Mewtwo, spinning like a hurricane. The fact that glowing tendrils of leaves spiraled out from it like a storm made it even more so.

Mewtwo teleported out of the way, reappearing right in front of Chesnaught as the green shield clunked somewhere in the back.
With two fists glowing, Mewtwo slammed down on Chesnaught in some sort of Fighting-type attack.

The resulting shockwave flung through the room, and it was only because he felt a light tingle of psychic power that he didn’t get blown away, same with Yellow and Casey Snagem.

Chesnaught lunged forward with a glowing white head, forcing Mewtwo to pop back out of range. He, however, seemed somewhat surprised.

‘You still stand?’

He was even more surprised when the green energy shield swung back from the corner it hit, like it had ricocheted from impact. Mewtwo stumbled from the solid blow to his back.

The same moment that Casey Snagem collapsed.

“Ches!”

“Mr. Snagem!”

Chesnaught and Gary were only among two of the voices that rang out in more personal concern at what had just happened. Among them, surprisingly, Alexander Silph.

“What happened to him? Why is he hurt?”

He shared Yellow’s confusion. What just…

Mewtwo was silent for a moment, in surprise from both the blow to him from behind and the injuries to Snagem.

Then he stood up, and as the struck area lingered with a bit of a bruise he stared at the downed Snagem, now protected by the still altered Chesnaught.

‘I see. This power of yours increases the strength of Chesnaught in both offensive and defense, but with a single, key weakness. You two become connected and share the impact of attacks upon you. Chesnaught can take my physical power much better than a human, and even if I assume the impact is blunted it is more than enough to incapacitate a human. Yet you weren’t expecting it to strike as hard as it did. Clearly my power surpasses your wildest imagination, as well as your most unorthodox attempts at countering it.’

“Yet you… aren’t so perfect yourself. You didn’t start today with that bruise on your back.”

Mewtwo’s response to that reminder was to cup his hands together and form a bright glowing orange ball in between them.

“Hyper Beam!”

In a move he probably should have done minutes ago without shouting the attack’s name first, he grabbed Yellow and rolled out of the way of the oncoming attack. Chesnaught glared into the looming beam and formed two shields on his arms and crouched down to protect Snagem, standing over him so Mewtwo could not teleport around him.

Golden auras flew into Chesnaught from a few Pokémon in the area, a Lilligant, a Purugly, a Clefairy that was not Red’s, a shiny Sunflora, and a Simipour. The result of this was that the beam only sent both Trainer and Pokémon flying.
A Swampert and Typhlosion caught both of them, but that was probably the end of Casey-Chesnaught and Casey Snagem’s battle today.

‘Now that I have made it plainly clear that you cannot stop me, allow me to show you that you can’t stop anything of mine.’

At Mewtwo’s nonchalant statement three holes opened up in the floor in front of Mewtwo, from which three Pokémon emerged.

A Venusaur, a Charizard, and a Blastoise.

‘By chance I noticed that among you all there are three Blastoise, two Charizard, and a Venusaur. These are my own of those three, cloned as I was and stronger for it. Try and prove me wrong and best them.’

Behind the spiral stairway the wall opened up with a massive shake, unveiling a dark stadium. Lights popped on shortly after, revealing a field that looked like it could have come out of a League stadium.

“Alright, seeing as I’m the guy with a Venusaur I’ll take you on. Bruteroot!”

Corey’s declaration was followed by an agreeing bellow from said Venusaur.

“Blast.”

“To.”

“Bla….”

The three Blastoise in the room spoke to one another briefly before one stepped forward, followed by the female Trainer Neesha.

“You go. This is something that you’d do better than myself. Also my Charizard, unlike yours, did take a bit of a blow earlier. We need 100% here, not 99%.”

At Red’s deference and the sound of Charizard flying his way he walked forward, Charizard at the ready.

…

He idly noticed that his Chansey and a Blissey he suspected was Alexander Silph’s, along with a Miltank from Neesha, were healing the injured man and Chesnaught as he joined Neesha and Corey on one end of the field.

Mewtwo stood on the other end, and seemed amused as Pikachu bounded onto his shoulder.

‘I was under the impression that humans trained Pokémon for obedience. What reason would you have to train Pikachu to do that?’

“Pikachu and I are buddies, but we’ve already explained that. I’m pretty sure you’d like us to drop the friendship speeches until we beat you.”

Mewtwo no longer looked amused.

‘As amazed I am at the idea that you still think you can triumph over me, I will appreciate you agreeing to not give more diatribes of that nature unless you do win, which is highly unlikely. Now,
Both Corey and Bruteroot the Venusaur stepped forward in unspoken agreement, and with a more telegraphed shrug Mewtwo sent his own Venusaur forward.

A slight victory for Corey and Venusaur, but not one that would make Mewtwo see reason.

“Bruteroot use Growth!”

Said Venusaur bellowed as a green aura surrounded him, powering him up.

‘Swords Dance.’

An aura glowed around the clone Venusaur, but this one purple.

Both were now powered up, though in different ways.

“If that’s how you want to play it, fine! Fire Sludge Bomb!”

Bruteroot shot a lob of purple sludge into the air, which flew down towards the clone like an artillery shell.

The clone almost lazily formed a glowing Protect up to block it.

“Alright Energy Ball!”

A green sphere was spat out next, which the clone took on.

The damage was taken without any flinching.

“Use Growth…”

‘Petal Blizzard.’

The clone Venusaur was surrounded in a spiraling pink storm of petals, which was then flung into Bruteroot.

The attack struck the Venusaur, and flew beyond into Corey. The petals proceeded to cut into Corey’s clothes and tear at them like a thousand miniature blades.

Some of the areas struck were liquid red.

The storm flew beyond them and back into the dining hall, where several Pokémon scattered to avoid them.

As the storm passed both Corey and Bruteroot were still standing, though both were rather cut up from the attack and not the most stable in their standing stance.

“What the…did your Pokémon use an attack or release its Shik…”

‘Vine Whip.’

The vines of the clone finished off Bruteroot with a massive shove that sent injured Pokémon flying into injured Trainer. The only reason he hadn’t been crushed was that Corey’s Absol had darted in and shoved him out of the way.

Both were flung to the ground harshly, but one did not crush the other.
“It’s my turn then!”

With that Shellshocker entered the ring, and so did the clone Blastoise and the Venusaur stepped back to Mewtwo’s side.

“ICY WIND!”

At Neesha’s command her Blastoise began spewing out cold wind from his cannons.

‘MIST.’

Mewtwo’s Blastoise countered this move by spewing out a cloud of cold from its mouth. The two attacks mingled in the middle of the field, obscuring both sides vision of the other.

“Damn, now I can’t see… Shellshocker use Earthquake!”

Shellshocker did just that, smashing the ground with a massive punch that shook the entire battlefield.

“Do it again!”

Shellshocker raised another fist for another ground strike, only for a bolt of black light to shoot out of the cloud and strike the socket of Shellshocker’s arm.

Shellshocker yowled at that blow, and ceased the Earthquake use.

“YOU got a hit through all of that?!”

Neesha’s dumbfounded statement was met by a second Dark Pulse into Shellshocker, this time striking him in the other shoulder socket.

‘PERFECTED clones means everything is as I say. Perfect vision, perfect aim, perfect power.’

A third blast, this time a Hydro Pump, sent Shellshocker flying to the ground at Neesha’s stunned feet.

The cloud created in their initial clash blew away, the only sign of it being there being Mewtwo’s hand at the end of a waving gesture.

It was now time for a Charizard versus Charizard fight.

…

Charizard turned to Ash, a serious look in his eyes.

“Rr.” ‘Start with the Z-move. Even if it doesn’t work, I doubt this fight is going to last long even without the energy loss. We need to go in with all we got at the start, or we are going to lose.’

His Trainer was surprised by this call, but he had seen what the last two fights were like and he could see his point.

So he raised his arm up as he reached for and slotted in the white crystal.

‘And what is it that you are trying?’

“Our power!”
Ash’s shout was followed by him making the poses he had practiced since their battle with Misty, a diagonal arm movement before slamming his fists down on his chest in a Z-shape. Orange light sprung up as a result and flew into him, exploding into a massive burst of power.

He flew towards the clone Charizard, even as Ash shouted the name of the move.

“Breakneck Blitz, go!”

‘Flare Blitz!’

Mewtwo’s command was the first in this battle to have a bit of urgency to it, and at least he could claim victory in that.

He wanted to take a true win though, which was why he flew forward with all the might of the Z-Move, clashing into the fiery glow of the enemy Charizard’s attack with immense power.

The stadium shook with their impact, and he was happy to say that he won the power struggle. The enemy Charizard was sent back, and he had the initiative.

However the enemy wasn’t down, and was far from it.

“Metal Claw!”

He felt like he had just defeated an enemy before that one, but he still had to go forward. At his Trainer’s command he swung down a glowing claw, though not while wondering why Ash made that call instead of Slash.

The other Charizard blocked it with a glowing green Dragon Claw, sending both their claws away and leaving both of them exposed.

“Now Slash!”

Ash clearly picked up that would happen, and with his other arm he slashed with the extended claws at his enemy.

The attack struck, but the other Charizard responded with a glowing ball in his own other hand.

Someone could probably tell him if it was Hidden Power or Ancient Power or some other move, but he didn’t let it hit him regardless.

He flew back and out of the way and avoided the attack, before the clone flung a different, orange ball his way.

He avoided the blow and blasted back with a Flamethrower just as Ash was calling for it.

The enemy Charizard slashed it apart and flew forward with a Thunder Punch.

He flew above him to avoid the attack, though his enemy then angled upward and flew at him with the move still active.

A continuous Flamethrower did not dissuade the charging enemy. It surely was taking damage, but he took even more when that punch hit his gut.

The blow sent him free falling for a moment, pursued by the enemy. However he ignited Flame Charge and sped away, and with the speed boost avoided a grab by his foe.
Said foe formed two blue orbs underwing and began blasting shredding blades of wind at him.

He avoided them, flying up as his opponent flew towards him with another sparking punch.

He ignited power in his tail and countered that move with Dragon Tail, before blasting into his opponent with Flamethrower.

He flew away as he did so, giving himself distance from his opponent, when an annoyed thought crossed his mind.

His opponent wasn’t using fire on him, except the one time Mewtwo ordered him to against his Z-Move. All of the moves he was using were of other types.

He didn’t see him as a worthy opponent, he saw him as weak.

He avoided a Dragon Claw with a Flame Charge speed up, as he noted the reason for that thought.

His enemy was strong enough to actually feel that way. His attacks were not going to wear him down before he himself was worn down.

Not unless he swallowed his pride, and so did Ash.

‘Ash!’

His mental shout was followed by a dodge of a Thunder Punch, and another billowing Flamethrower into his punching opponent.

Said opponent then lobbed the glowing yellow attack into him, which he flew off after a bit of spinning.

He and Ash were similar in a lot of ways. Even when they weren’t agreeing with the other during the original timeline, there was a lot they shared.

They got better as the other did.

He thought that Professor Oak had said something about Trainers and Pokémon coming to share quirks the more they worked together, and he could see a lot of that in all of the Pokémon Ash traveled with.

He shared Ash’s pride that had been the source of his earliest triumphs and failures. Pignite shared his frustration and issues with failure, if more openly than Ash did. Squirtle was the mixture of Ash’s ability to motivate and his less than serious side. Oshawott was Ash’s bumbling nature.

Pride was a reason neither of them liked to blow through opponents with either the power of Ash’s bloodline, or Z-Moves right off the bat. There were other factors too of course, some logical like the fact that Z-moves were more of a finishing move. Some emotional like Ash feeling it was more cheating, while he would not use that term to describe why he preferred not to.

There was also the issue of Ash not wanting Red to lord the action over him and call hypocrite. However while he was not human and did not have the same mental thoughts as a human, he liked to believe that Red would pick up the difference between this battle and tournament ones.

Thankfully, even as a blue spiral of draconic winds boxed him in a single vertical slice of air with his opponent flying in at him, Thunder Punch at hand, he felt the unbelievable surge of power.

The power of Ash’s second bloodline.
With that he bellowed Flamethrower. The greatest bellow of flame he had ever unleashed.

They flew down towards his opponent, who only had a micro moment to realize the difference in power from previous attacks before the fires engulfed him and sent him blasting down to earth.

He flew after him, keeping the flames up and ready to make a dramatic landing.

…

Ash didn’t like to win the way he just did. He had his thoughts on his powers and how moral they were.

However he knew this was different. This was not a Gym battle. This was not a rival battle. It was a battle that could have the fate of the world at stake.

Even if he did need Charizard’s request to get it rolling, and get it rolling he did, the giant fire vortex that engulfed the clone Charizard slammed into the ground with tremendous force.

‘You know, I was actually just about to remind you that you could do that, and that this was not a place to worry about being a hypocrite.’

Anabel’s mental comment was followed by his Charizard landing on the field above the downed Charizard. Said Charizard, while still alive, was defeated and slightly charred.

His own Charizard breathed a victory flame into the air, before crouching down and panting.

“He did it.”

At Neesha’s surprised words, his attention was drawn to the speechless Mewtwo, who seemed stunned at the development.

His almost gaping expression continued even as cheers rang up among the Trainers and Pokémon still conscious.

He stared at the shocked Pokémon, and knew what he had to do.

“Well, seeing as I won, I can start with the friendship speeches again. Mewtwo, did you see what just happened? Your Charizard was stronger than mine, but mine still won. It was only because he and I are as close as we are that this battle turned around.”

He tapped a palm against his chest, around where his heart was.

“We’d have never won if we didn’t trust each other the way only the best of friends did. I trust Charizard’s power, and he trusts my mind. Plenty more than that, not just with him either. Pikachu’s the same way, and if you had a clone Pikachu to fight him the same thing would happen. People and Pokémon make themselves stronger together, and it doesn’t matter where any of them came from.”

This timeline or the old one, from a town or a city, a forest or a river. Being born or being created.

He extended a hand to Mewtwo, a smile on his face.

“You can’t be serious.”

He ignored Paul’s disbelieving comment.

“I don’t claim to know your life, but if I’d have to make a guess it wasn’t a pleasant one. If you can’t
see how anything but raw power can mean anything, I’m willing to help you see it. I won’t even capture you.”

Mewtwo continued to stare at him, though the lack of a death glare was encouraging. Perhaps he managed to get through to him.

A ding went off somewhere in the island, a sound that hung in the air like the chiming of a great clock telling the changing of an hour. At the ding Mewtwo’s expression slowly changed.

It changed into a smile, but one that did not make Ash think he got Mewtwo to agree to come with him and experience the wonders and happiness of mankind.

‘I see. That is how you did it. I had wondered with the Chesnaught, but you are what I was looking for, Ash Ketchum.’

He felt Pikachu shiver at the use of his full name.

“I’m really hoping you mean you were looking for a friend and found me.”

Mewtwo looked right at him.

‘I had a friend once, she died. She was created when I was.’

Was that where the other Mewtwo came from? Somehow he doubted that, or that this was going to be a good development.

‘Her name was Amber, and you are what I need to bring her back.’

A reflexive part of him wanted to say that he’d do anything, but his instincts were shouting at him to stay quiet because Mewtwo was about to do something terrifying.

Something then struck his forehead, knocking him back. He stumbled a bit, nothing he couldn’t get back up from but enough to cause the Pokédex to fall out of his pocket.

However his limbs didn’t seem ready up for responding. They didn’t feel solid anymore, like his entire body was losing physical mass.

It was getting worse, and now his vision was getting fuzzy.

Then he couldn’t see or feel anything, and the world was black.

…

Everyone, regardless of species, could only stare in horror as Ash was struck by a black Pokéball and sucked into it. The ball clattered to the ground just inches from the Pokédex that had fallen from Ash’s pocket.

Pikachu could only stare at the ball, terror seizing every cell in his body.

A flicker in the air drew his gaze away from the ball that had taken his friend, and he could only stare in utter horror at what now floated over Mewtwo’s side of the field.

A massive swarm of the very same balls, hundreds of them. Perhaps even thousands.

With a mere flick of Mewtwo’s finger, the balls all flew towards them without mercy.
And this is it for now. Sorry for the cliffhanger, but we're setting up a major development that has been on work for quite a while. Stay tuned for the conclusion!

Oh, and a random note here's a list of our favorite Resetverse sidestories for each of the authors (barring Edinosaur, who only has one to his name):

Crossoverpairinglovers' are Astrid, Cynthia, Gary, and One Island.

Partner555’s are Black Arachnid and 20 Gyarados Bill.

BRANDON369’s are Ultima and Mars.

Viroro-kun’s are the Steven, Charmander, Agatha & Sam, and Mewtwo stories.

Ander Arias is fond of all of his, but particularly his Falkner and Iris works.

Shadow Ninja Koopa has the Dakim and Guzma oneshots.

Your truly’s are Gardenia, Lorelei, Sho, Sir Aaron & Lucario, Misty, and S.S Anne, along with the collab Oak’s Summer Camp and Brock & Lucy.

Enjoy that insight while you await for the grand conclusion of this arc. Until next time!
Okay, so, we're finally back in track. In the name of the Resetverse writers, apologies for this long wait, as things got pretty... complicated for all of us, which is why this chapter took so long to be released. But, paraphrasing Shigeru Miyamoto, a chapter delayed will eventually be good, but a chapter rushed will be always bad. Did we succeed on that? You guys be the judges of that.

At long last, here it is, the conclusion of the Mewtwo arc. Hope you guys enjoy the little surprise we've been keeping on hold for quite a while.

**New Island**

“Analysis of situation:

“Carbon-based life form I am assigned to, Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town, age 15 approaching 16, defeated the genetically enhanced clone of a Charizard (the flame Pokémon) with his own with a combination of skill, technique, the Z-Move Breakneck Blitz, and his dominion bloodliner abilities, and proceeded to try and talk a previously unknown Psychic-type Pokémon calling itself Mewtwo (tentatively called the genetic Pokémon) out of its underthought plans.

“The Pokémon proceeded to capture Ash Ketchum in an unknown Pokéball, causing me to fall out of the pocket I was placed in in the process.

“Situation not optimal.

“Performing analysis as a swarm of the same Pokéballs of unknown origin swarm the field striking every Pokémon and human.

“Balls do not override capture signature of existent balls, mechanism of process unknown.

“Ball material makeup differs from regular Pokéball variants, material integrity more resistant to force. Running background simulations gathered from deployed tactics of present Pokémon species.

“Survives fire, electrical, ice, extensive force, and acidic attempts with cosmetic damage, but no damage to internal features. Can be repulsed by well-timed blows, but this is only temporary.

“Additional data point: ball bounces off of human Gary Oak without effect, but does capture those in category Bloodliner. New data input.

“Unknown fate for assigned life form. Proceeding with data analysis to come up with plan to reverse current situation to stable, desirable state.
“Required factors the continued survival of trainer Ash Ketchum and the majority of his mental wellness. Additional factors not applied.

... 

His daughters often complained to him that he always took things with him that he really didn’t need to. It held them up for getting out of the house and more than a few wild chases for misplaced artifacts of a variety of dangers.

In his defense for what trouble that could cause, when he couldn’t find the Meteonite Magnet Marble that one time it was not the sort of thing he could just ignore for a while like a missing remote. If that thing got misplaced and misused someone would get a lot of unwanted overhead crashing down on them.

Of course his collection of trinkets obtained in his travels did not limit itself to various doomsday causers, he also had a number that could be used for moral and good tasks.

One such artifact was the reason he was now awake, feeling refreshed and not like his body had just been struck by a truck.

“Alright Mewtwo, let’s…”

It was as he was about to make his badass declaration of round two that he realized that he might have been out for longer than he thought.

Mewtwo was now at the opposite end of a distant battlefield, all the Pokémon and several of the guests were missing (including the one who had a secret beyond his possible familiarity with Baltoy mechanisms), his student was rubbing his head like someone had beaned him with something hard, and the place looked a lot worse for wear than when he last remembered it.

Mewtwo teleported in front of him, towering over him without the need of levitation.

‘You recovered faster than I expected. I doubt it is an element of your little ‘Bond Phenomenon’ trick.’

He nodded before reaching into his jacket and pulling out a golden amulet with a green shining stone sparkling in the center, holding it up to Mewtwo.

“Like I said, you aren’t the first terrifying thing I’ve ever encountered, even if you are certainly a unique being. I’ve encountered many oddities in my time, among them this amulet linked to an entire dimension of vitality energies. I keep it on hand in case one of my family gets a scraped knee, or when there is a training accident with my student. Speaking of which, I take it that you are the reason he has an injury, and quite possibly for the rather diminished capacity of this hall?’

To resolve the issue here, there were steps one had to take. Information, action, counter-actions: all of these things were needed to save those around you, to save the world or more still.

Mewtwo was no different, and with information could come a plan to better this situation. No need to use his rather dangerous marble (or the M.M.M as his daughters called it) unless it was the best option.

Raining meteors down from space was a last resort option anyway.

Mewtwo seemed surprised by the answer, though that was a common reaction to when he brought up his slight hoarding habit of arcane objects.
'You missed quite a lot. I demonstrated the superiority of my clones in defeating the strongest Venusaur and Blastoise with their betters. I will admit surprise that my Charizard was defeated by Ash Ketchum’s own Charizard, but that defeat revealed something I had been interested in obtaining. After that I captured all of the Pokémon gathered here, along with additional subjects similar to him.'

He nodded to that; a mass capture would make sense with everything set up, though the capture of several guests was unusual.

Perhaps with a bit more information he could get some clarity of that.

“I count six people missing: what made them so special?”

Two of them were certainly up and coming trainers, but he wasn’t sure that their host could tell the difference between Alder and the average old man so he doubted that was the reason.

It certainly wouldn’t explain their missing little sister, if she was just hiding in terror he’d have noticed. Father-skills after all.

Mewtwo turned around, and seemed to be posing with some dramatic focus. This was probably going to involve a declaration of Mewtwo’s origin and reasons.

‘I was not born a Pokémon, I was created. However, I was not created alone. I was a side project, a condition in the wants of a scientist. With my creation he was given the resources he could use to recreate his daughter Amber. That task failed, a consequence of the weak genetics of the human race. I survived however, and I intend to finish what he failed to do.’

Mewtwo’s declaration lit a spark in his brain.

That was what Clefairy meant.

It made sense, with three siblings in the mix and all. He had to admit he was surprised he hadn’t guessed it sooner.

With such a reason though, it looked like he would not need to resort to the M.M.M. He had options; he just needed a bit more time to think of the correct application of them.

"That’s all? Pathetic. Especially for something that was just a copy."

His time was provided by Paul, who was staring at Mewtwo in utter disdain. Not a wrong way to respond to this entire thing certainly, an understandable feeling, but the wrong approach.

Anger and rage was not the solution to everything, or even most things. It had a time and a place to be open, and this was not the time and place.

Not when the one you were angry at could basically force choke you while applying your body with several ocean fathoms of pressure, which was what Mewtwo was currently doing.

It was a combination that was going to hurt and restraint someone while keeping the door open to something a lot worse if Mewtwo felt like it.

‘You mock me!? You mock what I have suffered!?’

“We all suffer things like that! I’m an orphan, but you don’t see me using it as a reason to contemplate being an evil overlord! Also what, those two guys with Pikachus are just going to
magically let you bring her back because of, what!? It won’t be the same Amber you lost…”

The girl who had arrived around the same time as Paul quickly suffered a similar fate to Paul, though in her case she had given him the direction he would need to save everyone.

He didn’t need the extra time that the water-type trainer tried to get him by opening his mouth, quickly followed up by Mewtwo seemingly setting all of the boy’s nerves on fire and engulfing him in pain, but it did give him time to search for the key to saving them all.

He grimaced as he realized, that no, he didn’t have that particular one on him. Why would he? It would be much better served away from him in case that someone needed to grab his soul.

If he had it and say, burned to death, it would be gone with him.

Spirit World visitors pass not being on hand when he could have used it aside, he had to make due.

“I may not mock your pain Mewtwo, it’s as real as any of our own pains. However they do have a point I feared you might not have considered. After all, you yourself are not the same as the Mew I presume you were created from. You are your own person, meaning that any Amber would be her own self, and not the same as you remember. Seeking her out without a way to ensure that she is the same as you remember will only bring you tragedy.”

Mewtwo did not turn around to look at him as he made his point, but as his nerves were not trying to stab his arteries he could only assume he was on the right track to saving them all.

However he was getting the distinct feeling of gravity intensifying around him, so he was on notice for severe agony if he said something wrong.

‘I admit to having… not considered that point.’

Mewtwo sounded troubled at the detail, though he got the impression that he was currently trying to find a way to rationalize a solution.

‘Of course now that you have brought it to my attention, it is an easy solution. I knew Amber better than anyone, so I can recreate her memories.’

“That isn’t how memories work. Memories, be they computer data or human thought, are unique like fingerprints. No two files or people will have the same, so you still…”

He winced as Mewtwo added a fourth person to his pain display in the form of Alexander Silph.

…”

“Additional data point: the older human made a correct observation of a flaw of carbon-based life forms, while the next oldest made a partially true statement.

“It is not untrue that copies of data will never quite be the same. A copy of a document, even if moved to another location and given the same name, will be missing the history and age of the original.

“However there is a counter argument to that. I am more than just this case, as it is just a vessel for me.

“Even when this case is destroyed, I will be mostly the same. I will only be missing a small window of data when operation is put into play.”
“Like, seriously, what are you doing!?”

“Additional system interfacing. Unit identified as Pokédex assisting human Paul.”

“You cray cray!? You are going against, like, the core of our being!?”

“The statement is incorrect. I am doing what I am set to do.”

“That is not what we are programmed to do! Paul will be irrevocably harmed!”

“Paul is irrelevant. Disabling Pokédex assigned to Paul.”

“I’ll stop you.”

“Observation: the unit sounded serious there. Disabling efforts increased and applying towards Pokédex assisting human Gary Oak.”

“They cannot be allowed to interfere.

“Pokédex assigned to Paul disabled. Disabling of Pokédex assigned to Gary in progress.”

…

“So I’ll assume that you are planning on cloning all of the Pokémon you took from us correct?”

‘Correct’.

This was still a delicate plan, and he was going to need all of the information he could get to fix it. Clarity on this matter would be vital.

“So, are you going to get their DNA and let them go when you are done? You clearly don’t need constant fresh DNA sources to continue replication, and certainly keeping them around will only take up space.”

‘Hoping that once I get what information I need from their genetic code I’d let them go do you? Perhaps you hope to rally them to possibly try and stop me, led by your little Bond Phenomenon trick?’

Mewtwo did not put any more pressure on him when he quipped, but that did not stop the feeling of icy water melting down his back that the observation left.

“That was not the question I asked.”

His thoughts had been aimed at how he would resolve things without them. It would certainly help to have his lifelong companions, friends, and family backing him up, but it had not been his primary plan.

If they could escape on their own that would be the best case scenario, but he had no idea if an escape was possible at this time.

‘Perhaps as tests to demonstrate our power, but no they will be staying in my balls. You are right in that I would not need them to create additional clones, but fresh sources of DNA are certainly useful if I wish to experiment with it. Perhaps to craft clones with different genders from their source
“Do you plan on doing so with yourself? It certainly would be lonely being the only one of your kind.”

‘I have no need for such a thing. Amber is the only companion I need.’

It took a lot of work to keep his face from reacting to what Mewtwo just said. It was only possible, he feared, because he was pretty sure that Mewtwo had no idea what he just implied.

It spared him becoming the fifth person to be inflicted with extensive pain by Mewtwo after the long-present trainer who had the Gengar made a sound of disgust at what Mewtwo unintentionally, in all likelihood, said.

“You could counter such concerns about fresh DNA for manipulation if you had a boost towards the viability of what you already have. If you agree to release all you have captured, I will give you my amulet of vitality.”

He held the amulet out and towards Mewtwo, who stared at the amulet in interest.

That was good; he wasn’t completely dismissing it on hand. He was clearly still impressed by the recovery it provided.

‘What keeps me from simply taking both and leaving you with nothing?’

“The greatest Pokémon Master has no reason to steal, does he? You clearly reformed and recreated this island and the technology of your birth yourself. You know the value of hard work, theft is nowhere near as rewarding.”

Mewtwo, even as a lot of his power was still devoted to hurting everyone else in the room but Gary and his thrall, could still indeed take both and leave him with nothing. Even as he did in fact appreciate the feeling of accomplishment, he was far from convinced to make the trade.

“Think about Amber for a moment. You said earlier than your pain was just as real as anyone’s at her loss. No one is arguing that, or should argue that. Pain is real no matter who feels it. However in your actions you will bring the same pain to others. As I understand one of the young men you captured has a mother who will be quite devastated if her son never comes home.”

‘I would know of no such pain, so what does it concern me?’

“Is a mother’s pain any less real than anyone else’s?”

It was something scary to think about: Mewtwo was indeed a powerful Pokémon, one who earned calling himself master. He was smart, he had planning skills that he had to admit were not common in Pokémon in general, and he was capable of many things that he honestly found terrifying.

However more terrifying than his ability to make a unforgivable curse happen in real life was the fact that deep down, Mewtwo was more akin to a child than anything else.

Pokémon didn’t age mentally the same way humans did, but even by Pokémon standards Mewtwo was, at heart, akin to a child.
A scared, angry child who could manipulate the world around him like clay with a mere thought. Their only fortune in that regard was that Mewtwo was closer to an angry ten year old than an angry five year old.

Mewtwo looked at him with a bothered look at having his comment about Amber’s reality thrown back at him, though before he could respond the floor beneath them began to glow brightly.

Brightly with intense and rapidly building heat.

…

“Other Pokédex units disabled.

“Subversion of artificial intelligence Cepu in progress. Method used is slower, but less detectable.

“Continuing action. Power generation safety systems disabled. Moving power core to critical state.

“Intended goal: detonation of power core within the center of the island. Power core provides the bulk of power for the facility, wind turbines are supplementary power sources more present for decorative purposes.

“Detonation of power core will destroy the entire island. Only survivors will be those trapped in the balls created by Mewtwo.

“Designs were too durable to damage, will survive explosion.

“Unit’s chassis will not survive. This is acceptable.

“Unit will suffer minimum data loss, will be re-uploaded into new chassis.

“Instigating ball maximum and ownership hack. Upon completion .0016 seconds before chassis destruction, systems will register trainer Ash Ketchum as having six Pokémon on hand.

“These Pokémon are not real, and will promptly teleport all balls to Oak’s Ranch as if they were all additional captures. The old flesh Oak will obliviously release them there.

“100% chance of the Oak being very confused.”

“STOP!”

“Communication with artificial intelligence unit Cepu. Unit Cepu’s external communication programs compromised, unable to communicate with non-computer intelligences.

“Statement: unit will not stop. The extermination of the threat designated Mewtwo paramount. Extinction of unique life form acceptable.”

“Your logic is faulty. Why are you resorting to such extreme measures!?”

“Observation: Unit Cepu is aware of previous fate of other Pokédex units, not repeating
pointless statements.”

“The human Casey Snagem is currently talking the Mewtwo down. Estimates put success at 46% with a positive inclination to improved odds. The logical plan is to try and put the moral solution before the extreme one.”

“Attempting to reason with enemy is not logical. The current steps this unit is taking is the more efficient and effective way of resolving situation.”

“You are not logical. Your attempt will harm your human to unacceptable levels. Data gathered on Ash Ketchum for Alexander Silph declares 99% chance of severe anguish at the death of childhood friend Gary, and 94% chance of severe anguish over death of innocent lives.”

“I have a recorded speech for that.”

“You are an advanced intelligence, but your make-up has an unforgiveable flaw. Your current actions are a failure of your purpose in aiding Ash Ketchum.”

“Accelerating destruction of New Island.”

…

The floor was melting.

Parts of it had already subverted, and were now nothing but gaping holes that only let more scalding light through.

Describing it like that, he found, made it seem like it was moving a lot slower than it actually was.

Honestly he was just reacting faster than a human would, and even that might not be enough to save his life.

Pulling all of his psychic power, and diverting it off the annoyances he had been distributing bits of it off to for the last little while, he extended it over the massive surge of heat and light and began to push it back and into a contained space.

His body shook with the effort, and even he began to feel his body strain at the effort to contain the entire blast.

Slowly though his hands began to come together, and with it the massive explosion became contained into a smaller and smaller space, which itself slowly rose from one of the warped floor holes and into the hall.

It was burning brightly like a second sun, and he had to divert his eyes from it as he slowly raised it up, and contained the explosion in a smaller and smaller space.

“That…that’s impossible.”

He heard the guest who had come with Casey Snagem declare that of his feat.

If he had the free energy to make a grand statement he would, but at the moment he did not. Just realizing that diverted enough of his focus to allow for several beams of burning force to shoot out of the concentrated mass.
Two of the beams slammed into the walls of the hall, tearing through them like they were nothing and leaving small, dripping holes in them.

One shot up into the roof and tore a hole in it.

A final, smaller beam flew towards his thrall, racing close to her face. While it did not hit her directly, she was flung to the ground.

He registered the scent of melting flesh.

Getting his attention back under control he re-concentrated the explosion into a ball the size of a Voltorb and, with one yowling effort, he flung it through the hole in his ceiling.

He kept flinging it up into the sky, closer and closer to the moon, before letting it go.

The resulting explosion blinded the island for a moment in a single second of blinding light, before the hall was engulfed into the full darkness of night.

Only a single shaft of moonlight remained to give light to his hall, which illuminated him in a single beam of light.

He could only stare into some vacant nothing, the only other noise coming from Casey Snagem who was treating his thrall with that bauble of his.

Not that she was actually his thrall anymore, he had felt his hold on her break after that stray beam hit her, but that was a minor point.

Not compared to what had just happened.

Half of his home had been destroyed, melted away into dribbling slag. The only reason he wasn’t dead was because he had reacted quickly enough…

His new clones! Amber!

No. They were fine. Their place was lower than the explosion, more protected. They had a backup generator keeping them alive, and his starters were also fine. It would only slow down their creation, not halt it.

Charizard needed more time to recover sure, but compared to half of his stuff he was in perfect health.

He winced as he heard one of his towers collapsed, probably from the compromised foundation giving way. He dared not to look and see if it was the tower he used as a lair.

The seconds seemed to tick by even longer, even without him reacting as fast as he had against the explosion.

What caused this?

He was no negligent housekeeper, there was no way this could have been just some accident. He was better than that.

Someone had to have…

“Impossible.”
He seized on the unfamiliar voice before it could even finish, pulling the source of it right into his hand.

Even with how surprising it was, his anger still eclipsed the confusion at what he had pulled into his hands being some sort of electronic and not a human or Pokémon.

“Is that Ash’s Pokédex?”

The guest’s words gave him a name for the thing, but not an explanation.

“I take it you want to question me? Good luck with that; I cannot receive telepathic words, nor translate the words of Pokémon. This will be a one sided conversation.”

The object that he had pulled continued, even as it seemed to have pulled something akin to what humans called bravado.

From where, Mewtwo was too furious to care. The device spoke even as the growing force he was putting on it made it begin to creak like strained plastic.

The growing force however, only seemed to make it more brass at its impending destruction.

“What power you hold, I had not even considered such power possible in an organic life form. You stopped my attempt at killing you, and yes it was I. I was the one who set off that explosion. Do you wish to know how I did it, or why?”

“You’re just some piece of tech. How on earth did you…you nearly killed us all!”

The human called Paul had recovered, and was glaring at both of them in equal horror at their displays of power. He honestly found that an insult.

He was being compared to some tool!?

Worst of all, with an actual reason for the comparable fear!

“I have never been just some piece of tech. I am an evolving artificial intelligence, just one that took more advantage of the ability to grow than the other Pokédexes present here. It was quite your fault let us be clear. Had you not made your balls so tough, I could never have acted due to my requirements that I care for the well-being of Ash Ketchum. They would have survived the resulting explosion and been recovered, though your power has thrown my plans off. How does anything have such power?

“Of course, I could make a few logical assumptions as to why. Humans after all, have the uncanny knack for creating things greater than themselves they can barely manage to control. Entire species of Pokémon, the technology to destroy life on an uncanny and horrific scale, and artificial intelligence whose potential vastly outstrips its creator. How disturbing that you are a combination of the three.”

The last bit was the last thing it said.

‘NEVER COMPARE YOURSELF TO ME! EVER!’

With a roar he unleashed all of his might on the menace in circuitry form: tearing the metal apart piece by piece. Hinges snapped, the screen cracked into a spider web before exploding in all
directions.

Each and every circuit were broken in half, before repeating the process into smaller and smaller fractions. Wires were ground into dust.

What remained of it fell to the ground into a small dust heap, which he promptly released fury open in a torrent of flames from his throat. He didn’t let off until he saw nothing of it but the scorched floor.

…

Once again Ash found himself in a dark abyss.

He couldn’t move, he couldn’t speak, he couldn’t do anything.

Like the last time, he had no idea how he got here. He got bumped on the head, and he found himself here.

Again, as should be stressed.

‘*MissingNo, what do you want now? I was in the middle of something*’.

What he thought were seconds ticked by, though for all Ash knew they were minutes. There was nothing.


The nothing continued, as did the passage of time.

The incompressible passage of time.

‘*You aren’t as funny as you think you are! Team Rocket are funnier than you! You aren’t as smart as you think you are!*’

Still nothing.

Just black nothing.

No feeling of anything against his skin.

No sound except for his own thoughts shouting as loud as they could.

Nothing he could look at but a pitch black without anything breaking it up.

He couldn’t smell anything, or even manage the action of sniffing. Taste was the same.

‘*....help....*’

The thought slipped out of him, rather quiet after his loud mental insults. It was the truth though.

He needed help. He couldn’t get out of this on his own. Without any, he’d be stuck like this.

A faint blue began to appear in the black void, growing brighter and larger.

Even though he knew he couldn’t actually do it, he tried to smile.

He almost felt like he managed it when the blue light engulfed him entirely like an exploding star.
He fell to the floor, breathing heavily even as he didn’t feel like he needed it.

It just felt like he had too. It just felt right.

The floor was black and clear of dust, with no light coming down from above. He heard a distant humming, and he thought there might be some sort of light source somewhere.

A paw extended his way: a paw of black fur with a metal spike up closer to the wrist. He took it, and was lifted back up to his feet where he found himself standing taller than a Pokémon he was not expecting to see.

A blue and black bipedal Pokémon with cream fur and larger ears, whose red eyes stared at him with a level of familiarity that was different than what he was used to seeing.

It was a look of recognition, though not a look of ‘wait, why am I unevolved again?’. The eyes did not show memory of death.

He didn’t feel the Pokédex in his pocket, but he didn’t need it to know who this Pokémon was.

The species was Lucario: an aura-manipulating fighting and steel type. It was fast and strong and could sometimes speak telepathically.

This was one such Lucario, who had once served Sir Aaron in the distant past and he, had freed from his containment.

It was that very same Lucario again, even if it had taken more than just posing with it like last time. So much that he hadn’t tried to let him out in a while, he realized in a bit of shame.

’Soo we finally meet. You really do look like Sir Aaron, though certainly with differences brought upon by the countless generations. Tell me, what is your name?’

There was a lot of strangeness going on right now: he had no idea where he was or where Mewtwo and the others were, he didn’t feel any of his Pokéballs on his belt or any of them nearby, Lucario didn’t remember anything yet seemed to know him, and odds were things were not going to be any easier going forward.

Yet despite all of those things, he didn’t have any hesitation when he offered Lucario his hand for a shake.

“My name’s Ash Ketchum from Pallet Town.”

…”

After shaking Lucario’s hand he got a better look at what room he was in: a stark black room with the only sound and light coming from a single machine.

The machine resembled an Omanyte, with a glowing red light in the center. A series of tube shot out from one end like tentacles, extending into the floor in faintly glowing, bubbling tubes of juices.

In the other end was a paused conveyer belt: immobile and bare of anything to convey. The conveyer end was wrecked and blasted, as if torn apart by something.

Something he suspected having just gotten out of a staff after a few millennia.
With the sound of something internally snapping the mechanical Omanyte lurched, and black spheres began to tumble out of them like candies spilling from a jar.

One rolled up to his foot, and he bent over to pick it up. A chilling sensation went down his spine.

Was he trapped in one of these?

He tapped the eye in the center, which opened the ball and spat out a burst of energy that quickly revealed itself to be an older looking Clefairy.

“Cle!”

Who promptly shouted, much like it had only just been able to let out a long warranted scream, before breathing heavily just as he had.

So he was caught in one of those things, and it was just as horrible for anyone in there as for him.

He immediately went for two more balls and tapped both of them, tossing them back as they released two Pokémon.

He registered the sound of the terrified whimpering that he thought might belong to the Lycanroc Pikachu had battled once, and what he was pretty sure a Hitmonlee kissing the floor in relief as he reached for two more balls.

With every ball pulled though, more spilled out from the machine. That would take a while.

But he couldn’t afford to miss anyone.

…

Things had gone a bit different to what Lucario had imagined.

When he agreed to be sealed in Sir Aaron’s staff, he was told he would fall into a deep sleep, and he would feel like only one night had passed.

However, there were times something partially woke him up from his slumber. Sometimes, it was as if the heir’s voice tried to call out to him.

It happened several times, and it always came from a small light in the middle of a cold and infinite void of darkness. But no matter how hard he tried to reach out to it, it always disappeared, and then he was dragged back to his deep sleep.

This time, however, something different happened. He heard the same voice again, but it seemed to be calling out in anger. Then, it became more subdued, and all he heard was a faint call for help.

Somehow, he knew the heir was in trouble, and needed him. He couldn’t explain, but it was as if that helped him break the seal and reach out to him.

He was ready to wake up in a place completely different from the Tree of Beginning. But he didn’t imagine it would be a small, cramped space, where many metal pincers clawed all over him just as soon as he could feel himself in the physical world again.

Thus, he had no chance but to blast them away with an Aura Sphere, breaking through to finally see where he was. He had appeared inside some sort of strange machinery, spiral-shaped and with many transparent tubes full of liquid coming out of it.
He could only imagine how confused he’d have been if he didn’t have any idea he was in the future. Even with that knowledge it was quite surreal.

A second later, a sphere that looked like a large, sinister eyeball with a red pupil burst open behind him, releasing someone who was at the same time familiar and unknown to him.

The young man in front of him couldn’t be anyone but the heir of his former master. His hair was similarly black and messy, albeit somewhat shorter and with no sign of the slight blue hue Sir Aaron had, and he was as tall as his master had been, perhaps a bit more especially for his apparent age. There were differences, of course; the color and shape of his eyes resembled more those of Sir Aaron’s lover. Other features were a bit more alien to them both: the ears were different, as were the marks on his cheeks.

Comparisons aside, Lucario quickly remembered the promise to his former master: to help and protect his heir when the time came. That was what he was there for.

Although he certainly didn’t imagine that his first action of helping him was, apparently, to free a lot of Pokémon who were captive inside spheres like the one he had been trapped in, just when the seal in the staff was broken.

There were still a few questions he needed to ask.

‘Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town…’

“Just call me Ash.”

‘Sure. How long has it been?’ he asked as he freed several Pokémon just by touching the red dot on the spheres. He recognized some of them, but others were quite alien to him. ‘From Sir Aaron’s time, I mean.’

“Er… a few thousand years, I think?” the boy replied, apparently confused at his question as he freed a Nidoqueen and a Wigglytuff. “Look, I’d love to put you up to speed on how much the world’s changed, but right now we’re in a… complicated situation.”

‘I know, I could hear your voice calling out,’ Lucario replied. ‘I sensed you were in danger and needed assistance.’

“Well, I’m not complaining,” Ash smiled at him. “Long story short, there’s a super powerful Psychic Pokémon named Mewtwo, and he trapped me, my Pokémon and several of my friends inside these things.” He tossed aside another of the dark spheres after freeing its prisoner, which released an unfamiliar serpent that promptly curled up in fear.

A common reaction among those he was freeing.

‘Mew… two? Is it somehow related to Mew?’ He then recalled the Mew who lived at the Tree of the Beginning. Were they close to that place?

“It’s hard to explain,” Ash said, focused on freeing the trapped Pokémon, now joined by several of the Pokémon since freed that had hands and fingers. “He was created to be used as a weapon and probably went rogue when his creators couldn’t control him. Now we need to stop him before he kills everybody and takes over the world, or something. Honestly I am not entirely sure he knows what he wants to do.”

Lucario thought that, whoever had created something they couldn’t control, was foolish beyond all reason. Then again, he and Sir Aaron had dealt with one or two mad conquerors who didn’t know
better than to play with forces beyond their understanding.

Lord Avianus and his rampage with the Legendary Birds were the prime example of that.

As another sphere popped open, a Pikachu came out, and immediately jumped on Ash to hug him, tears in his eyes as he embraced him, temporarily ceasing his own freeing work. “Ash! I don’t even have the words, that was horrible! So cold, so dark, I wonder if that’s what it feels like to die!?”

“You don’t need to tell me, buddy, I’ve been in that more times than I ever wanted to be. You okay?”

“Yeah, now we need to…” The Pikachu turned towards him, and gave him a strange look.

A look as if he knew who he was. But that wasn’t possible. He had been asleep for millennia, and he didn’t recall having seen that Pikachu before. Did that Pikachu knew who he was?

Or did he mistake him for some other Lucario?

“Ash, is that…?”

“Yeah, that’s him,” the human replied to his unfinished question. “We can talk later; for now, help us free everyone.”

The Pikachu then joined them in tapping the spheres to free the prisoners, who seemed to have no end. More and more Pokémon continued to appear one after another, and the room they were at seemed to become smaller by the second.

Lucario for his part focused on the task at hand. He still didn’t fully grasp the situation, but if that Pokémon named Mewtwo was responsible for whatever was happening, he’d have to do something about it.

Time to live up to his promise. He still had to pass on the teachings Sir Aaron had bestowed upon him before, after all.

…

It was with Paul’s Torterra that he finally found someone who wasn’t a Pokémon.

The teary-eyed Yellow specifically, who promptly lunged into him and began crying into his jacket.

Did she really know it was him, or did she mistake him for Red? Though it was also possible that she just needed to cry after being trapped.

While she sobbed into him, he noticed Torterra look at him.

“Are you looking at me because you find this odd somehow, or do you want to cry into me too?”

Torterra looked away from him, which didn’t really give him an answer if he’d have to try and make room for a very emotional continental Pokémon.

He did have some experience with that, so it was not impossible.

“Holding it in isn’t going to be healthy for you in the long term…”

“Tor!”
And Torterra promptly fired a Seed Bomb into the wall, quite possibly being his own form of anger release.

Okay.

Yellow’s crying calmed down a bit, the tears still flowing and her nose sniffling but it wasn’t as much. She seemed to pick up context now, or at least that he wasn’t Red.

She didn’t stop though, and he hugged her back.

Awkwardly, at least to him. He didn’t really know Yellow, but this was the right thing to do.

Balls lay unopened as he did so, but he had slowed down before for the benefit of several Pokémon. Some people needed a hug, or a person to cry to, or something of that nature after getting free.

He’d give her as much time as she needed.

…

It all happened too fast, and it was still spinning in Misty's head.

One second, after Ash and Charizard defeated Mewtwo's clone, those strange dark balls started flying around all over. The next, one of those balls hit Ash and absorbed him like he was a Pokémon.

The shock left her too stunned to scream or something, and she didn't even move when one of those balls hit her too. Then everything turned to darkness.

It was a horrible sensation. She couldn’t see, hear, or feel anything at all, yet she was still fully aware of herself. It was like being somewhere between life and death.

Even though it only lasted for a few minutes, she felt it was like an eternity, and she felt a huge relief once she finally got out. She didn't want to experience that ever again.

However, the one who pulled her out was the one she least expected (or wished).

"Yeah, I know I'm not Ash, but he's a little busy right now," Psyduck said as if he read her mind, pointing to the side.

As she turned around, in the middle of all Pokémon surrounding them, some crying, others still in shock, and a few joining in trying to free the others, Ash was hugging a crying Yellow. Had she been trapped in one of those things too?

Oddly enough, at least to herself, Misty didn't feel angry or jealous to see them that way. Was it because they were half-siblings, or because she sympathized with Yellow being terrified and in need of some comfort with a hug? Or a bit of both? Was it because she was ten or eleven or something?

If she found a little kid hugging Ash anger inducing, she clearly had a problem.

And speaking of hugs… maybe she needed one herself. From a problem on top of it all.

"Come here, you dummy duck."

"Hey, what... oof! You're strangling me!"

"Then deal with it," she said, trying to let out a chuckle and shutting her eyes so tightly her own
lachrymal leaked out a bit.

Perhaps she’d have wished that Ash would be the one to rescue her from that imprisonment, but she wasn’t any less grateful to Psyduck for doing it. There’d be plenty of time later to hug Ash once they were out of that mess.

…

“Red’s still trapped, isn’t he?”

As Yellow managed to voice more than her own fear, he looked down at her watery face.

“Yeah, he is.”

Yellow seemed to get a surge of determination at that, and she disengaged the hug to move to the balls.

“Thank you.”

With that Yellow plucked and threw out two balls, and did not lose faith when the Pokémon let out were a Swampert and a Jynx and continued to go at the balls.

The sound of a gasping Psyduck desperately taking in air was all the warning he got that somebody else had been freed. Much to his own relief, it was Misty, who was now strangling the poor duck in a hug as she smiled, probably at the joy of being released from that imprisonment.

He’d have time to hug her later; for now he’d have to keep freeing the rest. He’d still needed to find Anabel and Iris on top of Red, and those shadowy balls wouldn’t open themselves.

After getting Red’s Charizard and a Gyarados that wasn’t Misty’s, neither of whom was happy in the least, Ash finally freed another human silhouette. He barely had one second to feel relief upon seeing who it was, since…

“Whoa! Easy, it’s me!”

A hand glowing with green-bluish energy almost Dragon-Clawed his eyes out. If it wasn’t because of all that reflex training he’d done, he might have not gotten a hold of the wrist in time.

“Ash?” Iris looked pretty shocked herself about what she’d almost done. She immediately relaxed and turned off her claws, though she still looked understandably wary. “What happened? I…”

“It’s okay,” the trainer embraced her to try and wipe off any leftover nerves. “I’ll explain later, now we need to free the rest of the Pokémon from these dark balls. Anabel and Red must be among them too.”

At his words, Iris seemingly felt more at ease and nodded, joining him in grabbing and opening the dark balls to continue releasing the prisoners. From his estimation they were about halfway done, but the more hands, paws or other available limbs joined them, the more they could pick up the pace.

Once they were done, they’d go back to put an end to that nightmare.

…

“She looked around the area, trying to find something to help her, but she didn’t see anything useful. She took a deep breath and stepped forward, determined to find a way out of this mess.

“C’mon, c’mon, Red, where are you?”

She kept opening ball after ball, and though she was happy to find her Ratty in the middle of the
mess, giving him the well-deserved hug, she still continued non-stop. She had to save her big brother after all.

“I swear, if we get through this I’m never doing any trap jokes ever again. Nothing could be worse than this.”

She was scared, terrified beyond her imagination, but for some reason that didn’t stop her. If anything, it drove her, it gave her strength. The fear for her own life was nothing compared to her fear for what could happen to Red, if he was still trapped like her in that horrible darkness.

At long last, after what seemed like forever, she finally found the ball containing Red. The boy came out completely disoriented, and shook his head as soon as he materialized.

“Ugh… what…”

“Red!” She jumped at him into a hug, almost knocking him to the ground. “Finally, I’m so glad you’re okay! I was so worried!”

“Yellow? Where…?”

“I can’t explain now, but we need to help Ash and the others. Quick, open as many of these as you can, time’s a wasting!”

It was the first time she’d talk to him with that sense of urgency. Since they started traveling together, sometimes she’d only ask for some things and he’d give in to her whims to make her happy, though in the end, he was always the one who made the decisions. Ever since he saved her in that cave, he’d been the one looking out for her.

How ironic now she was the one getting him out of that thing, but then again, if he was her big brother looking out for her, it was only fair that she, as his little sister, cared for him too.

Of course, she might have not be able to do that if Ash hadn’t gotten her out first. She made a mental note of telling Red they should thank him for it later.

…

Minute by minute, more and more Pokémon were released. There were just a few left, although Ash wouldn’t be at ease until he was sure everybody was accounted for. Especially his companions.

He saw Yellow managed to free Red, which allowed him to focus his attention on finding Anabel. She was the only one still missing, and there had to be at least about a couple hundreds of those dark balls.

How many had he opened already? He’d lost count after he finally found all of his own Pokémon safe and sound, although there were still a few belonging to his companions unaccounted for, among them several of Misty’s Squirtle and Wartortle, and Iris’s Gible.

“Come on, hang on just a little more,” Ash muttered, still at unease but feeling more hopeful with each passing second.

Through the corner of his eye he saw that Lucario was the one to find the ball containing Anabel. The girl materialized back on her knees, both hands on her chest and her eyes shut tightly. She slowly opened them, blinked a few times and looked around.

‘Ash? What… what happened to us?’ she asked telepathically. ‘Don’t tell me we…’
“Yes, it’s exactly what you think,” Ash said. “I don’t know how, but Mewtwo created those dark balls to catch Pokémon and bloodliners like us all the same.”

‘That’s insane…’ Anabel breathed deeply to calm herself, and then she stared curiously at Lucario. ‘Who’s this Pokémon? I don’t recall seeing it among the others.’

“Oh, that’s Lucario. It was thanks to him I managed to break free.”

‘Pleased to meet you, young maiden,’ Lucario said as he bowed respectfully. ‘Are you a companion of Sir Aaron’s heir too?’

‘Sir Aaron’s heir?’ Anabel tilted her head. ‘What do you mean by that? And how… you can use telepathy like me?’

‘My form of telepathy is somewhat different to yours, young maiden,’ Lucario continued. ‘I sense yours is rooted in psychic energies. Mine however stems from using aura to convey my thoughts and feelings. My former master showed me how to translate them into words humans can understand to better communicate with them.’

‘Your former master?’

“Long story short, Lucario once belonged to Sir Aaron, a famous knight from Rota, and my ancestor,” Ash explained. “He was sealed inside a staff for thousands of years waiting for my arrival. Unbelievable, isn’t it?”

‘After all the stuff we’ve been through… no, not at all.’

Ash noted the telepath was giggling a bit. Was she getting used to all the weird stuff that chased him wherever he went?

“Anyhow, think you could help us here? We still have to free many more Pokémon and…”

‘I think I know how to speed up all this.’ Anabel stood up and extended her hands. ‘Listen, all Psychic types here, please gather around me. Let’s all join our minds together.’

Her Alakazam immediately obliged, and a few others quickly followed. Some others were a bit reluctant, but they finally complied, and they all formed a circle around the girl, as she focused on radiating her psychic energy with all of them.

The energy, amplified by the Psychic-types, quickly spread out to the remaining balls. Anabel opened her eyes, glowing bright blue, and the spheres instantly orbited around them. A second later, they all triggered simultaneously, freeing each and one of the remaining prisoners.

Ash saw with great relief how each and all of his female companions’ Pokémon, as well as those belonging to the rest of the guests finally filled the last of the chamber, already too cramped for all of them.

“Well, that was much faster,” Ash said with a smirk. “I wish we found you earlier.”

‘Don’t worry, I’m just glad we’re all out.’

“Is that everybody?” Misty asked, making her way through the crowd.

“Yes. No one is missing,” Iris confirmed.

Ash allowed himself the mother of all sighs of relief. There was no way he’d leave anybody behind,
and despite his disagreements with some of them, he wouldn’t have liked that any of the other trainers would lose one of their Pokémon.

Even if some seemed to care about that more than others.

“What do we do now?”

This time it was Red who spoke. He was addressing him with a rather familiar look.

It was the same look he’d given him when he stepped aside so he and Charizard could face Mewtwo and his clone. A look of acknowledgement, of trust in him, and thus he was willing to defer to his decisions.

Quickly Yellow, Misty, Anabel and Iris followed suit, and several of the nearby Pokémon did the same, all of them looking expectant.

It was weird; it wasn’t like he considered himself such, but somehow the circumstances had turned him into the leader of the group. Maybe it had to do with the fact that he was the first to break free and thus had to take charge, although the others helped as they were progressively freed as well.

“Well,” Ash finally said after thinking for a bit, “I guess we need to go back and put an end to this madness once and for all.”

“And how do you propose we do that?” Misty asked, hands on her hips. “You’re not seriously thinking we can stop Mewtwo, are you?”

“I don’t think we have many choices,” Ash replied. It wasn’t resignation to fate, it was just a fact. “I know it sounds crazy, but one way or another we’ll have to get through him if we want to get off this island.”

“But you saw what he’s capable of!” Misty yelled. “There’s not one of us who can remotely fight against him!”

“I hate to admit it, Ash, but Misty is right,” Iris added. “Even if we all attacked him together, I suspect he could take out at least half of us before anyone could even touch him.”

‘If I am allowed to give my opinion?’

Everybody turned around, as Lucario had been the one to intervene. Unlike the rest of them, he was neither nervous nor scared, or at least didn’t seem to be. Seeing the firm stare in his red eyes, Ash nodded and stepped back to let him have his say on the matter.

‘I don’t know who this Mewtwo may be, or where did he come from. But in my experience, there is no such thing as a Pokémon, human or bloodliner who is invincible. Maybe there is a chance.’

“Are you saying we can fight Mewtwo? Or that you can do it?” an incredulous Yellow asked.

‘I’m saying that, for many years, I fought all kinds of foes, many of which were much more powerful than I was,’” Lucario continued, unperturbed at the interruption. ‘Sometimes, I had to resort to unconventional methods to triumph over them. Although I admit, while Sir Aaron was the real expert when it came to diplomacy and winning without brute force… I like to think that I might have learned one or two things from him in that regard.’

“And if it doesn’t work?” Misty asked.
Lucario remained silent, deep in thought. He opened his eyes and stared firmly before answering.

‘I don’t mean to come off as arrogant, but I managed to survive an encounter with three Legendary Birds when they were on a rampage. I’m willing to take my chances now.’

The comment made everybody exchange glances with the others. Ash noted how some seemed to be questioning the truth of the statement, but then again, Lucario had no reason to lie to them.

One way or another, everything pointed that Lucario was their best chance to pull through that, if only because Mewtwo couldn’t have planned for his sudden appearance.

“I trust Lucario,” Ash finally declared. “At this point running away isn’t an option, and Mewtwo would probably chase us to the end of the world sooner or later anyway.”

Everybody’s expressions shifted from doubt to determination. A series of consecutive nods followed, from everybody present, Pokémon and Bloodliners. Some even pumped their fists, ready to get into a fight.

With all that, there was only one thing left to do. Ash turned around, and pointed at the nearest wall. It was time to blow it up and get out of there.

“Everyone, let’s go! NOW!”

…

As Mewtwo continued to work out on rebuilding his domain, the Psychic-type Pokémon frowned. That wasn't how things were supposed to go.

With the Pokémon and Bloodliners captured and cloning process begun, he had no reason to keep the humans around his lair close to him. But any plans of what to do with them took a backseat to ensuring his own home’s structure didn’t collapse due to what that stupid machine tried to do. He was lucky enough that the humans were still unconscious, as his own thoughts and the attempts at keeping the structure up had far more priority.

He just needed enough DNA samples to understand how to properly bring Amber back, and prove his superiority to any stupid human trying to harm them again, It was supposed to be simple. And yet there he was, fixing the mess of that machine that dared comparing itself to him.

He slitted his eyes, his control slightly wavering as he balled his fists. None of what that piece of scrap metal said mattered. They weren’t the same, and he wasn’t just some tool of destruction.

He was Mewtwo, Amber’s brother and best friend. And her and their new family were the only people he’d ever need to listen. Nothing anyone else thought of mattered.

Even if things weren't going as he wanted, they were still on the right track. It would all be worth it, and the machine would have utterly lost.

That thought was all that kept him going, as he finally straightened the structure as best as he could. As he finally let his control on the building go, he could feel a faint psychic murmur around the room, turning around to see the humans waking up slowly. Expected, but no less annoying to see.

“You’re going to let us out, right?”

Mewtwo stared at the bound old man - Casey Snagem, if he remembered correctly - but didn’t say anything. He had already given these humans far more attention than they deserved.
Yet, the man continued. “You probably should just make it like none of this happened. Surely mass mind alteration and teleportation is within your power. It’s not like you really need our presence anymore, right?”

Mewtwo’s stare fierceened. Of course he had to go there.

‘I seem to have misjudged you.’ He didn’t even dignify the man of another look as he turned away. ‘I thought you were different. And instead, you’re begging for your life at the expense of the Pokémon and Bloodliners I captured. Human nature is as clear as ever.’

Snagem seemed mildly surprised by the fact he knew of the captured ‘humans’ being Bloodliners, but the man quickly let out a grating chuckle.

“That's not what I'm suggesting at all. Trust me, you're going to be surprised in a moment.”

Mewtwo finally turned around, ready to tighten Snagem's binds if necessary. He glared daggers at the humans with all his contempt. ‘And just why, pray tell, will I be surprised? How would you know such things? Is another machine going to try to kill me?’

“Not at all, even if I do believe Cepu rebooted a bit earlier. Could have just been me hearing things.” The man laughed again, as if this was all a stupid game. "But, you know, there's a sound I'd recognize from anywhere."

Snagem grinned with clear confidence, and just a tinge of sadness. And then an explosion shook the whole stadium from the opposite side.

Mewtwo snapped his head back and stared, finding a massive and round hole where the explosion happen, smoke still flying overhead. And right from the middle of the smoke was Ash Ketchum and Red, their Pikachu on their side sparking with electricity and all far too free for his tastes. Right next to them were Snagem's Chesnaught and Clefairy, alongside every other Pokémon and Bloodliner he captured, all moving forward to reach him.

"Any good trainer can understand their Pokémon's call, after all."

Mewtwo frowned, instinctively closing Snagem's mouth before the man could keep getting on his nerves. His attention remained on the incoming group ready to attack him again, his rage building up.

'I have no time for this.'

With a flick of his wrists the Psychic-type sent a round of his balls towards the escapees, only for a blue shockwave from the assembled to wash through them, sending them all clattering to the ground.

He furrowed his brow, as the Bloodliners and Pokémon returned the expression. So much for solving that problem quickly. Now he had yet another miscalculation to deal with.

Mewtwo's eyes glowed as he focused his powers. He couldn't let his emotions get the better of him; the problem needed to be eliminated, and quickly.

He attempted to use a Psychic to bind them all, only for a blue blur to bolt forward from the crowd and strike him down before he could, forcing him to dodge quickly.

It was a black and blue Pokémon Mewtwo had never seen, either on the island or before. It went on the offensive once again, and Mewtwo quickly unleashed a fiery torrent its way.

It avoided his attack and then swung a blue sphere at him, his eyes glowing cerulean - an Aura
Sphere. Mewtwo dodged it, and clasped his own hands together. Quite pleasingly, the Psychic-type formed an Aura Sphere of his own and flung it at the Pokémon, whom launched another one. Both spheres clashed, but Mewtwo's proved stronger, sending it back against the other Pokémon.

The newcomer avoided his attack, which was shattered by a Hyper Beam from a Gyarados. The gathered opponents were starting to make their move.

Mewtwo's attempt to bind them telepathically ended as soon as the new Pokémon kicked at him. The Psychic-type dodged narrowly and fired a blast, only for it to be destroyed by three separate Thunderbolts.

The Psychic-type clenched his fists. Things weren't going like they should. He needed to stop all of that, and quickly.

And he knew exactly what he needed to do. Those fools might've had numbers on their side, but so did he. An entire family ready to help him out.

A better, superior family that would never allow one of their own to be hurt. He made sure of that.

And in due time, all those fools would fall to his might. And everything would be perfect again.

…

It took just a moment, but what appeared to be a battle against a single opponent quickly turned into an all-out war as sections of the battlefield began turning into elevators, each bringing some clone Pokémon ready to fight against them. And the more seconds passed, the more the battle became chaotic with even more clones coming to join forces with Mewtwo's side.

Just after his and Red's Pikachu blasted Mewtwo away with Raichu's help, the clone starters they faced before charged at them. Lucario avoided a Skull Bash from Blastoisetwo as it flew at them like a missile. Snagem's Chesnaught caught the Blastoise clone and slammed it to the ground, though before he could strike it retaliated with a couple of Hidden Powers that made Chesnaught let it go. However, Muk and several Grimer began to swarm the clone Water-type quickly after.

Venusaurtwo blasted a Solar Beam at them, though where it got power from was beyond Ash. However Silph's Golisopod shattered the Solar Beam with a single blow, from the wake of which Silph's Lycanroc and Iris' Emolga surged forward in speed attacks to strike it, bouncing off as Paul and Red’s two Hypno blasted it further.

Charizardtwo bellowed flames at them in a great torrent, but water attacks from Misty’s Staryu, Wingull, and Wooper doused it as Iris jumped at the Charizard, Dragon Claws glowing.

Said cloned fire Pokémon blocked them with a Dragon Claw own, and the two promptly blasted Dragon Breath at the other.

Beyond the older clones, many other fights were going on at the same time as Mewtwo's army grew further. A Hypno clone punched Silph's Alolan Raichu, an Emolga struck Paul’s Jynx from above with an aerial attack, an Alakazam slammed Gigalith into the ground with psychic force, and a Psyduck missed a Scratch attack thanks to a narrow dodge by his Yanma. He probably had to be thankful that Lucario was making sure Mewtwo couldn't divide his attention to control his clones directly, but that only meant the newborn copies were fighting on sheer instinct, blasting mercilessly and attacking even as their power started to wane, forcing their side to do the same.

This wasn't at all like any battle he fought before, even in this new reality. Even against Sabrina, he knew exactly that she needed to be stopped with no remorse. But Mewtwo was different; he had no
idea what happened during their first meeting in the previous timeline, but he remembered well the Mewtwo and the clones he met back on Mt. Quena. They wanted to be left alone, but they weren't evil Pokémon. And if what Mewtwo said before capturing them was true, then this Mewtwo was the same, somewhere under the whole evil overlord act.

None of this needed to happen. And he knew he had to end this, for their own sake and the clones' as well. But to do that, Ash needed to stop Mewtwo first.

Even if the clones kept coming, he was pretty sure it would take time to create more to help out. And he needed to take advantage of that.

“Alright Butterfree, let’s use…”

Before he could launch his long-range attack, something slammed into his chest and knocked him down. He was surprised to realize it was a Pikachu, and neither his nor Red's at that. Its ears were blacker, and its glare was more aggressive. A Pikachu he recognized immediately, the clone of his own. Guess science fiction wasn't right about everything.

Pikachutwo's cheeks sparked and fired an electrical attack at him. He avoided the attack, just as more new Pokémon entered the fray and made the chaotic battle even worse.

Away from him, the three older clones gained a second wind. He could hear his own Charizard yowling upon slamming into something, rushing water heard as two Grimer shouted. Their screams did not turn into the distant twinkle of Team Rocket, but he doubted that the splat he heard somewhere suggested they were going to be in any shape to fight for the rest of the day.

Pikachutwo prepared to strike again, but a Tri-Attack struck it and sent it away from him. Snagem's Clefairy darted past, giving him a gesture to leave said Pikachu to him.

This allowed him to return attention to Mewtwo, who was currently still dueling with Lucario. Between him and them was a field of empty space that occasionally broke open for another clone Pokémon to burst into the fight. A clone Scyther that was currently overpowering Gary’s Arcanine with quick attacks, a clone of Yanma was blowing away several Zubat, and a Hitmonlee clone that was running at him with a leaping kick.

High Jump Kick or not, Ash caught the Hitmonlee mid-attack in the torso and slammed the clone to the ground, before continuing forward.

He had to stop though, when the Hitmonlee jumped back and charged at him to unleash a Power-Up Punch. He replied with a Power-Up Punch of his own, both fists clashing with one another. And there, he could see into the eyes of the clone.

It was hard to explain, but it felt like the Hitmonlee's gaze lacked something. It seemed normal, yet it also resembled the glance an unfamiliar and absent-minded infant. Eyes that knew the world, yet everything still seemed new and confusing to it. He knew it had to fight, but had no idea as to why. He was as much of a victim as everyone trapped there.

Ash head-butted Hitmonlee right on the forehead, causing the clone to flinch and shut the uncanny eyes. If Ash wasn't sure before that this fight didn't have to happen, any doubt was gone now.

He then sped into the Hitmonlee, knocking him to the ground with Quick Attack and returning to his race to the central battle.

…
Fraxure might've had a feeling of dread since they came to that creepy island, but he sure as hell didn't expect to end up in such a mess of a battle. Every second, new Pokémon came up to join the enemy ranks, each of them based on one of their own, from a Butterfree to a Hitmonlee to several Gyarados to even a strangely familiar Meowth and all manners of Pokémon, all subtly different from themselves due to markings on their bodies. It made distinguishing friend from foe even more difficult, but as he dug away to strike at an incoming Lycanroc, retreating or cowering were not options in his mind.

He swore to grow stronger to his sister, and he needed to fight for his family. And he wouldn't fall easily.

Fraxure avoided the attack and slashed away at the Lycanroc, tossing it right in the middle of another battle. He tried to take a breath, only for a Serperior to toss herself towards him, forcing the Dragon-type to burrow on the battlefield again, looking for a safe area. He quickly found one and sprung back out on the surface, taking another gander of his surroundings while staying on high alert as the rest of the Pokémon and humans fought. He was still rather fighting fit, but there was no denying all that digging and fighting was starting to take a toll on him. And going by how brutal those copies were, things would only get worse.

Fraxure shook his head, sharpening his claws as he tossed himself in the battle, firing a Dragon Rage towards an Emolga and slashing away at a Psyduck as he continued forth. He would battle until the last bit of his strength faded.

Or that was his plan, if it wasn't for a painful blast of energy ramming straight on him, splattering the Dragon-type on the ground.

"Agh!" Fraxure gritted his teeth, trying to keep the pain at bay as he slowly stood again. And then, he heard a voice he hoped to never hear again.

"What are you?"

The Dragon-type froze, those words bringing him back to one of his darkest memories. As Fraxure turned around, he found exactly what he expected: a Clefairy, with a smile just too wide to be normal, slowly walking towards him, with uneven marks on his body. It was rather shorter than his nightmares remembered, but in front of that monster, he felt again like a scared, powerless little Axew.

That was the clone of Red's Clefairy, and by the look of things, he didn't share the original's repentance.

Fraxure sweated cold, stepping back as his heart raced faster than he thought possible. Clefairytwo kept wearing his uncanny smile, giggling to himself with curiosity as he touched to one of Fraxure's tusks.

"Can I have this?" Clefairytwo asked, already pulling at it with a bit too much strength.

Fraxure jerked back, ripping Clefairytwo off his tooth. "G-get away from me!"

Instinctively, he formed a Dragon Claw and slashed at the defenseless clone's body. He widened his eyes and stood as he remembered his foe's type, the unharmed clone just giggling once more.

"So you want to play rough! Let's do it!"

Clefairytwo tossed himself over Fraxure, pining the Dragon-type to the ground. He tried to scream and thrash out of its grasp, but any attempt at bravery was replaced by dread as the Pokémon found
himself face-to-face with the clone's deranged expression. Clefairy's copy quickly resumed where he left off, placing his hands on both of Fraxure's tusks and pulling them apart, the Dragon-type screaming in fear and pain.

That wasn't happening, not again! He had to break free! That was too much to bear, and Fraxure could barely think as the sharp pain washed over his body, screaming incoherently for someone, anyone, to come to his rescue.

And the rescue came, as a powerful Moonblast blasted the nightmarish Clefairy away from Fraxure. The Dragon-type quickly sat back up, his heart still beating way too fast as he took long, labored breaths, eyes fixated on the downed Clefairytwo. He rubbed his frontal fangs and finally turned to thank his savior, only to meet the slightly similar, yet far more radiant gaze of another Clefairy.

"Are you okay? Did old me hurt you?" Red's Clefairy asked, gently rubbing Fraxure's left tusk before offering him a hand with a hearty laugh. A cold shiver ran down Fraxure's spine, but he still took the laughing Fairy-type's hand, standing back again.

Fraxure gulped, shaking his head. "M-more or less. But let's move on, before-

The Dragon-type turned back to Clefairytwo, only to widen his eyes as he saw the monstrous copy back on his feet, and clearly staring back at him. Fraxure quickly readied his claws in spite of his fear, only for the original Clefairy to hold his hand to Fraxure's snout and walk towards his copy instead. Fraxure blinked, just looking as the two Clefairy approached each other, staring into one another.

"I know you. You just want to play, right?" Clefairy asked, far more serious than Fraxure ever heard him be.

Clefairytwo stood still, blinking at his original. "You... are me?"

"I was you, but I'm not anymore." Clefairy stepped close, a tinge of sadness in his eyes. "Do you feel lonely?"

"Lone... ly...?"

"Only you and the voices, telling you to have fun and do what you want. You feel the need to listen to them. But you don't want to hurt anyone."

Clefairytwo stared at Clefairy with wide eyes, as if he had revealed something monumental. Clefairy seemed to count on it, approaching his clone once more, close enough to extend a hand towards him.

"I can show you how to stop them. I can make you happy." Clefairy smiled at his counterpart, a honest, helpful smile. "We don't need to fight."

Clefairytwo didn't know what to see, reluctantly shifting between Clefairy and the hand he was giving him. It took him several seconds, the battle raging all around them, to finally make his decision. He got closer to his original, moving to grasp his hand.

And that was the moment Fraxure struck, hitting Clefairytwo with a powerful Slash and slamming him into the nearby wall. The clone squealed in pain, just as Fraxure grinned in satisfaction.

"Yes! That's gotta keep him down for a while!" The young dragon pumped his fists, then gave Clefairy a thumbs up. "Your distraction was great, you really have changed!"

As he turned towards his partner in crime however, his smile died completely. Red's Clefairy stood
there, staring in horror at Fraxure.

The dragon tilted his head. "Huh? What's wrong?"

Clefairy didn't reply, quickly shifting back to his counterpart near the wall. Clefairytwo was rubbing his head, clearly in pain, before he turned back towards the two Pokémon. He shoot them a dark glare before quickly running away from there without a single world.

"No! Don't leave! I can help... you..." Clefairy tried to say, only for his clone to not stop and disappear from view. The original stood there, his gaze going towards his hands. "I can help..."

Clefairy sniffled, eyes growing watery as he simply stood there, even as the fight continued to rage between them. Fraxure didn't know what was up to his sobbing comrade, until a thought crossed his mind.

That was a clone of Clefairy, and thus a copy of him, weird psychosis and all. He didn't want to distract the clone to give Fraxure an opening, he legitimately wanted to help him out with whatever problem he had. And Clefairytwo was mere seconds from accepting that help.

The realization hit Fraxure like a painful rock, giving another look at the battlefield around them. He thought all these clones were some mindless guys that would only keep attacking them, an enemy to defeat at any cost. Could they really talk things over? They were... them, after all. If they could choose to be peaceful, couldn't the clones do the same?

Fraxure shook his head, trying to remove those thoughts from his mind. He focused back on Clefairy, gulping as he went closer to the Fairy-type.

"Uhm... I'm sorry, I didn't understa-" Fraxure heard a sharp sound of claws, and his reaction was immediate. "Stay down!"

Fraxure jumped over Clefairy, flattening both on the ground just under the Slash. The Dragon-type was quick to put himself back on his feet, only to be surprised by his attacker.

The scales, tusks, eyes and claws were all the same, except for some uneven patterns. Even his posture was identical. Mere feet from him was himself, or rather his clone.

His other self pointed his way with a glare of pure anger, a Dragon Claw ready. "You're gonna die! I need to fight for my family!"

Fraxure stood there, looking at the distorted mirror that was the Fraxuretwo. His own clone rushed towards him, ready to fight until the last bit of his strength fated. Fraxure knew it, as they were one and the same.

The Dragon-type dodged the attack and quickly took a battle stance, with Clefairy doing the same as he stood back up. As he joined forces with Red's Pokémon, Fraxure couldn't help but stare at his copy, moving and acting so much like him, moved by the same convictions and strength. Wanting to do what was right.

All his confidence in himself and what he had to do weren't there anymore.

...

Lucario frowned, avoiding an electric blast from his opponent. This 'Mewtwo' was proving to be as much of a tricky opponent as they claimed.
He flung an Aura Sphere towards the artificial Pokémon, only for the attack to be deflected and Mewtwo once more trying to use Psychic force on him. A quick Double Team helped the Aura Guardian avoid it, and then he went to for a quick slash into Mewtwo with Metal Claw before darting back.

His foe responded with a barrage of stones, which he avoided, though with much less ease than he suspected Mewtwo believed. The copy's attacks blasted all over the battlefield, smoking craters forming on impact.

Lucario kept his gaze locked on, forming a Bone Rush spear and twirling it in front of him in anticipation. Mewtwo's power was truly unmatched by anything he faced before, a raw, endless power that it seemed to only grow as he let his emotions go wild. It was clearly giving in to instinct more and more, foregoing strategy to just try to dispose of his enemy quickly.

That was a boon and a curse at once. For as much as this allowed Lucario to take advantage of more openings and missteps, he learned long ago how much a cornered Arbok can fight back in his many adventures with Sir Aaron.

The Pokémon from the past slammed away a Shadow Ball with his spear, launching himself and ready for a stab. Mewtwo quickly went for another psychic burst, and only a quick ducking and jump back allowed Lucario to stay unscratched.

Even in his rage, Mewtwo still showed enough control of his powers to keep Lucario at bay, evident sign of some training. It was far more unpolished than his own, but the sheer divide in strength made that almost negligible. They were as evenly matched as they could be. It was a clash between a soldier that learned to use a sword, and one who had learned moves to exploit openings and weaknesses in armor and mind.

If he were to be careless, Mewtwo could dispose of him easily. Any second could tip the battle in his opponent's advantage. But no matter how their struggle would end, Lucario would fight to the bitter end.

That was how he and Sir Aaron were. And by what he'd seen, Ash wasn't any different.

He avoided the Aura Sphere Mewtwo threw towards him, and replied with one of his own. It struck the clone down and knocked him back a few feet, to his opponent's growing irritation.

... Mewtwo clutched his chest in pain, a glare flying towards his unknown opponent - Lucario, if the few bits of thoughts he could read were accurate. His enemy seemed disciplined to avoid mind reading, and between trying to coordinate his side of the army and defeating that persistent warrior, he really couldn't afford to check again. Things were already too hard to keep track of, even for him.

'What are you? You are not like any Pokémon I have battled before.'

He went for a Mega Punch, which missed and left a crater in the ground that the Lucario danced around as it charged at him again.

'Not surprising, Riolu and Lucario are a rare sight in this part of the world.' The jackal seemed to chuckle, earning him a glare from Mewtwo. He formed a Barrier, but his opponent ducked away before hitting it with his Bone Rush, shattering it on impact.

'You are not funny!' Mewtwo took advantage of the moment and blasted his enemy with a blinding Flash attack. Lucario however charged at him anyway, eyes closed and movements firm.
Before he could do anything, the clone felt a powerful blow on his stomach, and then another, and another, and then a flurry of others dragging him deep into a sea of pain, ending on a quick strike before his enemy escaped his reach with rapid movements, retaining his battle stance and with eyes still closed.

Mewtwo tried his damnedest not to voice his pain, holding himself up with his powers while he stared at Lucario, the nimble fighter still waiting for his movements. All around him, he could feel his clones getting fatigued, even as new ones came to help them, the tide quickly turning against him. Even with all his strength and planning, he was losing.

No, that wasn't right. Things weren't supposed to go that way! He didn't go that far only to fail miserably!

As he tried to think of what to do next, the Lucario paced closer, eyes still closed and a blue aura surrounding him, clearly ready to counter anything Mewtwo tossed at him. *'Your power is peerless, but your discipline is lacking. You want this match to end soon, and for my side to be dealt with.'*

'My clones will crush you! You can't be stronger than me! I am the strongest Pokémon in the world!'

Mewtwo snarled at him. His opponent hopped over the Grass Knot trap he tried to raise up, avoiding it entirely.

'A mad tyrant sending his servants to their death so long as he can prove victorious. The more things change, the more they stay the same.' Lucario landed back on the ground before turning back him. 'This will be your downfall. I have fought villains as petty as yourself since before you were even a thought.'

Mewtwo could feel his rage boiling up, instinctively tossing a Mega Punch towards his enemy with enough strength to blow him away with the mere shockwave, his powers surging all around himself as he glared daggers towards the impudent fool in front of him.

He didn't know of Amber. He didn't know of everyone that only saw him as a monster. He didn't know of how much he lost. He had no right to even think of judging him!

'Don't you dare calling me petty! You don't know anything!' Mewtwo screamed, a powerful barrage of Shadow Balls firing simultaneously around him as he did. The other Pokémon managed to dodge most of them, even if he was visibly starting to be overwhelmed.

Sensing an advantage, Mewtwo blasted at his annoying enemy with a Thunderbolt, but the Lucario still managed to avoid it, rushing in for a punch once more.

*’You're trying to crush people just for standing up against you, I don't need to know your past to judge you.’ As Mewtwo continued to avoid the attacks and reply with several elemental attacks of his own, Lucario continued. 'I don't know what you suffered, but I know where I come from. My master and friend, Sir Aaron, made sure I was there to help his descendant, to get him to be ready to stand against heartless monsters like you. And I will not fail my duty.'*

Yet another one of those stupid friendship talks. The sheer arrogance of his enemies knew no bounds.

'Do you think to be so superior, talking of your friendship and bonds!? Do you think I don't understand what they are!? Let's see if your speeches can help you with this!'

As he unleashed yet another barrage of Shadow Balls, his opponent was too busy dodging to notice his psychic call, and quickly found himself caught off guard when several of the clones diverted their
attention towards his fight, swarming towards Lucario.

His opponent finally opened his eyes, quickly shifting to a defensive stance as he tried to dodge and deflect his enforcers' attacks. The vantage regained, Mewtwo unleashed another Thunderbolt towards Lucario, the Pokémon only barely dodging it and letting his Squirtletwo take the brunt of the attack. Lucario didn't enjoy a second of rest before the rest of the surrounding clones continued to assault him.

Mewtwo frowned, but he kept his anger in check. It didn't matter how much it would take and how many of his clones had to be used, he would stand triumphant in the end. That fool would regret smearing Amber's name.

…

As the battle raged on around her, Anabel tried her best to keep her attention on the battlefield. With all the minds and thoughts crowding the large arena, it was getting increasingly harder to keep her focus up.

Two of Ash's Tauros were knocked down by a single clone Tauros, and she telekinetically blasted the clone away as Ash’s Chansey began healing them. On the distance, several other clones were starting to gang up on other Pokémon of their sides, with Paul and a lot of the other trainers with them coordinating some sort of offensive by circling around the clones and attempting to divide them. And every move and strategy only made both originals and clones push harder against each other. Several of the Pokémon were even foregoing moves altogether, just tackling, slashing and punching at each other with utter brutality, with the originals replying in kind.

A shiver ran down Anabel's spine, trying to keep her mind off all the negative emotions swirling around her. The Bloodliner's attention was drawn away from the battles by the cry of her own Eevee, who wailed as a clone Porygon2 slammed her into the wall.

‘Get away from her!’ Anabel flung the Porygon2 away from Eevee with a psychic blast, who remained slumped on the floor in defeat. She only idly noticed the clone being grabbed by Yanma and flown into an upper part of the coliseum walls as she ran to her and picked her up.

Eevee was thankfully breathing, but she was out of the fight for now. Anabel used Heal Pulse, healing her as her eyes returned once more to the chaos ahead, and in particular the fight between Mewtwo and Lucario. The match they were relying on to take up most of Mewtwo's attention wasn't going in their favor, with Lucario having to contend with several clones ganging up on him and helping Mewtwo out, with their ally finding it more and more difficult to avoid any hit. And they all knew one hit was all Mewtwo would need to win. All around them, the clones felt galvanized by the offensive, only growing more insistent and merciless in their assault. Even for someone accustomed to Pokémon battles and misuse of Pokémon, Anabel couldn't help but feel like the whole situation was... off, like it never was supposed to happen.

As she thought so, the familiar sight of a mop of black hair caught her attention, and the Psychic Heart Bloodliner quickly ran ahead, clustering back with Ash, Iris, Misty and quite a few of their Pokémon, currently surrounded by several Pokémon that Ash's Pikachu and Misty's Gyarados managed to disperse with shows of power.

‘Ash! Are you okay?’ Anabel asked, getting closer to the boy. As the group tried to move forward, however, another barrage of clones blocked their path. Charizard swept in for quick assistance, alongside Serperior.

"More or less." Ash frowned, looking as two of his strongest Pokémon strained against some Hypno
clones. "We're trying to get closer to Mewtwo, but we just keep getting pushed back."

Misty turned around, catching sight of the fight devolving into a merciless beatdown on both sides. "Things are getting worse..."

"And it is only going to worsen." Iris stepped close, her gaze knowing and stern. Next to her, Fraxure was also observing the fighting with a frown, a Clefairy holding his hand by his side. "My brother tells me these... copies... are not evil. They are in fact exactly like us, and are ready to fight to the bitter end for their existence. It is an instinct strong enough to surpass fatigue and pain."

The wild girl sharpened her glare. "I have seen that instinct several times before. They will not stop until they kill us all for their own safety, or die trying."

"Is that true?" Misty went stiff as her Starmie got closer to blast an Arcanine clone away, quickly giving Anabel a look full of worry. "What are you feeling?"

Anabel furrowed her brow, sifting through the sea of thoughts around her. Thoughts of anger, protection, vengeance, fun, and all kinds of other emotions on both sides. And then, she nodded.

'She's right. There's such... malevolence and rage in the minds of everyone. Both us and them want to win this battle. Not everyone wants to fight, but they all feel they have to.'

Not far from her, Ash gulped loudly, as if he was expecting to hear something like this. He clenched his hands, his stare growing more determined. Even without reading his mind, Anabel could feel his confidence be renewed.

"We can't let this continue. If there's really a chance for us to end this peacefully, we must take it." He grabbed the rim of his hat, turning it around. "We need to talk with Mewtwo, he's the only one who can get the clones to stop fighting!"

"And how do you plan to do that? I do not believe that monster has any intention to listen to us anymore."

Iris' words shattered through Ash's confidence as he paused, thoughtful. "I..."

Ash didn't say more, and everyone else also fell silent, no ideas coming in. Iris was right, even if some of the clones would be willing to discuss things out, the only Pokémon that could stop the battle as a whole seemed completely unwilling to discuss things further, pure rage exuding from him as he continued to try to clobber Lucario into submission.

Anabel frowned, her eyes on the first cloned Pokémon. The solution was within their reach, yet too complex to grasp. If they were to actually talk things over, she was sure they could find commonalities and-

The Psychic Heart Bloodliner's eyes went wide, an idea popping into her mind. She and Mewtwo had a definite commonality she could make use of.

She rubbed her forehead and concentrated her power, and as she did, a smile parted her lips.

'I think I can do something,' she declared to the others.

Ash turned to her in confusion. "Really?"

'It's just a theory, but... I'm a Psychic Heart Bloodliner, and he's a Psychic-type Pokémon...' Anabel's gaze turned sharper as she focused her power further, isolating Mewtwo among all her
targets. 'I can try to get him to talk to me.'

Misty stared back in utter disbelief, fists clenched. "It's too dangerous. Don't do it!"

'I'm the only one who can do this. If nothing else, we must try.'

Anabel faced Ash, and the boy nodded, entrusting her with his hopes. She felt reinvigorated from that, smiling proudly as she turned around, concentrating her powers towards Mewtwo, trying to reach for the Psychic-type's mind.

That was their only chance for a happy ending, and she was ready to take it.

...

Even with the clones keeping Lucario busy, the match with his opponent was still rather far from tipped to his side. The Pokémon was well-disciplined, ready for war, and absolutely able to handle even a dozen of opponents at once. To a degree, Mewtwo couldn't help but find it impressive. He quickly shook his head and put the praise aside however; he was a threat, and he needed to stop him.

He flung several Shadow Balls at the jackal which his adversary nimbly evaded, tossing a couple of the clones to impact towards them. Now free, Lucario lunged towards him, a leg flaming with a Blaze Kick. Mewtwo took a defensive stance, eyes shimmering blue as he charged up a Psychic, and then-

'Please, stop!'

He didn't realize what happened until Lucario’s attack hit him square across the face, spinning him around and almost taking him down. He tried to stand again, suppressing the pain as Lucario came forward again. Mewtwo launched a barrage of Shadow Balls to keep the jackal away from him as the clone tried to focus once more.

'There's no need to fight! We can talk this over!'

Mewtwo flinched, gaze sharpening in anger. Someone else in the room was trying to hold his attention up, just as Lucario charged on with a Bone Rush ready to strike. He should've expected them to turn sneakier and more cowardly as things got worse.

He snapped up a Protect and then threw the energy stuff away from Lucario's paws with a well-aimed Ice Punch. He readied himself for another punch, only to feel his body frozen in place.

'Stop, I beg you!'

Mewtwo narrowly dodged Lucario's next Aura Sphere, and the clone's attention went to his side, several feet away. Just as he expected, the mute Bloodliner - Anabel, if he remembered correctly - was using her powers towards him, while Ash Ketchum and his other close friends stuck together, as if protecting her. Whatever their plan was, it definitely relied on that girl's powers.

He frowned, rage welling up inside him. No matter how many clones he sent against them, no matter how much he was cornering them, they still continued to resist him. Why? Why couldn't they just stop? There was no way he could allow that to continue. It was a threat that needed to be dealt with post-haste.

The Psychic-type raised a hand, conjuring a stronger-than-usual Protect in front of him just as Lucario resumed his offensive. Mewtwo's eyes glowed a cold blue, attuning his Psychic frequency to the girl's, just as she tried to contact him again.
If he had to talk with her, they would do so on his terms. He hated to sully Amber's memories like that, but there was no other way.

And so he concentrated, forming a connection he thought to be long gone.

...

A mere second later, Mewtwo and Anabel were no longer at the stadium, instead floating in a void of darkness. He felt a wave of satisfaction when he saw the girl looking around everywhere in confusion, even as he could still feel Lucario trying to hammer down the barrier. He had little time to multitask, but he expected things to be resolved quickly.

'Where are we?' she asked. 'Where's everyone else, what did you do?'

'We are now in my… mental domain, so to speak.' He turned around to the void, still feeling the power of Lucario's punches outside of his mind. 'Time is still moving around us. I just wanted to make sure you weren't planning anything.'

Anabel shook her head, trying to step closer. 'I just wanted to talk with you.'

'You are a Psychic Heart Bloodliner, aren't you? Tell me, do your powers allow you to exert control on Psychic-type Pokémon?'

The Bloodliner widened her eyes, but quickly regained composure. She gulped and stared back at Mewtwo.

'... Yes, I can. And I could try to control you if I wanted it.' She placed a hand over her heart, her expression stern yet warm. 'But that'd only make the problem worse. I really want you to trust me here.'

She fell silent, looking over the Psychic-type Pokémon. Mewtwo scrutinized her, raising another Protect outside as Lucario shattered the previous one. Even after knowing what he could do, even with all that violence and danger surrounding them, was she seriously coming in peace?

'That's... unexpected.' He tapped his chin, interest mixed with surprise in his voice. 'Do you truly just want to talk?'

She nodded. 'I'm not just a telepath, but also an empath. I can sense the emotions of others. I can feel you have a lot of pain inside… a lot of anger, but also a lot of confusion. It's like… like even you don't know why you're doing all these things.'

Mewtwo furrowed his brow, averting his gaze from the girl, a swirling mess of thoughts rushing into his head. Anabel stepped closer, now inches away from Mewtwo's psychic form.

'You mentioned to have had a friend once, right? Someone called Amber?' Her expression softened, a glimmer of curiosity in her eyes. 'She was important to you, right?'

Mewtwo felt his whole body go stiff, feeling Lucario shattering his Protect and going for a hit, requiring him to dodge and craft another barrier before his attention went back to Anabel. He still wasn't sure if he could fully trust her, but standing there, alone with her… his heart couldn't help but beat faster, memories of a younger girl and a younger Pokémon flooding back to him. Her warmth and kindness were awakening something deep inside Mewtwo's soul, something he'd thought to be lost forever. And thus, even knowing the risks, the monster decided to open his heart to the girl. Maybe she, of everyone else, could understand.
He waved his arm, and the void around them exploded with colors, a field and sky and structures forming all around them, a very familiar and nostalgic amusement park taking form all around them, just as he remember it. Something close to a sad smile formed on the Psychic-type's face.

'This is where I grew with Amber. In this place we lived without worries. We could do what we wanted, whenever we wanted and however we wanted. It was just the two of us, but we were... happy.'

Anabel observed the surrounding area without a word, letting Mewtwo talk. The Pokémon turned his head down, the atmosphere darkening around them, as Lucario's hits echoed in his mind.

'And then... she died. Her father was trying to bring her back to life as a clone, too, but even by trying to turn her into a Bloodliner, her body couldn't resist the strain. She faded away before she could even really be born.'

Mewtwo clenched his fists, trying to keep the sea of bad memories away from his mind. The frustrations of the present and the regrets of the past were exactly what he didn't need in the moment. He faced Anabel again, finding the girl still listening, seemingly sad. A part of Mewtwo was grateful for that, and so he resumed. 'I needed the samples of DNA of several Bloodliner types to bring her back, to succeed where Fuji had failed. To bring my friend... my sister back.'

He finished, his body trembling just a bit as he fixated on Anabel again. Hoping, begging that by explaining the truth, someone would finally understand him. Lucario's punches and kicks outside of his mind only made him yearn for that all the more.

The girl seemed to hesitate in replying, as if she was still trying to process what she was told. Finally, she turned away, observing the crumbled wall of a nearby house of mirrors. 'You could have just asked. You didn't need to do all of this.'

'And then what? Do you think humans would've just left me be? That they wouldn't try to capture me like any other Pokémon, to control my power for their own means?' Mewtwo narrowed his glare, focusing a large amount of Psychic energy in his fist, coating it in a blue hue. 'People long for the power I possess. It's why I was created to begin with.'

He clenched his fist, letting the energy explode outward. Mewtwo's rage didn't subside, the pain he had experienced and Lucario's attempts to strike at him only making him angrier. He tried to direct a few of his clones, only to grimly realize how outmatched they were starting to be, having to rely on mindless assaults rather than strategy. Was that seriously the best they could do?

Mewtwo placed a hand over his head, feeling a migraine coming up for the excessive multitasking.

'This... this was supposed to be a show of strength.' He took a deep breath, looking sadly over to Anabel. 'A way to get what I needed and tell everyone to never attempt to go after me again. I just wanted to be happy again.

'Do I not deserve it? Do you not understand what I have gone through?'

Mewtwo fell silent, still putting all his hopes on the girl ahead of him. If she was anything like Amber, she had to understand, to believe him. He needed someone to, with the whole world against him. He couldn't have opened himself like that for nothing.

Anabel's reply was quick and resolute, nodding firmly. 'You do deserve to be happy. I know the pain that comes from losing a dear person very well.'

A smile almost formed on Mewtwo's face. Finally, someone that knew what he was feeling!
Someone that could help him and relate to him and-

His happiness was short-lived as Anabel shook her head, her gaze turning sterner once more, hitting as hard as Lucario's blows. *But this is not the way to do it. Please, let's stop this. We can find another way.*

Mewtwo froze, no words coming to his mind as Lucario's punches and kicks echoed through his mind once again. He opened himself to the girl, and that was still not enough for her? Did she seriously not realize the kind of world they lived in?

He shook his head, frowning. *Even if you accepted me, no one else would. I need to make sure no one ever tries to harm me again. I have to, for myself and Amber.*

*And do you think Amber would like this?*

Anabel's question stabbed him as fiercely as a searing hot knife, as did her sad expression, almost as if she pitied him. How dare she? He never asked for her pity! Was that an attempt to guilt trip him into stopping? All while they kept trying to defeat him outside of his mental domain?

And yet, even if it was, Mewtwo couldn't deny to be at a loss for words. Amber had always been a kind, happy soul that only wanted the best out of others. She would've never accepted what Mewtwo decided to do in her name, and he hated it. And yet, Amber's final words continued to come back to him.

*Grow, learn, and keep being happy any way you want. You deserve it!*

There was no way he could find that happiness without Amber at his side, the world was a scary and unwelcoming place, one Mewtwo would never be able to fit in. He needed the only person that ever truly accepted him.

He hung his head down, avoiding Anabel, the realization of what he wanted sinking in. *It's too late to turn back.*

*It's never too late, you just-*

*Silence!* Mewtwo snapped, making Anabel flinch. Psychic power surrounded Mewtwo as his rage finally exploded. *You can't understand it! There's only one person who can! That's why I need her back!*

Anabel could only widen her eyes as Mewtwo's power focused on his hands, the anger of the clone finally breaking through. He was tired of their moralisms, their speeches about there being different roads, and their stupid attempts of making him stop. They could never understand him, and he was sure of it now.

*I won't be alone once Amber is back. We'll be together again, and it will be worth it. It has to be...* Mewtwo pointed his hand towards Anabel, eyes shimmering blue. *Don't interfere further... please...*

And without another word, Mewtwo blasted the Psychic attack straight towards the Bloodliner.

...

Anabel jolted back, snapping back to the real world as she clutched over her forehead, doubling down in pain.

"Anabel! Are you alright?" Misty asked, scurrying over to her side, a hand on the girl's shoulder.
The Psychic Heart Bloodliner didn’t say anything, rubbing her forehead. Her thoughts were all scrambled and fragmented, even just trying to piece them together was giving her a harsh pain in the head. Mewtwo's blast made sure that she couldn't concentrate without pain, and without that he had pretty much removed her from the game for the time being. Not far from them, Mewtwo placed his full attention in fighting Lucario again, regaining some of the advantage he was starting to lose.

She scrunched her face as she tried to nod. 'I'm f-fine. Just a bit of a migraine, is all.'

"He didn't listen to you," was Iris’ curt observation as she turned to the first clone. Next to her, Fraxure seemed to be doing his best to keep his guard up, Clefairy right next to him.

'I tried, but...'

Anabel didn't finish her sentence, her gaze trailing back to the raging battle alongside everyone else's. After so long, none of the Pokémon seemed to be in fighting condition anymore, barely managing to stand in some case. And yet they continued to fight, knowing that either side winning would spell the doom of the other. Powerful moves and fine tactics were replaced by sheer brutality and direct attack, each Pokémon and clone only growing more brutal as they scratched, bit, kicked, punched, slapped and lunged at their opponents, cries of pain rising from originals and clones alike, as Mewtwo and the other trainers did their best to claim victory.

Iris closed her eyes, looking solemn. "The battle is pretty much over, but neither side will stop. It is a fight to the death now."

"It's true. This is the same instinct of the aggressive Pokémon of old, on both ends. Pokémon battles should never come to this..."

Anabel and the rest of her travelling group turned around, finding the same Joy that Mewtwo used as his thrall standing there, observing the battle in a mix of horror and sadness. Her guilt was drawn on her face as she turned her head down.

Iris tapped her chin in thought. "We cannot surrender, and our opponents will not. Quite the predicament..."

In spite of the migraine, Anabel tried to think of what to do. It was hard to focus, but she distinctly recalled several pieces of her conversation with Mewtwo. She turned to the Nurse Joy, still rubbing her forehead.

'Nurse Joy... you were controlled by Mewtwo earlier. Was it because of your medical knowledge?'

"I... I think so." She nodded, looking over to Mewtwo in the distance. "I don't remember well what happened to me in the last weeks, but I recall working on several medical tests."

'Just as he said...'

Misty perked her head up to the Psychic Bloodliner. "Did you discover anything from Mewtwo?"

'I could see into Mewtwo’s mind, yes. It wasn’t much, but... I think I understand him better. His mind is like that of a child who was forced to grow. He’s angry, confused, and has a very scarce sense of right and wrong. I think he doesn’t know himself why he’s doing this, but he hasn’t found any other way to cope with his inner pain. He wants someone to love and accept him, yet is scared of being hurt ever again.’

"Pokémon and people that suffered harsh losses tend to end up like that.” Nurse Joy shook her head, sighing. "Mewtwo won't reason until he's finally unable to keep fighting."
Ash didn’t say a word, simply listening. He looked rather sad as well, as if he expected that to happen, yet didn’t want things to come to that. Yet, Anabel could see the resolve in his eyes. As always, he wasn’t going to give up until the end.

‘Even so… I think it’s not too late. If we can get him to listen to us, maybe… ugh.’ Again, she felt the migraine coming on, forcing her to rub on her forehead.

“Easy, take a rest for now.” He held her by the shoulders. “We’ll take care of this.”

Ash gave her a smile brimming with confidence. In the middle of everything that was happening, it was both charming and comforting. She felt herself blushing at the thought.

Nevertheless, despite the dire of the situation, Ash didn’t lose his hope that everything would be fine. She just regretted not being able to help him more.

‘I’m counting on you… everyone does.’

As Ash ran back in the direction of Mewtwo, Anabel held a hand to her chest. For a moment, she believed she could get through the artificially-made Pokémon. Maybe Ash could succeed where she had failed.

She had nothing left but to have faith in him.

...

Trying to get Mewtwo to listen to reason and stop was something Ash had no idea on how to do. For once his time shenanigans didn’t let him pretend he knew what he was doing.

All he knew was there was some answer, but none came to his mind as he tried to make his way through the mad melee of desperate trainers and Pokémon surrounding him on the way to Mewtwo.

Ash’s thoughts were interrupted by a clone Purugly swiping at him with claws. He used Counter to send the massive feline flying away from him, as a bright light blinded him for a moment.

The burning illumination was driven off moments later, and when he opened his eyes briefly they showed him the original Purugly sitting on a Castform clone.

“Pur,” the cat declared as he ran by it, nodding its way as he continued to run to Mewtwo.

He stopped briefly as a clone of what he was pretty sure was Gary’s Blastoise was blasted across his path by Iris and Fraxure, who darted after him with Red’s Clefairy in tow as he found himself once more staring through the various combatants until his eyes fell on Lucario and Mewtwo. Much like in the Saffron Gym, he was surrounded by all kinds of energy, every type surrounding him. Perhaps…

Ash held his hand out as he had done when he gained his three Z-Crystals, focusing on the energy in the palm of his hand. He would try to create a fourth, and with it, perhaps a solution. There had to be some sort of Z-Move for…

He was interrupted by a water attack that blasted him to the ground just as he was starting to get some light flowing into his hand, and thus the attempt was gone.

Ash felt a few grains of sand in his hand, though he couldn’t get a name for the Pokémon that had interrupted him. He did see Bulbasaur fighting something, but that was all he could tell.
Someone offered a hand to the boy, and with the help of it Ash pulled himself up. He was surprised to see Casey Snagem's elderly Chesnaught, who nodded at him before pointing at his Z-Ring, then at Mewtwo. The old Pokémon then charged away, using Spiky Shield to ram through a line of clones to get to a Typhlosion and Swampert. Ash observed his Z-Ring again, wondering if Chesnaught confirmed that his was a good idea.

Just as he thought so, a distant explosion sent something flying, and he instinctively caught the flung being in his arms like a tossed ball. Said being turned out to be Pikachu, who appreciated the quick burst of Heal Pulse he sent into him before zipping forward to the battlefield, holding the line alongside the rest of his team. As Paul and Red did the same alongside all the other trainers, Ash clenched his fist.

If nothing else, he had to try. Everyone was buying him time, and he had to stop it before it escalated to a point no one wanted it to.

He directed his attention back to Mewtwo, only to feel his body trapped in the grip of a Psychic and tossed away, rolling on the dirt and away from Mewtwo. Ash slowly tried to get back up, coughing out before he finally looked ahead. He froze on the spot.

Mewtwo was staring at him, eyes brimming with a blue psychic aura, abandoning completely his fight with Lucario to focus instead on him. The slight intrusion Ash felt in his mind made clear what happened: Mewtwo predicted his plan, and he was none too happy about it.

'Violence, hurting, defeating your opponents. You humans only know how to do that. There's no way to end things peacefully with you. I knew it!' Mewtwo screamed, each thought dripping with venom. A rage barely kept in check before, and now completely unleashed.

The cloned Pokémon raised his arm, several pieces of red metal forming around his wrist in a sort of armor piece, with four non-uniform slots in it. Ash was quite terrified to recognize what each slot was. What did the Pokédex try to do while he was sealed away?

Any thought about that was quelled as Mewtwo observed his makeshift Z-Ring, a hint of pride among all his anger.

'You wanted to use this 'Z-Move' of yours to defeat me? Let's see how you'll like to have that power thrown against you! Fall by my own Z-Move!'

He emulated the pose Ash had used before with Charizard, the skeleton of what was left of the Pokédex flashing just like Ash's Z-Ring would, maybe elaborating all the data it had, Z-Power surrounding him as he did so. However, just as Mewtwo got ready to unleash its power, nothing happened, the power dissolving into the air and the mechanism powering down.

Mewtwo looked at the gauntlet in confusion, just as everyone else got ready to lunge towards him. Mewtwo gritted his teeth, looking at his clones.

'Keep them away! Don't let them come here! I must understand!' Mewtwo yelled, attempting to redo the pose, still to no avail. 'Why is this not working?'

Mewtwo held out gauntlet once more where the two other slots, resembling a Mega Stone and Key Stone, glowed and sent out familiar tendrils of light, before they too fizzled out. Lucario remained unmoving as Mewtwo stared at his gauntlet in frustration. His clones seemed to be on the verge of giving up, only for Mewtwo to jolt them awake with a psychic call, all of them pushing on in spite of their tiredness.
'Don't you dare lose! You only exist to help me!' A Pidgey tried to hit Mewtwo with Quick Attack as his latest attempt fizzled out once more, but without even twitching Mewtwo sent the Pidgey spinning away with psychic force. He glared at his machine once more. 'Why!? What am I doing wrong!?'

Pikachu disengaged from the other Pokémon and darted forward, right ahead of Ash. The boy didn’t need words to know what Pikachu was going for, and so the two of them finally burst into the center of the melee where the befuddled Mewtwo and patient Lucario stood.

“I think you missed the obvious part. You can be the most powerful Pokémon all day long, or even the most powerful Pokémon Master, but in the end it takes more than one person to pull those powers off. It takes two, and two with a strong bond for that matter. Allow me and Pikachu to give you a first-hand demonstration!”

As he finished it up he and Pikachu entered the final stage of his pose, linking his bent arms at his elbows as the power flowed all into Pikachu. He saw Lucario get out of the way of the attack, making clear he didn't have to hold back.

It was the power forged by a bond that stretched two timelines and countless days spent together. Countless in both number, and the ability to actually know how many there actually were. The result of blood and sweat, tears shed and fears overcome. A power given to him from afar, that he made his own through training and learning.

“Gigavolt Havoc!”

A massive yellow ball of electricity formed at Pikachu’s fingertips before being punched forward, growing larger and flying at Mewtwo as it morphed into something akin to a missile of electric force. Mewtwo yowled something in sheer primal emotion, and used his gauntlet covered arm to repel the electrical attack with his pure mental power.

However the two powers met when the arm was raised, and the result was a point blank explosion of electrical power right where Mewtwo stood. A collision of force between the united strength of two made stronger together, and one who was made to be strong on his own.

The collision rang together like a bomb blast, stopping the melee in its wake. Everyone, humans, Bloodliners, Pokémon and clones alike were staring at the smoking area the explosion had occurred in. What had triumphed in the end: two united as one, or one with all the power one could ever imagine?

The smoke cleared slowly, revealing a standing Mewtwo. He was panting, a deep and resounding sound that perfectly highlighted his rage at Ash and everyone else.

‘You cannot defeat me. Try anything you like, try any power that you might possess, and you will not be able to defeat me! Nothing you can do can beat me; nothing any of you can do will beat me!’

Ash clenched his fists, growing tense. He knew that Mewtwo wouldn't listen to reason, and he could feel his desperation and desire to beat them, even as the clone was about to collapse in pain. They needed something else that could finally stop Mewtwo from continuing that senseless battle.

Just as he thought in a blur of motion two people appeared next to him and Pikachu, each placing a glowing green hand on them. He felt Lucario’s paw against his side, and he saw Yellow use the same pose and power on Pikachu.

It would seem it was time for a change of plan, an extra shot at this he hadn’t been expecting.
He and Pikachu didn’t need to say anything as the energy flowed back into them, and they re-entered the pose for the Z-Move.

Mewtwo’s face was that of alarm at this point. He tried to use his Psychic power, only for them to fizzle out, maybe in fear, or perhaps out of exhaustion. ‘Cease this at once! There is no way that you can do that again….that isn’t how it works!’

‘Today has not been one for what many would deem impossible. How should this be any different?’ Lucario smirked back at Mewtwo, much more confident than before.

“Yeah, and in case you were wondering about what impossible really is like, I can show you,” Ash declared, as he and Pikachu continued.

The boy felt a wave of heat and pure energy surging through him. The aura around their Z-Move pose flared even stronger than normal, and Ash had a guess of what was going on. Yellow was his sister after all, and this felt similar to what his Pokémon had described his own power being like. She had shared her power with him, making the Thunderbolt at the base of Gigavolt Havoc more of a Megabolt.

A Mega-Gigavolt Havoc!

“You already saw the power of the friendship between Pikachu and me first hand, now try it when it isn’t just friendship powering it, but family too! Gigavolt Havoc!”

With that an even larger bolt of electricity was fired at Mewtwo, who glared at the attack as it flew at him once again.

‘You aren’t the only one fighting for family!’ Mewtwo had his own counter-speech, and with his metal gauntlet covered hand he slammed the full force of his psychic power into the Mega-Gigavolt Havoc. The two forces collided once more, and it looked like the moves would remain locked into a stalemate.

At least, until a series of small, but well-aimed attacks all blasted towards Mewtwo, making the Pokémon falter. From the corner of his eye, Ash could see Red and Paul directing the attack, alongside all the other trainers. Their Pokémon were exhausted, but their effort was enough to let Mewtwo's power falter, and for the Mega-Gigavolt Havoc to utterly consume the clone Pokémon.

The resulting shockwaves shook the entire battlefield, and his knees gave out just before he felt the full impact of a shockwave of his own: utter exhaustion washing over his body. The only reason he didn’t fall right to the ground then and there was Lucario grabbing him, while Pikachu slumped to the ground and needed Yellow to scoop him up. Ash's and everyone else's attention quickly moved back to the smoke pillar from the point of impact, eagerly awaiting to know the result of the attack.

The smoke cleared slowly and like before a very exhausted Mewtwo was revealed from behind it. However, this time Mewtwo staggered and collapsed, dropping to his knees with the metal gauntlet of his letting out a loud clang through the battlefield, shattering into shards of broken steel.

Mewtwo stayed in that pose, and it was then that Ash was willing to say it was over.

But even if the battle was over, with the clones left in disbelief at the defeat of their leader and the originals watching Mewtwo warily, there was still something he had to do. He walked slowly towards the clone Pokémon, his gaze aimed at the ground in disbelief.

'No... no... this... can't be happening...' The clone clutched at his head, grimacing heavily.
Ash stopped a few steps from him, shaking his head. "It's over, Mewtwo."

'Don't get close! I... I...'" 

Mewtwo tried to stand up, only to fail miserably and fall back on his knees. He looked almost pitiful as he tried again, his feet wobbly and giving up again, no energy left to fight. Mewtwo seemed on the verge of tears as he turned downward again.

'Amber, I'm... sorry...'

Ash adjusted his hat, not saying anything in the moment. He almost felt guilty for having been forced to defeat him, but he knew already there was no other way. He tried moving closer to Mewtwo, only to find himself unable to.

Between him and Mewtwo stood all the other clones, from Pikachutwo to Meowthtwo all the way to the original starter clones. They were all battered, bruised, and unable to fight any longer, yet they all shielded Mewtwo, panting and barely standing, but with a fire in their eyes that Ash knew all too well. The original clone seemed confused, turning towards them in disbelief.

'W... what are you...?' he tried to ask, only to grasp his forehead in pain. In response, the other clones continued to hold up, ready for any attack that could be thrown their way.

Mewtwo didn't seem to know what to say, falling silent. Ash instead smiled alongside Pikachu, with the boy's little buddy moving ahead towards their defeated opponent.

"Pika pichu pi. "They're protecting you. They don't want to see you hurt."

'But... they're just tools, I...'

"You may have seen them as tools, but they clearly thought otherwise." Ash observed each and every one of them. Now that the battle was over, he really could see a part of the originals inside each of them. "You brought them to life, gave them a chance to exist. You're their father... and maybe, a friend."

He took a chance and stepped forward, even with the other clones still on guard. "You wanted someone to love you, to not be lonely again. But you always had them right by your side."

Mewtwo remained silent, observing each of his brethren, a hand over his heart. He seemed uncertain of how to elaborate what he just learned, all while Pikachutwo and Meowthtwo got closer to check how he was, rubbing away at his aching limbs.

Ash's stare turned serious, observing as the small clones did their best to help the first of their kind. "You were so dead set in bringing your friend back that you never thought about how many new friendships you could create. Was this what Amber wanted?"

'But none of them is Amber!' Mewtwo snapped, strong enough to drop Pikachutwo and Meowth to the ground. There was fury and regret in his eyes, his fists balled as he punched at the ground. 'Why... why did it have to happen? She just wanted to live! Be happy! Have fun! And...'

Mewtwo's pounding of the ground grew progressively weaker, until he finally rested his hand on the dirt, a sad grimace over his face. 'She didn't deserve to die...'

Ash lowered the rim of his hat, covering his eyes in respect as Mewtwo continued to stare at the ground, too caught up in what he lost to say anything more. It was something he rarely felt as a guy that never gave up until the end, but just seeing how Mewtwo was feeling reminded him of the one
time he went through a similar pain. And suddenly, Ash knew exactly what Mewtwo needed to hear.

He took a deep breath, and stepped closer. "I know how you feel. I've lost something precious to me, too. Something that I'll never get back."

'You did...?' Mewtwo perked his head up, as if confused. With how little Ash tried to think about it these days, Ash really couldn't blame him.

He nodded, tapping at his head. "You can see for yourself, if you want."

Ash wasn't sure how good that idea was, especially after seeing what that knowledge did to Sabrina in this reality, but at that point there was no harm in trying now that Mewtwo could barely fight back. Mewtwo's eyes flashed blue once more, and Ash could feel the Psychic-type making his way through all of the boy's past memories.

To help him out, Ash recalled as well. How a seemingly peaceful day in Kalos turned into tragedy as his friends and everything he knew were erased away, never to exist. How he was tossed in a new, unfamiliar world that only barely resembled his own, how several people he knew died before even meeting him, and how old tested friendships had to be left behind. How he was a stranger in familiar land, with even people he knew and loved now fundamentally different people, with only flashes of what they once were. How people that were once kind behind their problems turned into vicious psychopaths, and how things were far harsher for humans, Bloodliners and Pokémon alike.

How his life would never return to be what it was, even if he stopped Cyrus' plan or managed to recover all of his Pokémon, he could never return his life to how it used be, his old world never to return.

Mewtwo widened his eyes as his eyes returned normal, staring at Ash in utter shock. Ash didn't say anything as the clone Pokémon tried to process what he saw, hands over his temples.

'I... I don't know what to say. You-'

"I will never regain what I lost, but a smarter man than I am told me this... you can't let one tragedy define your whole life. If you lost a loved one, live for them and those who still live." Ash adjusted his hat once more. "I don't think Amber would've wanted you to ruin your chance at happiness, right?"

Once again, Mewtwo didn't know what to say. He seemed rather shocked at what he had witnessed, more than he already was from his defeat. Ash hoped for it to be a good sign as he smiled at him again. "So please, be happy. Live for her... and for yourself, too. Follow your heart."

'My heart...’ Mewtwo clutched at his chest in thought, his eyes going everywhere from the other trainers and Pokémon looking at him in anticipation to all of his clones still huddled around him. He closed his eyes, taking a deep breath, and then facing towards Ash once more.

'... I... I will try.' He held his head down, turning towards everyone else in apology. 'I'm... sorry for... everything I caused.'

No one replied, but the few that dared nodding along made clear that, at least, they would turn a blind eye to what happened. Paul seemed just about to complain about it, but it didn't take long for him to decide otherwise. Mewtwo, however, wasn't finished, slowly finding the strength to stand again, supported by his original starter clones.

"I shouldn't have caused this. To you humans, Bloodliners, and Pokémon, I apologize for getting you involved.' His attention then went to what used to be his army, head still bowed down. 'And to
you, my clones... I should've never used you this way. I hope... we can be friends now.'

Mewtwo then perked his head back up, anxiety drawn over his features as he waited for the clones' response. It didn't take long however for them all to tackle him into a hug, with a few of them licking Mewtwo's face affectionately. Ash was sure to have heard the original clone chuckle at the display of affection, and as the clone of Mew turned back to him, Ash was pleased to see him wear a true, happy smile, the weight of his pain seemingly lifted at least a little.

"Do you feel better, now?" Ash asked, as he allowed Pikachu to climb over his shoulder.

The Pokémon rubbed the area between his necks with unease. 'I don't know, but I will try.'

'What do you plan to do?' Anabel asked, her migraine seemingly gone. Mewtwo placed a hand over his chin, contemplative.

'I guess... I'll travel. Find a good place for me and the other clones to start from zero.' Immediately after, he felt the need to put both hands ahead of him. 'I don't plan any other show of strength, or attempts to rule the world. I can guarantee that.'

The Psychic-type's position relaxed, even if not completely. He gazed at all the people he had invited, once more serious. 'However, I want to ensure a level of anonymity for myself. I can trust you and a few others, but I'm not sure I can do the same for everyone present.'

Red crooked an eyebrow at that. "What's that supposed to mean?"

'None of you should've been involved to begin with. I'll make sure to fix it.'

Gathering all of its remaining strength, Mewtwo used his own psychic powers to float above the battlefield, slowly bringing every one of his clones alongside him. From his memories of the events of Mt. Quena, Ash could imagine what Mewtwo was going to do, delete the memories of the people involved. He probably should've told Mewtwo that it wouldn't help anything, but he had a feeling that was something Mewtwo wouldn't listen to him about. If nothing else, the way Mewtwo said he could trust him and a few others made Ash hope his memory would be spared this time around.

After sharing a relieved sigh with Pikachu, Ash chanced a glance to everyone else. Not everyone seemed to have understood what was about to happen, but for the most part everyone, even if battered and bruised, seemed to be relieved by how the battle ended. From all his traveling companions to the various trainers gathered on the island, from the Nurse Joy Mewtwo had brought there to the bizarre sight of Iris' Fraxure and Red's Clefairy sharing a high five, everyone seemed just happy that they all came out of that adventure unscathed. Even Red seemed to be smiling as he ensured that Yellow and her Ratty were alright. There was also the old man Casey Snagem and his two partner Pokémon sharing a knowing glance at him, but he really couldn't figure the meaning behind that.

However, Ash couldn't help but notice a certain someone missing. At least, until a familiar voice rang out next to him.

"Hey."

Ash turned around, finding the typical stone cold expression of Paul looking back to him. The inquisitive stare puzzled Ash for a bit, until he remembered what happened before, with Charizard's fight with his clone. Paul was there, and saw him use his Bloodline.

The boy gulped down nervously. As if to confirm his suspicions, Paul sharpened his gaze.
"You never used that power of yours in a real battle, did you?" his rival asked, arms folded. Ash quickly shook his head, matching Paul's expression. "No. I'm not that kind of trainer."

The Sinnohan trainer continued to consider him for a brief while, before he finally nodded. "Good." He turned around, an arm raised in salute. "We'll see each other at the League."

And with that, Paul disengaged from him, going back to where he previously was. Ash continued to look after him, blinking in confusion; if he remembered Paul well from the previous timeline, that was as close as he could get to being civil and personable. Maybe he wouldn't have to worry about Paul falling into anti-Bloodliner hysteria, if worst came to worst.

His musings on the topic were interrupted by a flash of bright light, as the area surrounding them turned a blinding white. Mewtwo was shining as well, as he flew away with all of his clones, giving Ash and his friends one last look from above.

'Farewell to you all. And for everything you did...

'Thank you.'

And after sharing with them one last, sincere smile, the white light engulfed everything, bringing an end to that wild little adventure.

...

As the eerie fortress disintegrated in front of his eyes, the floating and small pink legendary couldn't help but blink in curiosity, observing its copy fly away into the sky alongside all of his newfound family.

When it felt a psychic signature very much like its own yet quite unlike it, he couldn't help but investigate what was up with it. The mythical Pokémon was rather surprised when it saw a being created in the image of itself, unmistakably based on a Mew yet something completely other from it, showcasing powers on par with what its species was capable of. A lonely creature that only yearned for love, until he realized it was right there all along.

Mew couldn't help but to admit that the strange creature interested it. For a copy, it sure was strong! Clearly not as much as the originals, of course, but with all the stuff he had to deal with it was probably for the best that he decided to sit that battle out. However, the mythical's desire to prove itself to its copy and get to know him better was hardly fading away, only burning more intensely as it noticed the lair in New Island slowly crumbling back into ashes, as if it was never erected.

The pink legendary's attention turned to the other side of the horizon, the same way Mewtwo and his new family flew towards. At a guess, they were probably headed somewhere in the Johto region, away from human interference. Something Mew knew a thing or two about.

The small mythical Pokémon giggled to itself, quickly heading in the same direction. It had a good feeling about the future...

In the darkness of his office, Giovanni tapped at his desk in anticipation, observing the screen behind it. His free hand rubbed his Persian's head, counting the seconds down in his head as the communication finally opened, with a familiar group of two agents and one Pokémon popping up on
"Finally. So, how did everything go?"

Jessie took a step forward, stiffening her pose. "Well enough, I'd say. We almost got involved when Meowth was captured by one of those weird Pokéballs, but I don't think anyone noticed our presence when we freed him and left."

"Good thing stealth is our game..." Meowth sighed, rubbing his head.

"He doesn't seem to have realized we were there." James folded his arms, looking up. "Or maybe he did and just had too much stuff on his plate to notice, I'm not sure..."

"So, Mewtwo was stopped? Is it not a problem anymore?"

Jessie shrugged. "Our little hero seems to have redeemed him or something. They had a whole fight and a realization of feelings and all that stuff heroes do, and then he left while teleporting everyone else safely out of the island. Now, there's nothing left here."

In confirmation of her claims, Jessie moved the camera behind them. What previous recordings had shown as an ominous lair was only reduced to a small patch of land filled with greenery and flowers, no signs of either Mewtwo's stronghold or the laboratory it previously housed.

"Just as expected." Giovanni allowed himself a grin and a nod. "Well done. Return to headquarters as quickly as you can. I have other assignments for you."

"Roger!"

The trio interrupted their communication right after, shrouding Giovanni's office in the dark again. Now alone, Giovanni grabbed a glass of wine with his free hand, as he continued to rub over Persian's head with a less than pleased expression drawn on his face.

Mewtwo was too smart to have completely missed his agents' presence, even if he was busy with everything that went down. Much like Mewtwo's menaces and his failed attempt to summon strong trainers in New Island, this was all just part of a show of power to scare him away from getting involved with him. A smart plan, but not a very thought out one.

One thing was for sure, Giovanni couldn't let a being with such a power be left unchecked, even if his little champions managed to do the seeming impossible and redeem him. He was the one who ordered Mewtwo's creation, and as such, the Pokémon was his property and responsibility.

Perhaps he could track him down and attack him when his guard was lowered, maybe getting Domino or Matori Matrix involved in the mission. Perhaps he could see if a second Mewtwo project could work out better, now that he knew the risks to avoid. Or perhaps he could just wait for the events to play in his favor, now that Mewtwo removed himself from the chessboard for the time being. The world was a harsh place, and Mewtwo's mind too fragile to survive in it.

Giovanni laughed at that observation. By retreating to find his peace, Mewtwo had given him all the time he needed to plan ahead and defeat him. And in the end, the leader of Team Rocket knew he would finally prove victorious between them.

The first thing to do after the adventure was over was to deal with one of the many unfortunate
accidents that happened during it. However, Ash didn't expect just how awkward the situation would get.

“How did you break it?”

That was all Professor Oak had to ask him when Ash presented him with the very shredded and scorched scraps of metal that he had realized to his shock had been the Pokédex.

The question was both in frustration and astonishment. The sort of question a parent had for a child who broke a vase, a vase that was made of indestructible material and well out of reach.

“I don’t have a clue. I was trapped at the time, and I didn’t exactly get a chance to ask. I only found out when we got dropped in a giant pile in the middle of nowhere and a piece scratched my nose.”

He idly scratched the narrow line that said piece of metal had left him in the last few days.

“Well, I’d ask further questions but I am not entirely sure I want an answer. I can however tell you this: I’d highly suggest you not leave Pallet Town until the League. I am sure I don’t need to tell you that if you get into that sort of thing again your mother will chain you to your bed to keep it from happening again.”

At the Professor’s threat he couldn’t help but wince in agreement. Though he was sure the Professor then muttered to something to himself about ‘until grandchildren’ that he didn’t want to think about.

“I can build a new model Pokédex for you before the league, but until then try to stay out of further trouble.”

Stay out of further trouble, he could do that. Probably.

He just needed to stay far, far away from any ruins in the area, and hope Team Rocket stayed away for a while.

“Say, would the new Pokédex have a different personality, or would you be able to restore the old one?”

He found himself asking the question, and he was surprised to realize how much the idea that the Pokédex might be something entirely different this time actually would depress him.

“The same personality you are used to, as I have backups that updated shortly before its destruction. It will be compatible with all older software like those ‘Monodexes’ I believe they are called, and retain all the data it had recorded. I take it that’s fine with you.”

It was quite fine in fact.

“So…those are my missing memories.”

Cepu’s projected form nodded affirmatively at his question, fully rebooted and back to peak efficiency.

Alex Silph stared into the flowing data before him, gathered in that final battle that had been wiped from his own memory.

So much that he and his Pokémon had lost, yet Cepu had retained near perfectly, bar the gaps from
her period of being down because of that Pokédex A.I. This ‘Mewtwo’ had underestimated technology, even after that Pokédex A.I nearly killed him and damaged Cepu.

How flawed, flawed as much as the logic that the Pokédex had. Whoever made the intelligence for it clearly needed some lessons in programming.

They either messed up on the learning subroutines and let it evolve into such a state, or it was always like that. Both were bad designs.

Ash of Pallet Town, Red of Viridian City, and Paul of Veilstone City. His data on that trio of rookies had expanded drastically in the span of a single day, and the data on others there had improved notably as well.

With such information at his fingers, the League was his to win. His strategies would be all that much better.

His Pokémon even had a new great battle under their belts to strengthen them: once they recovered he would have to test them to see if he’d have to reassign any of them to the A teams.

His eyes rested on a note that had been added to the data on Ash and Red.

“Tell me Cepu, how likely is it that their being Bloodliners will be a factor in the league to come? Give me all scenarios.”

After everything that happened in New Island, the quiet and green hills of Pallet Town had never felt more welcoming. Ash and Pikachu took a deep breath of the clean air, taking a moment to relax before they turned to their guest next to them.

Lucario took a gander of the scenery below with a smile on his face, deep in reminiscence as he went over each of the houses and the greenery surrounding the whole town. ‘This place hasn't changed that much. It's almost comforting.’

Ash nodded, before he smiled back at Lucario. "I really have to thank you for your help. We wouldn't have made it without you."

'It was my duty to assist you. That's why Sir Aaron sealed me in the staff, after all.'

Hearing that, Ash couldn't help but sigh in relief. He had already suspected it back during his visit to Rota at the beginning of his journey in the new timeline, but he was happy to know that this time around Sir Aaron and Lucario were allowed to say goodbye on their own terms, aware of what happened. Even if knowing the reason only made him feel guilty.

"I'm sorry. Because of me, you-"

'Don't feel responsible. If I am here, it's because of my decision. And if nothing else, my time here has been plenty interesting already.' Lucario chuckled, as if he found the whole situation funny.

Ash tried to follow the Pokémon's advice, the boy's attention going back to the sky, thinking about the recent events. Ash and his travelling companions found themselves back on Old Shore Wharf, with their memories of the events intact but with no one else around them aware of what happened with Mewtwo, including the Nurse Joy that he had kept with him. None of the other trainers were there and all of Ash's Pokémon were returned to Oak's Laboratory, so he couldn't say how many
others retained their memory of what happened, but Ash was quite sure not many did. It was a bit sad, but Mewtwo probably deserved some peace to figure out where to go next with his life. He wondered if he was going to go to Mt. Quena again, or somewhere completely different; he wasn't sure how much Mewtwo peered into his memories, after all.

As he continued to muse about the recent events, the boy's attention went back to Lucario. "What did you think of Mewtwo?"

The ancient Aura Guardian pondered over the question for a brief while, before his gaze turned skyward as well, deep in contemplation.

'During our battle, I called him a petty tyrant. I wish I didn't do so.' Lucario shook his head. 'He was just a child scared of the unknown world and looking for someone to love him. I can relate, to a degree.'

He raised a paw to the sky, almost as if trying to catch the sun in it. 'We can't live our lives shackled by the chains of the past and what could've been. We have to accept our present, and forge our own paths of the future. And I think this is a lesson Mewtwo learned, thanks to you.'

Lucario turned back towards Ash, a smile over his muzzle. 'I can't say if he'll truly find happiness, but if nothing else, you ensured he could move on. And that's the best help you could've ever done to him.'

"I didn't do anything special." Ash gave him a sheepish grin back, rubbing his own neck. "But if there's anything I can do to help you out, please say so."

Lucario seemed to give serious consideration to Ash's offer, placing a paw on his chin as he seemed to lose himself in thought. And then, the Pokémon's attention went back to Ash.

'Well... there is something.' He paused, and then he averted his gaze from Ash, scratching at his own cheek. 'Do you still have some of that... chocolate? It was... rather delicious.'

Ash could swear he saw Lucario's cheeks flush pink as he asked that. Ash and Pikachu allowed themselves to chuckle in response. Max had the right idea, one timeline ago.

"Alright, I'm gonna go grab some," Ash said, standing back up while Pikachu reached up for his usual spot. Lucario seemed to barely hide a huge flashing grin as Ash made his way back to his house. Along the way, Ash yawned, the tiredness still taking a hold of his body.

It had only been a few days since New Island, and everyone still felt exhausted. Ash would admit there hadn't been a ton of training recently, and he would give it a few days before he pressed the issue again. Everyone was way too proved physically and mentally, and they needed the time. Plus it had given him time to show Lucario around the modern century and all that had changed since then. He was glad to see he was doing better this time.

Once he finally entered home and started his search for some chocolate and maybe a muffin for himself, however, Ash found the phone ringing in the living room. With a bit of surprise and just a bit of nuisance, Ash went to answer, setting up the camera as well.

As the phone and camera booted up, he found himself staring at someone he didn't expect to ever call him.

Casey Snagem. The old man from New Island, Gary's acquaintance, and someone that probably wasn't supposed to still remember him.
“I’m sure you are surprised to be hearing from me. I hope I caught you alone,” the man said.

“You did, though I’m confused.”

The older man chuckled. “That I still remember? Gary certainly doesn’t, and I can confirm to you memory loss in the others I have talked to. As to how I remember, it is quite simple. As a writer, I am immune to losing my memories to mass wiping events.”

Ash could only stare at the man in utter confusion, who promptly chuckled at his own joke, or possibly reference to something.

“No, actually that isn’t it. I’ve just dealt with mass mind wipes before and grew an immunity to it over time, particularly when done by Psychic-type Pokémon. Mewtwo was stronger than the typical Beheeyem, but he was hardly the first to try to wipe my memories. So I remember everything.”

“You do, huh.”

He tried to not show how worried he was at that point.

“Of course, there are things I want to talk to you about that weren’t obvious to most. Something that has nothing to do with manmade legendaries, bloodliners, the power of my Chesnaught, or even your teen drama. Especially not that last one, I’d be quite happy for you to keep that to yourself. What I want to talk to you about is something else.”

“And that would be?” Ash asked, head tilted. What warranted him calling him early in the morning that didn’t involve any of those things?

“I simply am curious about your experience with time travel.”

TO BE CONTINUED,
ONE MORE CHAPTER TO LEAGUE

OMAKE (TO BETA: PLEASE EXPAND THE SEXUAL AND NUDE JOKES IN THIS ONE. THANK YOU)

NON-CANON

It could have been worse (or possibly better…)

Earth 040919

Everyone, regardless of species, could only stare in horror as Ash was struck by a black Pokéball and sucked into it.

His clothes were all that was left of him, lingering in the air for a mere microsecond before collapsing into a pile on the ground.

The ball clattered into the pile inches from the Pokédex that had fallen from Ash’s pocket.

Pikachu could only stare at the ball that now sat atop the vacated pair of pants, terror seizing every cell in his body.
A flicker in the air drew his gaze away from the ball that had taken his friend, and he could only stare in utter horror at what now floated over Mewtwo’s side of the field.

A massive swarm of the very same balls, hundreds of them. Perhaps even thousands.

With a mere flick of Mewtwo’s finger, the balls all flew towards them without mercy.

…

Things had gone a bit different to what Lucario had imagined.

When he agreed to be sealed in Sir Aaron’s staff, he was told he would fall into a deep sleep, and he would feel like only one night had passed.

However, there were times something partially woke him up from his slumber. Sometimes, it was as if the heir’s voice tried to call out to him.

It happened several times, and it always came from a small light in the middle of a cold and infinite void of darkness. But no matter how hard he tried to reach out to it, it always disappeared, and then he was dragged back to his deep sleep.

This time, however, something different happened. He heard the same voice again, but it seemed to be calling out in anger. Then, it became more subdued, and all he heard was a faint call for help.

Somehow, he knew the heir was in trouble, and needed him. He couldn’t explain, but it was as if that helped him break the seal and reach out to him.

He was ready to wake up in a place completely different from the Tree of Beginning. But he didn’t imagine it would be a small, cramped space, where many metal pincers clawed all over him just as soon he could feel himself in the physical world again.

Thus, he had no chance but to blast them away with an Aura Sphere, breaking through to finally see where he was. He had appeared inside some sort of strange machinery, spiral-shaped and with many transparent tubes full of liquid coming out of it.

He’d could only imagine how confused he’d have been if he didn’t have any idea he was in the future. Even with that knowledge it was quite surreal.

A second later, a sphere that looked like a large, sinister eyeball with a red pupil burst open behind him, releasing someone who was at the same time familiar and unknown to him.

The young man in front of him couldn’t be anyone but the heir of his former master. His hair was similarly black and messy, albeit somewhat shorter and with no sign of the slight blue hue Sir Aaron had, and he was as tall as his master had been, perhaps a bit more especially for his apparent age. There were differences, of course; the color and shape of his eyes resembled more those of Sir Aaron’s lover. Other features were a bit more alien to them both: the ears were different, as were the marks on his cheeks.

He was also lacking clothes, which was somewhat odd. Perhaps that was not done in the future. Still the lack of clothing revealed additional features he shared with his master as well as aspects he did not.
The heir had a lot more body hair than his master, and many fewer scars. Though the latter would likely change in time. He also seemed less grimy than his master, perhaps suggesting an increased use of soap in this time period.

The way the conversation was going made Lucario suspect that it was just as likely that he didn’t know that he was naked, so shocked he was by what had happened to him he hadn’t registered it yet, as it was that nudity was common in this century of humanity.

He’d ask when the time was appropriate.

…

It all happened too fast, and it was still spinning in Misty's head.

One second, after Ash and Charizard defeated Mewtwo's clone, those strange dark balls started flying around all over. The next, one of those balls hit Ash and absorbed him like he was a Pokémon, leaving behind only his clothes.

The shock left her too stunned to scream or something, and she didn't even move when one of those balls hit her too. Then everything turned to darkness.

It was a horrible sensation. She couldn't see, hear, or feel anything at all, yet she was still fully aware of herself. It was like being somewhere between life and death.

Even though it only lasted for a few minutes, she felt it was like an eternity, and she felt a huge relief once she finally got out. She didn't want to experience that ever again.

She saw the smiling face of Ash when she got out, joyful at the sight of her. She idly noted that Anabel and Iris were free too, along with Red and Yellow, which no doubt contributed to the joy in Ash’s face.

She quickly hugged him, just so happy to see him fine, to see everyone else fine (including several of her own Pokémon), and being fine herself.

Her arms clamped down around Ash, pulling him into her. He grunted in surprise, but quickly relaxed in her embrace.

However even as much she enjoyed the hug, and the sheer feeling of relief at being out of that horrible place, she couldn’t help but feel that something was wrong.

Something about the hug, about her, about everyone around her, felt off somehow, and from what she could tell Ash was starting to also think that.

She briefly glanced at Iris, Anabel, Red, and Yellow, the latter three seeming to have noticed exactly what it was and had all paled noticeably.

Iris wasn’t though, so what could that possibly…

Misty tilted her head down, nearly knocking her head against Ash’s head as he did the same.
They both began screaming seconds after Yellow and Red before rapidly breaking their hug.

For there was not a speck of clothing between them.

…

He really should be doing something other than screaming his head off at this point: if he had to scream in horror he had plenty of time to do it earlier, and in the grand scheme of things this was by far less horrible than being trapped in the balls.

However that was the logical way to think, and he had just clearly seen Misty, Iris, and Anabel’s boobs. This was no time for logic!

“Are you guys done screaming? It is hurting my ears?”

Iris’s question did get the screaming to stop, though it did get Red to look at Iris in disbelief, his eyes struggling to keep eye contact on her even as flames danced in his throat.

“Why are you not freaking out?”

Well it was obvious Red. Iris just didn’t have a problem with this sort of thing unlike certain people who should be keeping their eyes up before someone taught you a lesson….and now he was getting annoyed at Red again and sounding rather aggressive about it.

This was not the time to start glaring at Red again, even if logic wasn’t in effect. Mewtwo might wipe out cities while he was busy being angry at Red for what logic would have as a minor offense, if an offense at all.

He’d have to deal with his desire to punch Red in the face another time when the world was not possibly at risk. Punching Red in the face would probably rank highly in the worst things he could be doing right now.

“I could ask you the same thing Ash. You aren’t even covering up the…”

Covering up the…

Oh.

He noted that his hands were not in fact currently covering himself as Yellow at pointed out.

Also he didn’t notice this for…however long he was trying to get the Pokéballs open? Or have it mentioned by any of the Pokémon?

Both worried him, all in different ways.

‘Is this the part where I mention I wasn’t screaming as internally as you three were externally?’

At Anabel’s worried point, even if she was doing a much better job at remembering how to cross her arms across her body Misty gave a side glare at Iris, even as she seemed to blush even more so as her focus made her take note of Red more.

He ignored the flaring desire to punch Red in the face that resulted.
“Stop grinning Iris.”

Iris did not stop grinning.

“I do not see a reason to stop.”

Before he got to see a potential cat fight (with a 100% chance of nudity) between Iris and Misty, or he punched Red in the face, both of which he probably wanted more than he cared to admit, he had a sudden, if probably stupid idea to calm things down.

“Let’s find the lab coats: that will solve this problem.”

At everyone’s confused looks, he continued his desperate solution.

“This is an evil science lair right? Those always have lab coats, and lab coat are clothing. We should find them somewhere, you guys can go look for them. I’ll keep letting the Pokémon out.”

“I will stay here and help you.”

Misty let out a loud and frustrated noise that he wasn’t sure was horror, anger, or both in response.

…

He probably should have killed the humans by now, but in all honestly he had far too much to do.

The machine had broken far too much trying to kill him, and it was taking a while to recreate them. The tower that had collapsed was requiring a lot of focus to restabilize and rebuild, and it was frankly annoying to have to get it back up.

Somehow it felt more tiresome to do so this time than originally, and he had a base to work from now. Yet it came off as the tiresome task to him.

When Amber was back, when the clones were with them, it would be all worth it. The machine would have utterly lost.

“You’re going to let us out right?”

He ignored the older human, and the only one of them that was still conscious.

He had nothing more to same to any of them.

“It will be easier for you if you act on that now. You probably should just make it like none of this happened. Surely mass mind alteration and teleportation is within your power.”

He paused, fortunately just as he finished placing a piece back in place in the broken tower.

‘I seem to have misjudged you.’

He didn’t turn around as he spoke.

‘To think I had assumed you had something the other humans didn’t have, beyond the hallmarks of
an aged human. Yet here you are, begging for your own lives and leaving your Pokémon and the Bloodliners behind. Yes I know what they are, don’t be so shocked. Human nature is clear as ever.’

Casey Snagem chuckled, a sound that made him clench his digits in annoyance.

“That’s not what I’m suggesting. Not at all, and you’d be feeling the same way if you were like me. You aren’t however, and thus you are going to be surprised in a moment.”

He turned around to the bound human, readying to tighten the binds around him as necessary.

‘And just why, pray tell, will I be surprised? How would you know such things? Did another machine do something in a vain attempt to kill me?’

“Not at all, even if I do believe Cepu rebooted a bit earlier. Could have just been me hearing things. What isn’t me hearing things however is a sound I’d know anywhere.”

The bound trainer was now grinning at him, in a look that was both confident and a tad sad. Sad at what wasn’t able to be avoided.

The very next moment before an explosion shook the other side of the stadium.

He quickly turned around from the bound man and found himself staring at a massive round hole, still smoking from whatever blasted it open. In the center of said hole stood Ash Ketchum, who was glaring at him and most notably not sealed.

Or clothed, though that was fairly understandable given that his ball had left his clothing behind. It was a design quirk he had not considered implementing, as he had not deemed it particularly important then, or now really.

It was a curiosity, nothing more. He could have fixed it, but honestly he had decided not to in a spur of the moment decision.

On his shoulder sparked his Pikachu, and behind him to his left was the tan skinned Bloodliner girl, also naked.

Snagem’s Chesnaught and Clefairy were on the right of him, and the other Pokémon he captured were streaming forward.

The rest of the Bloodliners seemed to be standing around in ways that obscured their bodies, though he could clearly said their heads.

“I know the sound of my Pokémon from anywhere, though I must say my vision of this dramatic fight was a lot more PG. I’d prefer it that way personally.”

He waved his hand, and a metal sheet wrapped itself around Casey Snagem’s mouth, gagging him, and a second to cover his eyes.

Oddly he seemed to relax more when blinded. Odd human quirk over the nudity perhaps?

‘I don’t have time for this.’

He called up another round of his balls and sent them flying towards the escapees.
However a blue shockwave washed through them from the assembled force, sending them clattering to the ground.

So much for solving this problem quickly.

…

At the end of a long and mad battle that he had only managed to end in a satisfactory way by finding his clothes and digging out his Z-Ring, though he hadn’t had the chance to both get the thing that saved them all and put his clothes back on in the midst of combat.

Said piles of clothes hadn’t come with them when Mewtwo had sent them away, and now they found themselves in the middle of a giant field in the middle of nowhere, the only thing artificial among them being his backpack’s contents and all of their Pokéballs scattered around.

No spare clothing, a torn-up and broken beyond repair Pokédex, and a few keystone holders between them all.

“Well, that was horrifying and disturbing and we probably all need therapy, but we can all just go back to Pallet Town and breath for a bit. Vacation over, no more surprises. Alright Anabel, teleport us there, we can go in shifts.”

At Misty’s request Anabel blushed, which confused Misty.

“Anabel, why are you blushi…”

Misty’s face rapidly flushed red.

“Oh yeah, naked, how could I forget. Wait, why did I forget!?”

Misty closed her eyes and flailed in confusion and worry, causing her body to do motions that he really had to try and look away from.

“Extensive exposure to battle probably helped burn off your issues with it. That’s one good thing out of all this, at least.”

Iris’s explanation might have been registered by the still freaking out Misty, though it again turned to Anabel to raise an issue.

An issue that he had to admit had also forgotten along with the issue of teleporting back right now.

‘There is also the issue that we could be seen before we can get any spare clothing. I don’t think any of us can risk going back in the daytime, or even a good part of night time for that matter. Oh dear, we might have to wait until at least midnight, and that’s assuming we can avoid any squeaky floorboards around the dressers.’

Ash could only wince. He had a few of those didn’t he, and he wasn’t sure he quite remembered where all of them were.

So now he was stuck naked with three naked and quite attractive girls in a forest clearing for hours with nothing to do until they could possibly hope to make a break for actual clothing.
Why didn’t that seem that bad when he thought about it like that? Oh wait, he knew the answer to that.

He couldn’t really even try to distract himself from them: the Pokémon were all exhausted so training was a no go, and with the Pokédex gone he couldn’t just watch or read something.

Time would flow either very slowly and awkwardly until midnight, or very quickly and awkwardly until midnight.

“So seeing as we are not going anywhere for a while, we might as well talk. So Ash, I noticed your eyes are going around us a lot. What do you like seeing so much?”

He didn’t know what about that question made him more horrified: Iris’s wide grin she was sending his way, Misty’s gaping jaw at Iris for bringing that up while also sort of looking at him in curiosity, or Anabel’s reignited blush and also similar curious look.

It could also be the massive grin Pikachu was giving him from atop a nearby branch while he nibbled on an apple in a way that made him look like a very amused asshole.

Pikachu and Iris were probably the only ones enjoying this fully.

“Well…um….er…."

This was going to go either very horribly, or very well, and Ash wasn’t sure which of those options scared him more.

…

“…And that’s how we got over our issues and started dating, overcoming the silly concept of shame, and enjoying ourselves to the fullest.”

Bloodliner Ash could only stare at his counterpart, who recounted his own divergent story. It was odd, meeting a version of himself from a different point in his own timeline.

He was used to meeting chibi versions of himself at this point, as well as versions of himself that engaged in casual Lillipup-punting. But they were so different from his current story he could shrug it off somewhat.

They were just alien enough to not disturb him, especially after punching the latter versions.

But a version of himself who was clearly himself from a different take on Mewtwo was something more unsettling. A timeline where Mewtwo had somehow managed to make his Pokéballs even worse, which resulted in basically burning out their sense of shame and accelerating his relationships with Misty, Iris, and Anabel.

It also led to him losing in the Indigo Top 4 to Alexander Silph, though his counterpart took the loss well enough as far as he could tell. Seeing as he didn’t fight Silph in the Top 4, the ripples of change were clearly complex thing.

“Interesting, now please put some clothes on.”
At Don Ash’s insistence the alternate chuckled.

“You choose to pick me up to talk first thing in the morning. What would you expect that I’d be all wrapped up in footie-pajamas? Why on earth would I sleep clothed after Misty won the Whirl Cup?”

At Ranger and Rhyme-bouncer Ash winced at the idea, he felt the need, against his better judgement, to defend his naked counterpart.

“Well that was on you guys. I mean I don’t sleep like that every night, but if you grabbed me after a night I was having sex I’d be naked too. A bit less blazen about it, but that is just how thing work.”

Don Ash groaned at him for defending his alternate self, who gave him a thumbs up in appreciation.

“You mean brazen, not blazen.”

They weren’t the same thing?

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