Guide Me By Your Light

by BeetlesMcGee

Summary

What if Alola's savior wasn't a child from Kanto?
What if that child never existed?
What if instead, that child came from somewhere much, much further...
And much, much darker...
(Heads up: Gladion doesn't arrive until the point he would in canon.)

Notes

First off, this is an AU, running on the concept that Sun is an amnesiac alien from Ultra
Megalopolis... I've had this stuck in my head for months.

Technically, he's the same species as the Ultra Recon Squad, but in practice, I thought it was a waste that they were basically just blue humans and that's literally it. So, I added a lot more odd stuff to Sun's physiology, including various powers. (Although nothing story-breaking) You know, for the funsies.

Also, Hau comes in chapter 2. Chapter 1 is basically just for setup and all that. But this is going to be Sun/Hau eventually, just as more of a slow burn. There's already some platonic Sun/Lillie though, if you like that kind of thing.

Sun is typically referred to as a male here, but he doesn't really follow the "male" gender role strictly, so he's kinda genderfluid.

There's a good chance I'll have someone else be nonbinary/genderfluid later on too, since I have heard that some people feel sort of upset when only non-human characters are like that.

I used to put all of my Pokemon stuff on Fanfiction.net, because the Pokemon fandom there seems bigger and more entrenched, but over time, that community has really worn me down. Multiple toxic sections, crawling with homophobes, rude reviewers, etc... So, I decided to pretty much pack it in over there and try starting fresh here. As such, this story will not be cross-posted any time in the near future, and perhaps not at all.
Chapter 1: As Light Falls

In most people's minds, the strangest and most inexplicable things were typically supposed to happen in the middle of the night. Or perhaps dusk, or the crack of dawn, if you believed the liminal natures of such times had anything to do with it.

As it turned out, the world often didn't play by the arbitrary rules that humans liked to make up for it.

So, late morning on a humid spring day, a certain Rockruff got the surprise of his young life when a glowing hole opened in the sky, just wide enough for someone- a human? - to come plummeting out, back turned towards the ground, but headfirst. Notably, their only clothing was a plain white pair of shorts.

Rockruff's eyes widened in shock as the person fell, and the small dog believed he had no choice but to helplessly watch their demise... At least until some kind of little... Pokemon?... came shooting out of the hole just before it closed up, screeching bloody murder as it shot towards the ground as fast as possible. Rockruff just watched in bewilderment as the small creature grabbed the humanoid one by the foot, noticeably slowing their descent, surprisingly enough. The little one was stronger than it looked.... and could apparently fly? Still, Rockruff could hear it squealing in distress with the effort of holding the other, and knew they wouldn't hold up forever. The little one was slowly hovering lower, but just one lapse in their grip could prove disastrous. Still, Rockruff realized that if the strange little creature was buying him time... Perhaps he could do something after all!

Rockruff turned around and focused on the soil beneath him, his will forcing it to rapidly loosen, soften, and dehydrate. Once he had enough for a decent start, he started furiously kicking with his back legs, sending copious amounts of sand flying backwards.

He dug and kicked as fast as his legs could possibly go, piling up at much sand as possible behind him, in ever-larger amounts. Still, he panted with the effort all the while. Sand Attack wasn't normally used the way he was doing it, and it was definitely harder than it seemed when the idea first popped into his head. He wasn't that good with terrakinesis yet. The ground was still stubborn and finicky, unwilling to cooperate with him to its fullest extent... But if it meant saving someone, he would force it to obey regardless.

Rockruff gave a long howl of effort, pumping adrenaline through his body and having his legs surge with strength, all to help him excavate as much sand as possible.

His keen ears could still hear the little creature struggling more than ever up above, giving little clicks and whines at the effort of keeping a grip on such a heavy load... and with such stubby hands, to boot. The creature didn't even have fingers or claws, it essentially just had little nubs equipped with hairs roughly equivalent to those of a gecko.

Rockruff just kept going with all of his might, but the creature was falling faster... and his strength was really flagging.

Still, there was a sudden clicking, chirping cry of encouragement from the odd creature above, and Rockruff was abruptly doused in an expertly-aimed blast of some kind of glowing cyan fluid, which smelled a bit odd, but rapidly began to soak into Rockruff's skin and mucus membranes, after which he near instantly felt an enormous rush of renewed strength and vigor, while the excess just rapidly evaporated. The little creature above cheered as Rockruff began flinging up sand with utterly unbelievable speed, doing his best to corral it all into one singular large pile. As it turned out, his best was quite good. The determined little pup had built up a mound at least eight feet tall before he
finally collapsed on the spot, in order to regain his strength.

The little floating creature almost immediately followed suit, its glowing eyes and mouth dimming somewhat as it released its grip right above the sand mound, and promptly went plummeting down right along with the humanoid.

Rockruff tiredly forced himself to his feet, panting with the effort, but he had to know whether or not the plan worked.

It was a bit worrying to see neither of them moving at first, but Rockruff quickly saw that both of them were still breathing at a steady pace, which he took as a good sign. Still, the humanoid seemed to be out cold, not receptive to licking at all. Fortunately, at least the little one was awake, just very tired, by the looks of things. Rockruff cocked his head listening to it. It seemed like it had a heartbeat in its... entire body? Was that... was that right? Somehow, it didn't seem to come from any one place. When he looked closely, the surface of the little creature's skin seemed to be pulsing and vibrating ever-so slightly. Meanwhile, the humanoid one had what sounded unmistakably like two heartbeats in their chest, one to either side, and then one near their pelvis, right about in the middle. Not only that, but they all seemed to... take turns beating, each individually much slower than a human's... But all together, the beats were actually somewhat faster. Rockruff couldn't tell if that was good or bad.

Rockruff just cocked his head even further. These people were very strange, but at least they were okay!

Rockruff tried to tell the little one that he was going to get help, but it didn't seem to understand him very well. When the little one came clicking and squeaking back, eyes subtly flashing in various patterns, Rockruff also found that they were very difficult to understand... But he got two things out of what they were saying. One was that they were thankful, and two was that they were apparently surprised at how bright everything was. Rockruff was a bit confused by the second thing. Of course it was bright, it wasn't night time!

They went on to say that it was always dark, before. Rockruff just cocked his head again, wondering if he was misunderstanding. Still, he barked energetically in response, and repeatedly looked off in a different direction, trying his best to impress upon the strange little one that he knew where to get help. Finally, they seemed to understand, their eyes brightening dramatically for a moment as they gave a long, high-pitched beep of apparent pleasure.

After Rockruff went through a bit of extra struggle to convey to the new arrival that they needed to stay put until he got back, he raced off to his master's home. Surely, he would know what to do. Master Kukui knew everything, after all!

A blonde teenage girl quickly snapped a book shut and climbed down from a loft to reach the front door, the moment she heard incessant barking and scratching at the door... although she proved to be just a bit too slow, as the door abruptly burst open on its own, once Rockruff slammed into it with the full brunt of his body.

“Rockruff! Not again! You’re supposed to wait! Doing that will mess the door up!” the girl scolded, putting her hands on her hips. Although her scolding would normally have more of an impact, Rockruff felt he didn’t have time to be too put out by it. He simply barked loudly, then turned and barked loudly in the direction he wanted to go. “Oh, what’s that? You found something?”
the girl asked. Rockruff nodded happily, jumping about with a mixture of excitement and impatience. Lillie was such a smart girl, she always understood him so quickly!

Although she hadn’t been around for even two weeks, there had already been times when it was just an interesting stick, or a dead lizard, or some random lost item Rockruff had found or dug up. Still, Lillie could subtly tell that something seemed different from usual.

“Alright, I’ll get the Professor,” Lillie said, as she hurried off to do so. “I’ll tell him to hurry.”

In just a moment, Professor Kukui was there. Rockruff was off like a shot before he could say a single word.

“Hey, wait up little cousin!” Kukui shouted, as he and Lillie went after him.

Fortunately, the site of the incident wasn’t all that far away. There was a massive amount of disturbed ground, a truly impressive pile of sand, and… what looked like a young adolescent boy and a strange purple Pokemon, both lying on top…

Even besides the oddity of the Pokemon, the most striking thing about the boy was that his barely-dressed state made it readily apparent that every square inch of his skin was a pale blue in color. What looked like little dark blue freckles lined his shoulders, arms, face, and neck… But rather than just being randomly oriented, they actually seemed to slowly and lazily drift about on his skin, as if floating on water. Almost by instinct, Lillie timidly went closer.

“Lillie, wait, we have to think about this… Whoever that is… is he even human?” Kukui asked.

“Either way, he doesn’t look so good! We have to do something, don’t we?” Lillie asked.

“...You have a point there. But at least let me get in close first. I don’t want anything happening to you, Lillie,” Kukui said, as he made to do just that… only for the little purple creature to suddenly get up with a shrill, high pitched cry of alarm. Apparently, it’d only been resting. Both Lillie and Kukui immediately froze in place, although Lillie had to admit... as strange as the creature was, it was actually kind of cute.

“Hey, little fella… We’re not going to hurt you, we promise,” Lillie said. “Do you understand? We promise,” Lillie repeated, more slowly. The little thing just cocked its head a bit, but it didn’t seem too worried. It then motioned quickly to the sleeping boy, squeaking with apparent worry.

Kukui and Lillie exchanged a single nod, before moving in for a closer look.

Immediately, there were a couple more oddities about his body. For one, he didn’t have nipples, or a navel… and his hands seemed remarkably human, apart from the detail that they entirely lacked fingernails. Instead, the palms and fingertips seemed to have countless incredibly short and fine hairs, reminding Lillie a bit of a Treecko. His feet were the same way. His hair was jet black, shaggy and unkempt, and his ears were noticeably a bit pointed and elongated. So were most of his teeth. Not to mention, his lips were dark blue.

Kukui got out a couple of pairs of spare latex gloves in his lab coat’s pockets, handing one pair to Lillie. He was glad he happened to have them on hand, in case of handling any wild Pokemon or biological samples of any kind. “Here. He’s clearly not human. Or at the very least, he’s only part human. We don’t want to accidentally get him sick, or vice-versa,” Kukui said. Lillie graciously took the gloves. She hadn’t even thought of that. “Come to think of it… Rockruff, how did he get
here? With the way he’s sprawled out, it’s almost like he dropped clear out of the sky!”

Rockruff just nodded.

Kukui and Lillie just stared.

“Seriously?” Kukui asked.

Rockruff nodded again.

“Well… Lillie, I know you probably weren’t expecting something like this, considering you only became my assistant last week, but-” Kukui paused, realizing Lillie had an odd look on her face.

“Lillie… is there something you wanted to tell me?” Kukui asked.

“Well… I… It’s just, I think I might at least vaguely know where this person came from,” Lillie said, a bit unsteadily. “I’m pretty sure… he fell out of Ultra Space,” Lillie continued.

Kukui’s eyes widened at that. He didn’t want to jump to conclusions… but it was the only thing that made any amount of sense. The only alternative was that the child was some kind of secret illegal lab experiment, but that would never explain how the child fell out of the sky with some Pokemon that Kukui had never even so much as heard of. Perhaps the Pokemon was a lab experiment along with him, but he doubted that too. Even then, the theory had clear holes in it… not to mention, Kukui wasn’t even actually sure the person they’d found was really a child, by their own standards… Or even actually male. Judging by the lack of nipples or a navel, chances were good that the person they’d found wasn’t born the way humans were at all.

Kukui quickly put his gloves on and got the… Unexpected guest… onto his back, while Lillie, Rockruff, and the strange purple creature followed. He figured his wife was going to have an absolute field day with what they’d found.

“So, the little one floats… Kinda like Nebby! I wonder if it’s a Psychic-type, then?” Lillie said.

“Could be!” Kukui replied. “I’ll have to do some tests at some point… of course, nothing that’ll hurt our new little cousins here. Most importantly, I’m going to have to find out their diet and make sure they can actually digest whatever I end up trying to give them. They already seems a bit worn out. I wouldn’t want anyone starving or getting food poisoning on my watch,”

“It is a good sign that our air is apparently fine for them, though,” Lillie said.

“Come to think of it, you make a good point,” Kukui said. “Hopefully, since they presumably still use oxygen for cellular respiration, that’ll mean their biochemistry is similar more than it’s different, and we can at least find something… Or maybe I’m horribly wrong, and we’ll accidentally poison them to Ultra Space and back. Who knows? Science is funny like that sometimes!”

“P-Professor! Please don’t joke like that!” Lillie cried.

“My bad, my bad! We’ll just have to take it slow, and play it by ear. That’s all we can do for now, just ride the waves,” Kukui said.

“Okay,” Lillie said, as they got back home and Kukui carried the unconscious guest into his and Professor Burnet’s room, allowing them to rest on the bed. Lillie, the little purple creature, and
Rockruff were all hot on his trail. Professor Burnet came in soon afterwards, and even Nebby arrived, attracted by all the commotion.

“Honey… what-who in the world did you find this time?!” Professor Burnet loudly cried, as Kukui made a motion for her to lower her voice.

“Don’t blame me, blame Rockruff. But either way… this could be huge for your research, you know! We’re already just about certain that both of these visitors fell straight out of Ultra Space!” Kukui exclaimed.

“…So the purple one… could that be a new kind of Ultra Beast?” Burnet asked. “And what about the boy?! Is he one, or is he in a category of his own?!” As Burnet looked closer, she frowned a bit. “…That is, if they even are a boy… I wouldn’t actually know.”

As Kukui started talking about his own theories, Lillie came closer to the guest on the bed, walking right up to their side to curiously look over them… Only to see all of their “freckles” begin to glow with dim white light.

Lillie’s eyes widened as she made to say something, only for them to suddenly grab her wrist, causing her to yelp in alarm as the guest’s eyes finally snapped open… Revealing large, slightly glowing eyes with nearly no visible sclera, only bright golden-yellow irises, and shockingly enough, two round pupils for each eye.

Immediately, for Lillie, everything about seeing this person absolutely paled in comparison to seeing their eyes. Extra pairs of pupils, golden yellow, slightly glowing… already, they seemed to peer into her very soul. She couldn’t bring herself to look away as the guest’s grip tightened slightly, and all of his freckles steadily began to dim and brighten in a rhythmic cycle… a cycle she quickly realized had actually fallen into line with her own heartbeat. The little creature the guest had come with was ecstatic, immediately nuzzling up against the guest’s chest.

Lillie was distantly aware that Burnet and Kukui were at her side, and definitely excited and talking, but at the same time, they may as well have been a hundred miles away. For what felt like an eternity, it was just her and the guest, and no one else. She could… *feel* them at the surface of her mind, cautiously flitting amongst all the thoughts that came to the forefront, hesitantly exploring, but not wanting to probe any further without permission.

In the same way, she realized she could feel their mind too. Like the surface was pressed right against her own, their most immediate thoughts and feelings freely diffusing back and forth. She focused on theirs. Confusion. Fear. Exhaustion. Tension. Curiosity. They rippled across his consciousness in blinking flashes and surges of light, crossing and overlapping constantly… and yet, the meanings remained as clear as day to Lillie.

She could sense that curiosity and confusion were definitely a strong common thread for both of them. Without words, she set up a deal. If she was allowed to look a bit deeper, then so were they. They agreed to her terms, and suddenly, rather than touching the surface of a pond, Lillie felt like she were immersed… and yet… there was precious little there. It was mostly murky, or blurred, or degraded into mere scraps of information. There were great, confusing swaths of *other* information, but when it came to anything she actively tried to ask or request about his life, or where he came from, or why… the guest didn’t seem to remember a thing.

Lillie snapped out of it with a shock, although she realized that Professor Kukui had been moderately shaking her for at least several seconds already, so to him, her reaction had probably looked incredibly delayed. “He’s psychic!” Lillie exclaimed, eyes bright with wonder.
“And he is a he?” Kukui asked.

“He says any pronouns we want are fine,” Lillie replied.

“‘Says’? Did he actually learn your language? Can he mentally translate his own?” Burnet asked, fascinated.

“…No, it’s more like, feelings, and symbols, and a bunch of lights all thrown together… until somehow it makes sense, I guess.”

“Ah, so it’s closer to Psychic-type Pokemon who haven’t been trained to use spoken telepathy… The fact that his brain is compatible enough with yours is another excellent sign!” Kukui said. “And do you feel any ill effects?”

“No, it… I actually kind of like it, really,” Lillie said. Even though she was well aware that the whole thing was the process of some different species coming into her mind, she wasn’t actually upset about it at all. The guest seemed very polite about how they handled a mind, restrained and gentle. She wondered what training he might’ve received for it, how his culture might’ve handled it… it was a pity he didn’t seem to remember.

“As for the other creature, the one that seems more like a Pokemon…” Kukui started.

“Sha!” the guest emphatically blurted out. Their voice was notably a bit strange, having a slight faded, echoing quality to it.

“…Sha? Is that your language?” Kukui asked.

“Sha!” the guest repeated, directing the gaze to the creature on their chest.

“That’s their name?” Burnet asked.

The guest rapidly nodded, smiling. Everyone immediately picked up on how surprising it was that he’d already picked up on those gestures.

“Do you know their species name?” Kukui asked. The guest sat up more and stared up at him, then back to Lillie, parsing her mind for help understanding Kukui. Once he knew what was being asked of him, he simply looked down at the bed, apparently unable to remember the answer.

“Alright, that’s alright,” Kukui said gently. “Well, what about Sha’s traits? Abilities?” Kukui asked again. “I want to know about you two so we know how to help you better.”

The guest stared back up at Kukui, ‘freckles’ flickering in an erratic pattern of white and cyan, drawing Kukui’s gaze in completely. A good deal of the ‘freckles’ on his face began to gather and pulse slowly, steadily, brightly together, much to everyone’s astonishment. It definitely gave the impression that he was deep in thought.

Images and blurred memories appeared in their heads, depicting Sha firing some sort of toxic, acidic substance from the nozzles on his head. There was also Sha eating strange looking ‘insects’ and plants, and odd dark blue or purple… meat? Strangely, as everyone saw it, they could even taste it a bit. It definitely tasted something like meat… surprisingly pleasant meat, at that. Then there were images of Sha basking under lamps, especially after meals… Everyone could even feel the warmth themselves. However, at other times, Sha seemed to prefer small, dark, cool areas, and it also seemed to sleep in a sort of slimy cocoon at times. The images steadily abated, the guest apparently not remembering anything further. But it seemed good enough for Kukui and Burnet, who immediately
began trying to piece together their findings.

“Cold-blooded… omnivorous… Poison-type, perhaps Psychic or Bug as well?” Kukui asked Burnet.

The guest mentally queried about what those terms meant, especially ‘cold-blooded’. Sha wasn’t cold?

“Oh, that’s just a term we use for any creature that can’t regulate body temperature on their own. Meanwhile, take us for example. We’re humans. We’re warm-blooded,” Kukui said.

The guest’s pupils dilated a bit at this, apparently curious… so curious in fact, that he suddenly sat all the way up in bed, turned so he was facing Lillie on its edge… and promptly pulled her into an embrace, with little to no warning.

“Ah! W-what are you-” Lillie started, only to hear a strange, thrumming, pulsing noise emanating from the guest, who seemed to suddenly be in a moment of bliss. His ‘freckles’ were pulsing bright green light to the rapid beat. Kukui was right! ‘Humans’ were super warm! And comfy, too!

“Okay, okay, uh- I’m glad you’re happy, but-” The guest almost immediately recoiled and looked down at his lap, rapidly picking up on Lillie’s discomfort. They had stopped issuing light, their ‘freckles’ only buzzing agitatedly, every one of them vibrating like mad. Apparently, that was… shame, mixed with regret.

“Uh, sorry! It’s not that I think you’re gross or anything! I just... Humans only touch under certain circumstances. When they’re fully comfortable with each other.” Lillie said. The guest just frowned a bit more, the ‘buzzing’ of his spots slowing slightly as they lit up cyan. Lillie quickly felt a certain sense of warmth brush against her brain. Of trust.

“...But we just met. You... you shouldn’t instantly be comfortable with everyone you just meet,” Lillie said.

Confusion. Questioning. Rationalizing. Why not?

“...Not everyone will want to help you,” Lillie said quietly, as much as it pained her to say it. Kukui and Burnet just nodded slowly. It wasn’t exactly a comfortable truth for them either.

The guest repeated that in their mind, as best they could.

Something… something flickered through their mind, through the mind of everyone present, suddenly. Something white hot, horribly painful, and terrifying in a way he could barely even begin to comprehend. Something sharp and awful. Dark blue blood on a crystalline floor. Otherworldly screaming and howling. A room of floating white spires, the whole thing spinning in nauseating fashion, as vision faded to black...

Everyone flinched as the guest simply laid back down and curled in on himself, body suddenly starting to fade and become translucent. Everyone gasped out in alarm as the guest steadily vanished entirely over the course of a few seconds… Only for Lillie to quickly reach out, and come into contact with slick, smooth skin.

“...Invisible,” Lillie said, half relieved and half bewildered, as she slowly removed her hand and moved back.

“Incredible! Full invisibility, just like that! Even his shorts!” Kukui said, quickly getting over the
strange memories he’d just been bombarded with. “Still… is he okay? Seems like fear triggered it…”

“Oh, no, I didn’t mean to scare him!” Lillie cried, but soon after, the guest began to reappear, still frowning slightly. A wave of heavy, resigned acceptance emanated from them. They’d realized- or perhaps, remembered, what Lillie meant.

“Still… if he remembered something, maybe eventually, he can remember more… although I don’t want to push him. It seems like things were hard for him…” Burnet said.

Kukui just nodded quietly. “For now… I’ll bet he and his little friend are starving. I think now’s as good a time as any to try and figure out what they can eat,” Kukui said. “Lillie, you stay here with him. We’ll go and see what we can come up with,” Kukui said. “After all, he seems to like you most,”

“Me? Really?” Lillie said, a bit flustered. But again, they’d only just met!

The guest agreed, smiling slightly. Lillie didn’t really understand it, until she felt an odd, specific sort of fondness ghost against her consciousness… Something of understanding, camaraderie… Something like…

“…Because we’re the same…” Lillie whispered, loud enough for only him to hear. He nodded, smiled again.

“We’re both lost…” Lillie continued, in that same whisper. “Just in different ways,”

She wasn’t sure when he saw that. How much he saw. How deeply he understood, beyond just the surface… But he at least understood the gist of it, and… despite it all, that made her happy.

Lillie and the guest ‘talked’ for about two hours, mostly Lillie. She also showed him Nebby, who almost immediately seemed to take a shine to him, gladly cuddling up against him. She also got him one of Kukui’s t-shirts to wear, in the meantime. For his part, the guest was mainly just a very good listener, although he seemed appreciative of the shirt, and affectionate with Nebby. Kukui would pop in every now and then to tell them that things were “almost ready”, although he’d started saying that about half an hour in, so by the third or fourth time, Lillie wasn’t sure how much she believed him anymore.

Still, it helped that much of the time, they didn’t have to literally talk, they could just get lost in images and colors and concepts. Lillie had gotten to a point where she was steadily explaining music to him and Sha, silently communicating notes and rhythms, before Kukui and Burnet finally came back in… with a whole cart of many different foods and drinks, both breakfast and lunch-themed.

Lillie just gaped, expecting that they’d come in with something more… scientific. Not just a massive smorgasboard.

“W-what is all this?!” Lillie cried.

“Food, of course! We didn’t know what they’d want, so we figured we would just have them try a tiny bit of everything, one at a time,” Kukui said. “If anything happens, I do have a Skitty with Heal Bell that was temporarily staying to help with my research… I figured an energy-based healing may work better than risking more chemicals,” he explained, as he casually tossed out a Pokeball. The guest stared in utter amazement as the little orb opened in a great rush of light, revealing an adorable little pink and cream creature that couldn’t have possibly fit inside through normal means. Sha went
to investigate as the Skitty mewled cutely, immediately causing the guest’s freckles to light up a soft, seafoam green as he smiled at the little creature.

“Alright… well, here goes! Dig in… but be careful!” Burnet said, as she pushed the cart up to the side of the bed for the guest. Even before he started, his glowing shifted to a brighter green as he sniffed at the whole display, a bit of saliva oozing from the corner of his mouth as he licked his lips… with what the others noticed was a rather long and pointed tongue, dark blue in color.

That was all capped off by a sudden, thunderous rumble issuing from his abdomen… followed by the lights vanishing, his whole body tensing as his freckles instead switching to buzzing like mad, and his whole body vanishing just a moment after that.

As everyone realized what had just happened, they fought back the urge to laugh.

“Come on, there’s no reason to be embarrassed! You’re just hungry, that’s all!” Lillie said.

“Don’t worry about the meat, either. We don’t have to kill Pokemon to get it anymore, with technology on our side,” Kukui said.

With that, an invisible hand slowly picked up a sausage, and a small piece of it seemed to disappear…

There was a pause of trepidation.

The guest came back into full view in a flash, eyes wide and streaming out strong gold light, nostrils flaring, a mouthful of sharp teeth bared. Their spots were the brightest, most vivid green seen yet, as they shoved the whole rest of the sausage into their mouth, followed by two more in a matter of seconds.

“Hey, wait!” Lillie cried.

“Slow, remember?! Take it easy, cousin!” Kukui shouted, but the guest didn’t even seem to care. Burnet just stared in silent shock. Rockruff briefly wondered if he could get some too, but it definitely looked like he didn’t want to share.

A flurry of emotions roughly akin to “If I get sick, it’s worth it!” flickered through their minds as the guest tore into more food like a frenzied Sharpedo, Sha quickly following suit. Pure bliss was flooding the minds of everyone around them, merely by being near the guest as he enjoyed the food, even though everyone else noticed that the combinations and choices were getting odd. Salt in Pinap juice, then meat dunked in the drink… A slab of raw Tauros meat that Kukui had hesitantly decided to add in, gobbled up in seconds flat after the guest slathered it with marmalade and stretched his jaw impossibly wide to better eat it… At least Kukui didn’t have to worry that leaving the bone in was unnecessary, as the guest’s jaws crushed it up with little fanfare at all.

Raw eggs, intended more for Sha than anything, were scooped up and crushed whole in the guest’s mouth, the guest apparently relishing the sensation and texture. Mushrooms, bacon, sugar, and vinegar all combined on slices of bread and then devoured. Tomato Berries slathered in maple syrup. No matter what anyone said, they’d suddenly become all but unreachable, as if they’d slipped into some sort of feeding frenzy. There were various kinds of Pokemon kibble as well, which were supposed to be just for Sha… but the guest was apparently enjoying them just as much. Anything with meat was gone first, followed by basically everything else.

Sha was hardly any better, their oddly glowing mouth apparently able to stretch remarkably wide to
simply engulf things whole. Kukui wondered if it had teeth at all.

The meal eventually concluded with the guest chugging the whole bottle of vinegar provided before blissfully lying back. His belly was distended, his face and his new shirt a bit of a mess, all the plates licked clean, and his spots all glowing a constant, vivid green. Sha was in a similar state.

“Well,” Kukui said, rather blankly.

“That was… something…” Burnet added.

“The whole bottle of vinegar… he drank the whole bottle of vinegar…” Lillie muttered to herself, almost in disbelief.

“Well, this’ll either be fine, or an utter disaster… Guess we’ll just have to keep a close eye on him,” Burnet said, only to notice that the guest was already asleep.

“…We’ll have him clean up later. For now, it looked like he was literally starving. It’s probably best to just let him sleep,” Kukui said.

They supposed they already had their answer to what the guest was willing to eat, which by the looks of things, seemed to lean noticeably towards meat, but could really be absolutely anything, provided it was combined in the right way. Now they just had to wait for what the guest could truly eat safely, although it was fortunate that nothing seemed to have an immediate adverse effect.

Everyone opted to stay with the guest nearly all day and all night, doing it in shifts to ensure he was never entirely left alone. It was a bit worrying that he slept literally the entire day away, but he still seemed to be doing fine, beyond his exhaustion. They even went as far as to sleep in chairs around him.

Luckily, by morning, he and Sha woke up seeming absolutely fine, much to everyone’s relief.

After the massive meal, he seemed exceptionally friendly, still glowing green and showering everyone with silent gratitude, besides the fact that he was humming some kind of simple, wordless tune. Lillie recognized it from yesterday, when she’d started telling him about music. She couldn’t help but smile at the fact that he seemed to like it.

Still, Professor Kukui saw to it that he explained to the guest how the bathroom worked, and got him a full change of clothes… Fortunately, as it turned out, the guest proved able to walk and get around just fine. It was surprising how utterly human-like in proportions they were. Arms and legs the typical lengths and size, hands and feet as well… The main oddity was by far their eyes, noticeably rather oversized and still strange as ever, lacking white sclera and still having two pupils each. That wasn’t even counting the fact that they often glowed, with soft golden light.

The guest was a bit on the short side, just 5’2… about the same height as Lillie. His age was still indeterminate, but considering that Lillie was on the cusp of 15, he actually looked very close to that age as well. …At least in alien years, however they worked.

Once he’d showered, he came out dressed in a sky blue t-shirt, and a white skirt that Lillie had actually allowed him to borrow, as he’d expressed interest in Lillie’s once Kukui picked out spare clothes he could wear. However, he was still barefoot, apparently not really liking the socks or sandals he’d been provided.
Still, there was the issue of a proper name for the guest, considering he couldn’t very well just be ‘the guest’ forever. Even Sha apparently remembered who he was as far as their relationship and a few things they’d done together, but not his actual name. And they needed a species name for Sha, too.

Kukui suggested Toxispike at first, but Burnet complained that it sounded too much like a Toxapex evolution, and Lillie complained that it wasn’t “cute enough”.

As such, Lillie ended up coming up with the name of “Poipole”... which even Sha seemed to be fond of. They figured they could come up with a more scientific term later.

As for the guest, they settled on the term “Lux Sapien”, which he personally approved of. “Wise light”, it apparently meant. He could easily get behind that. It was sort of like a compliment, an acknowledgement that he was different but still similar, not just a freak or an experiment to them.

But as they all stood in the main room, Lillie asked the guest what he’d like his personal name to be, figuring he had a right to choose on his own.

The guest casually went over to a window, staring up at the sun… Admiring its sheer beauty, despite the fact that it was hard to look at directly. Somehow, despite his lack of memory… he felt that something about it was precious. Important. Not to be taken for granted. Not that he felt he was personally someone who actually deserved the same level of awe, but still… Something in him felt that he needed to show his respect, somehow.

The guest pointed up at the sun, then back to himself.

Everyone understood what he meant.

“Alright, then…” Lillie started, smiling gently, as the guest turned around, and light poured both from him and behind him, making him look truly otherworldly as he mirrored the same sort of smile.

“We’ll call you Sun.”
Chapter 2: Cold and Warmth

Chapter Summary

Before the journey begins, everyone learns more about Sun, and Sun has some fun! ...Among other things...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Things continued on for about three months, like clockwork... At least for the rest of the world. If you were talking about Kukui's lab, that was only true if you were referring to an exceptionally strange and convoluted clock. Each day, something new was learned, and there was another odd experience to be had.

Kukui and Burnet decided it was ultimately best to keep Sun on the down-low, not wanting to make him some huge spectacle for everyone to prod and gawk at. They agreed that unless Sun’s health and well-being were being actively threatened, they would keep everything relatively simple. Still, they were grateful for the sheer luck they were having in raising him.

In just three months, Sun had become noticeably a bit bigger and taller than Lillie, having reached 5'4 and gained about 25 pounds... A good thing, considering that he’d been looking a bit underweight before. He’d filled out more, and noticeably gained more strength and energy as well, although he still had bouts of fatigue. His skin had also darkened somewhat, becoming a beautiful shade of cornflower blue, and his ‘freckles’ had more than doubled in number. Not only were they becoming denser where they already were, but they were spreading downwards to dot his chest and upper back as well. Taking advantage of their ability to merge and change shape, Sun had also taken to maintaining a star-shaped marking on his face, just beneath his left eye.

His hair had been tamed, and Lillie and Burnet enjoyed brushing it... although they sometimes wondered if it really counted as hair at all, from a technical standpoint.

It was delightfully thick and soft, but upon closer inspection, each strand was about six times thicker than a human’s, and mildly prehensile. Under a microscope, every single strand also had countless, microscopic strands branching off of them along their entire lengths, and those strands all branched off into even tinier strands. It also had odd elastic properties, each strand able to stretch about twice its original length. There were times when it would puff or stand up as if there were strong static around, typically when Sun was startled or excited. It was also apparent that the rest of Sun’s body was completely hairless... And Sun could apparently control its length to an extent on his own, without even cutting it. Fortunate, considering that he proved to be incredibly resistant to the idea of a haircut.

Sun had mostly shortened his hair in the front, keeping it from impeding his eyes. But in the back, it still reached the base of his neck. However, two long locks were still preserved at the sides, just in front of his ears, presumably because his hair actually functioned as more of a sensory organ for him. Apparently, so did Sun’s feet, explaining why he still generally preferred to avoid footwear.

Sun’s internal anatomy proved to be a thing of wonder, after a few scans to see how it operated.
As Rockruff had heard the day he found him, Sun did indeed have three hearts… and three lungs. Left, right, and center, rather than just left and right. They sort of sandwiched his upper two hearts. One large, “main” lung between them, and one somewhat smaller lung off to the side of each heart. The lowermost heart was given room by the fact that his digestive system was much shorter and more compact than a human’s, more suited to a carnivore diet… although something about it also apparently allowed it to handle vegetable matter unexpectedly well for its design. Meanwhile, his reproductive system didn’t take up much space at all… It was… nonstandard, to put it simply and vaguely. No one wanted to be too invasive in any regard, but especially not that one.

Sun’s skin was actually made up of a colorless, elastic, clear outer membrane, not unlike a sort of saran wrap. A colorless, oily layer of liquid was just under the membrane, and it was through that liquid that Sun’s “freckles” traveled about. Kukui had taken to naming them ‘light nodes’ instead. Each was actually a clump of highly specialized cells, apparently gifted with an incredible capacity to rapidly convert chemical energy to light energy… A capacity that only seemed to expand and strengthen dramatically when the cells were concentrated together into larger areas. The membrane also appeared to be able to become convex, concave, thinner, or thicker, or even subtly change its structure in any given area, and to extremely specific levels of detail. Through that mechanism, it was given an extremely broad variety of ways that it could affect the light that passed through it. Beneath that, Sun’s skin was much more reminiscent of a human’s, besides the blue coloration, and being a bit more elastic.

Sha seemed to remain the same size, but they were also energetic, regularly shedding their skin, and generally in a good mood, so no one was worried. Their anatomy revealed that they apparently had no heart, instead pumping blood with muscular contractions around their blood vessels. Their flight appeared to be explained by some kind of repulsive energy field originating from a specialized organ in the lower part of the head, which also appeared to be responsible for making the light that emanated from their eyes and mouth… More exertion made the light brighter, and less would make it dimmer.

The head also housed proportionately massive sacs of acids, adhesive compounds, volatile chemicals, toxins, and associated production glands, along with a surprisingly small and compact brain… made up for by the fact that Poipole apparently possessed a second brain in its lower body. Sha’s outer armor appeared to be a sort of structural cross between scales and exoskeleton, the material being closer to chitin, but also laced with a tough weave of special fibers that made it much more flexible, yet also more shock absorbent. It was able to flex and bulge at regular intervals, and it could more easily repair any damage sustained. Both Sun and Sha truly were strange creatures.

Kukui also thoroughly studied Sha’s moves… finding that overall, it actually was still possible to classify Sha’s capabilities as typical Pokemon moves. Acid, Peck, Helping Hand, Fury Attack, and Growl.

Meanwhile, Sun proved himself to be absolutely enamored with the world’s Pokemon, making up for the fact that he apparently couldn’t really remember any Pokemon from his world, besides Sha. The fact that Kukui was a Pokemon Professor made it all the easier for him to indulge himself… and much to Kukui’s satisfaction, he made a surprisingly good research assistant right along with Lillie. Despite Pokemon being well aware that Sun wasn’t a human, it never seemed to affect how they treated him. With his empathic abilities, and the way his lights could pacify and mesmerize them, he seemed to be able to get along with just about anything.

But there was one major roadblock in the way… namely, that Sun couldn’t read, for rather obvious reasons. He did apparently remember a little bit about how to write, but not in any alphabet that could actually be recognized.
That was where Lillie came in. Already a bookworm, she practically jumped at the chance to help Sun learn. It helped that although his inexperience with their language would mislead the uninitiated, Sun actually was an impressively quick study. He also proved fully capable of both grasping and relating lengthy, complex concepts. A lot of it seemed to be that outside of the language itself, there were many things he wasn’t so much ‘learning’ as merely ‘remembering’... although unfortunately, this process seemed limited to impersonal facts and trivia, rather than anything specifically about where he’d come from or his former life.

Several tests of his math abilities also proved that he was excellent in that regard, quickly remembering complex math skills to easily blow through problem after problem, all the way up to college-level questions.

But still, Sun’s principal interests were always invested towards Pokemon. Sun and Lillie would often spend hours a day lost in piles of books and scores of internet articles, Sun using their psychic link to piggyback on Lillie’s ability to read and her knowledge of grammar and spelling, giving him access to far more knowledge than he’d have alone. Kukui and Burnet would help as well, whenever they had the time, making the process all the quicker. With that method, Lillie could hardly believe how rapidly he was making progress. In three months, they’d ramped all the way up from simple children’s books to Sun being well beyond his unofficial ‘age’ of 15… Specifically, ‘15 and 3 months’, as Kukui and Burnet had decided to treat the day of his arrival as his ‘15th birthday’.

After all that, it was no wonder that he and Lillie became close.

Their psychic bond was notably deeper than the bond between Sun and Kukui, or Sun and Burnet. While Kukui could feel Sun’s emotions after a brief delay, or a flourish of lights, Lillie could intuit what Sun felt at a mere glance, and it was the same the other way around. The concepts they could convey moved between them faster and more easily, information trading hands with almost seamless efficiency.

As much as they were obviously different, Lillie couldn’t help but feel that Sun was unexpectedly a lot like her. Curious, bright, yet a bit awkward and easily embarrassed at times… Kind, patient… although she would say he could be a bit more impulsive, at times. If something especially took his interest, he couldn’t help but investigate right away. And of course… she would definitely say he was more driven. His sheer drive to learn, to understand new things, was unlike anything she’d ever seen, even if her interactions with others were admittedly a little limited.

Fortunately, it’d even been possible to allow Sun to go outside on a regular basis, thanks to another handy light-based ability of his… Specifically, the power to create illusions over himself.

So, that was how Hau’oli town came to know him as simply “Kukui’s visiting little cousin”, a quiet young man who apparently had Kukui’s skin and eye color.

Still, the ability wasn’t absolutely perfect. Sun was limited in how much he could exert himself while it was up, and it was a steady drain on his energy no matter what he did. Going out in public was fascinating, but it’d always leave him completely wiped out by only 6 or 7 pm. He also had to avoid physical contact, which could slightly interfere with the illusion and simultaneously clue others in to the fact that his skin still didn’t feel human.

However, if you asked Kukui, illusions, invisibility, and telepathy were not Sun’s greatest powers. Not by a long shot. What was most impressive was Sun’s vision.

Sun could apparently see through objects, into infrared, into ultraviolet, into the finest details of objects, and make out details miles away. But that still wasn’t the greatest part. The greatest part, in Kukui’s opinion, was that he could see Pokemon’s fields. Amplified Will Effect Fields, nearly
always abbreviated to "AWE Fields". The fields generated by the will of Pokemon when they used their powers, the ones that allowed them to manipulate matter and living tissues in their vicinity. With that power, Pokemon could perform miracles practically on a whim.

It was the universal providence of every Pokemon. Something within them, with the help of chemical energy from the Pokemon, could convert their brainwaves into the AWE Field. A field of energy outside of the typical spectrum of all normal electromagnetic radiation, operating with an entirely unique sort of quanta. A property that made it exceptionally difficult to invent anything that could fully pick them up. The particles involved were superficially similar to photons, yet remarkably different. But what was most important was that somehow, within any AWE Field, most of the user's actions required markedly less energy. Moving objects, rearranging molecules, overcoming gravity, reducing air resistance, dramatically changing the speed of chemical reactions, performing rapid cellular reconfiguration…. All possible with the right Pokemon, and all with a mere sliver of the energy it would take if you followed conventional physics.

In short, Pokemon had the ability to take energy, take mass, take reality, and stretch it. Loop it in on itself. Tie it into a pretzel, if they so desired.

It was why Kukui studied moves, and their effects. Pokemon were just those who could wield miracles. Their moves were miracles in motion.

And finally, he had someone who could see those motions on an unprecedented level. See them, and then fully and accurately interpret, analyze, and relate what he saw… So could certain Pokemon, but that took great levels of training and resources… Not to mention, most Pokemon were hindered in how much they could assist by a certain psychological phenomenon, often known by names like The Block, The Wall, or most 'formally', Reluctance Syndrome…

Essentially, Reluctance Syndrome was a pathological unwillingness or lack of motivation to do a broad range of activities associated with higher technological advancement, certain social behaviors, and complex tool usage… sometimes to an outright illogical degree.

Equal parts cultural and instinctive, Reluctance Syndrome was named because it so often seemed that a Pokemon was by no means truly incapable of such things, merely unremittingly resistant to doing them. Often, Pokemon would be taught skills that typically fell under Reluctance Syndrome, only to rapidly forget them, intentionally neglect them, or start reacting adversely to being asked to do them.

There were rare cases of Pokemon without Reluctance Syndrome, nearly always because of exceptional life circumstances… But it was well known that attempting to imitate the conditions that could remove or suppress it was extremely unreliable, bordering on inhumane, and it only seemed to occur in Pokemon with some sort of rare inherent susceptibility to the process. As such, nearly everyone deemed the process at best an overly idealistic waste of time and resources, and at worst, a massive ethical violation.

There were several theories on the purpose of Reluctance Syndrome. One of the most popular was that it was some sort of biological and psychological failsafe, designed to safeguard the ecosystem from becoming excessively vulnerable or unstable… Pokemon often connected to nature and their surroundings on a level that most humans never would, due to humanity's lesser abilities, typically minimal AWE Fields, and the advent of modern civilization… From there, Pokemon seemed to have an inherent understanding of how things were connected, how the natural world operated, how it had to operate even in the midst of their miracles and oddities… To bend the rules, they first needed to be understood, even if subconsciously. With great power, came great responsibility.
It wasn't hard to see why multiple species wielding a combination of advanced technology, an exponentially growing need for resources, and reality-bending power all at once was quite frankly a potential recipe for absolute catastrophe. As counter-intuitive as it sounded... what humanity considered salvation, Pokemon may have very well subconsciously considered damnation. A path that only humans could risk traversing, a bridge that could not bear the weight of overwhelming power.

There were other theories as well... But what everyone generally agreed upon was that if nearly all Pokemon followed a certain rule to at least a certain extent, then something about it had to make it an incredibly important rule.

As beautiful as Sun’s ability was, as much as Kukui felt that it may have even been the holy grail of his entire body of work...

The very fact that it was so precious was what made it dangerous. Something he needed to protect, even if others might see that as hoarding it to himself. Surely, Sun was the one who could shed light on it all...

Once Kukui had the knowledge, and worked out how Sun could help him, the remainder of that three month period proved to be one of the most prolific periods of his entire career. Sun’s illustrations of the Fields, his unique insight into how they moved and operated, how they propagated, the speed at which they could propagate, even their specific frequencies, intensities, and wavelengths, all paired with Sun’s steadily resurfacing knowledge of math and physics... It was all nothing short of miraculous.

An AWE Field was like a sphere of invisibly radiated energy, with a blurry defined outer bound as the effect steadily weakened. Its range and rate of decay was highly variable, but consistently depended on Pokemon species and the strength, skill, emotional state, and general health of an individual Pokemon. Depending on the wavelength and frequency of the Field, its effects on matter, local reality, and the tissues of others could be divided into 18 distinct Types. The effects could then further branch into a variety of sub-effects, of which there were an incredibly wide and consistently growing variety.

With Sun actually able to see AWE in detail, he could not only advise Kukui, but also better advise Pokemon themselves. Deficiencies and abnormalities that no human would ever pick up on, tiny but crucial differences that not even Pokemon themselves were always aware of... As time went on, and his pool of reference grew, he only learned more. Advice on how to direct it, how to bend and twist it, exactly how much or how little effort to apply... Before Sun’s eyes, all of it was laid bare.

It was with a heavy heart that all of that research made Kukui realize one thing, above all, above even his simultaneous urge to guard Sun from the rest of the world.

And that thing was simple.

Sun was destined for far greater things than being a mere lab assistant.

Alola, no, the world, Kukui was beginning to think... It needed Sun. And Sun needed it too, whether Kukui liked it or not.

After all, there was no way just he and his wife alone were going to be able to get Sun back home. No way for them alone to find out if he even should go home. No way for them to even give him his memories back.
It was with that realization that Kukui made a somewhat difficult decision.

It was breakfast time, about three months after Sun had first been taken in. Sun’s appetite had calmed down a touch, but he still noticeably ate a lot, appreciably more than most human teenagers his size. Despite the fact that Sun was technically an ectotherm, his powers ran up quite a good deal of metabolic expense… After all, Sun's own AWE Field was only on the same level as the average human's, but his powers still seemed to be growing at an impressive rate, judging by the ever-increasing amounts of light nodes on his body.

Sun was eating what had become his common, albeit strange breakfast, and sharing a bit with Sha as well… Two diced Tomato Berries with maple syrup on top, two peanut butter and spam sandwiches, a pound of vinegar-soaked bacon, four raw eggs, and a large bowl of cinnamon oatmeal… with salsa, a half pound of anchovies, and a bit of blue cheese added. As a drink, Pinap Berry juice with salt.

Kukui wouldn’t dare deny Sun whatever meal he liked, but he would honestly give an arm and leg to know what in Sun’s homeworld had such a strange chemical makeup that it drove his species to develop tastes like his.

Meanwhile, everyone else was eating much more normal, conservative, boring meals by comparison.

Kukui cleared his throat. “So, Sun… How would you feel about going on a Pokemon Journey soon?” Kukui asked. Sun almost choked on a sandwich, his current glow going from dim seafoam green to a bright greenish-white. Confusion mixed with hesitant anticipation radiated off of him as he looked up at Kukui with bulging cheeks, before swallowing an amount that would be impossible for most humans.

“I just feel like… as much as I want to keep you safe… Over and over again, you keep proving what a smart kid you are. And you’re more talented than I ever could’ve imagined. There’s so much you could do, so much you could be! And finally… if you stay here, I don’t know if you’ll ever really go home,” Kukui said. “We have no idea how to get you back over there…”

Sun just smiled softly, responding with what felt to Kukui like a sense of ease and contentment blanketing him, warm and gratitude and memories of his company, memories of warm food, memories of things he’d taught him.

Kukui knew what it meant, and he had to take a brief moment to regain his composure as he fully realized. “I am home.”

Kukui chuckled, more to relieve some tension than anything. “...You’re just saying that.”

Sun shook his head, glowing a slightly deeper green as he did so. He presented his case to Kukui with a series of images and twinkling lights, frowning slightly as his glow shifted back towards white.

If he came tired and starving, was it really such a good place to be?

If some of his only returned memories were vague and traumatic, should he really be in a rush to return?

Finally, there was a slight frown, as Sun summoned up the memory of a picture taken just weeks ago… All four of them, with Sha, Nebby, and Rockruff, posing on the beach…
Doubt radiated off of Sun, as his light briefly shifted to a dark blue.

Kukui immediately felt guilty. Lillie and Burnet frowned, no longer eating. “No, no, that’s not what I meant!” Kukui said, emphatically waving that idea away with his hands. “Sun. We’re family now. Don’t misunderstand what I’m trying to say. I’m not trying to force you to do anything… if I’m being honest, if it were up to me, I wouldn’t even want you to go back,” Kukui said. “But it’s your life. And before, that was your home. I just want you to be your best, happiest self, and I want you to be able to find the answers you’re looking for. However you think you need to go about that.”

Sun’s light swung to a rich emerald green in a flash, as he grinned at Kukui from ear to ear. It was oddly charming, despite the fact that his teeth were razor sharp and capable of crushing bone. He was a font of gratitude upon hearing those words, and everyone else at the table couldn’t help but smile as well.

But still, it was a lot to think about for Sun… He knew what the Island Challenge was, definitely. When people in Alola turned 15, they could do it. They would do Trials, and battle their Pokemon with others…

Pokemon battles…

Sun wasn’t entirely sure how he felt about that, and his flickering glow of green, white, and cyan only reflected that.

On one hand, Pokemon could get really hurt…

But on the other hand, battling others, and in turn being required to consistently train and raise a team, would give him an endless stream of material for further research and coming to better understand Pokemon.

From what he understood, a large fraction of Pokemon had a natural proclivity towards battle. Not just to hurt each other, but apparently, as a natural extension of the desire to hone their powers and attain self-actualization. For Pokemon, battle was often as much a form of communication as it was a straight up fight. Testing each other, pushing each other’s limits, overlapping their AWE Fields… That last part was especially important.

As Pokemon battled, and their effect Fields intensified and overlapped, it was possible for them to exploit one another’s Fields as well. Just as a Pokemon could generate a Field, it could partially absorb an incoming Field as well, exploiting the opposition’s inefficiencies in controlling it. That way, a Pokemon could create free energy that could be directed into long-term increases in power and growth rate.

But ultimately, Sun realized that all the research that supported battling in the world wouldn’t fully convince him, until he got the opinion he probably needed most of all. He turned to look at Sha, who was floating next to him, and silently asked what they thought.

Sha agreed, apparently more out of a sense of sheer curiosity than anything. Not only did they want to test what they were capable of, but if they were going to call a new world home, then they needed to see more of it. Much more.

Sun nodded, gently rubbing the little creature on the head as he made his decision.

Yes.
Yes, he *would* do the Island Challenge.

“Excellent!” Kukui said, grinning wide. “And this way, you’ll still be able to help me with my move research too! I think more than ever, in fact! Using and learning about moves is an inherent part of all battling, after all!”

Sun perked up at that, realizing that he’d never even fully considered something so obvious. In that case, if it was going to still be helping Kukui rather than just abruptly leaving him, that was all the more motivation to do it!

Sun’s hair fluffed up on its own as he glowed greenish-yellow, filling with excitement. He was going to make Kukui so happy! He’d get Pokemon, study as many moves as he could, and keep super good track of them, and maybe even come up with new ones! He would learn everything he could, and make Pokemon his friends, and meet new humans, and everything else!

Everyone else at the table couldn’t help but smile giddily as well, Sun’s excitement literally contagious.

“Still, not quite yet.” Kukui said. Sun frowned a little at that, glow dimming greatly. “I have to get your paperwork together, get you an ID, and make sure you’re accepted into the system. It’s going to be… tricky, to say the least, but if Burnet and I pull some strings, I should be able to make everything work!”

Sun pouted slightly, but Burnet soon spoke up.

“Oh, I have an idea! We can go get you some new clothes today, so they’ll be all ready for you by time you set off! Lillie, too!”

“No, there’s an idea!” Kukui said.

Sun perked up at that, while Lillie seemed a bit apprehensive. “I’m still not used to picking out my own clothes, so… I don’t even know if I’ll be able to make a decision on what to get…” she admitted.

“Oh, don’t you worry about that! I’m sure we’ll find something!” Burnet reassured her.

Just an hour later, they were shopping in Hau’oli City, with Sun doing his best to try and narrow down his options. Burnet and Kukui’s income combined was actually more impressive than their house would suggest, and Sun and Lillie had both received steady allowances for their help… Not to mention, Burnet and Kukui had offered to cover it if they needed any extra. But considering that they were already so kind, and they gave a large chunk of their income to Pokemon-related charities, Sun really didn’t want to impose any further.

Still, he ended up with several things… A dark navy energy-storage satchel with large, bright stars on it; a light green, floral-patterned sundress; a second golden yellow sundress; a skirt in the same color and a white skirt of his own; a couple of sky blue t-shirts; a shirt with a sunset on it; and three pairs of board shorts, in light green, yellow, and light blue. Finally, as the last thing… clip-on star earrings, a bit rounded at the edges. Sun liked how it made them seem even cuter. He’d rounded the edges on his facial star marking as well, and kept it even in his “human” illusion. It was easy enough to explain as face paint, or a temporary tattoo.

As she expected, Lillie didn’t get much of anything beyond a few items clothing that were nearly
identical to what she already had, even with Burnet’s help… although there was one more thing she got… It was a set of clip-on crescent moon earrings, which Sun had picked out so they could match, and also insisted on paying for them himself. Apart from the part about pay, which she tried to politely reject to no avail, she accepted without question, blushing noticeably. Sun giggled a bit, it was always so interesting to see humans change color! They didn’t do it nearly as much as he did, so it was always a lot of fun to see.

When they rang everything up, Sun noticed the cashier look at them and briefly pause before saying “Did you two young ladies find everything alright?”, with complete sincerity.

Sun just smiled and nodded along with Lillie, who also didn’t feel the need to say anything to the contrary. He’d long since become aware of how humans gendered clothing, but it hadn’t made him actually mind or bother with a correction when he wore ‘girl’ clothes and people called him a girl. It felt kind of nice, really. Being seen as a cute, sweet girl, just like Lillie!

Lillie blushed a bit once again, as she happened to pick up on Sun’s mental processes associating her with such things.

Once they were back home, Sun almost immediately put on the earrings and switched to the floral sundress, and couldn’t help but twirl about in the mirror after putting it on, adopting a pleased green glow to match it as it swished about.

Soon after, he and Lillie went outside with Sha and Nebby, where they made flower crowns to go along with Sun’s new dress, then simply laid back and watched the clouds lazily drift by, which had the dual benefit of allowing Sun to sunbathe. After so many days of being busy with one thing or another, it was so nice to just lay back and relax for once… Especially with Lillie by his side.

So nice, in fact, that Sun fell asleep, his disguise illusion flickering away in seconds. Lillie just turned towards him and watched with a slight frown. No one was coming, and he looked so peaceful and happy…

Before she could even fully think about it, she leaned over and gently kissed him on the forehead… although that proved to be enough to wake him, which wasn’t part of her plan.

“Sorry!” Lillie said, quickly rearing back, as Sun just looked up at her curiously, glowing a gentle green, lighter than the grass. He’d learned what kisses were, what they were for, and their various contexts… He’d seen Kukui and Burnet kiss...

But Lillie still blushed as she realized that may well have been the first time he was ever kissed in any capacity, and definitely the first time within his memory. She knew that he knew it wasn’t meant to be romantic, but it was still a bit embarrassing that she’d just… up and invaded Sun’s personal space like that.

Still, Sun didn’t mind at all, and Lillie supposed she’d already known he didn’t… Sun was far from averse to touch, after all.

Lillie felt a sudden twinge of anticipation, sensing Sun was about to do something before he even did it. Sure enough, Sun sat up and gently cupped the right side of her face in one hand, thumb under her chin. From there, a plethora of light nodes migrated to his palm, and it began to pulse with soft, whitish-pink light. Lillie immediately relaxed into the touch, leaning her head into it, feeling the light’s warmth suffuse her cheek, then feeling waves of fondness and affection gently pulse through her mind, relaxing her. Her posture slackened, her muscles losing all tension as a feeling of well-
being pulsed through her entire body.

Sun removed his hand, staring at it for a moment. He honestly had no idea why he’d suddenly remembered that gesture, but he was glad he did. Faintly, he could recall someone else’s hand, holding his face in the same way, pulsing with the same warmth… But just as quickly as the memory came, it was gone, and all of its further details went with it.

Relaxed by the show of affection, Lillie laid back on the grass. Sun followed suit, and she found herself falling deeper in line with Sun’s thought patterns, leveling out with him to the point that before she knew it, she was feeling tired too…

Maybe a nap wouldn’t hurt…

Lillie suddenly found herself standing in a massive tower with a white-gold interior that gave off a modest, uniform glow from every surface of its walls. There was a massive glass window as well, stretching around the whole room, allowing her to see out of it for miles on end… But for all of those miles, all she saw was an endless dark expanse of ice, snow, and blizzards. She sighed, wondering when it would ever end… in that moment, Alola felt like a mere dream.

Then there was only darkness. Shattered glass everywhere, frigid wind engulfing her entire body. Everything felt cold and wrong, as it steadily brightened with a perverse, flickering light. Something slowly clunked by. Her breath hitched.

She wasn’t alone.

A haze filled the room, and she found herself in another room. Bright white-gold yet again. Someone dressed head to toe in white with blue accents was handing her an spherical egg the size of a grapefruit, slimy and slightly pulsing, a dark purple in color. A pulsating cyan light could be seen inside. She hugged it close, hands glowing with her reverent white light, sharing warmth and energy with it.

The egg swelled, outside bubbling and distorting, turning black and burning her hands with a putrid, tarry ichor. Screams could be heard from all around. Everything darkened, became moist and frigid once more. She could heard pained, ragged breathing behind her… silenced by a few heavy thumping noises, sounds like glass on glass and ice being shattered, and then flesh being slashed and torn.

More mist came from behind her, then receded, leaving crystalline bones all over the floor. She looked down at her hands and realized the ichor had eaten them down to the bone as well. It revealed the shimmering, disturbingly beautiful cyan crystal of her skeleton, marred by her sticky, dark blue blood.

She lit up violet, filling with a bout of utter rage, the light suffusing her bones as well, heat filling her eyes and her mouth and her whole body, as violet light poured out of every orifice, and a small AWE Field blossomed forth from her very core. So too did the light suddenly illuminate the whole room, everything cast in striking violet, angry and sharp and oh, so desperate.

A Field bloomed before her, stretching as far as she could see, brighter and more terrifying than anything she’d ever seen. The terrible not-light of AWE pierced through the violet veil, more screams following, as the ground crumbled and gave out beneath her.

She tumbled through darkness and lurid swaths of neon-purple, finally finding it within herself to
scream, scream as she clutched the egg for dear life. The air became like frigid water, choking the life out of her as purple streaks of light converged in on her, and she blasted at them, tried to ward them away, only for them to converge into a host of terrifying, brightly glowing monstrous faces. They opened to reveal drooling, gaping, crystalline maws, each extending multiple tongues in an attempt to swallow her whole.

The egg gave a great burst of cyan light, and for a moment, she was filled with unbridled hope… But all that came out was an icy lance, piercing straight through her stomach.

Instantly, Lillie woke up gasping, shivering and clutching her stomach as tears pricked her eyes. She looked up at the sky. It was only just barely starting to get dark, and it was still warm and humid. Sun was up as well, immediately and desperately holding her close, his light nodes vibrating like mad and glowing a deep, heavy, powerful shade of blue.

He let out an anguished whine as he gripped Lillie closer, piping hot tears of deep blue light streaming down his face, steam issuing from his eyes as they glowed the same deep blue.

Sha and Nebby came out of Lillie’s bag with looks of worry, having apparently been sleeping inside. Lillie was glad Sha was around to help keep an eye out for Nebby, as she silently berated herself for falling asleep without having Sha take Nebby back home first.

But even though she was a bit annoyed with herself for taking a bit more of a risk than she probably should’ve, Lillie simply held Sun in return, the position of his head over her shoulder causing the tears to run down and land on it… She was fortunate that the tears only hurt a little, not quite hot enough to do serious harm. But all at once, she realized what must’ve happened.

“You had a nightmare…” Lillie said quietly, while stroking the back of his head. “Shh… It’s over now. I’m right here. It can’t hurt you, you’re safe,” Lillie said,

Sun just let out another wretched sob, a sound more like an animal than a human, but no less heart wrenching.

“Shh…”

“Hnya ga Ahz, hnya ga Ahz…” Sun sobbed. “Gek nege inqon, Lill-ie…” Sun continued, going invisible with shame.

“You don’t need to apologize…” Lillie said quietly. “I’ve had nightmares before too. It’s fine. We’re both here. Professor Kukui and Professor Burnet are still home. Do you want to go home now, Sun?”

“Hjis sath mykyo! Hjis sath hine Lill-ie!” Sun sobbed further, more hot tears slightly stinging Lillie’s shoulder, although luckily her clothing still took a good deal of the heat.

“Alright, alright, shh… We’re going home. I’ll help you up,” Lillie said, as she stood up first.

“Gek nege inqon… Je lamaz lux Ahz… Lill-ie, je lak lamaz lux Ahz…” Sun said quietly, as Lillie took his hand and helped him stand as well.

“No, you’re not a bad person. You didn’t mean to,” Lillie replied. “I’m not upset. I just want you to feel better.”
Sun just remained quiet, light steadily lightening ever so slightly, a few flickers of light pink appearing among the blue as well. Silent pulses of uncertainty. A flickering request for more confirmation, repressed… But not before Lillie noticed.

“Of course. About both things! I… I care a lot about you, Sun. No matter where you’re from, no matter what you are. Because above all, you’re a good person. And I believe in you.”

More soft pink-white light mixed in with the blue, the blue steadily shifting to cyan instead.

“...Jiv, oson heyet moute Lill-ie zu Ahz?” Sun asked.

“Yeah, we can share my bed.”

Sun’s body became a mix of green and light pink light, with only flecks of dark blue here and there. It honestly reminded Lillie of a flowery meadow, which she made sure to let Sun see clearly. Sun just glowed even brighter, even laughing a little as he wiped his eyes.

“Imose lak yavay Ahz, Lill-ie…”

“I love you a lot too,” Lillie said, smiling sweetly as she hugged Sun again.

Once they got back inside, Sha and Nebby soon following, Kukui was already in the main room, and immediately noticed the lingering notes of deep blue in Sun’s light, as well as the downcast expression on Lillie’s face.

“Sun and I took a nap on the grass, but then he had a nightmare… and accidentally made me have it too,” Lillie said.

Kukui just frowned. “You shared a nightmare?” he asked. They both nodded glumly. Kukui wasn’t quite sure what to make of it. It’d been long enough that he was pretty sure Sun’s psionic capability was limited to empathy, image transfer, and moderate mind-reading. Even then, it seemed to be necessary for him to make nearly everything two-way. If he wanted to do it discreetly, then he had to drastically limit himself. But then again, Sun’s new lifestyle seemed to be surprisingly healthy for him, and it was readily apparent that he wasn’t fully developed. So, either his abilities were getting stronger, or his bond with Lillie was. Really, there was a very good chance it was both.

“Also… I just realized this, but… Sun spoke his native language, and I understood all of it, perfectly and instantly! I didn’t have to think about it at all!” Lillie said. “At the time, I barely realized it was different in the first place!”

“Now that’s something… Sun, you’ve never spoken a word of that apart from ‘Sha’. Do you know what changed?” Kukui asked. Sun just shook his head, shifting to a white glow as he tried to think. Before, he’d barely even remembered how to speak his language. Like it was there, but all gnarled and jumbled up. Writing it was one thing, but somehow, speaking it had seemed insurmountable… Only for the words to just suddenly start tumbling the moment he woke up from that nightmare.

“I see…” Kukui said, as Sun slowly took a step forward. Then another. Then suddenly, he was dashing over to Kukui, colliding with him, hugging him tight as he buried his face into Kukui’s chest. An image flashed in Kukui’s mind along with a surge of fear, an image of scattered, shattered, glinting cyan bones among a frigid field of mist and broken glass, all the bones made with some kind of odd microcrystalline structure. Kukui shivered, feeling oddly cold for a moment. But then, he just sighed and smiled gently, hugging back. “It’s okay, Sun. I’m here. I’m not going anywhere,” Kukui reassured him.
No one had an issue with Sun sleeping next to Lillie that night. Before, he’d just a sleeping bag on the floor anyway.

But fortunately, he and Lillie both slept soundly for the night.

It took about another three months for Kukui and Burnet to manage to slowly cobble together necessary paperwork and documents for Sun, cautiously making sure to only contact people who they held absolute trust in, whenever possible. They also needed the time to help make sure Sun was truly more prepared to go off on a journey... and to an extent, they needed the time to build their faith that it was even a good idea. But from everything they were gathering, it was probably the best choice. Just staying at home, going through their daily lives, they’d barely come any closer to unlocking the mysteries of Sun or Nebby at all. Sun had another couple of nightmares, scattered over the three month period, but they didn’t really reveal anything brand new, or any grand key to it all. Sha seemed to be getting increasingly restless, and Nebby too.

A good sign that there was still an incredible amount they didn’t know about Sun came about two weeks into the process, when the outer layers of Sun’s teeth were slowly beginning to crack and chip away, much to everyone’s initial alarm. Luckily for Sun, the process apparently didn’t actually hurt in the slightest. By four weeks in, after everyone fretting that perhaps Sun needed different toothpaste, or gentler mouthwash, or less acidic food, or something, the process was over… Revealing that Sun’s entire set of teeth was actually the same cyan crystal as Kukui and Lillie had seen. Although that mental image had been disturbing enough already, seeing Sun’s teeth only added a new layer of morbid to the past image.

As far as Kukui could hypothesize, the outer layer of white had apparently been just some kind of protective growth sheath. The exposed crystal teeth were just as strong as ever, if not even stronger... Not to mention, surprisingly beautiful. Sun always got flustered whenever he was told as much. He had fortunately managed to remember that it was a normal process, but only once the process was nearly over with and there’d already been much fretting and fussing over him. He apologized multiple times for not remembering sooner.

Otherwise, Sun did his best to merely study about Alola and continue to practice reading, writing their language, and honing his illusion and invisibility powers. Besides just for practical purposes, it also allowed him to adjust his clothing on a whim, which struck him as such a fun possibility that he couldn’t afford to pass it up.

The light nodes on his body were still steadily darkening and multiplying as well, and he'd grown to 5'6 overall. His weight had jumped up almost 20 pounds in a month and a half, then stabilized for the remaining month and a half, his body having apparently recovered fully from his prior malnourishment. He looked healthy and vibrant, his skin having an almost glowing sheen to it, although it wasn't the literal glow he produced in other ways. Nodes went all the way down to his waist and lower back, smaller ones even beginning to lightly dust his legs. There were so many that he'd taken to keeping many of them grouped into star and planet shapes on his arms, the planets even being given thin little rings and fine details, intricate lines and artful smudges of cauliflower blue mixed in with the dark navy of his bundled nodes.

Sun’s prior clothing was able to be resized, much to his joy, but Kukui and Burnet still got him some new ones anyway.

Sun had taken to occasionally lightly teasing Lillie about the fact that she barely looked different
from the day they met, still 5'2 and barely a pound different from back then. He also found that he could easily lift her if he wanted to, even going so far as to pick her up and swing her around sometimes when they hugged. Lillie was at least a good sport about it, mostly just glad that Sun was healthy enough to be growing so well.

As far as Sun's powers, they'd improved as well. Sun's disguises were highly stable, and able to readily change apparent height, skin color, hair color, eye color, and outfit on the fly, even if it was a rather complex outfit. Sun also found that he could keep a disguise going all day and well into the night, only requiring a typical amount of sleep afterwards... which was still essentially almost the same as a human's sleep needs. Everyone was grateful that however his species evolved, he apparently was fully diurnal and pretty much fully compatible with the pace of their world. Really, it was exceptionally fortunate that his home world must've had a very similar day/night cycle. Either that, or he was just somehow incredibly good at adapting.

As for invisibility, it was trickier. It was better than before, but it required several uninterrupted seconds of focus to activate voluntarily, and Sun could only keep it going for about a half hour at a time. Depending on how much he exerted himself in other ways during the process, that time only shrank. From there, he needed at least fifteen minutes of rest.

But perhaps the most surprising thing was that apparently, Sun's AWE Field was developing much more as well.

Kukui was wide-eyed when he heard that. With Sun's help, he saw that the AWE Field was still only par with a somewhat weak Pokemon's, perhaps one powerful enough to face a beginner-level Gym or Trial. Something like a starter Pokemon about 2/3rds of the way to its middle stage. Its range was about three meters. Still, that was enough that Sun could moderately control light within that vicinity, even creating convincing illusions that extended well beyond his own body, or briefly making large objects invisible as well. It also allowed for Sun to generate lasers sufficient to rapidly melt plastic and burn paper, and massive flash-bang type effects, but such things were still especially taxing on him. The AWE Field could still only do so much. Not to mention, as Sun realized the harmful applications of the more aggressive powers, he refrained from using them much in general.

Humans had AWE Fields as well, but small, weak, and limited. They seemed to be able to stretch out and interact with Pokemon Fields, especially during battle, but it could only do so much. Any human with an AWE Field that could match the strength of any Pokemon's at all was immediately regarded as an unusual case. So, there were still humans with a Field strength that almost certainly matched or surpassed Sun's for the time being... but they were about 1 in 20,000. Given that Alola's population was 4.2 million, that left just an estimated 210 people in the entire country.

After a while, Sun was finally all set up to go on the technical and legal side of things... But still, Kukui had one more thing to prepare him for. Once again, Sun received the news over breakfast

"Alright! Sun, your Island Challenge will be exactly one week from today! But for your increased safety, I've decided you won't be going alone. I need someone who will help look out for you, and be able to provide backup at any time. Luckily, Burnet and I found just the thing! As it turns out, Kahuna Hala has a grandson who's also ready to begin his Island Challenge, and he's willing to help us out! His name is Hau. I think you'll like him!" Kukui said.

Sun nodded energetically, beaming with his mouthful of crystalline teeth, bursting with gratitude for Kukui and Burnet doing something so thoughtful.

Something gave Sun a feeling that Kukui was absolutely right. He'd definitely like Hau.
I think I'll make like a side-chapter specifically about the worldbuilding concepts of this chapter, just as a reference. AWE Fields especially haven't quite been entirely explained. (Although as a little tidbit, I did purposely make the acronym match and be pronounced the same as the word 'awe')

But as an aside, it's not an accident that I referred to Alola as a "country" and gave it a larger population than Hawaii. (this also comes with more surface area). In my mind, no matter how much everyone refers to Pokemon regions as just "regions", the increasingly wide variety of Pokemon, their typical self-contained natures, and the anime’s expansion of them have always made them *feel* more like countries, and I've always preferred to imagine them on a larger scale than what the game is limited to.

Also, from what I’ve read to refresh myself on USUM timelines and lore, there is canonically a three month period between Lillie running away, and first starting to travel about. But I increased it to six months, in order to give Sun a more believable amount of time to get used to and learn about the Pokemon world in a controlled setting.

Finally, there is no four move limit, because imo a rule like that is really only necessary for Pokemon as a video game, not a world where everything's "real" and battles have a myriad of extra factors and options available. Your opponent having eight moves isn't as much of an unbalanced death sentence when you have a lot more ways to block/dodge/outwit them in return. However, moves are still given a soft limit by time, skill, and resources at hand. Basically, you have to put in effort and maintenance rather than whipping them out willy-nilly.
Chapter 2.5, The Infodump

Chapter Summary

This chapter is basically a big ass infodump on various things. Don’t go into this expecting plot. I don’t even believe it’s strictly necessary to understand the rest of the story, as many things here are explained more briefly in other situations. However, I kind of have a weakness for technical details provided they don’t excessively break up action, so… I wrote this anyway. Whoops.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On Amplified Will Effect, The AWE Field

Author: Professor Kukui  (With further notation from Rotomdex! That’s me, zzt!)

Sun! Lillie! Seeing as you two are growing up and going out into the world, I believe it is of vital importance for you to understand AWE Fields! So, to help you with that, I’ve whipped up a handy guide! Let me know if anything is too complicated, alright? But with that being said, let’s begin!

Through various mechanisms, typically specialized tissues in or around the brain, provided with a steady supply of energy, Pokemon and humans can translate and amplify neural activity into AWE Fields, which are the general basis of how it is physically feasible for Pokemon to exist as they do. (Ya can't get talking nanoparticulate-infused plasma any other way, folkzz!)

Primary Functions: An AWE Field’s principal effects are the ability to lower the energy cost of any given action, and interact with matter and other particles to change their properties. AWE Fields appear to violate thermodynamics, but it has not been confirmed whether or not they actually do. This “missing” energy may actually come from a source we simply don’t yet understand. But overall, a Field can allow the user to do… as far as we are aware, anything, in theory. This is why the acronym is intentionally made to match the word “awe”, for it truly is one of the most awe-inspiring discoveries of our age. In practice, the only actual limitations seem to be the strengths of the Fields, and the physical and mental attributes of the wielders.

Many Pokemon require their AWE Fields to be constantly active to some extent just to be able to remain alive, or maintain sufficient neural activity to behave normally. Many Ghost-types fall within this category, along with many Pokemon who are not ‘conventionally’ biological, such as Minior, the Slugma line, the Magnemite line, the Beldum line, and others. (Lucky for me, no problemzzz so far for the past 994 yearzzz! Besides that, uh, Spiritomb incident…)

Field Types: The eighteen types have been formally derived from AWE Fields, as a Field can be any one of these types depending on its wavelengths. However, since their discovery, study of them has been relatively difficult and limited. The “psytons” of a Field, its analogue for photons, do not behave precisely like photons, which has only made this more difficult.

Field Detection: A Pokemon’s strength can be generally estimated from the intensity of its field.
Many humans have some level of ability to vaguely judge the intensities and properties of Fields for themselves, but this ability only barely scratches the surface. Modern technology can judge it more accurately, but even this has limitations. (*It’zzz true... There’s only so much I can do. <:3c*)

For a time, this led to the widespread use of the Level, Stat, and Power (LSP) system, rating Level on a scale of 1-100 for each species, and even judging the strength of moves and general attributes as well. However, this has been discontinued almost everywhere, now considered both outdated and inefficient. The Level and Stat System was both too ambitious and too presumptuous, coming with a whole avalanche of flaws and oddities in its design that could never be fully tuned out. There were simply too many variables to accurately reduce Pokemon down to such specific numbers, to the point of it becoming actively harmful to further advancement and how Pokemon were treated in competitive circles. (*Those were dark times...*)

**Field Development:** AWE Fields also allow Pokemon to rapidly grow stronger. As a Pokemon pushes the limits of its Field, provided it is in good health, the Field will build on itself, its effect allowing the Pokemon to have an easier time steadily improving the mechanisms of its Field generation. However, the faster method by far is to actively engage in battle. This way, the Pokemon will be able to exploit other Fields.

Even with the way Fields seem to cheat reality, Field control is not perfectly efficient. Much of a Field may radiate away from a Pokemon, never properly utilized. This efficiency fluctuates greatly with health and mental state. Heavily traumatized Pokemon are sometimes barely able to generate Fields at all. On the other side of the coin, there are situations that yield the exact opposite result as well, to deadly or even catastrophic effect.

The excess of Field waves produced by a Pokemon can be exploited by an opponent, absorbed in order to further the development of their own Field generation. In turn, this stronger Field will accelerate the development of the Pokemon’s physical body as well.

This happens most readily when a foe is defeated. Outward Field generation becomes highly inefficient, as the Pokemon is compelled to use their remaining strength and focus to recover from injury. Luckily, the recovery process of fainting is highly effective, and makes the mortality rate of Pokemon battles so low that it is nigh impossible to kill an opponent accidentally. However, this also means that the opponent can readily absorb any lingering Field particles.

**Field Tier System:** Considering that we still need a way to track this progression but have already discontinued the LSP System, we have now adopted the Tier System. Under this system, AWE Fields are broadly placed into eight Tiers of power, which I will list here:

**Tier 0, Low Tier:** Nearly all of humanity is here, with roughly 1 in 20,000 being an exception. These Fields make actions only slightly more efficient, and usually only extend a few feet at the most. They can become more diffuse or extend ‘tendrils’ in certain situations, however. At most, humans are simply somewhat more durable than you’d think. Moderate degrees of superhuman strength and speed have also been seen at this level. However, human Fields have been known to have special interactions with those of Pokemon. This will be detailed further down.

**Tier 1, Basic Tier:** Sun, you and Sha are here! Most Pokemon are at this level within two months of being born, regardless of training. This level allows basic elemental abilities, telekinesis, and moderately enhanced physical capabilities.

**Tier 2, Middle Tier:** Well-trained Pokemon can achieve this within three to four months. This is enough for starter Pokemon to reach their second stage, and allows for more dramatic, area-of effect
displays of power. But beware, Pokemon of this tier and above can easily threaten human lives.

**Tier 3, High Tier:** With rigorous effort, this can typically be achieved within a year. This is enough for most Pokemon to evolve fully, provided they rely on field intensity. Pokemon at this tier are capable of having dramatic effects on their local surroundings, destroying buildings, and more.

**Tier 4, Advanced Tier:** This is enough to fully evolve any Pokemon who depends on field intensity. 18 months - 2 years is typically the required amount of time. Pokemon at this level can destroy city blocks without particular strain. This is also about as strong as any wild Pokemon ever tend to get, with extremely limited exceptions. Such exceptions often turn out to be abandoned Pokemon.

**Tier 5, Master Tier (That’zz me! Haha! ...You don’t believe me, do you?):** Typically, some of the strongest Pokemon possessed by most Trial Captains and Gym Leaders. Allows for incredible displays of raw power, able to destroy even towns and villages. Before their Final Trial or Elite Four challenge, a Trainer will nearly always have at least three Pokemon of this tier. Typically takes 3 years or more of arduous training, battle, study, and dedication.

**Tier 6, Arch Tier:** The highest tier any trained Pokemon has ever attained. The Tapu, most ‘lesser’ Legends, and most Ultra Beasts are here, along with the strongest Mega Pokemon and fully evolved Pokemon. Fields of this strength denote a being that could raze major cities, kill tens of thousands, have massive long-term effects on its environment, and command worship. Essentially, any Arch Tier is a literal one Pokemon army. It takes unthinkable levels of skill and dedication to raise Pokemon to this height, and a bond so close as to become nearly one being. There is nothing higher for a person to reach for. This is it.

**Tier 7, Divine Tier:** Unreachable by trained Pokemon. Solely the territory of Legends. The Divine Tier allows those who wield it to perform the very grandest of feats. Continental terraforming. World-spanning storms. Nuclear fission and fusion. Perfect revival. Creation of life. Dominion over souls. Large-scale spacetime control. Overwriting reality. No Tier 7 being has ever been truly captured, and the very concept of trying is considered a suicide mission. No matter who you are, and no matter what you’ve done. Even Master Balls have unanimously failed, violently disintegrating under the strain. It’s mathematically impossible for any Pokeball mechanism to contain anything with a Tier 7 field.

**On Synchronized Oscillatory Meld; the AWE-SOM Field:** I came up with this name myself! Isn’t it amazing?! (<:3c... Kukui, could you define ‘amazing’ for me?...) Anyway, this is created when Pokemon bond with their Trainers so closely that their overlapping Fields link up and synchronize to varying extents, benefiting the Pokemon in various ways. This can be seen most prominently in providing a further boost to a Pokemon’s growth rate, and providing it with a stimulant effect. This effect boosts its focus, willpower, and metabolic efficiency to the extent that it becomes capable of feats it could never achieve on its own. This includes, but is not limited to: Overcoming status effects, enduring massively powerful blows, amplifying reflexes, and becoming better at focusing and directing attacks, which makes them more likely to deal critical damage.

As AWE is a direct extension of a being’s will, a sufficiently developed AWE-SOM Field also allows heightened empathy between its participants, sometimes even developing into limited mind-reading as well. At its greatest extents, the participants even directly share energy through their melded Field, and feel one another’s pain.

**Z-Power:** A unique subset of AWE, Z-Power can be of any type, but is often typeless in its ‘raw’ form. However, Z-Power is unique in that most Pokemon cannot actively utilize it without...
outside assistance, and it does not originate from Pokemon themselves. Instead, it originates from Ultra Wormholes, mainly through what are thought to be imperceptibly small but extremely common and numerous holes, continuously allowing small concentrations of Z-Power into the Alolan ecosystem.

**Totem Pokemon:** On rare occasions, Z-Power can be passively absorbed by Pokemon, creating the Totem Pokemon used in various Island Trials. Totem Pokemon develop through long-term Z-Power irradiation, and consuming food that has likewise been affected by Z-Power exposure. This becomes even more likely in area high in the mineral substrates that contain Z-Crystals and Sparkling Stones. Totem Pokemon are uniformly larger and more powerful than usual, and can even display the ability to further increase their physical capabilities in battle by utilizing their stockpiled Z-Power. There can be more than one Totem Pokemon in an area, however, Totems often gain a heightened understanding of Z-Power that allows them to wrest control of it from other Pokemon, in much the same way that AWE Fields are absorbed. But as Z-Power cannot be reproduced directly by a Pokemon's body, being defeated too many times, or pushed out of the proper territory for too long, can cause a Totem to lose its power.

**Z-Moves:** By far the more common and famous expression of Z-Power, Z-Moves cannot be performed by any lone Pokemon, even Totems. Z-Power can be generated in larger, more reliable amounts by exposing a Z-Power Ring to the Field of a human who enters the proper mental state. Once the reaction begins, the Z-Power Ring starts rapidly absorbing massive amounts of Field energy at once, placing heavy demand on a human’s Field generation.

The next part relies on the presence of a Z-Crystal, a special kind of crystal that converts Z-Power that flows through it into its given type, provided it is slotted into a Z-Power Ring. Trainer and Pokemon cooperate to synchronize their Fields and funnel the resulting Z-Power to the Pokemon, who then uses it to generate an attack that massively exceeds the usual limits of their AWE Field. Typically, this is facilitated by the Trainer doing a specialized series of poses for each type, to further facilitate synchronization, but with sufficient practice and focus, this is not strictly necessary.

Z-Moves can be either damaging moves or status moves, but one of the most important things to remember is that they are highly taxing, especially for humans…. However, Sun… I’m not sure how much this would apply to you, but I will tell you one thing. I believe there may be more to Z-Moves. Secrets that I believe you are the perfect candidate to unlock. And Lillie, I get the feeling that continuing to raise Cosmog will lead to yet more incredible, unprecedented discoveries.

You are both capable of so, so much. Please believe that.

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**Informational Logs: New Extraterrestrial Lifeforms.**

**Sun (Your pride and joy!)**

**Species:** Luxian, “Lux Sapiens”  
**Height:** 5’6/168 cm  
**Weight:** 145 lbs/66 kg  
**Gender:** Fluid, most often referred to as male.  
**Sex:** Inconclusive.
**Physiology:** Outwardly, remarkably close to human, besides blue skin, extra large and double-pupiled eyes, and thousands of freckle-like “light nodes” with the ability to move freely across the skin. These will all be described further down. However, there are a wide range of other differences as well. Luxians appear to be ectothermic, and naturally seek out sources of warmth. The internal workings of the body differ even further from here.

**Circulatory System:** This system involves dark blue blood pumped by three hearts, two in the chest cavity and one in the pelvic region. At typical room temperature, each heart beats one at a time, at a resting rate of ~45 bpm each. However, this adds up to ~135 bpm overall. The blood color also contributes to the blue skin tone, which appears to steadily darken with exposure to light and good health.

**Skeletal System:** Appears to be microcrystalline, and reinforced with a weblike network of microscopic protein filaments, serving a function similar to collagen. Crystal structure indicates high levels of carbon, silicon, oxygen, and copper, followed by smaller amounts of aluminum, iron, and trace elements. This also involves a mouth full of 42 exceptionally strong, sharp, crystalline teeth. They are initially covered in a white sheath, which cracks and flakes away at a certain point during adolescence.

**Respiratory System:** Although Luxians still breathe through the mouth and nose, they possess three lungs. A large central lung between the two hearts, and two smaller lungs on their sides. Luxians appear to have high endurance during most physical activity, and can hold their breath for at least 10 minutes, possibly longer. Sun’s physical condition has continually improved since initial arrival.

**Immune System:** Poorly understood, beyond the observation that surprisingly, it seems to have very little issue with our world’s food, pathogens, or environmental conditions.

**Nervous System:** Appears to be quite advanced, displaying impressive reaction speeds, along with psionic abilities. The “hair” does not appear to be mammalian hair at all, but a sensory organ with a massive surface area. It is highly durable, elastic, moderately prehensile, and can also be extended and retracted to a certain extent. The hands and feet lack nails, but are equipped with myriads of tiny hairs as well, providing both further sensory input as well as gripping features akin to a Treecko, or certain Bug-types. For these reasons, Sun has repeatedly displayed an aversion to footwear.

However, the most impressive aspects of the nervous system will be covered further down. *(Zzt! Keeping them in suspense, huh? :^3c)*

**Reproductive System:** Despite the fact that Sun ‘looks’ like an androgynous male, little is known about the reproductive system, or what Sun’s reproductive role would actually be in the context of Luxians as a whole. Quite frankly, I feel that it would be inappropriate to investigate further, even if it would be purely scientific.

**Diet/Digestive System:** Carnivore, with predictably shorter and more compact digestive tract, but will eat and digest nearly any food provided. Can safely consume raw food, and has also displayed a particular fondness for acidic foods. Also tends to combine food in strange ways, and has displayed a notably large appetite and flexible stomach. *(He’zzz not reading this one, so I think it’s safe to admit he makezzz me glad I don’t eat organic matter.)*

**Behavior:** Sun in particular appears to suffer from ongoing retrograde amnesia. In spite of this, he is remarkably kind and intelligent, with psychology and emotional response near identical to human. Although he tends to be exceptionally quiet, he has his own ways of communicating complex ideas, shows absolutely no signs of Reluctance Syndrome, and has displayed limited recollection of highly
advanced culture and architecture. For these reasons, I believe it is inappropriate to classify Sun as an “Ultra Beast” of any kind. (Just say he’s your son, then, zzt!) ...However, his kindness also comes with a certain degree of naivety, and a high willingness to openly trust and display vulnerability. Not to mention, there are times where his curiosity can become all-consuming. Admittedly, this… concerns me. (Aww.)

**Communication:** Sun communicates through a combination of body language, psionic ability, and signaling through his light nodes. He fully understands both Alolan and Universal, partly through education and largely through interpreting their underlying meanings. However, he has displayed exceptionally rapid advancements in reading and writing! There have been scattered occasions where he has spoken or written a native language of some sort, but never for particularly long. However, on every occasion, he is immediately and perfectly intelligible, to the extent that it can be difficult to even realize he’s doing it. This phenomenon will be further covered under Special Abilities.

**Light Nodes:** A special feature of Luxian skin, the light nodes are freckle-like structures made up of many bundled, specialized cells, surrounding tiny crystalline cores. But unlike freckles, they are actually three-dimensional spheres, and move freely within a membrane of fluid which overlays and protects a Luxian’s skin. This fluid is not for this purpose alone, and seems to also confer fantastic amounts of heat resistance.

The movements and actions of the nodes appear to be controllable both consciously and subconsciously. They can be bundled together into long-term shapes and patterns at will, and bundling them together into larger structures also vastly increases their functionality and power output. Throughout Sun’s time with me, his light nodes have continued to multiply with consistent regularity, to the point that their numbers have increased by an estimated 800% so far, and this increase shows no signs of stopping. Furthermore, each light node seems to increase in how efficient and densely packed it is with time and frequent use.

A thin, elastic, transparent membrane over the skin and nodes can also be altered in thickness, texture, and structure in order to further modify the light that passes through it from the nodes. This membrane’s resilience and elasticity also offers a certain level of protection from damage, although it is not perfect.

**Light Node Color/Behavior Guide** (in rough order of most to least common):
- Drifting/Wandering: Sleep/Daydreaming
- Cyan: Neutral
- White: Focus
- Green: Happiness
- Yellow: Excitement
- Light Pink: Affection
- Dark Blue: Sadness
- Violet: Anger

**Special Abilities** *(Oh boy, zzt!)*:

**Psionics:** Sun displays a degree of telepathic powers, along with the ability to generate a Tier 1 AWE field. Sun’s powers allow him to interpret the underlying meaning of any attempt to communicate at close range, which has been a vital part of our ability to communicate and cooperate.
In the other direction, Sun can wordlessly transmit emotions, images, and ideas with increasing detail, complexity, and speed as he bonds and builds trust with a given human or Pokemon. He can facilitate this transfer through the use of body language and light nodes.

**Photokinesis:** Upon Field generation, Sun is capable of manipulating any light within a range of approximately 3 to 4 meters. This manipulation is centered in the light nodes, but can also be channeled through the eyes and teeth. The varieties of manipulation possible range from illusions, invisibility, and complex patterns, to lasers, extremely bright flashes, and intense heat emissions. Sun has not only displayed the ability to manipulate visible light, but also infrared, ultraviolet, and potentially even manipulation of AWE Fields. (!!!!) Unlike Sun’s moderately increased stamina in regards to typical physical activity, his photokinetic abilities seem to drain him considerably, especially considering that his Field is merely Tier 1. However, I would still consider this absolutely phenomenal for a being with no Reluctance.

**Vision:** Sun’s vision is by far the most advanced of his five conventional senses, allowing him to see an extremely broad range of electromagnetic radiation, well outside of visible light. The quality of his vision is of the highest caliber, outstripping even many bird Pokemon. He also has X-ray vision, telescopic vision, heat sensing, the ability to pick up on extremely small details, and the ability to track extremely rapid movement. Perhaps most importantly, he can also see AWE emissions in high clarity, and has the ability to relate these in a way that is comprehensible for humans. I believe this ability holds incredible importance to the advancement of our understanding of not just Pokemon, but our bonds with them as well. (But that’s not entirely why you want to protect him, is it? :3c)

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**Sha** (Weird little critter, aren’t they?)

**Species:** Poipole, “Venenum viscosi”, UB: Adhesive

**Type:** Poison

**Ability:** Beast Boost

**Height:** 2'2/66 cm

**Weight:** 4.4 lbs/2 kg

**Sex:** Inconclusive.

**Physiology:** Poipole is a small creature, predominantly purple and magenta in coloration, with a large ovoid head, three gray nozzles which protrude from the top of it, and short limbs. Their appearance suggests both arthropod and reptilian traits. Their eyes and mouth continually glow cyan. They have a long tail, and can be seen levitating almost constantly, except during sleep or when highly exhausted. The body is protected by a surprisingly flexible outer covering, whose makeup is akin to a cross between scales and exoskeleton. It is shed in mostly one large, elastic piece roughly twice a month. The head and abdomen can distend greatly, and Poipole’s limbs are also unexpectedly flexible as well.

**Circulatory System:** Lacking a heart, the blood, dark blue in color, is pumped with muscle contractions that take place around most of the major blood vessels.

**Respiratory System:** There are four lungs, two in the chest cavity and two in the head. Poipole displays high amounts of stamina and endurance, along with the ability to put on rapid bursts of speed. Besides excretion, its nozzles also have secondary tubes for breathing. .
**Skeletal System:** Poipole completely lacks bones. Body shape is maintained by way of rubbery fluid bladders, hydraulics, and muscle tension. Notably, the fluid in the bladder is quite thick, and appears to have non-Newtonian properties, improving Poipole’s durability considerably.

**Nervous System:** Poipole has two brains. An upper brain located where expected, and a lower brain near the pelvic region. Both are protected by what appear to be durable, shock-absorbent membranes full of fluid. It is currently thought that the upper brain, with the help of a special organ, is largely responsible for maintaining the AWE manipulations necessary for the creature’s near-constant levitation.

**Glandular System:** Poipole’s head is surprisingly flexible, and contains sacs of gas along with various fluids, which it can freely mix for a variety of effects. Such mixtures are further altered by way of AWE field. Poipole can make at least thirty-one documented varieties of toxic and corrosive fluids, along with certain gases, ranging from mildly toxic to harmless. While its fluids can be supportive or offensive, Poipole’s gas may be used for communication or waste excretion, typically. These will be further described under Special Abilities.

**Reproductive System:** Little is known about Poipole’s reproductive system. Anecdotally, there is evidence they come from soft, mucus-coated eggs, purple in color, with a cyan glow within them. Beyond this, nothing else is known.

**Diet/Digestive System:** Omnivore. Poipole swallows food whole with a highly elastic mouth. Secretions from the back of the throat rapidly start to dissolve it even before it is fully digested in the stomach. Poipole is a vigorous eater, and will eat an extremely wide variety of foods without complaint. Apparently, the digestive system does not extend into the lowermost portion of the body, which is occupied largely by the second brain and other organs. Instead, waste accumulates in certain glands in the head, and is then either expelled from the nozzles or re-processed for use in various chemical concoctions.

**Behavior:** Poipole, or at least Sha in particular, is a friendly, energetic, and sociable creature that easily gets along with others, human and Pokemon alike. Sha displays high curiosity and intelligence, but as with most Pokemon, they display a moderate case of Reluctance Syndrome. Simple tool usage, basic math, and the operation of simple buttons and dials has been observed. However, Sha displays little interest or ability to retain information in regards to reading, operating more complex devices, and other behaviors blocked by Reluctance. With supervision and instruction, Sha has been observed to be able to successfully operate a handheld gaming device, and play simple, slow-paced computer and board games. However, in all cases, Sha rapidly lost interest, solely preferring to watch from then on. However, Sha has notably retained both the skill set and willingness required to play Tic-Tac-Toe, and they will freely create simplistic artwork without being prompted.

**Special Abilities:**

**Advanced Chemical Synthesis:** Poipole can generate a wide range of hazardous chemical substances in their head, along with various beneficial ones as well. This is exemplified in their knowledge of the Helping Hand technique, although it allows them to communicate, mark territory, and expel wastes. Poipole’s most potent concoctions may even go into the negative PH ranges, although such mixtures are hard to accurately measure. Finally, Poipole can also create powerful adhesives, to slow, immobilize, and even suffocate adversaries.

**Flight:** Poipole can apparently levitate with extremely low levels of exertion, utilizing a glowing
organ that grows directly off of the upper brain and continually generates a low-intensity Field. With more exertion, Sha can fly faster, using the tail for balance and control. Brief spurts of up to 50 mph have been recorded.

**Beast Boost:** Like other Ultra Beasts, Poipole can utilize the Ability of Beast Boost, using the absorbed AWE Field of a defeated opponent to release a flood of stockpiled Z-Power, in a similar fashion to a Totem Pokemon. This causes large increases in a certain subset of the user’s physical capabilities. In Sha’s case, it amplifies their AWE Field in such a way that their Acid attacks become more powerful. Analysis suggests that this same principle should apply to any non-physical attack.

**Evolution? (OWO what’zz thizz?):** Various signs in anatomy and cellular structure indicate the strong possibility that Poipole possesses an evolved form, especially the presence of a small gland with a miniscule but extremely intense Field contained within. Furthermore, this Field shows Dragon-type properties. Further investigation is required, especially given that evolution is not my area of specialty.

**Moveset:** Acid, Fury Attack, Growl, Helping Hand, Peck. Full possible learnset unknown.

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**Nebby** (A fellow non-solid being! The perfect partner in my zzick mazzter planzzz to rule the inferior solid lifeformz!!! ...Just kidding.)

**Species:** Cosmog, Creatum astrum

**Type:** Psychic

**Ability:** Unaware

**Height:** 0’8/20 cm

**Weight:** 0.1 lbs/0.05 kg

**Sex:** Inconclusive

**Physiology:** Cosmog is a small, colorful, gaseous being, whose appearance is not unlike that of a miniscule nebula. Despite having a seemingly solid yellow, vertical band around the center of its body, even this feature of its anatomy isn’t necessarily solid. Cosmog possesses wispy, gaseous “arms”, which contain light akin to miniscule stars. Cosmog’s face is typically black in color, with its eyes and mouth being round and yellow, and blue facial markings it uses as part of communication. However, all of these features are subject to change. Cosmog maintains “solidity” through a psionic outer field, but it is still exceptionally soft and light.

**Systems:** Every cell in Cosmog’s body is able to act as the creature’s personal analogue to “stem cells”, allowing any of them to revert to a basal state and then re-specialize as necessary. As such, Cosmog’s body as a whole can be thought of as a sort of super-organ. (Like me!) Cosmog has been shown to re-allocate and change its proportions as needed, as well as split into multiple portions with no harm to itself, and freely phase through porous or woven surfaces, as long as the portions are allowed to re-join.

The lights in Cosmog’s arms, besides being useful for communication, are generated by masses of specialized cells, as a byproduct of generating the bulk of Cosmog’s AWE Field. This Field also allows the arms to better manipulate objects, and lift up to ten pounds.

Cosmog’s ‘face’ seems to be maintained mostly as a subconscious effort to better bond with and relate to humans and other Pokemon. They do not actually require their mouth to eat, breathe or
vocalize. Cosmog has no need for air, can absorb particles through their entire body surface, and
their high-pitched vocalizations actually appear to be vibrations caused by their AWE Field. Besides
this, Cosmog can also form functioning eyespots anywhere on their body. (So can I! But Kukui
thinks it’zz ‘creepy’ when I do it... Buzzkill...)

**Diet/Digestion:** Cosmog passively feeds almost constantly on ambient electromagnetic radiation, as
well as dust, water vapor, and tiny particles of detritus in the environment. It has shown willingness
to eat certain dry, powdery foods as well. Powdered cereals, and finely powdered hard candies are a
favored treat. Myriads of tiny digestive vesicles throughout the body process any solid particulates.

**Special Abilities:**

**Nonstandard Field Generation:** Cosmog’s typical Field Strength is scarcely even T1, but it
appears to be able to somehow generate small (<1 mm) AWE Field “globules” that display unusually
high stability, and have been measured as high T6 tier (!!!). These are instrumental for its main
abilities… and may hint at further abilities we aren’t yet aware of. However, the process seems to
cause considerable exhaustion for it.

**Flight:** Cosmog levitates constantly, and can briefly achieve speeds of up to 25 mph. This is done
through telekinetic emissions, although its maximum height appears to be limited to roughly 8 meters.
However, the telekinetic force that Cosmog can otherwise generate is so miniscule as to be
impractical in battle… Probably. (Probably?)

**Teleportation:** Cosmog’s T6 Field globules can apparently propagate in such a way that they
instantly “tunnel” through conventional spacetime, immediately connecting any two points in space
and allowing Cosmog and passengers to safely and immediately transport from one location to
another.

**Wormhole Generation:** Cosmog’s T6 Field, applied as five globules or more, can also somehow
cause a localized weakness in the fabric of spacetime… The globules stretch and connect intricately,
forming a hyper-efficient ‘mesh’ of AWE that can ‘stretch’ an Ultra Wormhole open and then
immediately connect it to a different location, across lightyears or even dimensions. This is by far the
most draining ability available to Cosmog.

**Note:** Sadly, Nebby in particular does not seem to have any idea of where Sun’s homeworld is,
or how to locate it, making this currently unfeasible as a method to allow him to return home, even
before you consider the great strain it would put on Nebby… (>:C)

**Evolution? (OOOHHH...):** Cosmog shows many signs that they have not fully developed either
physically or mentally. There is also an incredibly miniscule but inordinately strong and dense Field
within Cosmog’s core, which has given typical measurement devices a great deal of trouble. (Me
too... oopz... <:3c...) Sun believes it to be the most intense AWE he’s seen yet, at least in terms of
intensity per unit area, and has described it as having Ghost-type properties. Perhaps it could even be
a Tier 7 Field anomaly... (OH MY GOODNEZZ...)

**Moveset:** Splash, Teleport. Full possible learnset is unknown.
So yeah, in this universe, there are Pokemon you just Physically Cannot Catch.

It’s not about how good you are, or how worthy, or how special, it’s just Straight Up Impossible. All the more powerful Legends fall in this category, but for the most part, Tapus, UBs, and “lesser” Legends still fall under Tier 6… which is still doable, just Really Not Easy.

Considering that any Tier 6 Pokemon is still so powerful that it would already match or exceed weaker interpretations of what the strongest Legends are like, no one has any damn business catching a Tier 7 in this ‘verse, regardless of age or accomplishments.
Chapter Summary

Basically a character sheet to help things feel more organized (also helps me tbh, even though I have a private version of something similar)

This keeps track of all moves and captures up to the latest chapter, so to make it at least a little harder to be spoiled, I have used Pokedex numbers for most of the Pokemon rather than species names. (Nebby, Null, and Sha are not "hidden" this way, because they shouldn't be a surprise to anyone)

Still, your best bet is to just not look if you want to avoid spoilers. Especially because some are kind of easy to guess based on Abilities and movepools, hence why "hidden" is in parentheses.

Will update continually as things progress.

Current Progress: Akala Island, through Brooklet Hill Trial
Number Of Z-Crystals: 4
Time Elapsed On Journey Roughly 7 months, 1 week
Time Since Sun’s Arrival: Roughly 1 year, 1 month, 1 week

Sun Kukui:
Gender: Fluid
Species: Luxian
Age: 15 → 16 (Chronologically 19)
Height: 5’2/157 cm → 6’1/188 cm
Weight: 100 lbs/45 kg → 215 lbs/97.5 kg

Pokemon:

Sha, Poipole:
Ability: Beast Boost

#571:
Ability: Illusion
Moves: Aerial Ace, Agility, Bounce, Dark Pulse, Fake Tears, Feint Attack, Grass Knot, Hidden Power Bug, Nasty Plot, Pursuit, Return, Snatch, Taunt

Rhovera, #636:
Ability: Flame Body
C.C.(Cotton Candy), #743:
Ability: Honey Gather
Moves: Aromatherapy, Dazzling Gleam, Defog, Draining Kiss, Energy Ball, Light Screen, Fairy Wind, Light Screen, Pollen Puff, Psychic, Silver Wind, Stun Spore

Nau, #762:
Ability: Oblivious
Moves: Bounce, Dazzling Gleam, Giga Drain, Light Screen, Play Rough, Rapid Spin, Razor Leaf, Reflect, Seed Bomb, Solar Beam, Sunny Day, Synthesis

Zmázie, #120:
Ability: Analytic
Dazzling Gleam, Ice Beam, Minimize, Power Gem, Psychic, Recover, Reflect Type, Scald

Lillie Celeste:
Gender: Female
Age: 16
Height: 5’2/157 cm → 5’4/162 cm
Weight: 115 lbs/52 kg → 120 lbs/54.5 kg

Nebby, Cosmog (Non-combatant):
Ability: Unaware
Moves: Splash, Teleport, Gravity

Euterpe, #730:
Ability: Torrent
Moves: Aqua Jet, Bubble Beam, Disarming Voice, Hidden Power Ice, Hyper Voice, Ice Beam, Sing, Sparkling Aria, Water Pledge, Work Up

Salsa, #372:
Ability: Rock Head
Moves: Aerial Ace, Crunch, Dragon Breath, Dragon Claw, Dragon Dance, Ember, Hydro Pump, Rock Slide, Twister, Wild Charge

#180:
Ability: Static

#220:
Ability: Thick Fat
Moves: Endure, Ice Shard, Mud Bomb, Odor Sleuth, Take Down

Hau Manalo
Species: Human
Gender: Male
Age: 15 → 16
Height: 5’10/178 cm → 6’0/183 cm
Weight: 215 lbs/97.5 kg → 230 lbs/104 kg

#724:
Ability: Overgrow
Aerial Ace, Foresight, Grass Pledge, Hidden Power Rock Leaf Blade, Ominous Wind, Razor Leaf, Return, Roost, Steel Wing, Swords Dance

#025:
Ability: Static
Brick Break, Discharge, Double Team, Electro Ball, Hidden Power Dragon, Iron Tail, Nasty Plot, Quick Attack, Sweet Kiss, Swift, Thunder Wave

#242:
Ability: Serene Grace
Moves: Calm Mind, Charm, Copycat, Gravity, Hidden Power Steel, Hyper Voice, Light Screen, Psychic, Return, Shock Wave, Softboiled, Sweet Kiss

#714:
Ability: Infiltrator
Moves: Agility, Air Cutter, Heat Wave, Hidden Power Grass, Hyper Voice, Psychic, Roost, Steel Wing, Supersonic, Tailwind, Water Pulse,

#058:
Ability: Flash Fire
Moves: Bite, Close Combat, Dragon Dance, Ember, Fire Fang, Flame Burst, Morning Sun

#061:
Ability: Swift Swim
Moves: Aqua Jet, Body Slam, Bubble Beam, Hypnosis, Mud Shot, Rain Dance

Outside Of Travelling Group:

Gladion Celeste:
Gender: Male
Age: 17 → 18
Height: 6’2/188 cm
Weight: 150 lbs/68 kg

Null, Type: Null:
Ability: Battle Armor
Moves: Aerial Ace, Brick Break, Earthquake, Iron Head, Play Rough, Recover, Rock Slide, Swords Dance, X-Scissor, Crush Claw

Abbadon, #359:
Ability: Super Luck
Moves: Double Team, Night Slash, Psycho Cut, Pursuit, Quick Attack, Shadow Claw, Stone Edge, Swords Dance, Zen Headbutt

Calypso, #700:
Ability: Pixilate
Moves: Draining Kiss, Fairy Wind, Heal Bell, Hyper Voice, Quick Attack, Shadow Ball, Skill Swap, Swift, Work Up

**D (Despair), #169:**
Ability: Inner Focus
Moves: Acrobatics, Confuse Ray, Cross Poison, Leech Life, Mean Look, Roost, Steel Wing, X-Scissor
Chapter 3: A Search For Guidance

Chapter Summary

The gang sings a song, and then stuff goes wrong.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The time of Sun’s journey steadily and inexorably came closer, the last week being one last-ditch mad rush to get every last thing in order. Sha obtained a Beast Ball, something apparently created by the Aether Foundation to contain Ultra Beasts… Lillie stiffened and backed away slightly when she first saw the device, but Sha took to it well, although Sun typically preferred to keep them out with him.

Sun was given his last rundowns on everything he’d have to look out for and be responsible for over the course of a journey, as well as given some of the information on Hau that Hala had relayed to them in his messages.

But on the day before he would meet up with Hau, there was one more thing he wanted to do…

Something special, something that would prove how thankful he was… He got the idea from what he’d already been told about Hau.

Namely, he was going to make malasadas.

Understandably, such a declaration sent everyone into high alert immediately, given Sun’s… unique taste buds.

But still, they were eager to support him, believing it to be a thoughtful idea regardless.

With a cookbook and a menagerie of cooking supplies and utensils, the house’s small kitchen suddenly became a lively place.

At some point, Sun began to hum contentedly as he worked, beating the batter to a rhythm that wormed its way deep into Lillie’s head, before she even realized it was there. She, Kukui, and Burnet were all standing around Sun, making sure he completed the task properly, and without adding any odd personal touches. Sha and Nebby were there as well, although mainly just out of curiosity… or in Nebby’s case, sucking up stray particles of flour and sugar.

And so, Lillie began to hum along with him...

And soon, so did Kukui...

And soon, so did Burnet...

And soon, despite themselves....

All three were suddenly part of a song, led by Sun's steady humming, as the actual sun peeked out
from behind a cloud, its light pouring strongly into the room.

"Guide me by your light," Kukui started.

"Set my soul alight," Burnet continued.

"Guide me by your light," Kukui repeated.

"And all will shine bright..." Burnet sang, with quiet reverence.

Kukui's voice picked up, soulful yet surprisingly gentle, as he continued the song.

"When I can't shine on..."

"Feels like my luck's gone..." Kukui continued, looking down and frowning as he felt an unplaceable sense of sorrow.

"When I'm feeling blue..."

"Nothing I can do..."

Kukui steadily lifted his head again, seeing Sun, Lillie, and Burnet, and suddenly, the song became more lively, more upbeat.

"I'll look up, see you,"

"See fortune so true"

"You are my light,"

"I'm guided by you."

Burnet took the next part, smiling gently as she looked at Kukui. Her voice was soft, yet strong.

"No matter what darkness may fall on me..."

"I trust that your light will set my soul free..."

"No matter the madness, the pain, the strife..."

"I trust that your light will give me life..." Burnet briefly slowed, taking a deep breath... Sun had simply stopped beating the batter, closed his eyes, and began silently conducting with his pointer fingers, his humming still ongoing, steadily getting more focused and impassioned. Burnet's next words came right in time with a surge of whitish-gold light from Sun. She belted them out at a full, sonorous volume, catching Kukui and Lillie off guard with their passion.

"And allow me to take..."

"Fate's joke of a knife!"

Lillie smiled wide, and Kukui briefly laughed before continuing right where she left off.

"And friend, don't you know,"

"Time's blade is so dull,"

"Our love goes to show..."
"All things it can't cull!" Kukui said, voice rising with a rich crescendo.

Kukui and Burnet then sang the next part in absolute harmony, voices steadily rising in intensity throughout. Sun's humming only continued, his conducting becoming more energetic, as Lillie just experienced the whole scene in absolute awe... Somehow, she already knew what words were coming next, as she continued to hum along...

"I see you glinting, on that wicked blade"

"I laugh, and I know,"

"Your light will not fade."

"With bright flashing fangs, I brandish my mind..."

"I reach up to you,"

"And leave fear behind!"

"With passion, I rend"

"The battle, it ends,"

Lillie couldn't take it anymore. Tears were building in the corners of her eyes, and she scarcely even knew why. She felt something building up in her, something that had to be released at all costs... and so, she joined in as well. Perfectly in time, perfectly in step. Not a lick of prior practice. There was an effortlessness to it she could hardly believe, a sense of freedom and purpose like nothing else in the world.

"And I see we shine brighter together..."

"So my friend, how's this?"

"Let's join hands in bliss"

"So that we might stay that way,"

"Forever..."

Finally, Kukui and Burnet stopped, leaving just Lillie, singing with a slow, quiet, fervent dedication. Feeling every syllable on her tongue, letting the song quietly surround and embrace her, knowing it had to come to an end... and yet not wanting it to. With her voice, combined with Sun's steady humming, it was as if she became the center of the room, shining with a light all her own.

"Guide me by your light," Lillie sang, looking at Kukui.

"And I'll guide you too..." she continued, looking down at Nebby

"Love where love is due." she added, voice cracking as she looked up at Burnet.

"I'll... bask, in the eternity... of you." she forced herself to finish, voice faltering even more... as she looked at Sun, lip quivering, eyes watering.

And with little other warning, both of them broke down sobbing. Sun's tears were hot and glowing whitish-pink, his entire body alight with bright, contrasting flecks of light pink and dark blue.
Kukui and Burnet tried to resist, both of them sniffling and wiping at their eyes, not even sure why exactly they were crying. Even Sha and Nebby were unable to fully resist, glowing cyan fluid dribbling from Sha's eyes and nozzles alike, as Nebby's eyes shed dense globules of golden gas.

The four came together for an embrace, all still crying, barely even comprehending why, but finally, there were images, flashing through their heads.

They saw themselves standing in a crowd of people, all pale-blue in the skin, midnight blue veils over their faces, and dressed in midnight blue robes… Everyone was lined up in such a way that there was still a clear path through them.

Immediately to their left, a petite child stood next to them, pale blue skin, their long hair in a striking orange braid beneath their veil. To their right, a taller, older teen, somewhat masculine. They turned and stooped down. The older one’s mouth glowed a soft pink, uttering words that could not be remembered, before the older one gently pressed a kiss to their collective forehead…

Or more accurately, Sun’s forehead.

Sun looked up.

Along the cleared path, people in thick protective suits were carting black, rattling boxes, filled with horrible banging and snarling. People in the crowd shrank back. Children cried. The shorter child next to Sun suddenly held him close, burying their face into his shoulder. A crystalline automaton followed the boxes. It stood twelve feet tall, standing on digitigrade legs with powerful claws, laced with cold diamond and sharp metal alloys. Its upper body was smooth, ovoid, and polished, coupled to its legs only by some unseeable force. It was mounted with levitating laser cannons and long arms, terminating in massive crystalline blades.

Faintly, the child hugging Sun could be heard singing to the same melody as the song, in their own language.

The memory ended, Sun glowing a strong dark blue and wiping away tears as he pulled away from the humans who had taken him in. Apologies flitted through their heads rapid-fire.

“Sun, it’s alright…” Kukui said.

“You don’t have to apologize! Any of your memory returning is a good thing!” Burnet reassured him.

“But… could it be that you remembered that because part of you is upset about leaving?” Lillie asked, although mentally, she was thinking of something else as well...

That orange braid... It was awfully familiar.

Sun looked up at her suddenly, nodding rapidly. Lillie just smiled softly and hugged him again. “It’s fine, Sun. Really. You can come back at any time… And even though you’ve left important people behind, I’m sure you can meet them again someday… As for the ones who you… can’t…” Lillie paused, remembering the horrendous sounds emanating from within the boxes. She wasn’t sure exactly what was going on there, but by the context... “I’m sure their suffering is over now,” Sun hesitantly agreed, although he apologized once again.

“Sun, not to pry, but do you remember anything further about what we just saw? Or the full context
of that song?” Kukui asked. “It’s okay if you don’t,” Sun just slowly shook his head. Kukui nodded in understanding, but then, another question came to mind.

"...Sun, did you give us the lyrics to that song?" Kukui asked.

"But he couldn't have. He can barely speak our language, and he hasn't progressed quite that far in his writing either..." Burnet said.

"And I would've known, if he were feeding lyrics into my head. I would feel it, hear it. But there, I didn't. I felt him, but just... his emotion.” Lillie said.

"It was the same for me," Kukui said.

"So are you telling me... that on the spot, without even really trying, we all came up with cohesive, rhythm-fitting lyrics to a song from another world, an alien culture! And not only were they lyrics that properly matched and expressed the song's original meaning, but we were simultaneously able to sing with perfect timing and perfect harmony?"

"Well, seems Sun's always full of surprises, isn't he?” Kukui said with a laugh.

"We have to study this more…” Burnet said quietly. “But for now… Sun, did you want to rest? We can finish the malasadas ourse-”

Sun silently but passionately refused, rapidly shaking his head as his nodes went bright white.

“Because Hau and Hala are doing something important for Sun, and he wants to make sure they know how much he appreciates it… Seeing as he never got the chance to fully let people know these kinds of things before,” Lillie explained, without missing a beat. Sun just nodded.

Kukui and Burnet stared quietly for a moment before nodding in understanding. It was helpful, but rather odd, how quickly and completely Lillie was able to parse Sun’s feelings and opinions, beyond even the surface level.

Still, the cooking continued, and the mood steadily brightened once more. By the end, a sizable batch consisting of equal numbers of both cinnamon and banana malasadas was made and packed into a large box.

Sun glowed a bright, contented green, seeing the fruits of their labor.

The meeting day arrived soon enough, with everyone going to Iki Town to meet up with Hau, and the Kahuna of Melemele, Hala. Fortunately, Iki Town was very close to Hau’oli City, almost enough that it could be considered more like a suburb than anything.

Sure enough, right near the primary entrance to the town, Hau and Hala were both waiting.

Having never formally met Sun in person, they introduced themselves in spite of Sun technically knowing them.

Hala seemed wise and kind, yet commanding and imposing all at once. He was like an implacable wall. He was definitely tall, well over six feet, and there was clearly a core of great strength and experience beneath his portly build and aging outward appearance.
Hau was about 5’10, with dark green hair, a build somewhat on the chubby side, and grey eyes that revealed a rather impressively silvery quality, once Sun looked closely. He was quite good-looking, to boot. Sun was especially fond of his shorts. They were so colorful!

Sun freely admitted the things about his eyes and appearance, thinking of it as nothing but innocent complimenting. Hau just smiled and chuckled nervously.

“Aw, you don’t have to butter me up just because you’re traveling with me!” Hau said.

Sun just shook his head, heartbeats speeding up a bit as he also handed over the box of homemade malasadas. Hau’s eyes noticeably went wide at that.

“A present? For me?” Hau asked. Sun just nodded somewhat shyly, hoping everything would go over well.

Hau quickly opened the box, eyes going wider still, as he quietly gasped, a massive grin spreading across his face.

“Malasadas? I love malasadas, how did you know?!” Hau whooped.

“Go on and try one! Sun’s dying to know how you like it!” Burnet said.

Hau obeyed almost immediately, biting into one without even bothering to ask the flavor. He gave a long ‘mmm’ of contentment before scarfing down the entire thing.

“How’d you know that banana filling is even more my favorite?!” Hau cried.

“We asked Hala, and told him we wanted it to be a surprise. We all helped make them, but it was all Sun’s idea to start with,” Burnet said with a soft smile. “He’d wanted to make Hala something too, but Hala already declined.”

Hau looked a bit confused as that, but Hala quickly stepped in to explain himself. “As Kahuna, I have no need to accept such gifts. Guiding and supporting Alola’s youth is already part of my job, after all.”

“You- mmf- really should’ve, Tutu… These malasadas are great!” Hau said, already delightedly tearing through a second one. “Thank you all so much!”

Sun beamed back at Hau, so relieved he liked the malasadas… After all, Sun had the sense to know his tastes were obviously very different from most human tastes. Trying to do it himself could’ve been a disaster. If it were for him, he would’ve definitely added mustard… and a dash of clam juice… and… diced olives, maybe? Or perhaps salsa...

“Anyway, Sun, Tutu told me before that you have a really special Pokemon with you! Can I battle them, if that’s okay?” Hau asked.

Sun was a bit caught off guard by the sudden question. Hau really got to the point, didn’t he? Of course, Sun knew about battling, and he’d engaged in mock battles to help Kukui with research… but this was going to be his first ‘real’ one, even if it was completely friendly.

Still, it’d be an interesting experience…
With slight hesitation, Sun released Sha from his new Beast Ball, feeling a quick pang of disdain from Lillie as he got the ball out.

Hau gaped in amazement for a moment before quickly handing his malasadas off to Hala and responding in kind, with an impassioned cry of “Go, Rowlet!”

Sun immediately recognized the adorable little Starter Pokemon, as Kukui had briefly looked after all three starters to ensure they were ready to partner up with new Trainers. For the time being, only Rowlet had been chosen. Kukui had offered both Sun and Lillie to take a pick as well, but Sun got the feeling that if he already had Sha, it was being a bit greedy. Meanwhile, Lillie got the feeling that if all three starters had been born and raised under the expectation of frequent training and battle, then they would probably just be restless and under-utilized in her care.

But with Hau’s Pokemon officially out, everyone backed away to give the combatants space. The battle was underway.

“Rowlet, Leafage!” Hau called.

“Sha… Ah-cid…” Sun called, the order somewhat halting and delayed.

Rowlet flapped its wings powerfully, its Field blooming outwards as it whipped up a strong gale and a flurry of leaf-feathers along with it, specialized feather that regrew just moments after being deployed.

The attack was expertly guided towards Sha, who tried to dart out of the way but ended up caught square in the middle, due to Sun’s sluggish order.

Sun modified the order a bit mentally just before Sha fired, and Rowlet wound up swooping to avoid one blot of luminescent purple before being hit by another, denser glob, its flight given more speed and force by a strong burst of gases that pushed it from behind.

Rowlet was soundly nailed in the side with that shot, but not defeated. After all, it was a somewhat higher PH, with lowered toxicity and a focus on elasticity.

Sun frowned a bit, hoping that wasn’t too much. He could tell at a glance that Rowlet’s AWE was moderately inferior to Sha’s. Besides that, Rowlet and Hau were barely synchronizing at all. Meanwhile, Sun had known Sha for years, even if both of them could only just barely remember the bulk of that.

What Sun wasn’t expecting was for Hau to command another Leafage, and for Rowlet to mostly blow all the tarry acidic gunk off of himself with a keening screech of effort, regaining enough use of his wings to mercilessly blast Sha with more leaves. Sun just blinked. Rowlet had summoned that initial wind with willpower alone. Still, Sha shook the attack off once more, and energetically flipped through the air a few times, clearly ready for more.

“...Fe-are-y Attack…” Sun said, slowly, silently urging Sha to aim for a spot like the chest or side, away from anything too important.

Sha zipped forward, but purposely slowed a bit when he got close, giving Hau and Rowlet the perfect chance.

“Counter with Peck, then Leafage!” Hau called. Rowlet banked sharply upwards before crashing
down against Sha’s head with surprisingly forceful pecking, taking advantage of Sha’s alarm to follow it up with a strong Leafage, which blew Sha back several feet.

Lillie tilted her head down and silently frowned at the display, while Kukui and Burnet gave encouraging cheers to Sun… but they had a good idea of what she was frowning about, and it wasn’t just the fact that she personally didn’t like battles.

Meanwhile, Hala just watched silently, with crossed arms, as Sun feebly commanded Sha to glue Rowlet’s wings, frowning slightly all the while. What if it made Rowlet fall and hurt himself? What if he did that and then Hau didn’t like him? What if everyone said he was being mean and unfair, not letting Rowlet fly like Sha?

Still, Rowlet expertly dodged the shots of glue, and Sha gave a low trill of frustration as Rowlet then used his dodging momentum to slam into Sha with a harsh combination of Tackle into Peck, followed by yet another Leafage as Sun tried to decide between more glue or another Fury Attack while Rowlet was up close… Maybe Peck, even… But what if Rowlet got jabbed in the eye?!

“Grrr..owl…” Sun slowly ordered, still frowning. Hau frowned a bit as well, pausing for a brief second, but Rowlet was still bursting with confidence at all the hits he’d landed. He effortlessly made a stylish figure 8 in flight before slamming into Sha with another Tackle-Peck combo, all while Sha was left bewildered by his Trainer’s reluctance and unusual insistence on verbal orders.

Sha tumbled to the ground, weakly rising into the air for just a moment longer before simply collapsing once more. Sun’s eyes widened, illusion flickering for the briefest fraction of a second as he immediately scooped Sha up, nuzzling him close to his face.

“We… win?” Hau said, sounding a bit conflicted. Sun looked up, noticing that Rowlet was in Hau’s arms, and Hau was nuzzling him, but Rowlet seemed far happier than Hau about it all. Rowlet was cooing and trilling up a storm, eyes comfortably shut and chest puffed out in pride, but Hau was only faintly smiling. Why? Wasn’t that what he asked for? Sun tensed slightly, wondering if he’d done something wrong. Did he break a rule he hadn’t known about?

“Better luck next time, cousin,” Kukui said to Sun in a placating fashion.

“That was only your first real one! You’re sure to get the next one!” Burnet said, in a somewhat restrained, subdued fashion. Sun could tell from a mile away that there was something both of them weren’t telling him.

“You could’ve won, you know,” Lillie said, quiet and yet plain and abrupt, almost as if responding to Sun’s internal question. Still, she immediately covered her mouth, seeming a bit regretful. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say it like that, I just…” Lillie trailed off. “That’s what you were asking, right?”

“No, young lady, you’re absolutely right. While I’m very impressed with my grandson’s victory, as well as Rowlet’s, I have no doubt that Sun should’ve been able to win that battle,” Hala said. Sun withered, looking down at Sha in silence. So that’s what was bothering everyone.

“Not to mention… it looked like you weren’t even having fun, really. I noticed, you know,” Hau said. “I would’ve even stopped if I saw sooner, but Rowlet was so into it already… Still, what’s the point of battles if you’re not able to enjoy them?”

Sun just frowned, unable to answer.
“And you ordered Sha in our language, even though you can talk telepathically? Just because you thought it’d be more fair to Hau, even though that’s much more difficult for you and Sha?” Lillie asked. “Sun… It’s great that you’re so thoughtful, but you didn’t have to go that far.”

“Hmm… seems this girl knows you exceptionally well, Sun. It’d do you good to heed her words. But don’t feel too bad. In a certain sense, you did try your best,” Hala said. “You tried your best to show kindness and fairness towards your opponent, and in that respect, I can tell you are a truly gentle soul.” Hala’s voice was soft at that point, but it suddenly became more firm. “However… battling is not purely for those with gentle souls. To battle effectively, you have to accept the good and the bad. The risks and the rewards. The fear and thrill alike. You have to trust in not only yourself and your Pokemon, but your opponent as well. Trust that they can take what you dish out. Do not be so afraid to harm them. Pokemon are incredibly hardy beings, after all. Brimming with life, bursting with power. Don’t go assuming all their limits for them. You’ll only hurt your own partners that way.”

“Plus, Acid and Peck are super effective on Rowlet, but you chose stuff like Growl and Fury Attack instead… And I appreciate what you were going for, but you really didn’t have to do that! You don’t have to be so concerned about me and Rowlet that you can’t even have any fun!” Hau said.

Sun looked down at Sha’s battered body with a pang of guilt, realizing that everyone was right. He was so preoccupied with looking out for Hau and Rowlet that he’d let Sha take a beating instead. Shame filled his heart, his breath catching in his throat. How would he be useful to Kukui like this? Unable to battle properly, too soft and overly worried… He’d barely be able to record anything useful for his studies at all! And if a powerful Pokemon attacked, how would he be able to win?! What if something happened to Hau or Sha because he couldn’t battle it right?!

Sun slowly faded out of view, as everyone stared in shock… Most of all, Hau, Hala, and Rowlet.

“Hold up, how in the world-” Hau started.

“Well, you see, Sun is-” Hala started, making fidgety hand gestures and sweating slightly… before Sun promptly reappeared with his disguise completely gone, his nodes vibrating wildly.

Hau actually screamed.

“Wh-wha… What’s up with his skin?! And why is he glowing??!” Hau shouted. But despite it all, he was actually slowly coming closer to Sun, rather than retreating. Sun looked up at him, treating Hau to the sight of his huge, unmistakeable, golden eyes, glowing softly as they looked up at Hau in trepidation.

“…Hala, don’t tell me you didn’t fully explain to him what Sun is?” Kukui asked, bewildered.

“Well!” Hala started, with a strained chuckle. “I had every intention to, you see, but I was a bit hesitant, seeing as-”

“Wait… is Sun an ALIEN?! An actual, for real, straight up alien?!” Hau abruptly shouted, so loudly it nearly shocked Sun into disappearing again. Kukui felt he was beginning to understand the situation a bit more. Hala was sweating more than ever.

“Oh… So, judging from that reaction…”
“Well, Hau is very excitable… and a bit... *iffy* … with secrets...” Hala admitted.

“Aue, Tutu!” Hau cried, shooting him an offended look. “I can keep secrets! Honest I can! I was just shocked, that’s all! I mean, you would be too if your grandpa never told you that the super nice new friend you met is a pretty-looking alien...”

Sun beamed and flashed a mix of green and pink at that, causing Hau to flinch back a bit. “And sharp crystal teeth, apparently?!” Hau added on. “...Not that there’s anything wrong with that!” Hau quickly added, seeing Sun quickly hide them again. “Again, just surprised! The crystal is pretty too!” Hau insisted. Sun continued to flash in a sea of pinks and greens at the words, although his nodes were still twitching and vibrating all over the place. Hau called him ‘super nice’! And ‘pretty’! And a friend! Wow!

Sun immediately resolved to hug him in sheer gratitude, creating a pleasant thrumming noise in his chest. Hau just looked a bit shocked for a moment, holding his arms up a bit stiffly before deciding to simply accept it.

Seeing that Hau didn’t seem uncomfortable, Lillie just giggled at the display. Six months, and Sun was still incredibly quick to hug people. Apparently, “friend” was his sign that it was okay.

“But honestly, Hau,” Hala started. The hug ended, and Hau turned to face him, expression suddenly serious. “You have to promise me that you will keep this a secret, understand? This is a matter of Sun’s safety and security. You cannot reveal this without his consent, under any circumstances.”

“I promise,” Hau said, with utmost sincerity and conviction. Hala smiled, glad that there was at least a certain workaround for Hau’s issues with secrets... Namely, the fact that he was exceptionally good with promises.

With that, Hau turned to address Sun. “The next time we battle... Just take a deep breath, okay? Take a deep breath, shake out the worry, then just... follow your instincts. Focus on what feels right, rather than being afraid of what’s wrong.”

Sun nodded, thankful for the advice.

Once more, everything seemed to be going alright again... At least until Nebby chose that moment to pop out of Lillie’s bag and go speeding off, due north.

“Nebby, wait!” Lillie cried. Sun ran off after her, quickly returning Sha to his new ball as well. Hau did as well, more to know what the fuss was about than anything.

“For one that doesn’t battle, that little creature is certainly lively!” Hala said with a laugh.

“Tell me about it,” Kukui and Burnet said simultaneously, sighing as they remembered all the times they had to get Nebby to stay still for tests... Not even painful or invasive tests, but they understood Nebby’s lack of cooperation regardless, considering that Lillie would’ve never even had to come to them if Nebby had always been treated properly.

Meanwhile, Nebby continued to race off, its tiny floating body quite easy to propel forwards along the uneven terrain, and simple to maneuver through all kinds of shrubbery and undergrowth, which was especially irritating for the three teens when Nebby shot clear through town and ended up on a winding path that Hau recognized as Mahalo Trail.
On Nebby’s part, they seemed to treat the whole thing like a game, racing along and then stopping, only to start again as soon as anyone got close. On one hand, this tactic did allow the pursuers brief chances to rest, but on the other hand, all the running still added up, especially on Mahalo Trail, which was uneven and sloped upwards to the point that Sun ended up carrying Lillie on his back before long.

“Nebby!” Lillie tiredly called out. “You have to come back! It’s not safe for you to go off by yourself!”

Sun pushed himself to run further, surprised that Hau was keeping up with him for so long. But finally, about two thirds of the way up the trail, Hau had Sun and Lillie go on without him, needing a moment to catch his breath.

Sun continued on, having already dropped his disguise and any illusions over his clothes in order to try and conserve some energy. He did his best to focus on just running and just Lillie’s Field, overlapping his. He did his best to sync up with her and draw upon her emotions, draw upon her strength and energy.

With a deep breath, Sun was able to put on a burst of speed, much to Nebby’s shock.

But by time they’d caught up, Nebby was crossing what looked like an old and unstable bridge… Which, by itself, was completely fine for a floating gas creature.

It was less than fine for two teenagers at once, and so, Sun stopped right before the bridge, then let Lillie off of his back. He panted heavily, putting his hands on his knees, trying to regain as much energy as possible.

“Nebby!” Lillie cried out “Please come back! You’ve had your fun, now you’re just causing trouble for us!”

Nebby paused and looked back, seeming to briefly consider it… but not getting the chance to finish, as a small group of Spearow suddenly spied it and swooped in to attack, much to the alarm of Sun and Lillie.

Spearow weren’t particularly amazing Pokemon, especially not the young ones around Iki Town, but both their attention and their harassment could be gained by any new or unfamiliar thing in their territory.

Sun’s stomach dropped as he realized the situation would be much easier if Sha were still able to fight, or still able to chase Nebby down. It was just what he needed, another reason to feel shitty about the ways his intentions had backfired.

Still, as he heard Lillie cry out for Nebby again, he realized that he had to do something.

He was too tired for harmful options, but if he could project a beam bright enough to disturb the keen eyes of the Spearow, perhaps they’d fall back…

He quietly requested Lillie to let him draw on more of her Field energy as his body lit up white, and his took a deep breath, doing his best to focus as he outstretched a hand. Swarms of light nodes immediately filed to that hand with great speed, turning it all such a dark blue as to be nearly black. As Sun looked at the Spearow, circling, taunting, swiping at Nebby, who cowered helplessly, his
nodes took on another color.

White-violet light poured off of him as he fired off a burst of light, causing all of the Spearow to squawk loudly in surprise, briefly dispersing, as planned…

There was a moment of triumph, as Sun and Lillie smiled at the wonderful outcome…

At least until the Spearow continued to loudly cry out, and dozens more began to arrive, from all directions.

Sun and Lillie both blanched, and Sun mentally urged Lillie to run away. Lillie was in tears, but ultimately only ran far enough to be able to take shelter behind some trees and vegetation, as she scrambled to find anything that might be useful in her bag. If it came down to it, she could try to throw things at them, at least. Make herself the new target.

Sun hunkered down, tiredly turning invisible, but knowing it wouldn’t do much good. The Spearow were already on the attack, beginning

But at that moment, Nebby made an unnaturally loud noise.

Sun looked up, and the Spearow all turned to look back at Nebby as well.

From behind them all, Sun could see hundreds of miniscule AWE Field globules, filling the air and shining like a tiny galaxy even in the middle of the day, all blasting out of Nebby’s body en-masse.

Sun’s stomach sank again. If Nebby did that-

Sun tried to mentally urge Nebby not to, but it was too late.

In an instant, all the nodes connected, creating a massive mesh in the air.

What happened next, neither Sun or Lillie could believe.

There was a bright pulse of light as local space squashed in on itself like a sponge being pressed in a vice. The bridge, and the entire gap in general, halved in length. The Spearow were nowhere to be seen, now just a nebulously defined mass of reddish-brown in the center of incredibly distorted air and land. The effect slackened a bit as little nodes of light rearranged themselves, the mesh changing form, the massive ball of Spearow being less compressed and distorted as Nebby instead dragged them towards Sun and Lillie. But as the mesh began to look not unlike the top part of a massive slingshot, some parts of space still pinching in tighter and tighter, Sun realized what was about to happen. His eyes followed its trajectory, noticing there was a large cliff face they were all being pointed towards.

Meanwhile, Nebby’s gaseous, pluripotent form had sprouted two extra eyes on its backside, which were also looking towards the cliff face.

The Spearow gave a great collective mass of shrieks and cries, unable to free themselves.

Hau caught up just in time to see the absurd sight. The Spearow being packed into an obscenely tight ball, by the will of what was little more than an enraged toddler.

There was a great, explosive sound and a mighty rush of wind as Nebby finally released its hold. All
at once, space snapped back to its proper shape. The entire bridge shattered from the recoil, and the entire ball of birds went rocketing over Nebby’s head and straight into the cliff face, impacting it with a sickening mix of thudding and crunching. All of them landed on the ground in a crumpled, bloodied heap.

Hardly able to think, barely even comprehending what was happening, Hau still threw out Rowlet’s Pokeball on instinct, breathlessly commanding the owl to go grab Nebby. Hau was lucky that despite the bridge collapsing, Nebby’s body was incredibly lightweight, slowing their fall.

Rowlet collected them with ease, then made a series of frantic motions to Hau that made it obvious it was inquiring about what in the world had just happened.

“I have no fucking idea,” Hau tiredly said, as his gaze turned to look at Nebby. He immediately frowned. Nebby’s entire body had gone black, save for their eyes, and tiny wisps of them were steadily blowing away with even the lightest breeze. Hau quickly brought them close and did his best to shield them.

Having seen Nebby being saved, Sun and Lillie were by Hau’s side in moments, both almost immediately wanting to break down at Nebby’s pitiful state.

“Oh, Nebby, I’m so sorry, this is all my fault!” Lillie shouted. Nebby was unresponsive.

Sun’s entire body was spilling out dark blue light, as he desperately tried to summon up power within himself, power that would allow him to do something, anything further, but he couldn’t manage anything more than a mere spark compared to what he’d need to actually make a difference.

But suddenly, there was a Field from somewhere else.

Huge, overpowering, surging through the entire landscape, melding with every tree, every stone, every grain of soil and blade of grass. Things began to dance with tiny sparks as its power soaked into them.

Sun’s eyes widened as he recognized its strength almost right away.

A strong Tier 6, Arch Tier, on a scale that only went from 0 to 7… Only the most unbelievably strong Legends could ever reach Tier 7… and if it was Tier 6, with elements of Electric and Fairy, that could only mean…

“Tapu Koko?!” Hau and Lillie both exclaimed, as the creature swooped down in front of them with unreal speed.

With a single, wordless command, enough to make Hau’s head pound with pain and set his entire body buzzing uncomfortably, Tapu Koko demanded to see Nebby.

Hau immediately complied. Tapu Koko took the darkened little creature into its arms, the sheer might of its Field contracting inwards. The land spirit closed their eyes, focusing deeply, as a Z-Crystal suddenly appeared before them… and in the very next moment, it shattered into incredibly fine dust, that dust being charged with so much energy it glowed with golden light before being gently guided into Nebby’s steadily fading body.

Within moments, Nebby began to regain color, and their body stabilized as well.
Once again, light began to twinkle in their arm appendages, and they slowly rose out of Tapu Koko’s arms, still showing signs of exhaustion but overall looking far better.

“Oh, Nebby! It’s a miracle! Thank you so much, Tapu Koko!” Lillie said, groveling before the immensely powerful Pokemon… Sun thanked them as well, flashing bright green… But Tapu Koko merely responded with a migraine inducing, crushing, nauseating feeling, shoved hard into the fabric of Lillie’s very being.

A feeling that could only be described as monumental disappointment.

Lillie was left softly crying in the aftermath, her body trembling and lightly sparking. Nebby gave a cry of distress as they snuggled against her, turning to Tapu Koko and making a series of indignant squeaks.

Tapu Koko just brushed them off, silently communicating something back that left Nebby completely silent. Tapu Koko then turned slowly to look at Sun. Sun immediately felt nauseous as well, as Tapu Koko’s eyes alone conveyed unspeakable disgust, for reasons that Sun wasn’t even entirely sure of. Then came the actual surge of feeling, the horrible, punishing feeling that struck right into the very heart of Sun’s soul. The feeling that told him that he was wrong. That he was other. That he was unnecessary, unnatural, and unclean.

Sun collapsed, his insides feeling like they were on fire, his light nodes vibrating and flashing wildly. Tapu Koko sparked menacingly, but Nebby gave an even louder cry than before, eyes glowing as several sparkling Field globules manifested around it.

With another otherworldly cry of effort from Nebby, Tapu Koko suddenly found themself punted 30 meters in the air by some unseen force.

Nebby, exhausted as they were, still didn’t have the same signs of being totally drained as before. And so, with what energy they still had, they did something that could only be described as throwing an utter tantrum. At a Land Spirit.

Flecks of light spun around Nebby, dust and pebbles and wind swirling around them, steadily building, as they thrashed and cried and screamed with everything they had, the screams alone causing everyone present to duck down and cover their ears. Space distorted, light distorted, smudging and smearing and twisting as Nebby shot pebbles at Tapu Koko as fast as bullets, sobbing all the while. The pebbles mostly broke apart, or Tapu Koko nigh-effortlessly dodged them, but once Nebby finally calmed down, Tapu Koko seemed defeated in a different sort of sense. The guardian of Melemele slowly floated back down to the ground and simply grunted at Sun, the pain Sun felt suddenly vanishing almost entirely, as Tapu Koko went about their next order of business.

Tapu Koko then looked deep into Hau’s eyes. Wordlessly, shakily, Hau held out his hands as if in a trance. Tapu Koko deposited a strange, glittering stone with odd markings on it. Its entire body sparked as its Field flared outwards for hundreds of meters, then immediately condensed until it just barely surrounded Hau and Tapu Koko.

Tapu Koko forced feeling and meaning into Hau as a single wordless, but undeniable request, and Hau tensed as a strange tingling sensation raced through his entire body.

“CAREFUL,” was what Hau roughly divined from the surge of feeling. Raw, powerful, and utterly absolute. Related not with fondness or concern, but unremitting seriousness and importance.

“W-wait, watch out for what?!” Hau asked.
Images of Sun and people who looked like Sun flashed through Hau's mind, bright and nauseating and at ungodly speeds, so much he could barely keep up. They crowded around something much like Nebby, prodding and poking it with odd devices… Then another scene, with them crowding around some massive, otherworldly orb of pure light. An old light, a light beyond light, that screamed out in its centuries-long death throes… And yet, none listened. None cared for its suffering.

There was zooming, flashing, maddening light then, light from everywhere, all the time, all at once. Hau became somewhat nauseous, blinking away tears in his burning eyes. “I don't get it!” he cried, almost pleading it. “Please… I… I don't get it at all!”

There was darkness then. Pure and utter darkness. Darkness to the point that Hau could not see his hand in front of his face. Hau fought back more tears as he heard an ungodly roar, followed by a screech that seemed to rise from the most unholy depths of the cosmos. For a brief moment, there was a beautiful swath of stars amongst the darkness, a burst of extravagant moonbeams, a bastion amongst the murky abyss… But then, once again, there was nothing.

But in a flash, the vast nothingness was replaced with horrible, sickening, relentless light.

Hau trembled in place, rapidly blinking as he tried to dispel his tears and see anything but that horrible, horrible light. There was one last echoing sensation that reverberated through his entire being. An inexorable sense that he’d understand eventually, whether he liked it or not.

Finally, reality came back into view. Hau's stomach settled as he saw Sun and Lillie looking at him worriedly, trying desperately to maintain composure. Tapu Koko was nowhere to be seen. Nebby was completely spent, but at least not on the verge of death again. But Hau was still holding the stone. Gripping it like his life depended on it, as a matter of fact.

“Hau, are you alright?” Lillie asked softly. “Tapu Koko came right up to you and put that stone in your hands… And from there, it just stared at you for a minute, but you seem like that really shook you up, somehow…”

“It… I don’t know. It showed me something, but I can barely tell you what I just saw! All I know is that it sucked ass, and it hurt, and for some reason I saw a bunch of people like Sun, but I have no idea what they were doing, or what else Tapu Koko knows about them… They barely explained anything! The only thing I remember is that they told me to watch out… and they sounded super serious about it.”

Sun and Lillie both frowned at that. Tapu Koko knew something about Sun’s species? But what? And how?

Still, knowing they wouldn’t be able to find answers right away, the group morosely walked back to Iki Town. Nebby had neither the energy or will for any more antics. In fact, Sun could clearly feel their deep regret, along with Lillie’s… and Hau was just as despondent, for his own reasons.

From what Sun had gathered, meeting a Tapu was supposed to be an incredible experience… But that…

That was horrifying.

The teens met the adults about halfway along Mahalo Trail, the adults starting their trek when they began to get worried. As the teens unsteadily related the tale, Sun felt yet more crippling regret radiating off of the adults as well.
He couldn’t help but think that all could’ve been avoided, if only Sha had still been conscious…

There was hardly even room to be excited about Hau getting a Sparkling Stone. Too many other thoughts, too many other questions.

Everyone got home without much more being said, but just before then, Lillie said something that surprised even Sun… although at the same time, part of him understood perfectly.

“Uh… Professor Kukui, Kahuna Hala…” Lillie started, her voice very small. before she took a deep breath and spoke just a bit louder and more breathlessly. “I know I was offered a starter once, and I refused, but… On second thought, if it's not too much trouble… I think I will take Popplio with me…”

Chapter End Notes

Although I had the general concept of this story far before I ever read a certain other fic I'm about to mention, the execution and motivation to do it is partly inspired by another Alola journey fic on here, Eldritch by TaurusVersant. I'm not quite caught up with it yet, but it's been a deeply fascinating read so far.

However, this story does have plenty of my own personal touches, and I think this chapter is a massive indicator of that.

I also felt like Sun was being built up as being a little too awesome and special for a minute there, so this was a good time to show that expectations aren't quite the same as reality. He's still largely a kid trying to find his way, even with special powers and fancy eyes.

Since none of the main stuff from the game should be a real surprise to most people anymore, I have to get creative here. The world of Pokemon is also somewhat darker now, which is also part of why I increased ages to 15.

I'm especially handling Nebby and Lillie rather differently, because I've always thought like...

Isn't a baby god... still a god?

Should Nebby really always be the helpless little creature you think they are?

And what happens if that's not entirely true? How do you deal with it?

Those are some of the concepts I wanted to play around with here...

Along with Lillie going a somewhat different path

After all, in this imagining of the world, what it takes to protect what's important to you is a bit more of a pressing demand and concern than it is in canon....
Chapter 4: Recon and Rematch

Chapter Summary

Hau and Sun have a rematch, and Lillie tentatively dips a toe into the waters of Trainerdom.

But who are those people in the odd, blue and white suits?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lillie’s change of heart came as a something of a shock to everyone, but upon hearing what had happened, it wasn’t too hard to see where she was coming from.

“Nebby and Sun… both of them could’ve died, if it weren’t for Hau… Nebby would’ve fallen in the water, and then they wouldn’t be able to tell Tapu Koko not to attack Sun…” Lillie explained. “I can’t let anything like that happen ever again. They’re both too important to me…”

“Wait… Tapu Koko was going to attack Sun?! Aue, Lillie, you didn’t mention that earlier!” Kukui cried.

“There’s something about Sun’s species… that Tapu Koko absolutely can’t stand…” Hau said. “They tried to show me something involving like, whole crowds of Sun’s species, but it was so intense that it barely made any sense to me… Like, they were all crowded up around something that looked like Nebby, and way more of them were crowded around some huge light… that was… in pain, or something? I don’t know. It hurt so much I could barely take any details in!” Hau explained, throwing his hands up in exasperation.

There were several more uncomfortable questions that followed. The only real good news was that Hau’s Sparkling Stone would be processed into a Z-Power Ring, and there would be a festival in two week’s time, during which Hau wanted his rematch with Sun. Sun and Lillie were advised to use that two week period to both spend time with Hau and explore the local area, challenging Trainers and wild Pokemon to further familiarize themselves with battle and increase their comfort with it… and after all, if they wanted to be stronger, it was their only real option.

After a brief detour, Lillie found herself holding Popplio’s Pokeball. She stared at it with tightly knit brows, frowning as she considered what it all truly meant. Time and time again, she would be subjecting a living being to violence and strife… But she then looked down at her bag, and thought of Nebby. She looked up to the sky, and thought of Tapu Koko… Thought of that searing, crushing, unquestionable disappointment and scorn…

Still, in her case, was choosing to take up Pokemon real strength at all?

Or was she simply continuing to get other beings roped into danger she couldn’t solve herself?

Lillie supposed there was only one way to find out.
Lillie took a deep breath and sent out Popplio. In a burst of light, she materialized, looking up at Lillie questioningly.

“Nice to meet you… Popplio,” Lillie quietly said. “From now on, I hope we can work together,”

The next day, the trio of teens were patrolling Route 1, with their Pokemon alongside them. Hau and Rowlet led the group, Hau walking with a quick, springy step as Sun and Lillie did their best to keep up and listen to his advice.

“Remember… wild Pokemon mainly approach when they actually want to fight, so there's no reason to be afraid you're being a bother. And usually, they'll be on their feet again in a minute or two, or one of their friends will be along to help them, so don't worry that you're making it easier for predators.” Hau advised.

Sun and Lillie nodded in understanding, and the first day exploring the surrounding wilderness yielded decent enough results. Wild Pokemon were such simple opponents that they yielded even to weak attacks. Most Pokemon in the area were young, and often a bit arrogant or overly eager, wanting to challenge any Trainers that came through in hopes of being able to get stronger… Or simply in hopes of consistent meals and increased safety.

Even if wild Pokemon lost, they could still learn something, and if they were captured, it could be their big break. So either way, many wild Pokemon would fight even if they were aware that they couldn't win.

Lillie was still uncomfortable with actual Trainers, but Sun found the courage to go up against younger Trainers alongside wild Pokemon… A few children and teens who lived in the area, too young or unprepared to go on a full adventure, but old enough to take their Pokemon into the local wilderness. The group also stopped by the Trainer’s School in Hau’oli, as many children and newly official Trainers gathered there as well.

On one hand, their typical power and skill was a cut below Hau and Rowlet.

On the other hand, Sun still had issues figuring out what the best way to compromise fairness, kindness, and aggression was.

Lillie had issues mustering the will to battle at all, finding it hard to even command her Pokemon in the slightest with all the racing thoughts and concerns that would swim through her mind.

The first few other Trainers were still hard almost entirely because of that, with Sha still taking undue damage and being overly limited in what he was allowed to do in return. Sun pulled off victories just barely, and Sha needed to recuperate for quite some time afterwards.

Lillie's Popplio honestly carried her through battles by making the decisions on her own, rather than being directed by Lillie. Lillie healed her almost obsessively, continually wondering at how she could possibly have such zeal for battle even if she got injured. Part of Lillie, despite reading about battles on a regular basis, had always partially believed that having Pokemon required you to always be actively pushing them to fight.

But Popplio… simply seemed to fight for the sake of fighting, the excitement of it all, the thrill of victory. Lillie found herself not fully understanding, even in spite of her reading... and in turn, the difference between knowing and yet not truly understanding began to hamper her and Popplio before long. Although Lillie was always kind to her, Lillie already got the sense that Popplio resented that part of her. She was falling into the habit of simply taking Popplio from fight to fight, passively
allowing the little pinniped to rack up battle experience without Lillie's actual guidance. Lillie knew it was unsustainable, but wasn't entirely sure what else to do... or at least, wasn't ready to do what needed to be done.

It was nothing like Sun, trying his hardest to push the envelope and extend his comfort zone...

Nothing like Hau, who was well within his comfort zone to start with, having a blast with every battle he partook in...

Honestly... it really did feel like she was still just relying entirely on someone else.

Over the next two days, Sun started to hit his stride. With his telepathy, he had an alternative way of quickly alerting the opponent to his next move, preserving his need for a certain level of fairness. Fortunately, a psychic human was simply rare rather than impossible, so people were merely surprised to see it at the most.

There was an immediate difference, as Sun's orders went from slow and clunky to swift and fluid. Without having to obsess over getting his words right, the battles automatically became far less stressful. All that was left was considering how he wanted Sha to approach and maneuver.

Sha suddenly proved more than able to dance circles around opponents, quite literally, given their speed and aerial maneuvering. Not even a boy with three Pokemon was safe. He was merely fodder for Sha's Beast Boost ability, his novice Pokemon easily bested by Sha's empowered Acid attacks.

By the end of the first three days, Sha noticeably looked to be in high spirits, surging with accomplishment in spite of their simultaneous heavy breathing.

Sun immediately noticed the massive contrast from how things were after his first battle with Hau. Just seeing that, Sha's sheer contentment to have proven their strength, to be able to feel the exhilaration of being able to battle at their best… That alone was enough to please Sun as well.

For the most part, the rest of the week continued on in a similar fashion. Sun and Sha would continue to challenge wild Pokemon, sparingly adding in a few Trainers for good measure. They would pack food sometimes, but remained close enough to home that he could merely walk back to either the lab or Hau's house whenever a mealtime came along. Hau would almost always be with him, after all, along with Lillie, who would typically bring healing items as well.

Overall, Sun had improved dramatically from the first battle, and almost all of it was merely because his mindset towards battle had shifted a bit. Sha was starting to improve too, but the difference was rather minor. It was largely because they were getting more used to battle, rather than a lot of physical improvement on their part.

However, Hau hadn't just idly sat by, passively overseeing Sun's progress. He'd trained and battled as well, seeming to be having the time of his life every step of the way. Sun couldn't help but feel it was rather infectious. His confidence and optimism affected Rowlet too, causing him to maintain a rather pompous attitude throughout the entire week. After every victory, his chest would be proudly puffed outwards. Sun had to admit, so far there was simply nothing to make Rowlet think otherwise. He was undefeated, and his self-confidence had his Field operating at excellent efficiency.

Meanwhile, Kukui and Burnet struggled to make heads or tails of the new pressing questions they had to work with…

The actual extent of Nebby's abilities… Everything about how Tapu Koko had acted….
What Tapu Koko was trying to tell Hau…
Why Tapu Koko had such disdain for Sun...

But the answers to such questions would not come so easily.

By the start of the second week, Hala recommended that Sun and Hau each think about getting a second Pokemon, if they wanted to… Lillie didn’t miss how her recommendation was simply to get more comfortable with the differences between her and Popplio.

Sun knew how Lillie felt without her even having to say it out loud. While they were once again all exploring the wilderness together, she simply spoke into his mind, so as to not alert Hau and draw his concern as well.

“Sun… do you really think I’m cut out for this?” Lillie silently asked, outwardly doing nothing but casting Sun a furtive glance. “You and Hau… it’s already been recommended that you could both catch a second Pokemon. Meanwhile, I still have to work with Popplio, because I can barely muster up the heart to even command her in a battle… and I can tell it gets on her nerves, the way I don’t really pull my weight… Even when it’s as simple as telling her to dodge, my timing is still off.”

Sun responded with an indignant no, trying his best to reassure Lillie that she was still doing a great job so far. After all, she’d only just started, and most full Pokemon journeys took at least three years. Even then, probably at least four, if a Trainer wanted to best the Elite Four or their Final Trial as well. You needed Tier Fives on your team to have any chance even qualifying for a chance to face the Elite Four or a Final Trial, and a couple of Tier Sixes had become pretty much mandatory to actually beat them all. And the ’at least’ was important. Even those times were considered fast, and still uncommon in the grand scheme of things. Faster times had been recorded regardless, but typically on the order of a few months faster. Shaving off a whole year or more was outright anomalous, typically only recorded on an order or one or two cases per year.

It didn’t help that as knowledge of Pokemon rose to greater heights, so too did the standards of training. Several decades ago, seriously challenging the best of the best would’ve been possible with Tier Fours alone… And they wouldn’t have been measured with a modern Tier system at all. A Tier 5 would’ve been enough to put someone at the top of the world. Capturing or raising a Tier 6 would’ve been a ridiculous concept. A Tier 7 would’ve been even more flagrantly impossible to obtain than it was in the modern era.

With all that in mind, Sun honestly felt it was too early to tell much of anything for certain, but he still felt that Lillie was trying her best. Still, Lillie wasn’t entirely satisfied with that. It was like being stuck between a rock and a hard place… On one side, her strong desire to see Pokemon remain safe, happy, and unharmed… On the other side, her pressing need to protect everything and everyone she cared about. That wasn’t even mentioning the deep, burning judgment of Tapu Koko, still stamped deep into her very soul…

The kind of judgment that wormed its way to the very depths of her soul, rifling its way through her every past action and intention...

Sun frowned at that. Guardian or not, Tapu Koko struck him as an excessively harsh being, even if they did have an entire island to oversee. How could they proclaim to accurately judge someone they’d only met once? Even if they could see into a person's depths, what gave them the right to do it so painfully and suddenly?

Lillie smiled a bit at that, even if it was moderately alarming to hear someone be so casually
disapproving of a Tapu… Especially when she personally felt Tapu Koko had a point. After all, all four guardians were thought to possess a limited form of omniscience, as long as it concerned their respective islands. They were perfectly in tune with the land, and those who lived on it. It was said that they were almost precisely as old as Alola itself.

Sun was still rather unimpressed. Anyone that old should've learned proper manners after all that time, honestly.

Lillie had to admit, as much as Sun's opinion of Tapu Koko was almost dangerously cavalier, it was also oddly comforting, how he didn't take too much stock in it. How he would still choose to believe in someone like her over a godlike being.

Before long, with a bit of urging from Sun, Lillie voiced her concerns to Hau and Kukui as well, which led to Hau and Sun having friendly practice spars with Lillie. Sometimes Kukui would join in as well, if he had the time. The point wasn't really to see who won, but merely to help Lillie become more comfortable with commands.

The results were mixed. Far from terrible, but they hadn't entirely cracked the code. Not to mention that Popplio had a bit of a willful streak, and while she did still obey, she would often choose to interpret and execute the orders in ways completely different from what Lillie expected. Such displays of her own creativity and will would often throw Lillie off, further delaying and interfering with her attempts to give orders.

Meanwhile, Sun and Hau scoured the area for new team members. Both had a bit of trouble deciding, there were already several fascinating options even within the limited range they currently roamed… But ultimately, Sun decided on type coverage. Something to satisfy either Sha's Ground weakness or Psychic weakness.

Finally, after a night of reflection, he came to a decision.

Meanwhile, Hau decided he'd try specifically for a Pokemon that arrived during SOS Battles. SOS Battles occurred when Wild Pokemon called allies for help.

Under normal circumstances, SOS Battles appeared to follow certain rules of etiquette. Only one extra Pokemon would be called at a time, and the Trainer would still never be attacked directly. It was important to recognize the difference between an SOS Battle and wild Pokemon who were simply trying to eliminate a Trainer at any cost.

Later on, SOS Battles became more beneficial…

But at his early stage, Hau merely wanted to capture something from an SOS Battle for reasons relating to the psychology of Pokemon involved in them.

Many times, Pokemon who would aid others in wild battles also tended to be more helpful and cooperative once caught, although it was important to keep an eye on how they acted in order to get a better idea of why exactly they chose to help. Sometimes it was almost the opposite, helping only because they disliked humans or didn't want their friend to be captured. Sometimes they were only there to steal their partner's thunder.

After hours of effort, Hau ended up with a scrappy little Pichu… But sure enough, Sun and Lillie could see how Hau's decision had paid off. The Pichu was instantly friendly and cooperative, requiring amazingly little effort to command and get along with.
Lillie made sure to keep mental note of such a strategy if she ever got to the point of capturing a second team member.

About two hours afterwards, Sun's decision led him to the dense, fenced-in greenery near the Trainer's School, he and Sha steadily powering through Meowth and Grimer, while doing their best to avoid Magnemite. Sun made a mental note to get a Pokemon that could properly do something about Steel-types soon. For the time being, if Sha really had to fight Magnemite, the best option was to just gum the magnets up and steadily wear it down. It was a rare case where Sun learned it really was best to aim for the eye, given that it wasn't quite like a delicate, biological eye.

For a time, there was no luck, even with Sun's keen vision scanning the area… But then, a child on a bench just outside of the area screamed about someone taking their hamburger. Sun turned around and saw through the little creature's disguise immediately. Not a human at all. They'd merely taken up the appearance of a young girl in order to get closer to students without suspicion. Typical Zorua tactics, from what Sun had read.

Sun quickly had Sha move to block the Zorua's escape path. Rather than continuing to run, the creature dropped its disguise immediately and prepared to fight, which was a good sign. The hamburger unfortunately just fell to the ground, with huge bite marks already taken out. Sun made a brief mental note that he could perhaps get the student another once the fight was over.

Sha was quickly commanded to glue up Zorua's legs as the Zorua rushed in with Pursuit, wreathed in a shadowy veil as their Field came out and partially absorbed the light around them.

Sha's attack fortunately hit dead on, causing Zorua to trip and tumble along the ground as Sha immediately began to glue their body further, keeping the acidity just mild enough to weaken them a bit but not seriously harm them. By time they were done, the Zorua could only squirm helplessly.

Sun then threw a Pokeball at the immobilized Zorua, sucking it out of the glue trap. Hopefully it would work the first time, or else Sha would have to re-trap the creature… And Zorua would probably wise up the second time around.

Unfortunately, that was exactly what happened. Zorua burst free in a flood of light, shaking themself off and immediately going for a menacing Leer. A weak Field projected outwards suddenly, along their line of sight, impacting Sha's and causing its nature to slightly change, somewhat reducing the extra durability it could afford them.

Sha shrank back a bit, and Zorua immediately followed with a Pursuit. Sun already knew Pursuit was trickier to dodge than a plain Tackle, however, and quickly came up with an idea. Sha was instructed to strike with glue right at the base of Zorua's feet, successfully triggering the little fox to jump high.

Sha then immediately punished the decision with a speedy Fury Attack, their top nozzle ramming the Zorua high into the air before they then slammed Zorua right back down to earth with their tail, following with a spurt of glowing glue for good measure.

Zorua whined in frustration as they were once again pinned by glue, then opened their mouth wide, their Field concentrating in their mouth as they charged up a small globule of dark, highly energized gases.

It then exploded, the Zorua sputtering and wincing at the blowback as the shockwave propagated. Sha took it with ease as the shockwave of gas and explosive force petered out before it could even reach Sun.
Sun excitedly got out another Pokeball, recognizing that the Zorua apparently had Dark Pulse, although it looked to be far from mastered. The energy usage was highly inefficient, Sha didn't seem nearly as hurt as they should've been, and the attack's shockwave had hurt Zorua a bit too. They must have inherited it from a parent, and only used it in desperation.

Once again, Sun threw a Pokeball. The broken first ball was designed to have its teleporting mechanism remain intact after a failed capture, so it had already teleported away to be reprocessed, through the same mechanism that teleported them when Trainers had more than six Pokemon. In that way, littering with Pokeball waste was largely prevented.

Meanwhile, the second ball shook… and shook… and shook… then finally stopped. Sun couldn't help but grin from ear to ear, as Hau cheered excitedly and Lillie looked on in wonder.

“Awesome, Sun! You got a Zorua with a super cool extra attack!” Hau called.

“If I remember correctly, Zorua's energy-based attacks are naturally superior to its physical ones, so that Dark Pulse should be really helpful if you manage to master it together!” Lillie said.

The child whose burger had been stolen approached Sun as well. They were a boy with shaggy, dark brown hair, looking to be about 11 or 12 years old.

“Dude, thanks for catching that Zorua! That's one less of those little jerks constantly tricking everyone...” the boy said, grumbling slightly after he said it. However, his tone immediately perked up considerably after Sun offered to replace his burger, although the boy was initially a bit confused by Sun's method of communication.

“Dude, holy crap, that's so cool of you!” the boy exclaimed. “I've heard psychics are weird or kinda stuck up sometimes, but I guess that's not true! My name's Dale, what's yours?” Sun gave a response, and Dale grinned.

“I'm from Unova, so it's been kinda hard getting used to everything, and getting to know people… But you made my day a lot better. Thanks, Sun.” Dale said.

Sun replied by letting Dale know that he was also from far away, adding that he was from another planet in a seemingly joking sort of way.

“You're funny, dude!” Dale said with a laugh.

Sun laughed as well, but for a decidedly different reason.

“To be from somewhere so different, it seems like Alola is a great fit for Sun,” Hau quietly said to Lillie, intentionally keeping his language a bit vague.

“Oh, yes, Sun's always been good at this kind of thing!” Lillie said. “He's kind, intelligent, focused, a fast learner… and given his situation, he handles everything so well! It's amazing, really,”

“So... do you... you know...” Hau said, suddenly smirking mischievously as Sun and Dale walked off, Dale still chatting amicably.

“Do I what?” Lillie asked.

“Well, from the way you're talking about him... “ Hau continued, his smirk only growing as he giggled slightly. Lillie started to catch on, her face flushing.

“I didn't mean it like that! Sun is a wonderful person, but, it's just... Something about it feels like I'd
be dating my brother. Not even my brother, actually… To be more precise, it'd be like dating part of myself.”

“Really?” Hau asked. “And not like, the sarcastic disbelieving really, but like… Actual curious really. What does that mean?”

“Sun and I have a mental connection… and it's… special. Very special. Ever since he first woke up here, I was the first person he ever formed any kind of psychic connection or bond with. I've been the main one helping him learn to read and write. Meanwhile, he's been helping me, in his own ways… Even if he doesn't always realize it,” Lillie explained. “I'm positive that all of this would've been much harder without him being there…”

“It's great you have someone that makes you feel that way!” Hau said. “Great for everyone else that it's platonic, too… Sun's a catch, after all. Brings you presents, compliments you, smart, sensitive, attractive, good with Pokemon, a great runner… You'll have to beat people off of him with a stick!”

“As friendly as he is, I'm not even sure if he'd ever like a human in that way… So far, I haven't felt anything like him having a crush. But then again, so far, he still has a lot more people to meet,” Lillie said… “But given that you just called him attractive…”

“I, well, you know!” Hau stammered, briefly caught off guard. “I just meant that in a general way! You know, just to be nice!”

Lillie smiled a small smile. Hau didn't fail to notice.

“It's not like that! Really! I haven't even really known him for two weeks! I only heard his name less than two months ago!” Hau protested, wildly waving his hands about.

Lillie's tiny smile didn't fade, but she was polite enough to let Hau off the hook.

Perhaps Hau was telling the truth for the time being, but it was still kinda fun to think about… They'd make a cute couple!

Provided they could still be together if Sun found a way home…

Lillie didn't particularly like to open that particular can of Wurmple, largely because it was an issue that affected her as well.

She was less than willing to admit she'd had a couple of nightmares along those lines already, especially with the stress and life upheaval that came with deciding to become a Trainer. The thought of Sun just going off somewhere and getting sucked into a portal, without ever even being able to say goodbye…

The thought that he might go through it and completely forget everyone, just as he'd forgotten everyone from his homeworld…

The thought that if he went there, he might actually be worse off…. How much worse off, Lillie dreaded to consider.

As time went on, Lillie found that those ideas never became any less terrifying.

Once Hau and Sun each had their second Pokemon, the day of the festival arrived soon enough.

Lillie decided she wasn't ready to battle there yet, not with such an audience, even if it wasn't that big of a festival.
Meanwhile, Sun and Hau were both rather excited, although Sun hadn't made quite as much progress as he would've liked with Zorua. They were female, and definitely a spunky sort, but it was a bit harder for Sun to communicate with them due to their Dark-typing. It wasn't impossible, as evidenced by certain moves, but he had to be more careful, taking the time to carefully focus and guide his messages through Zorua's Psychic-dampening Field, extending and trying to synchronize his own Field to use it as a safer transfer channel.

As a direct side-effect, Sun had also barely gotten a chance to make any progress with Dark Pulse, mostly just having Zorua battle wild Pokemon with what she was already good at in order to build up more comfort with her first. Still, she seemed very amused by the fact that they both shared an ability to create illusions.

With Zorua not trained as well as Sun would've liked, Sun had decided to delay entering town a bit, making sure that Sha was completely up to snuff. Not to mention, it was his first time at a large human social gathering of any kind, so he wanted to make sure he was satisfied with his outfit. He wore his sunset shirt, and put an illusion over it which changed it to a shirt depicting midday. With that, he was pretty much satisfied…. But as it turned out, what his shirt looked like was the least of Sun's concerns.

Suddenly, two people in odd but strangely familiar blue and white suits showed up. Lillie immediately froze, clutching her bag protectively. Sun just took a wary stance upon sensing Lillie's fear… while also seeing something else, through infra-red.

Those people weren’t warm-blooded.

“Sun. They haven’t noticed us yet…” Lillie silently started. “We can still avoid them, if we-” she tried to continue, before both of them suddenly turned around. They looked to be a petite young girl with orange hair in a long braid, and a young adult man with a tuft of magenta hair sticking out of his helmet. Sun and Lillie tensed up, already realizing the familiarity of that long orange braid...

Their masked gazes vaguely seemed to fix briefly on Lillie, who backed away behind Sun… But then, they were undeniably focused on Sun.

Sun tensed even further, automatically spreading his arms out wide in front of Lillie.

“Sun, Lillie, what’s going on? Who are they, what’s the-”

Suddenly, with an enormous grin, the girl suddenly pressed a button on her helmet, near one of her cheeks, and began excitedly, rapidly speaking to Sun in an all too familiar language.

“Sovonanoje! Iruge zahnt eshse Halo? Halo Anwaiaz, Halo-incanze?!” the girl excitedly spoke. “Prisevey Necrozma!”

Everyone’s eyes widened, but none more than Sun’s.

“Koncuv tey! Tey!” the girl continued, frantically pointing between her and the taller man. “Ahz Zossie-” she said, pointing to herself, “-gauti Dulse!” she finished, pointing to the older man. Both of them dropped their disguises, revealing very pale blue skin, with the same dark blue ‘freckles’ as Sun. However, it was obvious that their freckles were far fewer in number.

Dulse didn’t seem to even know what to say before Zossie quickly turned to him… her eyes and mouth briefly flashing violet in the process.
“Kumihvu alosleyte teyi, Halo-incanze…” Dulse said quietly, his voice cracking slightly. “Kumihvu alosleyte, gides… presimyude! Presimyude Halo-incanze! Prisevey Necrozma! Prisevey Necrozma!” he continued, hardly able to speak any louder as he seemed to be on the verge of tears.

“...You.. thought... you thought Sun was dead?” Lillie asked, warily. Zossie and Dulse noticeably flinched at how she’d managed to parse exactly what they’d just said.

“Woah, hold up, you can understand them?!” Hau cried.

“I’ll explain later,” Lillie quickly told him. “But what’s this about Sun being… a royal heir?”

Zossie and Dulse both quickly pressed small buttons near their cheeks again, then continued to speak.


Sun just stared, absolutely blank-faced, not even beginning to know how to handle the situation. He continued holding his arms out protectively, purely because he had no idea what else to do.

“And why isn’t Halo wearing visors outdoors?! The light here is harmful, their eyes are delicate treasures!” Zossie protested.

Sun looked at her like she had no idea what she was talking about, but promptly dropped his disguise.

“Incanze…?” Dulse inquired. “How did you possibly get so many luvekke?”

“Light nodes?” Lillie asked. “They’ve just been… multiplying, I guess? But, respectfully, what does that have to do with anything?”

“And their skin! Such color! Such sheen! It truly puts us to shame! Truly, only the Incanze is worthy of skin of such fine quality!” Zossie gushed. “No one has been adorned with so many luvekke since the Bright Ages! Oh, Halo, you’re just gorgeous!”

Sun blushed at that, although he silently conveyed that his name was “Sun”, not “Halo”.

“As you wish, Incanze!” Dulse responded. Sun just quietly impressed upon him that he wasn’t an ‘Incanze’ either. Dulse just shook his head at that. “Incanze… don’t you remember anything? Of course you’re Incanze. Halo-Incanze, the last Incanze of the Grand Luminaries”

“Okay, I am like, barely following any of this, but... Grand Luminaries?” Hau asked.

“Like your concepts of kings and queens. But without birthright. The Grand Luminaries were instead proven to be the most talented and genetically worthy amongst us. Even Halo was tested to make sure they were truly worthy of being Incanze…”

Lillie just cast a look at Sun, silently asking if any of it rang a bell. Sun just frowned even more, his nodes glowing bright white. The people were strongly familiar, as were the outfits, and that was definitely the correct language, but there was absolutely nothing beyond that.

“You people tried to stop Nebby and I back then… You both act so nice to Sun, but you were fine
with what was happening to Nebby!”

“Cosmog, Nebby, or whatever your species calls those creatures… There are countless things to be learned from them. Still… I do understand what you're saying. We would not abide what happened to Cosmog if it weren’t for the circumstances… So… let's make a deal.” Dulse said, quickly glancing at Zossie again.

“What kind of deal?” said Hau and Lillie, almost simultaneously.

“We will not harass you for ‘Nebby’. Nor will we alert your mother to your whereabouts. But please keep Halo safe.” Dulse requested.

“A deal? That's it? What's the catch?” Hau asked. “...And Lillie, why are they talking about your mom? What's going on with that?”

“They'll be wanting Halo back… Our homeworld… But..” Zossie's face contorted, her few visible nodes flickering white and midnight blue, although her eyes were hidden behind her visor. “Our homeworld is not doing well, by any means... And…”

“Zossie, shouldn't Sun-Incanze resume their duties promptly?” Dulse asked.

“Yeah, but Dulse, everyone back home knows things are bad! What's the use in lying to them about it?! Halo seems like they're doing so much better here! And they barely remember us, or anything! It would be unfair to force them back when they barely even understand what's actually going on!”

Lillie smiled a bit, relaxing ever-so-slightly. At least in Zossie's case, maybe those two weren't so bad...

“It is true that everyone else believes Halo is dead... So, if we neglected to report this… They would merely continue to assume as such… But is that really fair to the Grand Luminaries?” Dulse asked.

“Halo's parents are full of shit and everyone fucking knows it,” Zossie said flatly. Dulse gasped at that, his nodes going dark green. Sun winced, despite having little to no knowledge on if that was correct or not.

“Zossie!” Dulse cried, although he looked around for a moment before quietly muttering “I do think you have a point, though…”.

“And what if they can't restore all of Halo's memories even once they come home? What will everyone think of their Incanze then? An Incanze who is by definition, supposed to be wise, capable, powerful, a genetic elite among the people...” Zossie asked. “They'd have to cover it up... That would be a disaster waiting to happen... Things are already under enough political strain as it is”

“You're right. We can't approach this too hastily... Reporting it now would only have them hounding us to take immediate action,” Dulse said. “So... Inca- ... Sun-Incanze.” Sun half-shrugged, supposing that was... good enough, for the time being, even though he would still just prefer 'Sun'. “I do get the sense we will meet again. Our hope is that eventually, you will regain enough of your memory to be able to make a proper decision on whether or not you will return home. Please consider it... Although it is true these are tumultuous times for us, the Ultra Megalopolis is in great need of people to help calm the chaos... and I believe you are perhaps more suited for that than anyone else, Sun-Incanze.”

“Alright, but I still don’t really get this? Why does everyone think Sun’s dead? How is he here instead? How are you here? Why is your Ultra Mega Whatever in such bad shape?” Hau asked, as
he balled his fists and narrowed his eyes at the two.

“...There was... a horrible accident...” Zossie said. “I’m sorry. The incident is highly classified... the Great Luminaries were heading the project leading up to it, and they wouldn’t want anyone to know that supposedly perfect beings would make such a dire mistake...” Zossie’s voice crawled along, more restrained, and she clenched her hands, trembling slightly, taking on a dark blue glow as she continued to speak.

“What’s most important for you to know is that Halo was terribly wounded in the accident, and had to be put in an experimental machine to heal. This machine was designed to pull on the energy of Ultra Space itself in order to heal, beyond what we are normally capable of under our circumstances, given that we are terribly strapped for resources... But it was highly experimental. To the extent that Ultra Space couldn’t be approved to be used as a widespread power source. Even knowing that, we took the risk, if it was for the sake of saving the Incanze. And... well, obviously, that was... a mixed bag.” Zossie explained. Hau steadily calmed again, seeing how she was sounding and acting.

“On one hand, Sun-Incanze is miraculously alive and healthy, by the grace of The Blinding One! The machine worked long enough for them to survive what should’ve killed them!... On the other hand, the machine violently exploded, and the process must have violently torn open the micro-gauge wormholes the machine was pulling and converting energy from, enough to blast them straight into Ultra Space. However, by yet another miracle, Sun-Incanze survived entry into another dimension, and successfully thrived in the dimension’s biochemistry.” Dulse explained.

“It must’ve been hard at first... even with Ultra Space’s energy, the revitalization machine took a toll on Halo... I remember them being much thinner and paler when they were inside, not to mention the drastic decline in luvekke. Even worse, the greenhouses have only been able to support a narrow variety of natural food since Halo was young... We can’t even raise real meat beyond just our sessile, bio-engineered flesh-pods anymore. Even artificially, it became too resource-intensive... Many of us are down to meat fungi and protein mosses, not even able to have the flesh-pods...”

Sun just stared. So that explained why he arrived in poor condition... It wasn’t directly anyone’s fault he was like that. But still, his ‘homeworld’ didn’t sound like a very good place at all...

“Uh, excuse me, but you still didn’t answer one of Hau’s questions... why is your world doing so badly?” Lillie explained.

“...There was... an incident. More accurately, a great series of awful incidents, leading to the most horrible, disgusting incident of all. Our ancestors, led by the previous, disgraced Luminaries, did a truly unforgivable thing... And now, our planet has been plunged into eternal darkness, and eternal winter. Our off-world colonies too. Half the storms are not only cold, but horrendously toxic. And there are... things out there. Things I’m not allowed to discuss. What was once a spacefaring race, with multiple worlds colonized... It all fell to ruin. Disaster after disaster, atrocity upon atrocity... We are reduced to one city, one people, built on whatever technology and information we could salvage... Just 30 million of us left, as far as we know. Unfortunately, it’s already proven that for at least our planet and our moons, everyone else is gone. Perhaps there are other settlements, scattered out in our star systems, somewhere. We wouldn’t know. Not anymore. Possibly not ever again.”

Dulse’s nodes were a dark blue as he related the tale. A bit of steam issued from the slit of his visor.

All three teenagers present just stared blankly at Dulse and Zossie.

“You did ask...” Dulse added on, as he looked down and kicked idly at the ground.
“No offense, but this is a ton to take in… I mean, I knew there was probably some wild story behind Sun showing up, but not that he’s some kinda lost royalty of some post-apocalyptic alien dystopia!” Hau loudly exclaimed.

“Quiet. Even with an explanation this stripped down, there are things we weren’t supposed to tell you,” Dulse said.

“But… if you all thought Sun was dead, and you also just said you aren’t going to take Cosmog… why are you here in the first place?” Lillie asked.

“…That’s classified,” Dulse flatly stated. “ Mostly. What we can tell you is—”

“We’re part of the Ultra Recon Squad. We traverse Ultra Space to discover new things about other worlds.” Zossie continued.

“…So are you doing that so you can leave your world one day?” Hau asked.

“That’s also classified,” Dulse said flatly. Hau tried not to pout.

“Mainly, we’re hoping we can learn some way to restore our world… But there aren’t many of us in the Ultra Recon Squad. Expanding it much is hard with our current resource and energy levels… Similarly, that makes the concept of using the squad to transport resources from other worlds too inefficient to solve our problem,” Zossie explained. “It definitely sucks sinuous ch’rug…” she finished, flickering violet.

“Language!” Dulse scolded. Sun flickered with green at the word Zossie used, stifling a laugh, but one look from Dulse had him apologetically bowing his head.

“Anyway… That’s all we can comfortably tell you. For now, we’ll leave you alone, but we will be keeping an eye out for you,” Zossie said. “Until next time, Halo!” she added on, much more cheerily, before she and Dulse donned light-skinned human disguises, did a rather robotic version of the Alola gesture, then walked away, their steps noticeably more like an odd form of marching than typical walking.

“Well… I think it’s safe to say that that was just straight up weird,” Hau said. “Sun, do you even remember who those people are to you?” Sun frowned as he went a bright white with the sheer effort of thinking. However, he concluded by merely taking a resigned breath and returning to his disguised form. It was like he… almost did. Like remembering imprints in his mind where they were supposed to slot right in, but not really remembering them.

“Still, it was nice of them to be so considerate… whoever they are, I get the feeling they genuinely care for Sun… Even if Zossie kept calling him Halo.” Lillie said. Sun silently agreed.

A ways away, Zossie and Dulse stiffly marched in silence, doing their best to remember all of their training on proper emotional control. Still, wisps of steam steadily wafted from their visors, despite their otherwise successful efforts to maintain human illusions.

Hau never did get his answer to his question about Lillie’s mother.

“I can understand if the Incanze has forgotten me… But for the Incanze to forget even their own cousin…” Dulse silently communicated to Zossie. “Why didn’t you remind them?”
“Dulse, please! Halo loved you very much, and you always served them well! A little amnesia can’t disprove that! But when it comes to your question... I want to believe that in time, Halo will remember on their own. Making them feel obligated to love someone they don’t remember would just be selfish, even if it’s family. I don’t want to manipulate them into coming back... Everyone manipulates them enough as it is...” Zossie said.

“Soliera has said that there could even be a coup, with the further instability caused by Halo-Incanze’s ‘death’. But as they are, the Incanze would only be a liability, merely another weak point for revolters and assassins to exploit. They wouldn’t receive even a shred of freedom... So, even if they were to come back...” Dulse trailed off.

“It’s not like we could carry on like we used to...” Zossie immediately filled in.

“So that’s that, then. Either we disgrace our people, or we disgrace ourselves...”

“This feels like greasy ch’rugu...”

“Zossie.”

“Well, it’s true!”

“You can’t prove that! As if you’ve gained any reproductive rights yet!”

“Well, neither have you...”

“That’s besides the point!”

“As if anyone has actual sex anymore anyway, libido is through the floor with all those food additives...”

“Good point,” Dulse said with a sigh, as they both realized the pointlessness of continuing the argument.

Meanwhile, Sun, Hau and Lillie prepared to properly join the Iki Town festival.

Iki Town was not especially populated, really being more of a village than anything... But still, the people made up for numbers with passion. The town square was thoroughly decorated with colorful streamers and banners, and there were tables full of refreshments, with brightly colored cloths on them.

In the center of it all was a great wooden stage, the edges decorated with ornate white markings.

Sun knew that it was where the rematch between him and Hau would take place.

Hau had his new Pichu, a tiny but scrappy creature, already beyond his tendency to harm himself with electricity. That was mostly for the youngest of Pichu, and his field was a bright, healthy Tier 1, indicating that he had already started to acquire more control over his power with Hau’s help. Pichu had reached a point where only his most powerful, reckless shocks could threaten his small form.

Sun still had only Sha, not believing he was quite ready to accept a permanent new team member. But he would be lying if he said it wasn’t tempting. He could still barely remember any other species
from before… In comparison, Alola came off as a veritable wonderland of Pokemon, even if he'd only seen a fraction of it.

Still, Sha was sharper than before. Swifter, more practiced, venom and chemicals more potent, and quicker to respond to threats and commands alike. They were fully steeped in the feel of battle now, and seemed to like it quite a lot more without Sun excessively restraining them.

For Sun's part, he was a touch nervous, but oddly at peace. Something about Hau in general put him at ease at some times, and energized him at others. A steady warmth, softening and brightening as needed.

Regardless of the potential outcome, Sun would gladly have a rematch with Hau.

Hau and Sun took to the stage. Sun sent out Sha, to a variety of 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the crowd.

But still, people were more willing to accept a strange Pokemon, especially one as cute and non-imposing as Sha. People already accepted that Pokemon came with a massive amount of unknowns, and new ones were still periodically being discovered. All it took was a cover-up story about Sha being from some remote island, and most people took that as gospel.

Pichu made a display of power first, crackling with sparks. Sha's Field was brighter, pulsing slowly in time with Sun's, while Pichu's and Hau's formed a quick, but tenuous and slightly clumsy rhythm.

As everyone watched, Sun allowed Hau the first move.

Pichu shot out a jolt that skipped and danced along the wooden floor, his Field stretching and snaking outwards to keep up with it, but Sha shot upwards, the jolt jumping up to reach it but fizzling out in midair.

Sha plummeted back down, swooping over Pichu and pelting him with globs of gooey cyan. Then, with a graceful backflip, Sha crashed down right on top of him, pinning him to the floor.

Sha giggled as they zipped back towards Sun, and Pichu found himself entirely unable to move. He squealed and chittered in irritation, flailing about and casting off little jolts of electricity with abandon, bit it was hopeless.

“Pichu!” Hau called, quickly returning him just before Sha swooped back in to finish him off. In just another moment, Rowlet was on the field, raring for a rematch.

Sun realized that Hau hadn't allowed him to get a Beast Boost going, which would've certainly made the rematch between Rowlet and Sha a whole lot faster.

“Ahhight, Rowlet, you got this!” Hau called. “Leafage!”

Hau announced the move, but it was barely any use. It missed by a country mile. Sha slipped past it with ease, using the speed of the dodge to follow up with a flurry of Peck attacks, repeatedly jabbing Rowlet with its main nozzle.

Rowlet tried to respond in kind, but Sha's last jab was immediately followed by Rowlet being blinded by a thick, rubbery ooze of purple. Fortunately, its PH was neutral. Still, Rowlet acted as if it didn't know that, screeching and flailing about in the air with the sheer shock of being unable to see.

Once again, Hau recalled his Pokemon, his face scrunched up in thought.
“Pichu! Charm!” Hau called, as he sent Pichu back out, the recall to its ball having saved it from being trapped in glue. Sun knew that Charm didn't affect Sha's toxin generation, only reducing his physical damage… But still…

As Pichu took an alarmingly cute pose, Sha was taken off guard just enough for him to get a quick volley of small electrical jolts in edgewise.

Sha hissed at the pain but quickly shook it off, immediately firing off a brief flurry of glowing Acid globs. With Pichu's small size and quick reflexes, he put up a valiant dodging effort at first, but he was young and inexperienced, so his clumsiness betrayed him, allowing three globs to hit their mark.

Pichu cried out as the attack stung its skin, then Sun saw his Field thin and waver, like a soap bubble on the verge of bursting in the wind. Finally, despite his scrappiness, Pichu fell. His small Field fully dispersed as his body automatically directed the rest inwards, to rest and restore himself. Still, the Acid hadn't been strong enough to actually eat through Pichu's skin. Pichu's body was merely taking measures to prevent any deeper damage.

Sha happily took it for themself, and Sun laughed, mentally lavished them with praise as they twirled about in the air, then burst into a soft cyan glow, Beast Boost activating without a hitch.

Hau smiled as well.

“It's alright Pichu, you got a good hit in!” Hau called, as he returned Pichu. “And that's it, Sun! You're doing great! You too, Sha!”

Sun briefly struggled not to let any green light through his disguise, giggling as Hau sent out Rowlet, who joyfully flitted about upon realizing he could see again.

Sun quickly commanded an Acid, but Hau ordered a Leafage, artfully blowing the globules off-course and pummeling Sha as well. Using that opening, Hau ordered another Tackle-Peck combo. Rowlet's Field contracted and increased its density, as the little owl swooped upwards, then divebombed, directing the Field inwards to power himself forward with all his might.

However, Sha dodged at the last possible moment, and followed up with an immediate burst of poisoned glue, suddenly binding Rowlet's wings from behind. Unable to pull up, Rowlet gave a keening cry of panic before crashing clumsily into the stage.

One empowered Acid attack was all it took, a high-pressure formulation which was also made to free Rowlet's wings, but that freedom didn't matter when Rowlet struggled and sputtered for just a moment, clearing the floor for all of half a second before collapsing back onto the stage. His proud Field shuddered, dispersed, then retreated inwards. Sha happily soaked up the release of uncontrolled energy, noting it was significantly larger than Pichu's.

Sha's glow grew brighter, from the part that humans could see to the full Field that only Sun could. The little Poipole cartwheeled through the air, the surge of power leaving them raring for more, but the battle was already concluded.

Sun called them to his side, embracing them in a tight hug. They'd won! They'd actually won!

Sun's mind reached out to Hau as well, thanking him for such a fun experience… and for helping him be able to see the fun in it to start with.

Quickly, Sun's mind also scanned for Lillie, Kukui, and Burnet… He was pleased to feel that they were happy for him, and even more pleased to see that Lillie was watching with a genuine smile, rather than seeming afraid or uncomfortable at the sight of battling Trainers.
“We have a victor! Sun! Congratulations!” Hala called out with a booming voice.

Sun looked out over the crowd of people…

A memory came.

His body wreathed in ornate white and gold, him standing before a massive crowd, pale blue faces beneath a fake light, a fake sun, its light harsh and unnatural… Being told to smile and wave, despite the fact that he could feel that half of them were hungry, many of them were exhausted, and many of them were simmering with barely repressed anger…. Nearly all of them wore clean but paper-thin, mono-colored clothing, easily torn and worn out. But if anyone had even a flicker of violet or dark blue glow in the midst of the ceremony, they’d be… removed.

Sun could not recall what happened after ‘removal’.

He got the feeling he didn’t particularly want to.

Sun snapped back to reality, seeing a much smaller number of people… but they were all people who were actually happy to be there, people who were actually fed and properly housed and actually wearing things they liked… People who admired his accomplishments without expecting him to be perfect, by some warped definition of perfect that essentially boiled down to being a living machine…. Smart, but not too understanding. Principled, but not too noble. Guiding, but not too generous. Treat them as equals, but not with equity.

Sun remembered all the punishments for being too soft. Too kind. Too lenient. Understood where his former levels of concern with being too soft for battle had come from.

But among the humans, Sun was not Incanze. Sun was not expected to grow up to push the starving, exhausted masses through a damnable, impossible, toxic forever-winter merely by making them think he was smarter and better than all of them.

Sun was merely Sun.

But one day soon, Ultra Megalopolis could potentially be nothing at all…

Sun was snapped out of his thoughts by Hala coming up on stage and offering Hau something… A black bracelet with a carefully carved and polished stone on it, radiating a soft, steady glow of power that only Sun could see as it came in contact with Hau’s Field… Sun rapidly recognized it as a Z-Power Ring, made from a refined Sparkling Stone, but Hala seemed relatively quiet and subdued in giving it to Hau. Hau was equally subdued in putting it around his wrist.

Sun wasn’t entirely sure why, until Hala came over to him and spoke quietly to him.

“My grandson and I have talked about it, and it doesn’t feel right for you to leave this festival empty-handed, considering the incredible progress you’ve already made in adapting to Alola and learning about battle… Although Tapu Koko seems to have been quite clear in who should receive a Z-Ring, and I am not willing to ignore their wishes, I also want to make up for their harsh judgment… For all the good they do, Tapu Koko can also be a violent, hasty, and impulsive sort. Therefore, I have an alternative gift,” Hala said, as he held out an Ultra Ball. Sun would almost think the Ultra Ball itself was the gift, until he noticed a faint Field radiating off of it.

“The Pokemon in this ball is Larvesta, a rare Bug-type, smuggled out of a place called Lush Jungle by a group of thugs known as Team Skull. Apparently, it was a retrieval mission for their leader. It
would seem he has a particular fondness for the Bug-type, but all of Team Skull’s past efforts to obtain this Pokemon were met with failure. This happened for various reasons, including the skill and vigilance of Captain Mallow… and the pure strength of older members of this species. This time, however, Team Skull strategically targeted a vulnerable young one, and temporarily succeeded as a result. Either way, Mallow still managed to successfully track down and retrieve Larvesta… but as a result of the experience, this young one is quite shaken up. I had originally thought to give her to Hau, once he’d proven himself enough. But we both agree, someone like you is probably what this Larvesta needs most of all. After all, mythologies all around the world have always associated Larvesta with the sun.” Hala explained.

Sun took the Ultra Ball, radiating his gratitude for the new friend he’d have a chance to make, and quickly sent Larvesta out. She was a relatively large, brown-bodied, grublike creature; with her face largely hidden by a thick, white, fuzzy mane. Still, for a Larvesta in particular, she was rather small, probably less than 40 pounds. Her eyes were a beautiful, piercing blue, she had six black legs, and there were five wavy red horns on the sides of her head, slightly resembling a stylized sun. Still, they were also somewhat small for her species.

Overall, she struck Sun as so adorable that he couldn’t help but immediately feel the urge to pick her up, although he resisted at the last moment and simply bent down to tentatively reach his hand out to her.

Larvesta inspected it warily, brushing the very edges of her sensitive mane against it, as Sun tentatively established mental contact. A Bug’s mind was rather odd, not necessarily resisting psychic influences but being structured in such a way that it could be somewhat uncomfortable for a psychic regardless. Still, by making his progression slow and steady, just barely touching the surface of Larvesta’s mind and easing in from there, Sun was able to avoid such discomfort.

Sun mentally soothed her, and Larvesta came closer to him, allowing him to place his hand on her head and covertly emit a warm, soothing light through his palm, along with more wavelengths of comforting psychic energy, which also communicated more about him.

Larvesta leaned into the touch, making a soft, contented gurgling sound as she flopped to her side, relaxing and softening her horns so they would harmlessly fold against her sides as she did. Sun just giggled as Hau and Hala looked on, mouths slightly agape. In the crowd, anyone who knew much of anything about Larvesta had the same reaction.

“Marvelous… this Larvesta is already so comfortable with you that she’s relaxed her horns, even in spite of all the strangers around us…” Hala said. “You truly are a loving soul…”

Sun thought the comparison was a bit unfair if he had the help of psychic powers, when most humans only had fledgling mental powers that typically required strong bonds with Pokemon to be of any use… But he appreciated the compliment anyway.

“I look forward to seeing you compete against me in my Grand Trial! Both you and Hau!” Hala said, voice suddenly becoming much louder and more excited, which was enough to make Larvesta suddenly spring back to her feet, erecting her horns once more.

Hala quietly apologized, as Sun picked Larvesta up and held her close, suddenly getting an urge to name her. Something about her… it reminded him a bit of something that felt important, although he wasn’t sure precisely what it was.

Sun looked down at Larvesta. She looked up at him.
Softly, he spoke aloud.

“Rhovera,” Sun said. “Vera,” he added, as a shortened nickname.

Rhovera the Larvesta nuzzled against him, content with her new name.

Chapter End Notes

I know that in-game you need to beat the first Trial to start seeing SOS/Ally Pokemon battles, but that just seems like a decision designed to better ease you into the game, so I can't see a logical reason to directly translate that to here.

Also, what do you do when a certain Pokemon is one of your Biggest Favs and seems like an awesome fit for a character, and an awesome fit for symbolic purposes too, but natural progression wouldn't let you put it in the story until it's probably like 200k-300k words or some other shit like that? And that many words would probably take you like a whole goddamn year to write?

Why, Find Some Excuse To Put It In Sooner, Of Course!

Also, If you decided to read 2.5, it strongly implied it, but here, I’m outright confirming that a full journey through a region takes more than just a few months/one year in this universe. Now, it should be about two and a half years… Which is actually still kind of fast in the context of this alternate universe. As a result, the sequence of events is stretched in some places, and altered/switched up a bit in others.

“Halo Anwaiaz” is derived from the scientific name of Hawaiian seagrass, Halophila hawaiiana.

“Halo” would be pronounced “Hal-o”, not like the word Halo.

“Rhovera” (Row-vera) is derived from the “Rhodo” prefix of Rhodophya (red algae) and then Soliera.
Chapter 5: Vivid Pink

Chapter Summary

In which Sun and Hau bond, then Sun, Hau, and Lillie have their first Wacky Team Skull Hijinks, and *then* the gang meets up with Ilima.

Chapter Notes

As battles progress in this fic, I just wanted to quickly outline the rules of this kind of stuff:

1: Set-style, so no "Opponent is about to send out X" stuff
2: No healing items during battle.
3: Affection benefits are here, but they exist for everyone. Also, they are treated as an actual skill, not just steadily improving RNG.
4: From here on out, pretty much all important opponents will be buffed/altered to some extent.
5: Moves are more versatile and fluid, and movepools can be different from the games.
6: No EXP Share
7: No mid-battle new moves, or evolving unless it's Mega. Although it's exciting, I've always thought it was kind of cheap and unfair to whoever's on the receiving end. Unlike Megas, you have no way of knowing about it. Plus, I've always thought that evolving in the middle of a battle would actually be pretty dangerous for a Pokemon. Not to mention, I feel like a Pokemon should logically need a bit of time to properly get used to a brand new body anyway, which would seriously cut into the massive advantage this supposedly is.

The differences in movepools still generally follow a sort of logic system, with a few rules.
- As level doesn't really exist, level-up moves no longer follow a precise order, they're just what's easiest for the Pokemon to learn as it develops.
- Moves matching a Pokemon's type can be learned faster.
- Stronger attacks are generally harder.
- A move can be unmastered but still technically usable, like Zorua's Dark Pulse
- TM Moves are all teachable without TMs, but they're harder than level-up moves
- Tutor Moves are teachable without tutors, but are often the most difficult.
- Strong bonds make it somewhat easier to teach new moves
- Moves no longer have a precise power or duration. Eg, Rain Dance doesn't always last the same length of time for every Pokemon, Dragon Rage wouldn't always do "40" damage, etc.
- Just because a move isn't listed as possible to learn doesn't mean it's truly impossible... although many Trainers intentionally avoid trying this because if they were to fail, it would be a huge waste of time and resources.

Also, I'm gonna try not to hassle you all about this next thing too much, but I would appreciate people speaking up a bit more, or telling their friends, or leaving kudos/bookmarks/etc if you like this story. You still don't have to, by any means, just
putting it out there.

I will continue to write either way, because telling this story makes me happy, and I still prefer this compared to the risks and burdens of putting this on FF.net, but I felt I should say this regardless.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After the battle, the rest of the festival continued well into the night. Sun, Hau, and Lillie also reported their previous run-in with the Ultra Recon Squad to Kukui, Burnet, and Hala, going into complete detail. Once again, it was met with a thorough amount of worrying and follow-up questions, but eventually, the three were asked to simply do their best to enjoy the rest of the festival. They did their best to oblige.

By nightfall, Sun could feel his exhaustion setting in, wishing he didn’t have an illusion to keep up… or at least wishing that Kukui’s lab was closer. Sha was already resting in their Beast Ball, and Rhovera in her Ultra Ball. Zorua would probably still be quite feisty, but she was in her ball regardless.

Sun wasn’t sure if he unintentionally transmitted anything to Hau, or if he was simply observant, but he came over soon enough, somehow looking significantly more energetic than Sun. Running was one thing, but staying up for so long with a non-stop illusion up… That was something else entirely.

“Sun, you wanna sleep over at my house tonight? I already asked my mom, she said it’ll be alright… If you want to, that is…” Hau asked, getting a bit oddly quiet for a moment. “Lillie was invited too, but she had something to do…” Hau continued, even though he was pretty sure she made that up. He remembered that she had that same little smile she had back when she noticed him call Sun ‘attractive’. Sun was a bit confused by the brief nervousness, which gave him a moment of pause, but then he was nodding happily directly afterwards.

“Awesome! This’ll be great, Sun! I mean, it’s only natural that travel companions should be comfortable with one another, right?” Hau said, with a chuckle that sounded a bit forced. There it was again. That weird bit of nervousness. Sun asked about it, but Hau immediately waved him off, before speaking more quietly and seriously. “It’s fine! It’s just… this is your first sleepover on the planet. Kukui’s place doesn’t really count, since that’s basically where you live now… But anyway, I just really want it to go well for you! Those people we spoke to… from the sound of it, it seemed like your old life sucked super hard, even if you were some cool alien royalty or something,” Hau said. “So, I don’t know… I just… feel like I should try harder to make sure you’re happy now…”

Sun just smiled, silently assuring Hau that he was sure the sleepover would be great, especially since it’d be with Hau.

Hau briefly looked away with a nervous smile. “That’s really nice of you! But… I just… I don’t know. Hearing about your old life kinda stuck with me, especially since two weeks ago, when we’d only just met… I challenged you to a battle, and got you all upset, then… because of me, Sha couldn’t chase after Nebby…” Hau said.

Sun blinked. Hau had thought about that too? But where was this all coming from? That wasn’t Hau’s fault, that was Sun’s own fault for-

“I really should’ve made sure you were actually comfortable with battling first. You’re so nice, you
probably just went along with it because I wanted you to,” Hau said.

Sun quickly shook his head. He’d agreed! He’d thought it’d be interesting! Hau hadn’t forced him into anything!

“Still… Just as a little advice, don’t do anything just because someone wants you to. Even if it’s me, or Lillie, or Kukui, or even my grandpa. Not that it isn’t great to help others, but…” Hau sighed. Sun squirmed a bit. It was weird seeing him act like that. “I was asked to protect you on our journey for a reason, after all…”

Sun frowned at that. What was the reason, exactly?

“At first, it was just because that’s how Alola is. It’s a place where we help each other. I just wanted to do something nice, and make Tutu happy… But now… It’s different. Like today, when we met those two… I feel kinda bad, because I just… I could tell they really cared about you, but… a big part of me just kept thinking about how much I didn’t want you to go,” Hau admitted. Sun saw Hau’s gaze lower, his eyes drooping and shoulders slumping under the weight of such an admission.

“I know that’s your home planet and everything, but… I just, I don’t want you to go, alright?! That’s honestly how I feel! I want you to stay here! So you can be happy, and have fun, and have actual nice food, and- I just- you could say that’s me looking out for you, but aren’t I just being selfish? I want you to stay for me, too, after all. And even though I do think it’s really sad that there are 30 million of your people, stuck in that frozen nightmare… I can’t help but want to worry about you first…”

Sun’s response was surprisingly simple. He’d stay, then.

“But-” Hau started.

Sun frowned, doing his best to convey his full point. Hau’s eyes widened as he looked up again, just a little.

“It’s not that you don’t want to help…” Hau started. Sun nodded. “…You don’t think you can…” Sun nodded again, his expression rather somber. “But you could, if you wanted!” Hau cried, making frantic hand gestures along with it. “I’m serious! If that Megalopolis could just hold out for a couple more years… Your journey would probably help you be able to do more for them, rather than just be you ignoring them! Your Pokemon will get stronger, you’ll get stronger, you’ll learn more, you’ll probably remember more… And then if you did go back, you’d be so powerful that they won’t be able to force you into anything! You’d be able to help them on your own terms, right?”

Sun’s eyes widened. That sounded great! Hau was so clever!

Hau grinned a bit nervously as he felt Sun thinking as much.

Still, he ended up stumbling backwards a bit when Sun suddenly hugged him tight, once again making an oddly pleasant thrumming noise that originated from his chest. While Hau had merely passively accepted the first hug, the second hug had him hugging back in earnest.

Still…

Sun stopped applying pressure, merely stayed loosely wrapped around Hau as he leaned his head against Hau’s shoulder… Could he really do all that? Helping Kukui study moves was one thing…
Helping Lillie with Nebby was one thing… Exploring Alola was one thing… But aiming to gather the strength and wisdom required to make a meaningful impact on an entire race, millions of people, all without just getting sucked into being another pawn for them? Without being forced to just follow all the suffocating guidelines of being their perfect little Incanze once more?

It was… a lot…

And it was scary.

“We don’t have to do it all at once. We don’t have to rush it, either. Honestly, we don’t even know if it’ll work at all, but… Anything you want to try, I’ll be right here to try it with you. Promise,” Hau said.

Sun nuzzled against Hau, simply focusing on his warmth. They stayed like that a bit longer before Sun could feel twinges of embarrassment emanating from Hau, and quickly withdrew himself, looking a bit embarrassed himself.

“Well, uh… Let’s just go back to my house! My mom’s probably waiting by now!” Hau said. Sun just nodded, a bit stiffly.

Luckily, the trip didn’t take long.

Hau’s mother was already in the living room, greeting the boys with a warm smile. “Oh, hello Sun! I see your number one fan has brought you for another visit!”

“Mom, do you really have to say it like that?” Hau whined, squirming in mild discomfort.

“Well, you’re not denying it, now are you? You’re always fawning over them, after all… Saying ‘Sun did such a good job today!’ or ‘Sun looked so cute today!’. It’s really nice that you finally brought him over for a sleepover, you seemed so worked up about it!” Hau’s mom said, while happily clasping her hands together.

“You would use the word ‘fawning’…” Hau responded in exasperation, although he once again didn’t seem to particularly deny anything.

Sun just smiled wide, dropping his disguise and glowing with twinkling green and soft whitish-pink. Hau’s mother had already been informed of Sun’s true nature, after all.

Konani Manalo was a kind woman at heart, although she also had a tendency for excessive honesty and a penchant for teasing her son… Especially if it involved an absolutely adorable new friend of his!

“A-anything, Sun,” Hau started, clearing his throat before taking Sun by the hand. Sun jumped slightly, feeling as if a small shock had raced through him, but he didn’t pull away. “Let’s go to my room, where we should be safe from certain people being totally embarrassing…”

Sun noted the warmth of Hau’s hand in his almost immediately, although Hau seemed too flustered to think much of it as he led Sun away. As Sun looked at their touching hands, he felt his heartbeats seem to briefly desync and then suddenly all beat as one, before he noticed a few of his light nodes glowing a rather odd color, alongside the familiar bright, whitish-pink that many of them had…
A strong, vivid, darker shade of pink…

Huh…

The two reached Hau’s room in a moment, given that it was just a one story house. Still, Hau’s room was clean and comfortably large. The walls had plenty of Pokemon-related posters, and were painted bright goldenrod. A variety of collectible figures were organized semi-neatly on a shelf to the right of the room, and there were a variety of CDs and DVDs as well. There was a large flat-screen TV and the latest gaming system situated next to the dresser, centered against the wall, although Hau spent much of his time outdoors. In front of it was a huge Togedemaru beanbag, which was in turn propped up against the side of Hau’s bed.

A Shiny Stufful laid on top of the beanbag, fur sparkling slightly in the light. Sun recognized him as Butterscotch… Konani’s precious crowned jewel, gifted to her after being personally bred by her husband. He gave an adorable squeal of greeting as Hau turned on the light and shut the door behind him and Sun.

“Sun, I just realized! You’ve been over here for meal times and stuff, but I’ve never even showed you a video game! I usually just get so excited to take you places that I forget all about it! Have you ever played a video game before, actually?”

Sun shook his head. He definitely knew what they were after over six months, but back at Kukui’s place, he was usually too busy studying, helping, or playing outside to have actually experienced one.

“Oh, that’s awesome, I can show you one then! …I don’t want to have you start with anything really hard or violent, so… First, we could do Mario Kart! It’s a racing game, and beginners can get into it too! Does that sound fun?” Hau asked.

Sun nodded excitedly, despite mounting tiredness. It didn’t help his ectothermic body that the air conditioning was still on in Hau’s house, despite it being night time.

For a while, as Hau patiently taught Sun controls and gave brief summaries of various characters, Sun really was having fun… At least until his character getting hit by a lightning bolt suddenly brought back a memory, in a great rush of emotion, as his nodes flickered from green to dark blue in a great wave. Hau suddenly cringed, feeling as if he’d just been shocked himself.

“Ow! What was that?! Sun, are you alright?” Hau started, before he felt another painful shock run through his whole body… That time, he noticed it seemed… not quite real, but real enough. As if he were vividly dreaming of the shock rather than literally experiencing it… But still, it was enough to hurt either way.

Hau closed his eyes and instinctively shook off the pain and lingering tingle, but the moment his eyes shut, he suddenly saw something.

Himself, suddenly much shorter, with pale blue skin… In a cold room, with a bunch of other kids. In front of them all, a giant screen making up the whole front wall. All wearing special suits, all wearing special controller gloves.

He was suddenly frantic as the screen flashed out orders and broadcasted harsh psychic signals, requiring blazing fast reactions. Extremely precise patterns of light from his nodes, rapid movements
from him that couldn’t be a step out of place, and all under the knowledge that every other child in
the room was his competitor. His body felt frightfully sluggish from the cold, and he knew he could
keep himself going with the warmth of his light, but the more heat he made, the more tired he got…
The more tired he got, the harder it would be to keep up… And yet, the colder he got, the harder it
would be to keep up… The only way forward was to carefully balance himself between the two
extremes, like walking a tightrope.

There was a sound of electrocution as a child nearby wailed in pain, only to be electrocuted again.
No wailing. That was weakness. Hau did his best not to get distracted as the screen required him to
rapidly assign all his nodes to a hyper-specific configuration across his arms, while also doing a one-
armed handstand. He moved with uncanny speed and desperation to complete the action. Many
more zaps sounded around him, many more whimpers and cries of agony.

Stay focused on the screen. Just like you’ll have to focus on your duties. Just like you’ll have to
focus on honing your powers. Do not listen to them. Do not listen to them. Do not listen to them,
_Incanze!_

An especially demanding task came up. Hau felt a great wave of relieving heat as the task allowed
the energy production of his nodes to soar… then _demanded it_. Demanded a constant, frenetic
battle dance of light, at full intensity, for an indeterminate length of time. Bombarded his head with
painful psychic waves, harshly urging him to keep up as he moved through the steps as rapidly as
possible, almost seeming choreographed to whimpers of agony and the sounds of collapsing children
around him. Some vomited on the cold crystalline floor, others sobbed steaming tears. Some got
back up after horrible flashes of electricity. Others just laid there, erratically twitching and writhing.
Hau felt brief flashes of his own electrical pain as he made minor errors, concentration slipping
slightly, his eyes straining to interpret the speed of the patterns on screen… The pain built. More
shocks came. His muscles ached and burned, his hearts pounded, his lungs burned as well…

Someone wretched and heaved on the ground just behind him, he could _hear it_. He could _feel it._

_He couldn’t stand it anymore._

Hau turned on his heels and immediately tried to bend down to comfort them. No sooner than he
did, there was white-hot, blinding, mind-engulfing pain, and a headache so fierce it could end the
very world. He collapsed, snapping back to reality.

One word, or rather, one _name_ left both Sun’s and Hau’s mouth simultaneously, in a quiet, half-
choked, pleading sob for help.

“_Soliera!”_”

Butterscotch whined in concern, but the sounds of the game and the closed door prevented Konani
from hearing anything.

Hau looked at Sun.

Sun looked at Hau.

Both of them were clinging to each other, the controllers carelessly dropped, their eyes still brimming
with tears.

“Sun…” Hau started quietly. “Who’s Soliera?”
Sun just shook his head, white light mixing in with deep blue. He couldn’t remember. Why couldn’t he remember? It was important, he knew it was...

Somewhere, worlds away, a woman with pale blue skin and dark blue hair twitched as if she’d been lightly electrocuted. She looked around frantically for a moment, not even knowing entirely what she was looking for... But upon her failure to find it, she simply sighed and went about her business...

For just a moment, it'd felt like...

No. No, it couldn't be.

Back at Hau's house, Hau just frowned and did his best to shake himself out of it, quickly going to the closet and getting extra blankets for Sun.

“Here. Part of the trigger was probably that it was too cold in here, right?” Hau asked, as he handed the Exeggcutor-patterned blankets over. Sun shrugged, but he was grateful regardless. Hau quickly shut the game they’d been playing off, getting under the blankets and nuzzling Sun close without even thinking about it. Unlike before, his embarrassment was forgotten, in the wake of something else awakening within him… Something that was bristling with determination and fiercely protective, something telling him that Sun needed him… At least for the time being.

Sun found himself even more predominantly shining a vivid pink than before. And his heartbeat was acting up again, too…

But it felt... good?

“I’m sorry that I set you off like that…” Hau said, although Sun just shrugged beneath the blankets around them, not needing the apology. Hau couldn’t have possibly known, if Sun himself never even saw it coming.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Hau asked quietly. Sun frowned, not able to truthfully answer yes right off the bat… But he knew he would be, with Hau around. He nuzzled up against Hau more, the thrumming noise from earlier returning as he silently apologized, asking if the memory still hurt.

“I’m fine,” Hau quickly lied, electing not to unintentionally guilt Sun over the tingling pain he still felt in his back and sides.

Sun immediately turned and frowned at him before reaching up and pulling his head in close. Hau’s eyes widened as he noticed just how close, noticed how he could feel Sun’s breath on his lips… But Sun just put their foreheads together, his nodes glowing with pulsing, whitish-pink light. Hau felt better almost immediately, the pain first vanishing before being steadily replaced by a feeling of encompassing calm and wellbeing.

Sun backed his head away, gently setting a hand on Hau's cheek instead. It glowed with the same light, and Hau instinctively leaned into the touch, practically melting against it.

Sun smiled wide at Hau's recovery, his sharp teeth sparkling a deep, vivid pink, which Hau promptly
“Hey… I haven't seen that shade of pink before. What's that mean?” Hau asked.

Sun looked away, then towards the floor. He didn't want to lie to Hau, but… he was a bit confused himself…

Sun did his best to explain it as… like the light whitish-pink, but… different. Maybe different friends made the light different?

Sun was oddly relieved when Hau seemed satisfied with that answer. He wasn't even sure how to further explain why it was different, just that it was. He was certain that he didn't necessarily like Hau more than Lillie.

But he did like Hau in a different way from how he liked Lillie, in a way that wasn't like how he liked Kukui and Burnet differently from Lillie… That difference was easier to understand. With Hau, the difference wasn't so simple to him… all he knew was that it existed. It definitely existed.

Hau was… Almost scary, but not in a bad way. And it wasn't really fear. It was just… something about Hau made Sun… nervous? But in a good way. It was… exhilarating, more than anything. Like something he could hardly believe was happening.

Maybe Lillie, Kukui, or Burnet would know…

For the time being, Sun could feel tiredness setting in more than ever, as he leaned against Hau again without even really thinking about it, closing his eyes, slowing his breathing...

“Oh, you're getting sleepy? Hold on, let me…” Hau started, just about to get up before Sun responded rather offhandedly, in his half asleep state, with a request that made Hau's eyes go wide.

He wanted to sleep next to Hau.

Sun himself seemed to realize what he was asking too, as he was briefly wide awake again, frantically apologizing. It was probably really weird to ask that, Hau wasn't Lillie! They hadn't already lived together for months!

“N-no, uh, if that's what you want, you can… Go ahead…” Hau said. “It's only sharing a bed…”

Sun tried to politely decline if it made Hau uncomfortable, but Hau seemed to be in some weird mix of something roughly akin to what Sun felt. Nervous, but in a somewhat eager, anticipatory way…

From there, they took turns showering and getting ready for bed, then finally laid down together. Hau's Pichu and Rowlet came out as well, electing to sleep at the foot of the bed rather than inside the Pokeball. Sun was silently grateful for how it made things feel a little less awkward.

Despite his tiredness, he and Hau spent about twenty minutes just quietly talking and subtly experimenting with how close it was okay to sleep next to one another.

Eventually, Sun elected on a distance large enough for Rowlet to comfortably slot into, and fell asleep first.

Hau briefly looked over at Sun's sleeping form, noting Sun's sweet, peaceful features, the way light nodes drifted lazily across his face… Hau wondered if the way it made him feel was anything like how Lillie must’ve felt. No wonder she suddenly wanted to be a Trainer… No wonder she was so often timid, fidgety, and on edge…
Hau had never wanted to hurt anyone as badly as he wanted to hurt whoever made Sun play the ‘game’ from his memory. Whoever made that whole room of children play it.

Hau felt a sudden urge to hold Sun close. On one hand… Sun was royalty, and his people obviously needed help.

On the other hand…

Sun was an innocent kid who didn't need to go back there ever again. Sun was a kind, beautiful, intelligent person who shouldn't have been even remotely expected to help fix something he had absolutely no part in causing… And yet he was being asked to anyway, all because some self-important bastards out there felt it was within their right to saddle kids with bullshit, inhumane expectations.

Hau remembered what he'd said before, but… how could they even begin to do anything for an entire dying race?

The question kept Hau up for another hour, although Pichu had at least elected to move up to his chest to keep him company. He idly petted the little mouse until he fell asleep.

Hau woke up the next day to find that he and Sun had started holding each other in their sleep, their legs tangled together beneath the blankets.

It honestly wasn't as shocking as he felt it should've been. Something about it just felt… right. Good. Like Sun was exactly where he belonged. Even if he wasn't.

Sun's light nodes still wandered aimlessly, but he was sleeping like a baby, the light steadily pulsing soft, dim greens and pinks. As Hau watched closer, feeling almost entranced, he could swear the pace was the same as his own heartbeat.

It was all well and good, at least until Hau realized he needed to go to the bathroom… But really, really didn't want to move and disturb Sun.

Luckily, Sun woke up on his own within a few minutes… and urged Hau to go to the bathroom.

“H-how did you know?” Hau asked. Sun just gave a small, sleepy grunt, not sure himself.

As Hau got up, he realized one thing, whether he liked it or not.

He had it bad for Sun.

Once Hau and Sun got ready, they made their way to Hau's quaint kitchen, decorated with various nick-knacks and a wicker basket of Berries in the middle of the table.

Konani made a very generous breakfast spread, doing her best not to react oddly when Sun put grape jam, guacamole, raw egg, and curry powder on his toast. He did at least eat the resulting abomination politely.

Hau found himself giggling at it, despite himself. Oh sweet fuck, who would giggle at something like that?
Hau's mother didn't fail to notice, but she didn't say anything, she simply wore a knowing grin the entire time. Hau couldn't even deny it.

By time Hau and Sun had finished and were getting ready to leave, she briefly held Hau back while Sun went ahead.

“By now, you're old enough to make your own decisions…” Konani started. “I mean hell, I'm letting you go out into untamed wilderness to raise monsters that could crush both of us flat as a pancake, that much is readily obvious!” Konani continued, with a rather forced laugh. “But that's the way of the world. We all have to take risks now and again, and there comes a point when your kids should be allowed to live their lives. So, from that perspective, if you want to go after a genderfluid alien, I'm honestly fine with that. It helps that he's such a sweetheart, though… I wouldn't be nearly as keen on it if he weren't,” she said with a grin. “My son deserves to be treated properly, after all!”


“But still… Please be careful. Don't go biting off more than you can chew, you hear me?” Konani continued. “Even if it's for his sake,” she started, before pausing in thought for a moment, then coming closer. She looked him intently in the eyes as she spoke once more, her voice quieter and yet more forceful than before. “Especially if it's for his sake.”

“Mom, it won't be like that.”

“I'm not saying it'll be Sun's fault. I do trust him. But… aliens don't just fall out of the sky for no reason, Hau. I doubt this situation is really as simple as we think it is,”

“...Sun is royalty,” Hau blurted out, hastily deciding on the first thing to come to mind, to relieve some of the pressure of everything competing to come out at once.

“W… What?” Konani asked, her mouth agape.

“He's literally royalty! People like him came here talking about how he's some genetically elite designer baby who basically became their prince after they made him go through a bunch of messed up super unethical tests! And they were always hurting him and controlling him! And he came here because there was a huge accident and they thought he was dead, but now they want him back because their whole civilization is a high-tech dystopian trash heap on the verge of collapse, but, only, the people who came actually said he should stay here because coming back would probably make things worse! But I feel like someone should do something about how bad things are over there, but at the same time I feel like Sun doesn't deserve to have to deal with any of that, and it shouldn't be his problem, and he should just stay here and be happy instead! And it's really hard because I have no idea which option is better!” Hau ranted and rambled.

Konani just gave a deep sigh. “Well… first off… Be there for him. Listen to each other. Learn about each other. Have each other's backs, and don't be afraid to ask others for help. But above all… Please be safe. Above all else. I'm sorry, but... alien or human, I can't honestly say I care more about millions of strangers than my own son. Especially my own teenage son who shouldn't be worrying about anything remotely like this…”

“So basically, you're saying my second impulse is the right one?” Hau asked.

“As hard as it is to carry the burden of knowledge like that… Yes, I do think that would still be what I'd choose,” Konani said.

Hau sucked in a breath, then steadily exhaled. “Thank you so much, Mom. I love you,” he said,
hugging her tight. Already, he was significantly taller than her.

“I love you too, Hau. Have a good time out there, alright?” she asked. “Watch out for Team Skull, too,”

“I will. Bye! I'll make sure to visit!” Hau said, before finally dashing out the door.

Konani just sighed deeply, doing her best to stay calm. A couple of stray tears signified that her best was good, but not quite good enough.

Knowing her son…

There was still a good chance he wouldn't listen.

After the sleepover, Hau and Sun immediately went to collect the rest of Sun's travel supplies, along with Lillie, who was waiting patiently. Nebby in her bag, Popplio in a Pokeball attached to a strap on the bag.

Kukui and Burnet sent Sun and Lillie off in a briefer fashion when it came to safety and warnings, having already gone over many of their main concerns.

Still, Kukui handed everyone their amulets to signify they were officially Trial-goers, and also handed out Pokedexes… Along with giving Sun what looked like a slightly different but otherwise normal Pokedex, at least until a Rotom suddenly shot out of the ceiling with incredible speed and merged into the Pokedex, briefly making Sun drop it in alarm, hair puffing outwards as well. The Pokedex began to float before it even hit the ground, somewhat changing in shape as Rotom's face appeared on it.

“Surprizzed ya, didn't I?” Rotom asked, cackling. Sun just frowned as the creature floated back into his hands.

“Sorry, kid, I juzzzt couldn't help myself! Anyway, we already know each other, but from here on out, I'll be helping you out!” Rotom asked.

“Rotom, remember what we talked about,” Kukui said, his tone having just a tinge of warning to it.

“Right, right! Don't you worry, my little Kukui, your precious child is safe with me!” Rotom said with a laugh.

Kukui seemed to subtly flounder for a moment upon hearing that, but he quickly regained composure upon clearing his throat. “Great! I'm counting on you! And Sun, this Rotomdex has a bunch of useful features that will help you on your journey! Make sure to experiment with it!”

Sun nodded, although he did silently question the fairness of certain features…

Kukui's expression became more serious for a moment, his voice eerily calm and even. “There might be times when the situation isn't about being fair, Sun. Don't forget that.”

Sun tried his best not to get too worried over those words.

“Still, hopefully, things like that will be few and far between! In many situations, Pokemon are capable of reason, so just watch their behavior carefully!” Burnet said. “And when you get to Akala, you're free to stop by the Dimensional Research Lab in Heahea whenever you like. Starting today, I'll be heading back there for a while, with the research I've compiled on you and Nebby. The very fact you two are here signifies that there's still a massive amount of work to be done researching the
Ultra Wormhole…"

Sun nodded again, hoping that her studies would go well. Once everything was said and done, there were long embraces before they went off, even though they were all aware there was nothing stopping them from still meeting up later.

The three teens decided to set off through Hau'oli in order to get to Route 2, where they'd be able to get some slightly more advanced training in before the first Trial… although Lillie wasn't even entirely sure she wanted to do Trials. Then again, they would be an obvious avenue for getting stronger… if they didn't run an especially high risk of Popplio getting beaten to a pulp.

Unfortunately, the plan to simply take their time walking through Hau'oli wasn't exactly as straightforward as they hoped.

They were soon accosted by a couple of nigh-identical guys in trademark black and white clothing, including the iconic silver S-symbol necklaces.

“T-Team Skull?!” Lillie cried, shrinking back and clutching her bag protectively. Reacting to her discomfort, Sun was immediately on the defensive, sending out Sha in the blink of an eye.

“Oh, this little kid think's he's hot shit, thinkin' he'll win just ‘cause he's comin’ at us with a Pokemon we ain't seen before!” one started, while making a variety of odd hand gestures. Sun frowned, stepping back slightly. Why were these people so upset?

“Well tough luck, you little punk! Team Skull is gonna-”

“Sun is not a punk, you jerks!” Hau suddenly interrupted, quickly stepping forward with his Rowlet at the ready. “He's my friend, and you're not gonna talk to him like that!”

“Oh, his little boyfriend's gonna stick up for him?” Hau noticeably stiffened slightly, but didn't back down. Sun found himself a little more flustered than he'd like to admit by Hau's protectiveness, and by Team Skull's words... Was that really how they came off, or was Team Skull just teasing them?

More importantly… Sun found that he didn't entirely mind the thought of such a thing.

“It doesn’t matter if you come at us! We'll take those challenge necklaces and that rare Pokemon of yours!” one grunt said, before sending out... An Alolan Rattata. The other sent out an Alolan Grimer.

Their Fields burst outwards, assuming full… small… size. Sun blankly queried if that was all, without actual malice.

“What? what do you mean, is that all? And what's with you, pushin’ feelings into people's skulls like some kind of weirdo?! What, too good to talk to us?” one grunt aggressively asked.

Sun just cocked his head. He was talking to them.

“Whatever, weirdo! We're gonna beat you, and that'll teach you to be stuck up! Why else you would be hanging out with that prissy little girl off behind you?”

Sun audibly growled upon hearing Lillie being brought into it. Hau looked at him in surprise, while one of the grunts backed away. Just for a moment... had that kid's teeth gotten weirdly sharp?
The grunts didn't have much time to dwell on it, as Sun commanded Sha to blast Rattata with strong, sticky Acid, followed by a Fury Attack. From around the corner, a certain someone watched the display...

Blindsided, the little rodent was defeated in a matter of seconds. Sun briefly apologized to it before simply fixing the other grunt with an intense gaze, that grunt being given a sensation like there were suddenly spiders crawling just beneath their skin. They shuddered as Sun's eyes steadily turned a solid, eerie gold, and found themselves unable to look away for a brief moment, although that moment felt like eternity. Finally…

The second grunt returned his Grimer and sprinted off, screaming. The first grunt followed suit, especially since his Rattata had essentially been demolished in the span of seconds. “We'll get you back, kid! Just you watch! We'll get you back!” the grunt said, as he did his best to catch up with his partner.

Sun just quietly exhaled. Was that really it? That was Team Skull? Just some rude people in matching clothes who harass you with poorly raised Pokemon?

“Essentially, yes,” Lillie replied. Hau flinched at her sudden words, as he hadn't 'heard' Sun that time. “But it's still best to be careful… I hear word spreads quickly with them, and if you get their notice, they could come after you in bigger numbers…”

Sun grimaced. He hadn't thought of that.

“She's right, you know,” came a voice from behind Sun, which made him have to fight the urge to go invisible. Still, Sun found the source of the voice was actually a handsome young man with tan skin, pink hair, and exceptionally soulful eyes. They looked... Vaguely familiar... “Don't misunderstand. You handled that incredibly well… Scaring off a Team Skull member without a single word, now that's really something! But try not to stand out to them too much. The last thing you want is their special attention,”

Sun thanked the young man, who seemed to further realize something as his eyes briefly widened. “Oh, a psychic?! Don't see many of those! That's a very rare gift you have there!”

Sun disliked lying, but replied with the standard cover answer regardless. Poipole, a Pokemon recently discovered on a remote island.

“Incredible! Given that this Pokemon of yours has hardly broken a sweat, would you be interested in a battle? After all, if you're taking the Island Challenge, I'll need to get a better idea of your abilities.”

Sun asked why that was. The young man's eye widened yet again. “Oh, my mistake! I never introduced myself! I've gotten too used to people recognizing me. Anyway, Alola! I'm the first Trial Captain, Ilima!” Ilima said. Sun introduced himself as well, although all he outwardly did was the Alola gesture. Still, his eyes had noticeably brightened upon fully realizing why Ilima had been vaguely familiar. He'd already been doing research on the Island Challenge, but hadn't perfectly memorized the Captains offhand.

Still, Sun gratefully accepted the opportunity to battle. It'd be an excellent opportunity to learn more,
“Alright! So, how many Pokemon do you have right now?” Ilima asked. Sun replied with three. “So, three on three, then! That sound good to you?” Ilima asked. Sun nodded.

With that, everyone cleared space, and Ilima sent out a Smeargle. Sun smiled at the chance to see it, remembering that one had briefly come by Kukui's lab. They were apparently famous for the ability to copy just about any move, due to highly specialized neurology and internal glands that could work in conjunction with a Field to form an almost impossibly broad array of different chemical compounds.

Sun watched carefully, wondering which moves the particular Smeargle had, as it extended what he noted was definitely a Tier 2 Field, shining as brightly as both of the Grunts’ Pokemon put together, and modestly larger and brighter than even Sha's.

Sun considered his options. He'd have to be careful.

Sun commanded Sha to fire off a barrage of glue.

“Confusion!” Ilima countered, much to Sun's chagrin. Psychic-type attacks… probably originally meant to counter Fighting-types. The blast of telekinetic force blew right through the glue, scattering it harmlessly as Smeargle ran forward and fired off another blast, which Sha narrowly avoided, thanks to Sun seeing the subtle waves of the otherwise invisible burst and allowing Sha to react more swiftly.

Sun ordered a barrage of stinging glue around Smeargle instead, planning to bait Smeargle into jumping again.

“Psygust!” Ilima called. Smeargle's eyes glowed as Psychic and Flying Field energy merged, and surges of chemicals stimulated his brain. The combination allowed him to rise above the poison in a precisely controlled flurry of wind, further refined by telekinetic focus.

With that, Smeargle blasted a path of wind from him to Sha, with such force that it blasted a bunch of poison away and hit Sha dead on, too forceful for them to fly away from. They were blasted several yards backwards, although they still quickly rose back into the air.

Smeargle landed gracefully as Sha responded with fast, precise shots of Acid from multiple angles, zipping about energetically in the air. Smeargle responded by flipping and dashing about, and using bursts of psychic energy to avoid anything that seemed like it was coming too close. Sun had Sha keep it up, steadily building up more toxins on the ground for every shot missed, subtly trying to balance between making it seem like he was still aiming for Smeargle and still aiming for the ground.

“Nova!” Ilima called. Smeargle whipped his tail around, flinging a burst shot of paint that immediately caught fire, then formed into small star-shaped fireballs that immediately homed in on Sha, pelting them one after other as Sha hopelessly attempted to dodge and weave through them.

“Poor Man's Heat Wave!” Ilima called, while Sha was occupied. Smeargle held his tail and began to spin it rapidly, a process which generated far more wind than it logically should've, thanks to Smeargle's Field.

The wind mixed with combustible paint from Smeargle's tail, which split up into more of a burning aerosol, creating a great fiery gust that caught Sha up in its midst, and making Sun back up a bit more
When the attacked cleared up after a few seconds, Sha was still floating, grunting in pain and frustration with a few smudges of dust and soot on their body.

Sun frowned, knowing what Ilima and Smeargle were doing. By combining attacks with great skill, they could make up for Smeargle's low amount of raw power. Very fascinating. Sun commanded a Growl to set Smeargle off guard for a moment, then a Fury Attack... but only as a bluff.

In the frantic effort to dodge, Smeargle panicked and stepped in an area of thick, slimy acid, allowing Sha to follow up with even more Acid. Smeargle grunted in pain, doing his best to endure the attack.

"Very good! That was your plan all along, huh?" Ilima called. "Psygust!" Ilima called.

Smeargle's eyes glowed once more as he summoned up a burst of tightly controlled wind, blasting away the glue and forcing Sha back all at once. Sun frowned, quickly returning Sha as they were knocked back. He couldn't afford to lose Sha too soon.

Sun sent out Zorua next, but disguised as Rhovera.

"Psygust!" Ilima called. The effect was about as Sun expected. Zorua's illusion rapidly fell away, but she hardly felt any of the telekinetically enhanced effects of the Gust, suffering little damage overall.

Sun immediately had Zorua follow up with Fake Tears, her Field briefly extending into Smeargle's and weakening his guard and resolve along with the physical display of inelegant whining and blubbering.

Sun immediately switched back to Sha, knowing Smeargle would recover from the manipulation quickly.

Ilima gave "Psy Nova!" as a command, combining Swift, Ember, and Confusion into a single elegant move.

Sun froze, somewhat cowed by the three-attack display. The whole thing landed dead on, and Sun reached out in fright, his Field reaching out as well, as an explosion of energy overtook Sha.

Sha collapsed to the ground...

Sun silently urged them to rise again, knowing the plan was ruined without Sha.

The silent plea... was not answered.

At least, not in the expected way.

Sha, without even actually getting up, suddenly shot off a massive stream of glowing, steaming Acid, blasting Smeargle backwards and burning at his fur and sensitive nostrils as he fought to keep it from getting in his mouth.

With that, Smeargle fell. Sha, absorbing his errant energy, rose back into the air, wreathed in cyan aura. They gave a cry of triumph as Sun smiled, marveling at the burst of new intensity to their Field.

Beast Boost.

"Very interesting! An Ability must've activated! Is that something like Moxie?" Ilima asked. "Still,
Smeargle did quite a good job! Don't let your guard down yet!” Ilima called, before quickly swapping Pokemon. An Eevee appeared in a burst of light, his glossy fur glinting in the sunlight.

The battle continued.

Eevee was commanded to use Baby Doll Eyes, followed by Swift. Standing their ground, Sha toughed out the emotional impact and faced the stars with rapid-fire acid globules, destroying each and every one before coming after Eevee with them next.

The little fox dodged and rolled like the best of them, activating Quick Attack to make his job easier… Perhaps too easy. He skidded into a field of sticky poison, significantly hampering his speed and causing moderate discomfort on his paws.

Sha immediately punished the mistake with more Acid, but Eevee valiantly countered with a stream of Swift, the attack managing to block part of the damage, but not all.

“Wish!” Ilima called. Sun winced at that. He was putting Sha on a stricter timer. They'd have to try and finish it quickly… Parts of Eevee's Tier 2 Field compacted and contracted, some of its power funneling to that area and forming a soft yellow light visible to even humans, before it shot up into the sky, where it'd passively draw in yet more of Eevee's stray AWE while Eevee continued on.

Yet more Acid came as Sha floated higher, now as a sort of densely compacted glowing sludge for more weight and immediate impact strength.

The little Acid cannonballs rained down on Eevee, but now it dodged with Ilima's command to use Dig. Eevee disappeared into the ground with unreal speed, front claws rapidly vibrating with energy as the ground, even the pavement, softened and moved for him as if he were the underground's honored guest.

Sun grimaced. Dig and Wish at the same time… It was easy to see how that could be abused. Things could be getting messy.

Sun did his best to notice tiny twitches and vibrations in the ground, telling Sha to keep changing position as well. Unfortunately, even invigorated by Beast Boost, Sha wasn't quite as snappy as before.

With unreal accuracy, Eevee's Field stretched up, perfectly sensing Sha's position. Sun noticed, but his only recourse was to have Sha immediately fire downwards in great amounts of low-viscosity liquid, hoping that would do the trick, and at least some of it would wash over Eevee.

Eevee jumped out in a flash, the Acid briefly stinging, but not enough to keep him from slamming into Sha dead on.

Sha crumpled to the ground, Sun also wincing at the force of the impact. They did not rise again, but Eevee stood proud. Sun returned the little Poipole, grunting in frustration. Sha had definitely done well, but he was hoping for a bit more mileage out of the Beast Boost plan.

With that, Sun sent out Rhovera, immediately commanding String Shot

First, Rhovera projected a thick stream towards Eevee, who easily dodged, but Sun had been expecting that. The ball of light from Wish shot down to earth and bathed Eevee, instantly replenishing the energy that otherwise would've passively radiated away.

Rhovera kept up the String Shot, blanketing the area in silk and forcing Eevee to stay back, along with making it hard to land any Swift attacks through the streams of silk. The coverage included
many of the areas that still had lingering poison, and Sun even had her build up big silken piles at the edges near her. Ilima smiled slightly at that. Sun silently praised her for her work, clapping his hands together happily before quickly returning her, then sending out Zorua again.

Ilima commanded Swift as Sun ordered Fake Tears.

Eevee cringed at the excessive waterworks, but the Swift stars flew regardless, with Zorua ordered to take cover behind the bulges of silk. Luckily, Swift tended to automatically follow Field emissions along the shortest path, not regarding any substance that allowed Fields to freely pass through. It was difficult to control them to behave otherwise.

But not impossible.

A couple of Swift stars banked around the silk cover to nail Zorua on her back, causing her to yip in pain and irritation. Still, the shock-absorbent silk held up impressively well against most of the damage.

Zorua then came out from behind the pile with great speed, lapsing into a Pursuit. She leapt clear over the silk to crash right into Eevee with great force, but not enough to knock him out. Once they tumbled away from it, Sun had Zorua try to knock Eevee onto the silk, using Scratch to try and make an opening for Pursuit.

Eevee and Zorua closely exchanged blows for a moment, Zorua taking damage but harassing him too closely and aggressively for him to fire off more Swift stars. Ultimately, Eevee's higher strength and experience won out, and a powerful Tackle knocked Zorua away. Still, she remained conscious. With that, Sun was satisfied enough, and returned Zorua before sending out Rhovera again.

Sun commanded a flurry of Ember to start out with, as Eevee matched it with Swift… But unlike Eevee, Rhovera could advance further. The small Larvesta, unbothered by her own silk, easily traversed the terrain, scuttling along with surprising speed and surefootedness.

She successfully landed an Ember, doing greatly improved damage after the effects of Zorua's Fake Tears, then used shorter but stronger bursts of fire to ward off pesky Swift attacks. A few stars got through, but neither combatant could do much besides keep it up, each hoping to wear the other down.

Finally, Ilima commanded a Wish, but Sun had Rhovera countered with a String Shot. Eevee cried out in alarm as most of his body was engulfed in thick silk, and he was then yanked onto the field of silk, where he was completely at the mercy of Rhovera, who was commanded to use Absorb. Fluids, excess nutrients, and Field energy mixed and rapidly aerosolized, flying out of Eevee in globules of bright green light and disappearing into Rhovera's body, revitalizing her in the process.

Rhovera chittered in delight as Eevee finally succumbed. Sun pumped his fist, thrilled with her victory despite only getting her the day before.

Hau and Lillie just stared in wonder, both aware of the exact same thing… And realizing that because of that very fact, it was incredible that Sun managed to command Rhovera to a victory, although Zorua did help quite a lot.

“Keep going, Sun!” Lillie called.

“All you gotta do is beat that last one, and you win! You got this!” Hau called.

Sun smiled. He could do it… He could really beat a Trial Captain!
Ilima smiled as well, swapping Eevee for a new, larger Pokemon…

An owl nearly as large as Sun took form with a mighty screech, notably different from Hau's Rowlet. Their body, broad and glossy-feathered, was mostly shades of brown, with a tell-tale pattern of downward-pointing triangles. Their talons could crush bone and rip flesh. Their mind was keen and sharp, their Field a strong Tier 2, the strongest of any combatant so far.

Noctowl.

Sun's previous optimism came to a screeching halt.

The silk wouldn't work.

Rhovera would be beaten quickly.

Zorua was a frail species, already tired, hardly trained, with no recourse for recovery or keeping up with a Noctowl's aerial maneuvering.

Sha was out for the count.

As Hau and Lillie marveled at Noctowl, who took flight and fixed Rhovera with a piercing gaze…

Sun returned her...

And forfeited.

Everyone just stared for a moment, so caught up in the battle so far, and Sun's apparent lead, that it took a moment to register.

“You… you surrender?” Ilima asked. Sun just nodded. Ilima just stared for a moment before nodding in understanding. “Right, of course! You care so much for your Pokemon that you don't want to see them hurt any further! A noble reason!” Ilima said, smiling faintly. “Still… In complete honesty, that won't always be an option,” Ilima continued, voice still soft and gentle. “Even when it is… you need to weigh the situation carefully.”

Sun frowned.

“For now, a retreat may allow you a chance to learn and grow… But I'll tell you now, if you want to achieve great heights, retreating whenever things seem too hard isn't the answer. You mustn't be afraid to take more risks, Sun. Up until that surrender, I would say you were doing splendidly! You overcame such advanced move combos! This silken field is a thing of true ingenuity! Who's to say you’d really lose to Noctowl, if you never tried?”

“Yeah, he's right!” Hau called. “You were doing amazing! Even when you were down to Vera and Zorua! I mean, you've hardly had Zorua for a week, and you got Rhovera yesterday! So obviously, you're really good! Don't sell yourself and your Pokemon short like that!” Hau called. Sun found that for some reason, Hau's words sunk in much deeper than Ilima’s had, even though they were basically saying the same thing.

Lillie remained quiet, not wanting to come off as unintentionally harsh, but Sun could tell she largely agreed. Meanwhile, Ilima just stared, processing some of Hau's words with sheer wonder.
“Did you just say… He's only had two of his Pokemon for that long?” Ilima asked.

“Uh, yeah?” Hau asked.

“A mischievous, energetic, strong-willed Dark-type like Zorua and a rare, difficult Pokemon like Larvesta… and you command them so quickly and smoothly, in this short a space of time?” Ilima asked. “They act so precisely, and with such tactics and skill… Even if you are a psychic, that's extraordinary! How could you give up the battle so soon with such extraordinary skill?!” Ilima asked, suddenly seeming significantly pushier than he was before. He couldn't help himself. It was rapidly becoming clear that Sun wasn't just anybody. People like Sun… people like Sun especially needed encouragement.

Sun tried to explain himself, citing Zorua being worn out, Rhovera's type disadvantage, the strength of Noctowl…

“Regardless! You have such great potential, Sun! And it's my job as a Trial Captain to ensure that Trial-goers reach their full potential! But don't worry, I know just what to do!” Ilima said. “I'll have a special Trial for you… One that will help teach you not to give up! One to help you remember that your Pokemon are there to battle with you with everything they have, even when things are hard… or did you think it was a coincidence, when that first Pokemon of yours managed to rise again?”

Sun's eyes widened a bit. That was true…

“That was surely because of your bond… Your Fields synchronizing, your Pokemon drawing on your strength… I could feel it. That was how your partner rose again. That was how your partner's poison struck Smeargle with such quantity and force. With further practice, you can further hone the intensity and practical benefits of that connection you have… Synchronized Oscillatory Meld, the effect I believe Professor Kukui dubbed as 'AWE-SOM'.”

“Wow, that's such a creative name!” Hau said. “Professor Kukui sure is smart!”

Sun could feel that Lillie didn't exactly agree with the first sentiment of those two. But she was the one who came up with “Poipole”, so why was this wordplay the case she took mild issue with?

“Anyway, I'm afraid I have to be going now… I was taking this weaker team out for some training, so I'll have to run over to a Pokemon Center and try to squeeze the rest in before my next orders of business… See you all soon!” Ilima said.

“W-wait! I have enough to heal your team in my bag!” Lillie said, despite being a little flustered about speaking with a Captain… Especially since he mainly seemed interested in talking to Sun.

“Oh, that'd would be wonderful! You'd save me so much time! I can see why Sun rushed to protect someone like you,” Ilima said with a gentle smile.

Lillie quietly thanked him as she deftly got various medicines out of her bag, Hau blocking view of her a bit to better obscure Nebby's position within that bag. It wasn't that he didn't trust Ilima, but rather… If Ilima was around, and had just battled, then who knew who else was watching?

Ilima and Sun's Pokemon were fully healed, although the nanite-infused medicines took just long enough that it was impractical to use them in battle… and outright against the rules of formal battle.

“For your kindness, your bravery in the face of Team Skull, and your generosity… I'd like to give you a gift,” Ilima said, as he handed Sun a plain-looking CD… But as Sun spied its label, he
recognized it as the TM for Return, a move that could potentially get incredibly powerful based on someone's bond with a Pokemon.

As was becoming standard, Sun suddenly swept Ilima into a hug, not sensing that he'd be particularly bothered.

Sure enough, Ilima just sort of stood there and took it.

“Sun… you really ought to give it a little more thought before you keep going around hugging people on impulse!” Lillie silently informed him. Sun quickly let go, quietly apologizing.

“No, no, it's alright!” Ilima said with a laugh and a slight blush. Hau silently pouted a bit. Lillie didn't fail to notice.

Ilima then said Alola and actually set off, as Lillie just fixed Hau with another one of her Tiny Knowing Smiles.

Hau was not impressed.

“You know… I was willing to believe you before, but… are you really sure that-” Lillie quietly started, as Sun waved goodbye to Ilima.

“Yes!” Hau impatiently replied, hardly able to look at her. “It's nothing, it just kinda sucks that Sun lost…” Hau weakly insisted.

“Well, if you say so…” Lillie said, deciding to stop pestering Hau for the time being. Even if it was slightly tempting.

Although Sun briefly worried about how the mess from the battle would get taken care of, Hau quickly explained for him.

“There are people hired to clean and repair the aftermath of battles with the help of Pokemon, provided you don’t do anything crazy, like heavily damaging buildings and plumbing and stuff! Pokemon who are Tier 2 and below are fine to battle anywhere, but Tier 3 and up should usually battle in safer locations, unless you hold back by a lot!” Hau said.

Sun nodded, supposing that made sense. He didn’t feel so worried anymore.

As the group went on their way, Sun learned more about Ilima from Hau and Lillie.

“Ilima is only 17, from what I've read… He got cleared to start his island challenge a year early, then finished his Final Trial in three years.” Lillie said. “It's honestly pretty amazing that someone could do that.”

Sun was a bit confused by that. What did someone have to do to take an island challenge early?

“Well, the absolute minimum is 13… It used to be 11 for everyone, but that… started… not going so well…” Lillie said, ratherly quietly and hesitantly. “Frankly, a bunch of kids died,” she further clarified. Sun frowned at that. Lillie explained further.

"As Alola's population grows, it becomes harder to keep track of everyone… and honestly, it wasn't like kids had never died before, but… those were supposed to be rare freak accidents. As time went on, it was really getting out of hand. So the age increased, but if someone proves themself, and a Kahuna approves, it can still be decreased by a couple of years,” Lillie explained.
“Yeah, Tutu wouldn't let me do it... and he barely ever approves anyone to go early in general,” Hau said. “I only remember him doing it twice, but I'm sure he's done a couple more cases like that.”

Sun was glad to know that at least people in Alola were trying their best to think of the children...

Sun recalled the cold room, the electric shocks, the unrelenting, breakneck pace of the “games” he was forced to play, testing him to his absolute limits....

He was glad Alola was different.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry but also Not Sorry about how Sun and Hau are super affectionate in this chapter. Hopefully, it doesn't come off as moving too fast.

I would say this is a slow-ish burn, but not really all that slow, since both of them are just naturally quite open and affectionate people. Not to mention, Sun's psychic powers help the process along considerably, and I imagine Alola's culture to be rather touchy-feely in general.

I gave Hau a last name because Why Not, especially since he’s gonna be More Important now

I will also have a last name for Lillie’s family, eventually.
Chapter 6: Sun and Storm

Chapter Summary

Hoo Boy.

This is gonna be a long one.

Also a bit darker than the prior chapters have been (although I've already been talking about kids being force to play fucked up games, and I already wrote about Sun having a fucked up nightmare... So, yeah...)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The group planned to stop for awhile near the general area of Route 2 and northern Hau'oli, training and preparing. Hau was after a third Pokemon to match Sun, and he and Sun also made it a goal to keep helping Lillie get more comfortable with commanding Popplio, and get a second Pokemon before her first Trial. They promised not to move on without her, something she was immensely grateful for. She was barely brave enough to be a Trainer, let alone having to do it by herself...

In particular, a park soon attracted the group's attention. The landscape was flat and wide open, but with just enough shade. There were many children, and multiple people having battles as well. With it being about on the border of the city, there was a wide area of grass and forest beyond the outer fences as well, perfect for seeking out new Pokemon.

Everyone sent their Pokemon out to train, with Lillie doing her best to practice commands with Popplio, while Sun and Hau worked on their Pokemon's movepools.

First off was the TM for Return, which the group shared amongst themselves. All of Sun and Hau’s Pokemon ended up learning the attack. Lillie held out. For one, Popplio was mainly more of a ranged attacker... Second, she was more than a bit afraid of the move turning out to be pathetically weak on Popplio.

TMs contained the instructions for a small device to use psychic signalling to rapidly influence a Pokemon’s nervous system, causing them to almost immediately learn whatever attack the TM was.

In the past, such systems were self-destructive by design, largely for security purposes. An infinite-use TM in the wrong hands could be surprisingly dangerous, allowing powerful moves to proliferate easily among groups with bad intentions. However, as alternative security measures were found, and complaints about the single-use system mounted, on top of how unreasonably difficult it often was to get certain TMs in the first place, reusable TMs came to the forefront.

A similar thing happened with Move Tutors, their services pushed to become largely more accessible and common after complaints of Move Tutors demanding either ridiculous fees, or an utterly excessive amount of pre-requisite skill and patience required to actually gather whatever items or alternative currency were being requested instead.
But even so, TMs weren’t the be-all-end-all of move training. Because a TM worked through psychic signalling alone, and did not involve any degree of anatomical manipulation, there was nothing stopping Pokemon from learning them naturally. Paying for a TM was essentially just paying for convenience.

A TM also created the misleading illusion that just because a Pokemon wasn’t compatible with it, the Pokemon could never learn that move under any circumstances… What it actually meant was that the TM’s library of various signalling instructions simply wasn’t sufficient to teach that specific Pokemon. Often, the answer was simply for the manufacturers to come out with a new version, once it was successfully proven that a new kind of Pokemon actually was compatible. There’d been an infamous example decades ago, when Kanto had dealt with a design flaw in its Fly HMs that made it impossible for Charizard to learn from them.

Sun carefully visualized his team’s AWE Fields as they used new attacks… He was especially focused on the possibility that Sha might be capable of Acid Spray. Acid Spray was essentially like Acid, with similar overall power, but a different mix of enzymes that had a much more intense weakening effect on enemy defenses.

With that, Sun enlisted the help of Rotomdex and asked people around the park if they had any Pokemon that could use Acid Spray. He’d been expecting it’d be someone with an Alolan Grimer, but it actually turned out to be a young woman with frizzy, dark purple hair, dark skin, and a Trubbish.

Her name was Felicia, apparently. Despite the purple hair implying she favored Poison, her only other Pokemon were a Cutiefly and Alolan Meowth.

Sun carefully watched her Trubbish fire off about four Acid Spray attacks, while Sha floated close by within range of the Field, both Sun and Sha carefully noting Trubbish’s internal workings and the fluctuations of their Field each time. Once Sun believed he had enough information to start making his own attempts, he profusely thanked Felicia for her help.

“I’ve always wanted to meet a psychic, so I’m glad to help!” Felicia said, beaming. “Say, can you see the future, or anything like that?” Felicia asked.

Sun shook his head, although he did inform her that his abilities largely pertained to light, making a display of multicolored sparkles to show his point.

Hau watched from a distance, feeling amazed even by the simple act of Sun interacting with someone. It was already nice to see him interacting with people before… but after personally seeing a small piece of how terribly Sun had been treated in the past, Hau could hardly believe that Sun was still so open to others.

Was that through his own effort, or was it a side effect of forgetting so many bad experiences? Or were there just enough good experiences to balance it out? Or did Sun’s species have a different psychological response? Or was it because they were humans and not Sun’s species? If most humans were less powerful than Sun, was Sun simply less threatened by humans?

...Was the Sun with all his memories significantly different from the Sun that Hau currently knew?

Did amnesia even work like that?

Hau figured he was probably thinking too hard about the whole situation…. And getting awfully hung up on thoughts about Sun in general...
Still, that didn't ease up how shocked Hau was when he watched for a while longer... and Sha ended up duplicating Acid Spray within just a few tries. Lillie looked up from training Popplio as well, alerted by the wave of triumphant emotion radiating off of Sun.

Sha flew into Sun's arms, and Sun embraced him closely, silently lavishing him with praise before rewarding him with a couple of Poke Beans for his efforts. Poke Beans naturally produced a substance that was mildly euphoric but non-addictive for Pokemon, roughly akin to weakened catnip effects. Such an effect made them renowned for allowing Pokemon to bond with humans much more readily. But as with catnip and cats, most Pokemon weren't interested in eating more than a few at a time, especially if they weren't generally herbivores.

But being highly active, especially when fully employing Fields, was known to cause Pokemon to process the compounds faster. As a result, it also made them much more willing to continue eating Poke Beans.

Still, Poke Beans tended to run up quite a bill when enough of them were bought over a long enough period of time. Despite high supply, there was also endless demand. Pokemon Center cafes regularly gave out modest supplies of free beans with drink purchases, to help out.

That wasn't even getter into rarer and more potent varieties of Poke Bean, which were both more difficult to find in stock and more expensive to purchase, and generally weren't given out for free.

With Poke Beans on their side, the group continued to make good progress even after Sun's quick success with Sha's Acid Spray.

Still, as things continued, not every move came to Sun so readily. Acid Spray seemed to work so quickly largely because all Sha had to do was swap some chemicals around and go by what Trubbish did, already being on Trubbish's general skill level as it was.

Over the next week and a half, the group would train while traversing Hau'oli and the southernmost sections of Route 2, while using the park as a general meeting place. For Sha, the next move targets were Toxic and Venoshock, which Sun knew made a particularly powerful combination. It'd be of vital importance against a Totem Pokemon, especially if Ilima was going to make his Trial different. He wouldn't have to worry as much about going too hard on a Totem Pokemon.

Meanwhile, Zorua worked on mastering Dark Pulse, and Rhovea worked on learning Bug Bite, which would officially become her strongest available move if she managed to master it.

Hau's Rowlet managed to learn Razor Leaf and Astonish without much trouble, while Pichu got Sweet Kiss and Thunder Wave... with Nasty Plot well underway.

Even Popplio managed to learn Disarming Voice, along with Aqua Jet. It was partly with Sun and Lillie helping, but the first shaky signs of the moves came merely because of Popplio's instincts and experimenting during training.

Still, getting the scheduling down for training was important. The original training efforts were somewhat unfocused and unplanned, everyone largely playing things by ear. It was Lillie who ended up suggesting that things should be properly scheduled, to a certain extent.

Everyone typically woke up in the Pokemon Center by 9 am, ate breakfast together, then made their way to their training spot for the day, typically some area of the park or surrounding land. Training for general skill, fitness, and new moves went from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm, followed by lunch, further followed by general battling, playing with the Pokemon, or whatever else.
Around 3pm was when everyone would supposedly split up and do their own things if they wanted, before meeting up at the park again by 7pm... But as time went on, it proved to be rather rare that any of the three teens were willing to split up for long. The only real exception was that Lillie did at least go shopping for clothes that were a bit more suitable for travel... although her overall style remained very similar, including the rather impractical decision to keep with mostly white clothing. When asked, she just shrugged somewhat uncomfortably.

But after the whole first week and a half was over, Hau's search for a proper 3rd Pokemon still seemed to be fruitless. He would quickly and easily bond with new Pokemon he met on a surface level, playing with them and interacting with them freely, even many of the wild Pokemon... But he was surprisingly discerning when it came to actually keeping them around, citing his reason as not wanting to “force himself” on Pokemon. He didn't make a move until there was a case of a wild Happiny that had apparently been roaming the park from time to time, and wound up befriending Hau's Pichu. After a full two days of the two playing together, Hau decided he'd made his decision.

Unfortunately, it didn't end up being as easy as Hau expected.

Another new trial-goer, a pale and lanky girl with punkish clothing and short red hair, also had interest in the Happiny... Hau had briefly seen her before, but hadn't realized the situation until the exact afternoon he attempted to catch Happiny... which quickly drew the girl's attention.

“Hey! I was gonna catch that Happiny! Step off!” she called, running up to Hau from seeming out of nowhere while he, his Pokemon, and Happiny stood near the slides together.

“Oh, you were? My bad, I had no idea!” Hau patiently responded. “I have seen you around a couple of times, but never for long enough to see you with Happiny,” Hau further explained.

“I've been after her for three weeks now!” the girl complained. “She thinks it's some kind of game! Every time I get close, she runs away!” she explained.

“Hmmm…” Hau started. “Happiny, is that true?” he asked, looking down at the little Pokemon. She shook her head in short order.

“Of course it's true! I wouldn't make something like that up!” the girl indignantly shot back.

“Alright, so maybe we just have to be more specific...” Hau started. “Happiny, did it seem like a game to you?” Hau rephrased. Happiny quickly shook her head no. “So that's what it is! Even though you didn't mean to, you were probably making Happiny uncomfortable. Is that right, Happiny?” Hau asked. The little creature nodded again.

“Oh…” the girl started.

“Huh?” Hau asked.

“It's just... I should've known. It's not like this hasn't happened to me before. I'm not actually that great with Pokemon...” the girl said, eyes downcast. “Sometimes it seems like my Marill is the only Pokemon who really gets me.”

“Oh, don't feel too bad about that! You can always get better! I mean, I've spent my whole life around a lot of different kinds of Pokemon, so I've just had a lot of time to practice and get used to it. That's all it is, really! People who don't get along with Pokemon well always have a chance to change that! I could give you a couple of pointers, if you want,” Hau said, responding brightly and
energetically.

“Oh, you could? Like what?!” the girl asked, perking up considerably.

“Well, try to pay close attention to body language, and look at things like the Pokemon would. Every Pokemon is different, but most of the Pokemon of a certain species will more or less follow certain traits. And there's more than just facial expression when it comes to Pokemon. Happiny are really playful and cheerful, but they're easily frightened... Yet, a lot of the time, they keep smiling even when they're nervous, because they're trying to stay calm. And a lot of the time, scared baby Pokemon get rooted to the spot... So what seems like a Pokemon waiting for you on purpose might actually be a Pokemon scared to move until the last second.” Hau told her, doing his best to sound calm and non-judgmental.

“I hadn't even thought about that... Thank you!” the girl said. “But are there any more obvious signs that a Happiny is scared?”

“Happiny's ponytails will droop or vibrate when they're upset, or they'll be shuffling their feet. Try to remember that, okay? If you have a smartphone or Pokedex, you can look into whatever Pokemon you want on your team to see more about their behavior too!” Hau said. “Plus, there's another thing that helps a ton, but it takes a while, so I can tell you, but don't be upset if you don't really get it yet,” Hau continued.

“What is it?”

“When you spend enough time around Pokemon, you start to feel their Fields... You can't see them, but you can feel them. They go right through you, and the feeling varies depending on the Pokemon, and how it is,” Hau said. “My... relative is really, really good at it, and I can do it sort of too, but I still have a long way to go.” Hau explained, having certain reasons for not wanting to directly refer to Hala.

“How long does that take? Do you have to be psychic or something?”

“It's little bit of a psychic thing, but it's so minor that practically anyone can eventually do it. You basically just have to spend a lot of time with a variety of Pokemon... It especially helps if you become close with a bunch of those Pokemon, too! The more Pokemon you befriend, the better your Field will be able to harmonize with Pokemon from then on. At least, that's what I've been told,” Hau explained.

Hau had actually been told quite a bit, but he was doing his best to keep it simple. The connection that could be achieved between human and Pokemon Fields, an effect called Synchronized Oscillatory Meld, was still being researched extensively. However, much of the progress in how powerful it was possible to make a Pokemon could be directly tied back to advances in understanding the effect, and how human Fields were able to support and strengthen Pokemon in spite of typically being so much weaker. Apparently, it had to do with a human's Field being able to dramatically increase the efficiency of a Pokemon's, rather than the human Field directly adding much power.

What exactly made a human Field so good at supporting Pokemon Fields was still under study. But it was clear that Pokemon Fields did steadily impact the human brain tissues responsible for generating AWE. It was just that rather than the mechanism becoming exponentially stronger, as it did in Pokemon, the mechanism largely became more efficient, with the brain seeming to subconsciously learn how to better connect with Pokemon in general, even on levels that could be independent from someone's actual behavior.
People who'd spent time with and connected with many Pokémon often reached a state where they ended up attracting Pokémon without even trying, sometimes even if they were actively trying to ignore all the Pokémon in question. When such people became angry, it was often noted that Pokémon felt an urge to *comfort* them, rather than the natural urge to *avoid* them.

The possibility that someone with a Field above Tier 0 could influence Pokémon in unique ways was an active area of study all its own, and there were already many anecdotes and informal records that it could indeed be the case.

Hau realized he'd found another excuse to think of Sun and did his best to clear that line of thinking.

The redheaded girl he'd been talking to gave her name, Alex, and thanked Hau for the advice.

But of course, Hau realized something else, much like Kukui and most likely Lillie had as well.

He realized that it didn't answer the question of what could eventually happen if there were a Field above Tier 0… Without being either human or Pokémon.

A question that used to be nothing but a thought experiment, beforehand… suddenly begging to be answered, after Sun's arrival.

Hau said his goodbye and wished Alex well, before noting that Happiny was still leaning against his leg.

Without much further fanfare, Hau bent down with a Pokéball in hand, and the young Happiny happily submitted, getting sucked in and captured without even a hint of struggle.

Hau cheered as he let Happiny back out. When Lillie and Sun came over to see what'd happened, they couldn't help but be impressed. Despite an unassuming appearance, Happiny evolved into Chansey and then Blissey, both exceptionally useful and coveted Pokémon in their own right.

Things went on much like before for yet another three weeks, although the group steady pushed northwards over that timeframe, moving fully into Route 2 and ending up right next to Verdant Cavern.

Happiny had already become a Chansey, which wasn't a particularly difficult feat. The difficult part was merely finding finding the Happiny in the first place. After a week of higher-quality meals and rest, and some Poke Beans here and there, along with consistent training and a few battles, Happiny easily evolved, the transformation spurred on by the presence of an Oval Stone.

Unlike most evolution stones, Oval Stones did not have any particularly special properties in and of themselves, merely being significant for the psychological effect they had on Happiny.

Most Happiny rapidly built up an intense core of Field energy, even to a somewhat detrimental extent, as the rapid energy stockpile also hoarded much of the AWE that they could've put towards becoming stronger, making them rather weak and unskilled Pokemon. The energy, despite rapidly becoming present, wouldn't be properly released until Happiny had reached a certain mental state of feeling fully prepared for its next stage of its lifecycle… which was exactly what an Oval Stone was for, helping a Happiny feel more mature and secure. With one of those, the time required dropped immensely.

Along with Chansey, Pichu had evolved as well, soon after mastering Nasty Plot. Hau's Pikachu
had already gone from clumsy to far more nimble and surefooted, his electrical attacks improving dramatically in power output. When Nasty Plot was added into the mix, Pikachu showed that he had the makings of a true terror on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Rowlet was still on the very brink, but Sun could tell his time was approaching soon. Even without evolving, his Field had graduated to a full Tier 2. The radius and flexibility of his aerokinesis and the power and range of his other attacks had improved dramatically as well. He'd even learned Ominous Wind, a Ghost-type technique with a difficult but useful special effect, in which its excess energy could be used to temporarily enrich and refine a Field to the extent that all of the user's battle capabilities spiked at once. It was the first sign of Rowlet's ultimate path to developing into a fine Decidueye, deftly manipulating its Field to bring massive amounts of energy out of spirits, shadows, and life forces.

Meanwhile, Lillie had failed to obtain a second Pokemon, but despite the odds… she had obtained a Brionne.

It felt a bit hollow, honestly.

Although Lillie had done training drills with Brionne, and practiced with Sun and Hau, and always treated her with respect, she still wouldn't call herself nearly as great a battler as Sun or Hau. Brionne still made half the calls on her own, with Lillie mainly offering orders to dodge or watch out.

Still, even in having friendly battles with Hau's Chansey, it was evident that the entire Chansey line released inordinately large amounts of excess AWE upon their defeat. Apparently, just as Happiny rapidly built up an evolution reserve, the line in general also had great excesses of AWE typically reserved for their regenerative abilities, impressive vitality, and high-energy eggs. The tradeoff was that the excess AWE was easily dispersed, and offered little recourse when it came to physical strike.

So, it wasn't incredibly surprising that repeatedly sparring against Chansey would cause an evolution a bit sooner than expected… But the fact that it'd happened before Lillie could really call herself satisfied with her skills as a budding Trainer was what bothered her the most.

In terms of raw power, Brionne was already close to catching up as Sha's equal… but in overall skill, Sha still outstripped her quite handily. Sha had successfully learned Toxic and Venoshock as well, further increasing their potency and versatility. Still, even Brionne already had a good spread of Aqua Jet, Baby-Doll Eyes, Bubble Beam, Disarming Voice, and Icy Wind.

Still, around the approximate time that Hau and Sun were about ready to try the first Trial, the group saw a familiar duo at the entrance to Verdant Cavern, still clad in blue and white.

This time, the trio of teens was noticed almost immediately.

“Halo!” Zossie called cheerily. “You're here too! Are you doing that human Island Challenge?”

Sun nodded, just sort of passively accepting that Zossie was going to keep calling him Halo.

“Oh, what Pokemon do you have then? That must be fascinating… not just sharing Pokemon based on need…”

“Wait… I hardly noticed last time, but he has a Beast Ball around his waist… does that mean…?” Dulse started.
Sun sent out all three of his current team members, both Zossie and Dulse immediately brightening considerably upon seeing Sha.

“Sha's still alive too!” Zossie cried, immediately going bright green and rushing forward to hug the little purple creature… who seemed a bit surprised, but quickly relaxed into it.

“We definitely thought they were gone… They were still fine after your accident, Sun-Incanze, but reports said they rushed directly into the explosion just seconds after it happened… Rather than being destroyed, that must've allowed them to somehow find the portal.”

“Oh, this is wonderful! The hive's been shrinking over time… These Nadevae are an endangered species now, and it's exceptionally difficult for them to become Nagandel on our homeworld. If you could raise another Naganadel, that would be amazing!”

Sun just cocked his head, struggling to remember Nagandel. But slowly, it came to him… Massive, draconic creatures with insectoid traits. Apex predators. Powerful jaws, massive grey pincers on the sides, two powerful draconic wings, and a massive abdomen containing various glands designed to generate only the most horrific and potent toxins. The height of the aerial defense for the Megalopolis, the ideal bodyguards and broodmothers. They birthed hundreds of Poipole each, in luminous hives made of mashed soil and stone mixed with various chemicals, processed into a substance not unlike a toxic, shock-absorbent cement.

But how did Sha become-

“Sha must build a great deal of excess power and nutrients, then learn enough mastery over their latent draconic energy to fully wield a move known as Dragon Pulse. Upon doing so, a cascading rush of chemical reactions is triggered in the body, leading to evolution,” Dulse explained.

Sun thanked him for that, knowledge he'd already known coming back to him with Dulse's words.

“But wait, why are you guys here?” Hau asked.

“Verdant Cavern has highly fascinating energy readings, and we came to investigate. A human by the name of Ilima apparently oversees this area… They've been exceptionally hospitable over the last few days, and provided quite a bit of information. Relatively high amounts of the Blinding One's lingering light spill through into this area, filtering in through myriads of miniscule gaps in the dimensions… Along with the occasional opening of the Ultra Wormholes, causing incredibly large quantities of energy to arrive at once. Here, that energy is apparently called Z-Power. It's fascinating that humans can wield it… Not to offend you, but humans seem like rather fragile beings as a whole, although I am surprised by how kind they can be,” Dulse explained.

“Apparently, humans create even more Z-Power than what already arrives by funneling their Field energy through Z-Rings, and then further refining it with Z-Crystals… Still, it's a limited process, considering that humans have such weak Fields. Now, if someone with a Field above Tier 0 were to replicate it…”

“Wait… Are you saying your species could do more powerful Z-Moves than humans?!” Hau cried. Lillie and Sun were suddenly intensely focused as well. Neither of them had even considered something like that.

“Theoretically. However, Z-Power is bottlenecked by Field synchronization and the receiver as well. You have to guide Z-Power properly, minimize the amount of energy lost, and allow a Pokemon to absorb such large quantities properly. Not to mention, the Pokemon would have to be powerful already, to handle the strain of such sudden Z-Power influxes…” Dulse further explained.
“We have noticed that the efficiency of energy transfer is pretty low in humans… They usually need odd poses just to enter the correct psychological state. Either way, a bunch of power escapes, releasing heat and energy in such massive amounts as to create light that humans can see as well, something they call a Z-Aura… But beyond that, the Z-Aura extends far further, in forms only we can detect, wasting more energy still. Even with the strongest bonds, this aura strongly persists. There seem to be inherent limitations in the system of power. Moves typically only become 50% to 200% more powerful than before.”

“But how does the Z-Ring convert our power? If we knew that, we could make better Z-Rings, right?” Lillie asked.

“That's classified,” both Dulse and Zossie said simultaneously.

The teens all frowned at that.

“If it can create more Z-Power… it's likely to be some kind of substance that originates from Ultra Space itself…” Lillie started. “So what is Ultra Space like, then? Is it the source of it all, or just the transfer mechanism for the Blinding One?”

“That's classified,” Dulse replied again, although he flinched slightly at the fact that Lillie was honestly on to something.

“And if you said it comes from the Blinding One… What do Z-Rings have to do with them? I'd think it must be something, if the Z-Rings can make more too… Does the Blinding One, by any chance, secrete the necessary minerals, or cause chemical changes in-”

“That's classified!” Dulse repeated, his tone becoming harsher.

Sun frowned at that tone of voice, eyes flickering gold as he prepared to help Lillie out… Only to remember something in a flash of images and words and snippets of conversation, in the process of wondering why it was classified.

Oh.

Oh right.

He mentally broadcasted the images and information to everyone before he could be stopped, and before it was even realized he remembered at all. The Blinding One, Necrozma was made of a crystalline substance, but his ancestors heavily damaged and weakened it! So the Sparkling Stones and Z-Rings were probably made of Necrozma! The only reason that was classified was because they were too stuck up and ashamed to just admit it!

“...Well. That's another breach in confidential knowledge… Truly, we are doing such great work…” Dulse said dryly. “It’s not like we aren’t already breaking multiple rules by failing to report anything about Sun-Incanze or Cosmog…”

“You would remember that right now,” Zossie continued. Sun silently apologized. “But yeah, actually, you’d be surprised at how much stuff is pointlessly classified just because the Luminaries are too prideful to admit any mistakes.”

“It’s even worse that our people are getting uneasy because of a growing divide over whether or not Necrozma deserves any respect anymore…” Dulse said. “I think at this point, Necrozma’s only still alive because completely killing it would incite the ire of both much of the populace… and
creatures… beyond us…”

“What do you mean by that?”

“...Did you think Necrozma is our only god?” Dulse quietly asked. Lillie instantly went silent.

“Should I even ask what the other ones are, or are you just gonna say that’s classified too?” Hau asked.

“...Unfortunately, yes,” Zossie replied, sighing.

“I knew it!” Hau fired back. “Sun, you remember anything? You remember something else about this, right, don’t you? You’re really smart, so I bet you do!” Hau said, casually putting an arm around Sun and pulling him in close with an expectant grin as he did. Sun stiffened slightly, feeling his hearts briefly fall out of rhythm as his stomach did a weird lurch and his thoughts scattered into chaos, bouncing around in his brain like a mess of rubber balls…. And yet, if he said he weren’t also enjoying it, he’d be lying.

Sun focused, and remembered just one more thing… no image, just a phrase, a phrase he’d heard repeatedly.

The Light and The Sound,
The Blinding And The Deafening.

“...Let’s not discuss that any further,” Zossie and Dulse said simultaneously, almost mechanically.

The teens were quieted by the eerie unison, but from a great distance, high in the air, a certain being watched the gathering with great disdain.

Invaders, gathering up and exchanging information?

No matter how small the group, if they were to call for backup, and even more of them started to familiarize with Alola, started feeling too comfortable, starting feeling entitled…

If they had the child of the stars within their grasp, to boot…

Tapu Koko knew what that child had wanted… But this was larger than just that alien humanoid with them...

Tapu Koko needed to strongly discourage them.

With that, their Field surged outwards in an unbelievably fast wave, racing through the land and through the skies.

People for several kilometers around felt slight tingling sensations, or an odd sense of pressure, as Tapu Koko gave a thunderous cry, will reaching out to the heavens.

One of their siblings was the true master of rains and seas, but Tapu Koko knew their siblings well, and knew a few of their tricks as well.

Tapu Koko spun about, starting a wild dance through the sky, shooting up into the clouds and cavorting amongst them as they rapidly darkened and expanded, growing heavy with its fierce power.
Like a great dark bruise across the sky, the angry clouds spread like mad, propagating in unnatural bursts of flashing grey and long, spiraling whorls.

Along with the clouds, Tapu Koko reached for the errant Z-Power throughout the land, summoning it up in great waves and then extending their Field towards the objects of their ire, the Z-Power surging along with it.

A satisfactory way to get around that troublesome protectiveness the little one had. Simply make it so that he was not directly doing the punishing.

Meanwhile, the group of five near Verdant Cavern all shuddered, as an unsettling wind blew, and intense waves of AWE rushed in along with it.

There was a chorus of strange cries as a roving group of various Pokemon filed out of Verdant Cavern and from the surrounding vegetation, Pokemon all native to the area, lead by a truly massive Gumshoos, wreathed in a golden aura.

Their Fields flared as a seething mass, all just Tier 1 or Tier 2 typically, but also all further empowered with Z-Power. Fortunately, for most of them, out of the thirty or so Pokemon Sun rapidly estimated, there was only one Z-Aura with such strength as to make a glow visible to the human eye. Totem Gumshoos.

Apart from the Gumshoos, the horde didn't seem like a horde of Totems, just a horde of Pokemon given an unnaturally strong and sudden influx of Z-Power.

Judging by the slightly crackling ground and the unnatural storm brewing with impossible speeds overhead, Sun figured he knew perfectly well who was responsible.

“Holy shit!” Hau cried. “Guys, we gotta run! Something's not right with these Pokemon!”

“I'll hold them back, you all go ahead!” Dulse shouted, as his Field flared out with rich psychic energy, so much brighter and grander than any single Field from any of the mad horde.

Sun and Tapu Koko both recognized its strength immediately, as it pulsed over fifty meters outwards, and Dulse began to glow a deep violet light from his eyes, mouth, and nodes. One regarded it with awe, and one with disgust. Tier 3, easily.

“Everyone, listen to Dulse! He’s strong, he can do this!” Zossie called, although her voice faltered a bit in the intense winds of the storm, as she tried to to betray the fact that she was probably the most worried of all. The others quickly obeyed Dulse, sprinting off as fast as their legs could carry them. The horde rushed forward, but Dulse manifested a great wall of light, pushing them back. He grunted with the effort, bracing his body as steam wafted off of him and his suit also began to glow violet, issuing various beeps and diagnostic signals as it pumped his body with stimulants.

The horde threw themselves against it without mercy, the existence of the wall and Dulse's Field only seeming to further infuriate them. Dulse struck back by having spikes and spears of superheated hard light extend and shoot out from the wall at incredibly fast speeds, dealing brutal blows to the horde. Once the other four had run far enough, Dulse converted the wall into a tight semi-sphere shape, both fully protecting him and allowing him to more easily attack from all angles.

Rain began to fall as the bodies of Pokemon did too, building to a relentless pace in just moments. The skies flashed with lightning, and rolling thunder could be heard all around, strike after strike...
Harsh winds started up almost immediately afterwards, hampering Dulse's focus as they thoroughly battered him… And hampering the progress of all those attempting to escape.

Groups of Spearow and Cutiefly managed to easily bypass Dulse wall with flight, even as he tried to shoot them down. As they flew, they seemed far less affected by the angry squall than they should've been, as if they were cooperating with the storm rather than fighting it.

The Totem Gumshoos watched from the back, giving out loud calls to guide the horde, and occassionally joining in on the assault with powerful Pursuits.

Dulse gritted his teeth, trying not to get too intimidated by the fact that the Dark-type move caused the wall to briefly tremble and deform, its psychic energies being strongly disrupted as Dulse scrambled to keep it together… But regardless, he wouldn’t go down so easily.

Tapu Koko approached a bit closer, reaching out to the area with their oppressive will, and letting out a piercing cry of dismay when they realized that Dulse was holding up far too well for their liking.

Still, they supposed that was what happened when you got a species with the power of humans and Pokemon combined… Not just as a rare freak occurrence, but a species-wide trait.

Disgusting.

Creatures like that had no business in Tapu Koko's territory. And they had no business thinking they could keep coming without consequence.

Not after what happened last time…

Before any Tapu knew better…

Sun, Hau, Lillie, and Zossie ran on, racing to the north, attempting to find somewhere to hide away from angry Pokemon and the relentless storm.

Zossie, the smallest by a considerable margin, was also one of the fastest, easily keeping pace with Sun. However, her lead was soon ripped away from her by a blast of wind and rain so utterly intense that it actually knocked her off of her feet and blew her backwards, causing her to cry out in alarm until Lillie just barely managed to grab her by the hand, with Sun and Hau quickly moving to further secure Lillie in turn.

Everyone briefly paused to make sure Zossie was alright before they quickly set off again, Sun and Zossie doing their best to use their eyesight to scan for a good place to stop, which also caused Zossie to take her visor off so that it wouldn't get in the way quite so much.

But Tapu Koko wasn’t quite done harassing them yet.

Well over a dozen Spearow and Cutiefly arrived, along with a few Yungoos and even a couple of Ribombee and a Fearow, although they were semi-fortunately only especially strong in relation to the fleeing teens.

The Pokemon harassed the group constantly, even as Sun and Zossie attempted to ward them off with bursts of light and short laser pulses… But if anything, that only seemed to anger them further.
The next couple of minutes alone brought a harrowing mix of the attacking Pokemon, pounding wind and torrential rains, and a couple of terrifyingly close lightning bolts… The group ran into an area heavier with trees, all doing their best not to trip or fall behind. Regardless, they ended up split into two pairs, despite their best efforts to stay close. Hau and Sun made up one pair, while Lillie and Zossie made up the other.

Fortunately, with a Luxian in each pair, both managed to briefly evade the horde by taking advantage of their illusion capabilities along with the harsh conditions to make themselves harder to track.

The end result for both pairs was similar. Brief but uneasy safety, as both found shelter among the chaos…. Although in the act of splitting up, they’d also split the remaining horde into two smaller hordes.

Lillie and Zossie ended up in a small cave that was more just a tiny offshoot of Verdant Cavern than anything, with small tunnels and crevices that were only of any use to small Rattata and Yungoos. They ended up having to run a few Rattata off, but ultimately, the cave was theirs for the taking, and it had a small bend in it that they could use to avoid being directly visible from the entrance. Still, that only left them with enough room that they had to sit rather close, but it was much better than nothing.

Meanwhile, Hau and Sun ended up in a somewhat larger cave that was connect to Verdant Cavern by its walls, but lacked true entrances into Verdant Cavern proper. Sun had Sha and Rhovera seal off the only entrance with a toxic but waterproof mix of silk and various chemicals, buying them all time and allowing them to rest and relax a bit.

Sun, upon noticing how wet Hau was, wasted no time in wrapping himself around Hau, glowing bright white all over as his entire body began to steam and heat up. Rhovera joined in as well, squirming up into Hau’s lap and raising her body temperature.

Hau felt just a moment of surprise followed by quickly relaxing, surrendering completely to the utter warmth and comfort he felt in comparison to being soaked and exhausted beforehand.

Sun began to produce a low thrumming sound, further calming Hau as they quietly sat together. Vivid pink light crept through the white glow, Sun’s hearts briefly beating at an odd pace before going steady again. The exhilaration of being so close to Hau faded a bit, replaced by a feeling of deep ease, despite the frightening circumstances.

Still… What if...

“I’m sure Lillie and Zossie will be alright! The worst of those Pokemon came after us, and Lillie has Brionne with her. She's smart, so as long as she doesn't have Brionne fight them all at once, they should pull through. Plus, Zossie has powers like you, right?” Hau said, almost as soon as Sun started to think about it.

Sun nodded, feeling a bit reassured. If only he had a stronger Pokemon, he could have that Pokemon go check on them personally… For the time being, he called upon Rotomdex… who came out of Sun’s bag on their own, as Sun wasn’t particularly inclined to let go of Hau.

“Zzzt! The signal’s not very good!” Rotom said, crestfallen. Sun and Hau were equally upset until Rotom suddenly grinned widely. “Good thing I’m Rotomdex!” Rotom continued, before sparking for a moment. A Field of incredible breadth suddenly bloomed outwards, how far it went in total, Sun didn’t
know… But it easily penetrated the cave walls, and judging by its qualities, it could go on for far longer. It didn't seem particularly 'dense' or inordinately intense, but Rotom didn't seem particularly strained by the process either.

Rotom's will further strengthened and stabilized the signal even in spite of Tapu Koko’s troublesome influence…and moments later, Lillie and Zossie were on his screen, seemingly somewhere dry.

“Sun! Hau! Thank goodness you're both alright!” Lillie said. Nebby popped out of Lillie’s bag to make a squeal of delight as well.

“Halo! I mean, Sun! I'm gonna try to call you Sun now! Do you know how Dulse is holding up? There was a Totem Gumshoos back there!” Zossie asked.

Sun frowned, shaking his head. Meanwhile, Hau just gaped at the sight of her.

“Huh? What's with that look?” Zossie asked.

“Y-your eyes! You took your visor off!” Hau cried.

“Oh. Yeah, sorry about that! Forgot that'd surprise people so much! Lillie just kinda rolled with it, pretty much,” Zossie said. Her eyes were a bright, piercing cherry red, with the same unusually large size and doubled pupils as Sun's. She frowned slightly as she continued speaking. “Anyway, about Dulse… From our connection, he's exhausted, but conscious… But there's this distance, and the Field of that absurdly powerful creature interfering, so I can't tell much more,” Zossie explained.

“This is happening because of Tapu Koko, right? Do you know why they hate your species so much?!” Hau asked. “…I'm sure it was trying to tell me, once, but I can't remember! It was like, in my head, but it was so intense and painful I could barely handle it!”

“…I can tell you that it has reasons, but I can't tell you the whole story,” Zossie said with a sigh. “It's nothing to do with us personally… It's about what our species has done in the past. And what we have the potential to do.”

“What do you mean by that?” Hau asked. Lillie was looking at Zossie intently as well.

“Oh… I can't tell you the main thing, but besides that… You know how we have powers and we formed complex society and technology? Tapu Koko doesn't like that. From what we've been told, none of your ‘Tapu’ creatures do. It threatens them. It strikes them as especially unnatural, on top of the fact that we come from another world. Tapu are what you call Land Spirits. From what we know… They are like your land's heart and immune system. They're bound to it. They can't live without it. Its protection is their biological imperative. They seem to feed on its unique Z-Power, and thrive specifically in its weather conditions.”

“...Who told you all-” Lillie started.

“Classified,” Zossie interrupted. “Sorry.”

“Figures…” Hau said, pouting slightly. Sun just nuzzled him closer.

It was only then that Hau fully realized the implications of he and Sun still being so comfortably nuzzled up so closely together even while speaking, which made him swallow a bit nervously.

The… situation… between them was pretty much old news to Lillie, at worst she'd just tease Hau more. But Zossie… Hau had no idea how she'd react.
Not to mention that he and Sun had already been cuddling long enough that there was no point in suddenly trying to stop, especially because Hau didn't want to accidentally offend Sun… Who for his part, seemed completely and utterly unashamed, which Hau took as hopefully a good sign.

“So like… You and Sun, what's the relationship there?!” Hau asked louder than he meant to, suddenly uncomfortably aware of the fact that if Zossie was actually Sun's former romantic partner or something, that could have very unfortunate consequences… Especially with beings that could do weird brain stuff and shoot freaking laser beams…

“Oh, don't worry human! I'm… Sun's cousin,” Zossie said with a brief pause, not entirely sure how Sun would react.

Sun flinched at that.

“Qwesu Zostera?” Sun muttered quietly, even letting go of Hau to scoot closer to Rotom's screen, his eyes and nodes shining with intense greens and bright bursts of whitish-pinks.

Recognition, true recognition, sparked in Sun's eyes. Zossie smiled ear to ear, a mouth full of gleaming crystal teeth on full display. She nodded eagerly.

“Qwesu Zostera!” Sun repeated with glee, although it was just as quickly replaced with sorrow and regret, as he immediately began to profusely apologize for forgetting about her.

Zossie just emphatically reassured him it wasn't his fault, giggling at the display.

Hau and Lillie smiled as well, but still… there was something else Hau needed to know.

“Zossie… Sorry if this is weird, but is Sun, like, how you remember him? As far as personality?” Hau asked, somewhat quietly.

“Hmm… Mostly! But the main difference is that they seem a lot more relaxed here! Hal- I mean, Sun was a lot quieter and more uptight back home. They kinda had to be, given the circumstances… Dulse and I tried our best to help him feel better and relax every now and then, and that was when he'd be the most like how he is now. Soliera did her best to look after him too.”

“Soliera! I… Sun's said that before! Who is that?”

“Oh, she's not blood related, but like… she was a… tutor, I think you'd call it. Well, nanny/tutor, for Sun's powers and education... She's more Sun's mom than Sun's actual mom.” Zossie explained. “And Dulse was like… a servant. Or bodyguard. That's how he's so tall and strong already. He was literally born for it, really. They would give him all these pills and injections for it too… But Sun never did really like bossing him around, and the Great Luminaries always hated that. They would always say that an Incanze is supposed to be a ‘commanding presence’. And they especially hated how close Sun and Dulse were. Always whining about how unprofessional it was, how Sun was too soft on him, doting on him too much, having too much physical contact…” Zossie grinned widely, letting out an odd laugh. “So what do you want to be to Sun, human? Bodyguard… or something else? Something they've never had before?” Zossie said with a grin.

Between the low lighting of the cave and Hau's skin tone, Hau's blush wasn't visible, but he could definitely feel it. For his part, Sun just picked up on Hau's discomfort and nuzzled against him again, innocently attempting to soothe him. That just further intensified it.

“I think Sun would be happy with either one…” Zossie said with a laugh, Lillie giggling in agreement in the background. Hau just squirmed slightly. Without Zossie being nearby for full telepathic transfer, Sun was oblivious as to what she was truly getting at, but he did silently think
Something he'd never had before...

Sun looked down at himself, noting the flecks of vivid pink light dappling his arms and legs, as he focused his thoughts and bright white joined the mix… the realization came almost blindingly.

Sun’s vivid pink only intensified before suddenly cutting out entirely, his nodes going haywire as he abruptly flickered into invisibility.

“Sun?!” Hau cried. “What's the matter?”

“Oh, they'll be fine! Just a little something they probably just thought about!” Zossie said teasingly. “But more importantly, we should talk about ways we could possibly meet up and find Dul-” Zossie was cut off by the call suddenly ending, which seemed to directly coincide with an especially strong pulse of power through the omnipresent Field emanating from Tapu Koko.

“Sorry, sorry! Tapu are extremely powerful when they want to be! I tried my bezzzt!” Rotom said.

Sun and Hau reassured him that he’d done the best he could. Rotom went back into the bag after a few more attempts, buzzing lowly in defeat. Sun and Hau merely nuzzled back against each other for comfort as they both tried to think, finding it easier to go over the options in silent thought rather than Hau having to articulate himself out loud.

Meanwhile, in the small cave Lillie and Zossie were using, the two girls spoke between just themselves, after a brief period of Zossie swearing and Lillie desperately trying to get the call to connect again.

“...Well, as terrible as it is that we lost the signal, w-we’re not completely out of options yet! And… about that call, is it really okay with you that Sun has feelings for a human?” Lillie asked Zossie. On one hand, it felt like a markedly less important question… On the other hand, if Sun’s choices ended up having a bearing on how much Zossie was willing to continue being so lenient about Sun staying… Maybe it was actually rather important.

“Me, yeah. I think it's hilarious, honestly. They had a bunch of genetic unions arranged from Sun's birth, and political unions were gonna be set up right after he recovered from the accident… To think Sun’s gone back to the old fashioned way, and with a human no less! They can’t even have offspring at all, I’m pretty sure! Oh, the irony! The drama! Ah, but how would that even work if they end up wanting to fuck…”

“Z-Zossie!” Lillie cried, definitely preferring not to have a question like that posed to her in her current circumstances. “…By the way, what do you mean by political and genetic unions?”

“Hardly anyone reproduces in the old way anymore. Genes are combined, targeted, altered, and artificial eggs are brooded collectively until hatching. Unfortunately, the birth rate declines every year… But it's still less risky than having the population develop and raise eggs on their own. Natural births tend to have such fragile shells nowadays, or the babies end up too small and weak… So with all this being said, we get assigned partners for political and social purposes, and often completely different partners for genetic purposes… And you have to pass qualifications to contribute genetically.”
“So… eugenics, essentially?” Lillie said, with a slight grimace.

“Yes. The reason is that we have no chance of revitalizing the species if we can't have everyone being the best they can be… Although I suspect that's not the only reason…” Zossie added the last part on very quietly, to the point it was hard for Lillie to hear her.

“Huh?” Lillie asked.

“Before things collapsed, our genetic engineering and natural diversity was to the point that there were many different subspecies of us. But ever since the collapse, they yanked all the best, or quote-on-quote ‘best’ things out of various races and subspecies, blended it into an 'ideal' race… and threw out the rest.”

“...Threw… out…?” Lillie asked, voice small.

“The infrastructure of Ultra Megalopolis was originally so sprawling as to accommodate up to 150 million who could make it after things collapsed… It even extended super far underground! The old pictures and videos, they're amazing, I wish you could see them!”

“But before… You said… 30 million…” Lillie said quietly. “And why do you talk about the underground past-tense?”

“...There was an accident.” Zossie said, just as quietly. “Surviving subspecies lived down there, but… the entire power system for their Field protection faltered at a crucial time. The Sound got them…”

“...Are you saying what I think you're saying?” Lillie said, so quietly that the ambient noise of the storm nearly drowned her out.

“Maybe. Maybe not. It's classified either way. But awfully convenient that the 'best' species was almost totally unharmed, huh?”

Lillie was dead silent.

“Anyway… I should stop being so cryptic and down for now. Really, I should thank you for grabbing me back when we were out in the storm! I was going to blow away for sure!” Zossie said, flashing a huge smile that displayed all of her sharp crystalline teeth and dark blue gums. After spending so much time around Sun, Lillie just found it charming, more than anything.

“Oh, it was nothing! That was just the right thing to do! I should be thanking you for finding us this cave… even if it did have a Rattata family we had to shoo away, at least they were able to escape to a different tunnel instead of having to go into that storm.” Lillie said.

“No trouble at all! ...By the way, you're still wet from the rain. That's really not good, you humans have more vulnerable immune systems… I could dry you, if you want. Just like Sun dried that human he’s with…” Zossie said teasingly, looking deep into Lillie's eyes.

She giggled when Lillie just blushed and scooted away slightly. “I'm only joking! Here, let me just...” Zossie started, as she began to glow bright white, radiating copious heat without actually touching Lillie at all.

Lillie marveled at the display, scooting slightly closer again to soak in as much heat as possible.

“Oh, and do you want to know how we got here? You did ask before, after all. It's technically
“Of course!” Lillie said, intently interested in any process that could freely open portals between different places and dimensions.

“We took the DNA of Cosmog and… you could say we watered down some things, and changed some others. Added some things, fiddled with metabolism, repressed some things, removed some things… The end result is that Cosmog’s adult forms take far less time and resources to achieve, and are much smaller and less powerful… But still more than powerful enough for our needs. By the Tier system you use, they’re Tier 6, which makes them far more manageable than the usual situation…”

“Adult forms?” Lillie asked.

“They’re in your mythology too. I’ve seen it. Solgaleo and Lunala, you call them. Extreme developmental dimorphism depending on upbringing and role, but they are indeed the same species…”

“Wait…” Lillie started, looking at Nebby. “They’re the same species? As in, Nebby is going to evolve into one of them?!?”

“Yup,” Zossie paused and stared intently at Nebby for a moment, squinting slightly before nodding as if it were the simplest thing. “…Lunala, by the looks of it. But not our kinds of Lunala. This one here is a pure, natural specimen. When they grow up, they’ll be a Tier 7. 120 foot wingspan. Guzzling down light like nobody’s business,” Zossie said. “Well… almost nobody,” she corrected herself. “Lunala is what we call hyper-photosynthetic. 100% efficient light absorption, and the ability to absorb any within an enormous range of itself. It also collects Z-Power, AWE, and even the life force of the recently deceased… But in Lunala’s case, that’s what it needs to do. It’s… important. Solgaleo and Lunala… They’re progenitors of life itself. They take excess energy and resources and distribute it throughout Ultra Space, and to other worlds, sowing them with greater potential for life, and revitalizing those worlds that are struggling. But when a world’s time is up… That energy too will be harvested and re-distributed. Meanwhile, the best worlds, the richest worlds… They grant them Cosmog. Creatures that will grow up on those worlds and join the great cycle,” Zossie explained.

“But, your world…” Lillie started.

“Oh, nevermind that… They’ve forsaken us,” Zossie said, with a bitter laugh.

“But… but how does Nebby become something like that?! Nebby doesn’t battle! Nebby can hardly do anything powerful without terribly hurting themselves!” Lillie cried. “So how could they possibly absorb enough nutrients and Field energy to do something like that?!”

“How it goes about its life-cycle explains it better. It’s different from other Pokemon you know, but it should make more sense to you as time goes on. For now, I don’t think I can risk telling you much more. I’m really sorry!” Zossie said, flickering with dark blue.

“O-oh, that’s okay! You’ve still been such a big help!” Lillie said.

“No problem!” Zossie said, beaming. “Still, I am getting a little tired… it’s incredible that Sun can do things like this even without a suit, and apparently more easily than me… Even after having to go in that healing machine. We expected at least a year for full rehabilitation once he got out… The
conditions of this planet must be far better for his development."

“How long was he in there, anyway?” Lillie asked. “…Actually, how long are your years? How old is Sun really?”

“Hmmm… Our days are almost the same length as yours. And our years are 438 days long. But Sun was being healed for two of our years, and that mostly paused his aging, so he's technically almost 19 in your years… but you may as well say he's 16. Or 13, going by our years.”

Lillie nodded, thankful that it was only slightly confusing. And that would explain why Sun didn't have much trouble with such a human-like sleep pattern.

“And how long do you live overall?” Lillie asked. She was a bit confused by how Zossie seemed to have to think about it for several seconds.

“…Depends. It’s not as much as it used to be. But these days, the median is about 120 in your years. And anyway, you can ask more stuff later. We really do need to talk about how we could get back to Dulse… I can feel his consciousness fading...” Zossie said, dark blues continuing to dominate her nodes.

“Alright! So, we’ll do just like how we did to get here in the first place! I’ll use my powers for stealth, and you’ll have Brionne attack when they least expect it. We’ll retreat regularly so you can heal her, and I’ll throw in some bright light when necessary!” Zossie said.

“Right!” Lillie replied.

“On the count of three, we go back out there,” Zossie said. “One, two… Three!”

With that, both of them darted out of the cave, Lillie immediately sending Brionne out as well. The storm still raged on, but Lillie and Zossie ran towards where Zossie could detect Dulse’s fading signal. Along the way, they quickly found that it was best to hold hands… Both to make it easier for them to communicate silently, and to help them brave the wind and rain.

Brionne, for her part, seemed amazingly tolerant of the storm, leaping and sliding along on the damp earth and slick grass with ease.

Zossie spotted Pokemon approaching far before Lillie did. Their eyes glowed gold with Z-Power as an easy indicator that Tapu Koko had gotten to them. At least sixteen Yungoos and Rattata, uncharacteristically cooperating, along with even some Ekans and a couple of Makuhita, charging with surprising speed. At the heart of the horde, a Totem Gumshoos… although Zossie reported that it looked somewhat beat up already, having probably run afoul of Dulse beforehand.

Lillie’s legs felt like rubber, her heart was pounding, and the rain was coming down so hard it was actually a bit painful, but Lillie felt Zossie squeeze her hand, warmth filling it and surging through
her entire body. She still wasn’t sure if she could do it, if she were being honest, but… She supposed that the only real option was to try her hardest. For Nebby, for Sun… For her very survival.

With that, the two girls enacted their plans, using Zossie’s stealth to sneak through trees and vegetation. Once the horde was in range, Brionne fired off waves of rain-empowered bubbles and surprisingly forceful Disarming Voices, creating such powerful shockwaves as to briefly part curtains of rain each time they were fired and each time bubbles detonated against opponents.

They changed positions several times, doing their best to keep the horde off balance and confused, but Brionne took a few hits regardless, which Lillie had to do her best to keep up with. She belatedly realized just how hard it was to heal a Pokemon in the middle of a storm, and it even cost her some lost and dropped medicines, but overall, the strategy worked well enough with Zossie’s help. It was incredibly frustrating, but definitely helping. Even with the healing breaks being rather inconsistent and prone to getting rapidly interrupted, thanks to the medicine needing a little time to work properly, Brionne was still able to find the strength to fight on.

Nebby squirmed in her bag, apparently wanting to help in some way, but Lillie insistently quieted them, not wanting a repeat of the last time they used their power.

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Things continued in a hectic, exhausting back and forth, Lillie feeling like things were a game of cat and mouse… Just with a lot of cats, one especially powerful mouse, and two very wet and haggard mice desperately clinging to them for a chance at victory.

Brionne would harass the horde with Bubblebeam after Bubblebeam, Disarming Voice after Disarming Voice, breaking them up and weakening them, disorienting and steadily fainting them.

Icy Wind would be thrown into the mix every now and then as well, slowing and further harming the horde, but it left Brionne the most vulnerable, as the winds of the attack needed a bit longer to propagate and take full effect.

Brionne was pushed to the brink from time to time, but ultimately, the horde steadily dwindled…

And finally, with Zossie left heaving for air on the ground beneath a smattering of battered palm trees, and Lillie herself panting and gasping and struggling to even see or stand up straight with all the nonsense going on around her, there was hardly any of the horde left…

Just the Totem Gumshoos, who had decided to stay back for the most part, waiting and watching, trying to learn and conserve their energy.

Lillie glanced at Zossie, who seemed barely able to stand after using her powers so often. Her heart ached, as she was reminded somewhat of Nebby.

Was that what Lillie would always do? Have others keep getting hurt and risking everything for her sake, while she barely did anything in return?

Zossie just slowly shook her head, and pointed to the oversized Gumshoos before them, whose aura thickened and flared brighter as Lillie followed Zossie’s finger and met eyes with the beast.

She understood. There was no time for thoughts like that.

“Aqua Jet!” Lillie commanded, trembling, doing her best to yell it out through the howling wind.
Brionne shot forward in an instant, her body slamming against Gumshoos, who just gave a grunt of pain but hardly even staggered upon impact. The overgrown predator came forward with their mouth agape, crushing fangs at the ready, but Brionne slipped just out of range at the last moment, as Lillie commanded her to get into the air and ready Bubble Beam.

Using Aqua Jet, Brionne launched herself upwards, then fired off a concentrated stream of bubbles with a loud, songlike cry, pummeling Gumshoos with them nonstop before she fell back to the ground.

Gumshoos gave an ungodly screech at that, and Lillie balled her fists, trying to retain her composure as Gumshoos once again made to use Bite.

The hit landed, leaving a nasty gash in Brionne’s side, and Lillie immediately covered her mouth as Brionne gave an agonized squeal, immediately responding with another Bubble Beam.

Rain mixed with blood as Brionne darted about with further Aqua Jets, avoiding the rampage of Gumshoos, and Lillie regained her composure, with the help of some silent urging from Zossie.

Gumshoos came around again, as Brionne had to briefly stop to rest, and Lillie tensed as Zossie fired off an incredibly strong burst of light directly towards Gumshoos, causing them to screech in unholy pain at the sudden assault on their eyes.

Lillie silently thanked Zossie, who just wheezed in reply, her suit beeping some kind of slow, ominous warning. Lillie grimaced at that, knowing that the pressure was on more than ever.

She and Brionne had to win.

Brionne was commanded to use Bubblebeam once more, harshly impacting Gumshoos, who immediately rushed towards Brionne, mouth agape, forcing her to once again narrowly dodge, but Lillie could notice she was losing her edge.

Lillie ordered Icy Wind next, the attack mixing with the heavy rain and moisture to create frozen earth and a deep chill over the already soaked Gumshoos… and yet, the giant thing just steamed, growling lowly as the Aura around it only intensified further.

Why… why wasn’t it fainting?! How was it resisting?!

Gumshoos rushed towards Brionne again and again, in a sudden burst of renewed vigor, leaving deep tracks and skid marks in the muddy ground with their every move. Brionne was simply commanded to dodge like her life depended on it, as the jaws of the Gumshoos gnashed and snapped, and the thing snarled in a truly demented fashion, its eyes only glowing a deeper and stronger gold as time went on. Brionne could only just barely get in some Baby Doll Eyes and a Disarming Voice attack edgewise, hoping to throw it off its game a bit, and yet it just kept on pushing itself, seeming like a nigh relentless force.

How was it so strong?! Why was it so strong?!

Finally, Gumshoos landed a brutal Pursuit to match Brionne’s latest attempt to Aqua Jet away, but although it sent Brionne flying, and then skidding through the mud and into a tree, Brionne slowly, surely got up, at Lillie’s urging.
Gumshoos charged as if it were rabid, immediately trying to capitalize on Brionne’s weakness, but Zossie steadily raised an arm and gave a pained grunt of effort. Another horrid flash of light got Gumshoos from their side, causing them to snarl and whine as they turned to Zossie with rage in their eyes… But yet again, Brionne landed an Icy Wind, giving it all she had, fully diverting Gumshoos’ attention back to her… But the attack was so bitterly cold they could barely move, just as Brionne hardly could either.

Gumshoos gave a loud, ugly sound, their mouth stretching wide.

Lillie had a moment of clarity.

That was it.

Gumshoos, body steaming and glowing with terrifying vigor, once again prepared to charge Brionne, mouth agape.

Lillie silently apologized to the beast before giving her order.

“Bubblebeam, in the mouth!” Lillie shouted, throat raw, voice cracking with desperation.

Lillie felt something odd within her, as if there were a second presence... as if Brionne’s essence had briefly brushed against her very soul...

And then, there was a massive rush of bubbles under absurdly high pressure, travelling at up to a hundred miles per hour, jamming themselves in Gumshoos’ gaping mouth. Some detonated immediately, but many of them were getting swallowed without yet even exploding, as Brionne focused with all of her might to keep them intact.

Gumshoos reared up in pain, but the greatest damage had yet to come.

Myriads of bubbles detonated within it, the thing even coughing up copious amounts of blood as it finally collapsed to the ground, unmoving. Brionne collapsed as well, her entire body riddled with pain and exhaustion.

Lillie felt practically numb, doing little more than trembling in place. Reality stopped feeling real. The world was briefly spinning. She was hardly sure how she wanted to react at all… Moreover, there was some part of her that wasn’t letting her. Not yet. Not yet. They weren’t safe yet. They weren’t safe.

Lillie took a deep breath and returned Brionne to her Pokeball, hand trembling in the process. She went over to Zossie and steadily helped her up, listening with silent dread to her labored breathing.

Still, Zossie silently spoke to her, weakly smiling.

They’d done it.

Lillie and Zossie slowly pressed onwards, changing their plans to looking for a better place to briefly rest before going after Dulse again.

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Tapu Koko looked on with a slight tremble to their levitation, something like guilt gripping their ancient heart..
Especially as they reached and concentrated their Field into the Totem Gumshoos’ body, trying to assist its recovery…

And were met with no Field of Gumshoos’ own.

Tapu Koko trembled a bit faster at that.

As those events unfolded, Hau and Sun dealt with a different but simultaneously rather similar issue.

Namely, that Tapu Koko had gotten tired of waiting them out, and commanded local Pokemon to start aggressively tearing at the barricades that Sha and Rhovera had set up, even in spite of them being heavily laced with toxins.

The two sent out all of their Pokemon, almost immediately realizing that they had nowhere to run.

Telepathically, a plan was rapidly formed.

Chansey was at the front, soaking up the majority of hits and healing with Softboiled. Return would be used every now and then if necessary, but mainly just to knock combatants away if they got too close. Sha, Pikachu, and Rowlet were all behind her, firing off ranged attacks. Pikachu would paralyze whatever got too close, Sha would glue it down with water-resistant toxins, and Rowlet would finish it off.

In the back, Zorua physically attacked anything that tried to sneak through, and used Fake Tears to soften up anything still dealing with ranged attacks, throwing in a Dark Pulse or two if needed. Rhovera waited with a silken trap that spanned the whole width of the cave, and horns spouting embers. If need be, the silk was imbued with flammable compounds that would sent the whole protective strip of it up in flame.

Sun established an illusion to make it seem like the trap wasn't there at all, and hid himself and Hau as well, while Hau prepared a variety of Pokeballs. Certain young Pokemon could sometimes be caught without even weakening them… And even if they didn't capture outright, it would at least distract the Pokemon and hold them up for a bit.

The battle commenced, as nonstandard as it was.

Weaker Pokemon led the assault, but they didn't hold up for long, the first few handily bested as Sun did his best to give silent orders under the strain of holding up a large cloaking illusion.

Surprisingly vicious Cutiefly used their small size to their advantage, a couple of them zipping through cracks in the defense… but Rhovera quickly and easily dispatched them with a few thick globs of silk and a peppering of flames, all without setting off the flaming silk trap.

Sha's new Acid Spray was used to incredible effect in conjunction with Pikachu's electric shocks, leaving hides raw, wet and exposed in preparation to be shocked into submission in short order.

If anyone tired, they would briefly withdraw further back, where Chansey would quickly heal them with Softboiled and Sha would treat them with the cyan goop of their Helping Hand technique.

The two boys swelled with pride at how well their Pokemon were doing. They could really do it! They could really beat back the whole group!

Of course, that was when a Totem Raticate… did not come, so much as crash right in, its massive
body sending Chansey flying backwards, right through the three ranged attackers. They put up a valiant fight, with Sha managing to land Toxic, but the Totem was incredibly resilient regardless.

Sun and Hau looked on in shock, having never expected another Totem. Wasn’t Gumshoos the only one?

A subsequent painful Venoshock from Sha singled them out as the most threatening target. But rather than attacking right away, the Totem Raticate gave a piercing shriek, calling out to other Pokemon in the area. Something was wrong. Sha should’ve gotten multiple Beast Boosts. Raticate was poisoned before Sha unleashed the Venoshock. How in the world was it still standing?

Unlike the usual circumstances, not just one helper would come. Tapu Koko felt smug satisfaction as it sensed that at least a dozen more Pokemon were coming, faster than usual thanks to being modestly enhanced by Z-Power, but still slowly enough that their arrival would be somewhat delayed. Meanwhile, Raticate began to actually absorb excess Z-Power from all the already beaten Pokemon around it, its own Field and Z-Aura only growing brighter and more dense with unrelenting power.

Sun began to think.

If Dulse, back then, had beaten any significant amount of the first batch of Pokemon that came for them all…

If Tapu Koko had some completely unknown amount of Z-Power at their disposal…

And the Z-Power could be redistributed so freely, adapting as needed to the situation, behaving so unusually and being absorbed so easily and rapidly under the thrall of Tapu Koko’s absolutely unbelievable Field…

What they were up against probably had even more Z-Power reserves, having probably drawn from those resources as well.

The Raticate surged to a Tier 3 in strength, letting out a piercing cry as it continued to shrug off attacks, its Z-Aura so potent it seemed to be outright nullifying sizable chunks of the damage, then allowing Raticate to actually steadily regenerate over time, as evidenced by previous acid burns closing up, and Raticate’s general vigor suggesting it was actively resisting the potent effects of Toxic.

But at the same time, resistance wasn’t quite the same as immunity. It was still getting run down, if only they could keep pressuring it.

But the Raticate was positively obscene in their strength, especially compared to the opponents. The massive rat laid down savage Crunch attacks while moving at unsettling speed with Quick Attack, any impacts that caused it to hit the cave walls making the entire thing briefly shake every time. Sha fell in the process of taking a hit for Chansey. Rowlet just barely managed to avoid his monstrous opponent by buffeting their eyes with leaf-feathers at the last moment. Pikachu got caught by the tail and slammed into a wall with worrying force, knocking him out in short order. Zorua, despite resisting Crunch, was so utterly overpowered by Raticate that it didn’t matter, the attack still breaking her back leg with its merciless force.

Rhovera scurried to the forefront to harass the immense rodent with flammable String Shots followed by Ember, the burning silk still doing quite a number even on Raticate’s Z-Power toughened body.
As Raticate came for Rhovera, Hau threw a Pokeball, the little sphere working for all of six seconds before Raticate came out spitting mad. Rhovera used the time for more String Shot as Hau threw yet another ball, then another, then another; each time Raticate came out again. The beast of a rat was simply too big of a target to do much of anything about the annoying strategy, and too impeded by all the silk and the poisoning. Even Chansey had fallen into a clever rhythm of using Copycat to imitate Raticate’s Quick Attack for mobility, followed by getting in quick Sweet Kisses before the Raticate could react, then using Charm to counteract the creature’s immense levels of strength. With Rhovera and Hau as such fine distractions, there was little the Raticate could do about it all.

Finally, after about the fifth or sixth Pokeball, and the whole cave growing uncomfortably hot from all the burning silk that was scattered around, Raticate fell… Sun finally dropped his cloaking illusion entirely, and both Sun and Hau pulled each other into a tight embrace, relief and celebration rushing through their veins… The flames died down, and Rhovera, Rowlet, and Chansey came to them as well.

Sun returned Sha and Zorua, and Hau returned Pikachu, both of them allowing their friends to rest after all of their hard work. Sun could only hope that Zorua’s leg would be alright, but Pokemon were already great healers even before modern medicine was factored in.

And finally, Rowlet began to glow… and surprisingly, so did Chansey, as Hau pulled both of them into an embrace. Both Pokemon expanded in size and changed before his very eyes, leaving two new forms before him, by time the light died down. Blissey and Dartrix.

Hau cheered, hugging the two Pokemon even tighter as Sun marveled at their accomplishment… Only to tense up as he whipped his gaze back to the entrance, where yet more Pokemon were approaching, blasting their way through toxins and mud with blasts of telekinetic energy.

Both Hau and Sun had forgotten that the Totem had called for reinforcements.

At least a dozen Drowzee showed up, none particularly strong, but their group’s actions synchronized well with telekinetic communications and low, infrasonic rumblings from each group member. Not to mention, the way nearly all the excess Z-Power drained out of the fainted Raticate with unnatural speed as soon as they arrived, bestowing them with more power instead.

Immediately, the Drowzee made to rush forward before their enemies could get out into the open, trapping them in the cave once again. Blissey, Dartrix, and Rhovera fought their hardest, but they were already exhausted after all the prior fighting, and evolution only did so much to replenish energy, mostly granting a glorified adrenaline rush rather than total restoration. It didn’t help that they honestly needed more time to get completely used to their new bodies, while the Drowzee were fully equipped with exceedingly annoying tactics. They spewed out horrendous Poison Gas, pulsed hypnotic waves, and sent out debilitating psionic suggestions that completely shut various moves down for brief windows of time… But with everything else going on, Disable only needed to work briefly to be absolutely devastating.

All three remaining Pokemon fell, despite two of them having evolved.

Sun himself was tired as well, having previously spent so much time running for his life, blasting flash-bangs and lasers off at Pokemon, drying himself and Hau with heat, and then creating a prolonged invisibility illusion. But still, his eyes and nodes flared with violet light as he stood
protectively in front of Hau, and the gang of Drowzee spewed out horrendously large quantities of Poison Gas, filling the whole cave. Sun’s eyes watered copiously along with Hau’s, as some of the Drowzee started to follow up with Hypnosis. Even as Sun’s hearts threatened to burst out of him, and he still tried to stand between Hau and the Drowzee, he began to realize there was no point.

Once they both dropped, they’d suffocate no matter what Sun did.

Sun elected to just turn around and hug Hau tightly, as his eyes, nose, and lungs burned fiercely. He mentally suffused as much love and warmth into Hau as he could, doing his best to soothe any of Hau’s pain in his last moments of consciousness, while also doing his best to sent out a telekinetic goodbye message to Lillie and Zossie. Hopefully, Dulse too.

“S-Sun?” Hau wheezed, as Sun just held on tighter. Both of their consciousnesses began to fade… Everything was going black, black, black…

In the darkness, in the fade of reality, Sun could swear there was a feeling of brief movement in his pocket, followed by a mighty bang and a flash of white with unthinkable brightness…

A Field that wasn’t Tapu Koko’s anymore, a Field that pushed out against its disruptive effects with all its might… But it was an incredibly strong Field, nonetheless…

Somewhere, out by Ten Carat Hill, Kukui got a brief message on his phone as he looked out at the nasty-looking storm to the northwest.

Sun: Rotom here. Things got a little out of hand. Tapu Koko’s Field stopped me from intervening sooner. But I handled it. Just as we agreed. I’ll be calling Ilima shortly. It’d be good of you to stop by soon.

Kukui: Thank you, Rotom.

And that was that.

Somewhere, Tapu Koko sulked as it slowly flew off, finally ending the storm, which rapidly petered out without the unnatural influences of an obscenely strong Field to keep it going. The group was stronger than the guardian had realized. More caring and cooperative, too. As much as the Tapu loathed to admit it, they always had admired the qualities that had allowed everyone to persevere.

Perhaps the starchild was correct.

Beyond that…

There was the matter of that dead Totem Gumshoos.

Tapu Koko vibrated at that, and vibrated further as they flew up high and looked out over the landscape… The landscape of torn up vegetation, damaged houses, cowering Pokemon, and collapsed trees and power lines, plaguing much of Hau’oli and the general west coast of Melemele like an ugly scar.

Perhaps they’d gone a bit too far.
Sun woke later, finding himself in a warm bed. His lungs and throat were rather sore, but he found he was able to breathe and at least sit up in bed without too much effort.

Memories came crashing back to him as he did so. Where was everyone else?! Where was he, anyway?! It was someone’s room, but not any room he recognized. It wasn’t all that decorated, just a dresser, a nightstand, and a quaint painting or two hung on the walls. The sheets and blanket were plain, and the walls suggested he was in some sort of cabin. He quickly scanned the area, even looking through walls, which he usually didn’t do in order to give others their privacy… He was quickly relieved to see that his Pokeballs were in the nightstand drawer, Hau was in a similar room to his left, Lillie and Zossie were apparently sitting in what looked to be a living room together, and Dulse was in the room across from him. Ilima was in the hallway, accompanied by Rotomdex, which surprised Sun a bit. Was it his house?.

Speaking of Ilima, he quickly came in upon Sun’s clumsy attempts to get out of bed, which involved some grunting and low hisses of pain as the effort exacerbated the issues with his lungs.

“Oh, you’re finally awake!” Ilima said, immediately followed by the sound of rushing footsteps. Lillie and Zossie practically barreled into the room, Zossie shoving Ilima out of the way and Lillie filing in right afterwards, not even apologizing for it, as compared to her usual polite demeanor.

Lillie hugged Sun close, and Zossie joined in as well.

“Sun, we were so worried! We almost thought you wouldn’t make it! I couldn’t tell you how much I was fretting over whether or not you’d have some kind of terrible allergic reaction to Drowzee gas!” Lillie cried. Sun hugged both of them back as he silently asked after Hau and Dulse, his nodes trembling all the while.

“Hau should been waking up soon too. He’s been treated, now he’s just resting. Dulse was unconscious, but apparently just from straining himself so much. There were only minimal signs that the Pokemon actually managed to get very many direct attacks in,” Zossie said.

Sun almost immediately followed up with asking about how Zossie and Lillie had fared, after their call ended.

Zossie explained about how she and Lillie had left their personal cave shelter, and managed to beat back controlled hordes of wild Pokemon with a combination of Zossie’s light and psychic abilities serving to harass and distract them, Brionne being empowered by the rain, and managing to sneak through certain areas with the help of Zossie’s illusion abilities. Finally, they’d been able to locate Rotomdex, Sun, and Hau, and find Dulse as well, along with contacting Ilima to have everyone rescued.

Sun beamed at them. They were heroes!

Sun had expected Lillie to perk up a bit at that compliment.

She just broke down sobbing instead, burying her face in his chest, much to the alarm of everyone else in the room. Nebby was out of the bag and Brionne out of her ball in an instant, both trying to comfort her.
Barely able to speak out loud, Lillie just cried out mentally to Sun and Zossie, allowing Zossie to speak aloud whatever parts of it she was comfortable with Ilima knowing. But ultimately, it just came down to the sheer, unrelenting stress of the whole situation.

Sun just gently stroked Lillie’s hair, hand glowing with soothing light as he did so. But as he comforted her, he also thought to himself.

...If Tapu Koko hadn’t bothered them, Lillie wouldn’t be crying…

No one would be hurt…

Sun felt a brief pang of guilt at that, knowing that Tapu Koko would’ve left Hau and Lillie alone if it weren’t for him, but…

No.

That wasn’t right.

He didn’t do anything!

Tapu Koko did!

Tapu Koko thought they could just do whatever they wanted! Treat people however they wanted! Cause all sorts of trouble just because it was convenient for them!

Under such duress, images of a grand crystalline throne room flooded Sun’s mind. Images of people seated around a hexagonal table of crystal, dressed in lavish clothing, all either ignoring Sun or fixing him with disapproving glares.

It was just like them.

Besides Lillie, everyone was shocked to see Sun steadily glow brighter and brighter with violet light, growling lowly all the while, as wisps of steam started to rise off of his eyes and mouth. He didn’t even respond as Zossie asked what was wrong, the light and heat only building…

It wasn’t until Lillie flinched away at a sudden spike of heat from his hand that Sun snapped out of it, immediately apologizing to everyone in the room as his light rapidly shifted to dark blue instead.

Lillie opted to just sit next to him, still sniffling a bit. Sun was relieved when he asked if she’d been burnt and she confirmed that she was alright.

Sun reassured her that it’d be okay.

One day, he’d be stronger.

So much stronger, in fact, that he’d make Tapu Koko pay.

Lillie actually stopped sniffling at that, so taken aback by that tone that she was fully distracted from her tears.

Where Sun was normally sweet, and warm, and gentle…
That vibe, that feeling that had gone through her head as Sun communicated in his unique, technically wordless way…

It’d been outright predatory.

Still, Lillie found that she couldn’t exactly blame him for being angry.

Soon after, once Sun and Lillie had calmed down more, Hau and then Dulse woke up as well, to similar amounts of fuss and fanfare. Dulse’s helmet and visor had been taken off as well, revealing large eyes of a vivid fuchsia color, complete with double pupils and a slightly darker purple coloration at their rims.

Ilima couldn’t help but notice how alarmingly good Dulse looked without that helmet and visor. He’d already been kinda mysteriously handsome even without them, but… wow.

Ilima awkwardly stood in the doorway for a moment, quickly collecting himself before calling out a Blissey to attend to Dulse, one far more experienced than Hau’s freshly evolved specimen… Which Ilima had seen in the process of tending to it. Rotomdex had informed him that Hau caught her… Less than a month ago… As a Happiny.

Ilima shook his head in sheer disbelief. Everyone had said he was incredible for managing that in a month and a half, but Hau already had him beat? He’d probably already be incredibly strong, if Hala had let him go at 13…

But considering what Hau had just been through…

Hala definitely couldn’t be blamed for having him wait.

Even Ilima had to admit he’d had some close calls of his own, in his time.

Still, once Ilima confirmed everyone was on the mend, he set about making everyone some tea and various sandwiches, trying his best to listen to some of Rotomdex’s recommendations for what Sun’s species apparently liked… Recommendations that made the Pokemon have to repeatedly insist that he wasn’t malfunctioning. Ilima honestly would’ve just taken them to a hospital, but considering that three out of the five other humanoids present weren’t even human… He supposed Blissey and Audino could do a fine job of things themselves.

Hau’s voice was a bit quiet and scratchy, but he still insisted on trying to talk out loud until Sun managed to silently coax him into purely mental conversations.

Meanwhile, every Luxian present did their best to eat politely despite being simultaneously ravenous, their powers having clearly drained them. Lillie and Zossie gave up some of their portion specifically for Dulse, who understandably seemed to be hit the hardest of all. Although a Field’s principal effect was to dramatically reduce energy costs and increase the speed and efficiency of various processes, it still took plenty of energy to control and operate in the first place.

Still, Ilima made sure to go back to the kitchen to whip up extra too, once he realized the situation. He didn’t particularly mind. He always had liked cooking, and he already had extra leftover stew he could quickly warm up, specifically saved for trial-goers and travelers in need of somewhere to
rest… But Ilima especially didn’t mind if one of the recipients was a hot guy…

Really, even Sun was exceptionally easy on the eyes. Still, he was more cute than hot, his general presentation and mannerisms less masculine and more naive and cheerful… although both of them had an almost ethereal quality to them… But even if Ilima did want to try anything, Hau definitely seemed to have dibs on Sun anyway. They’d been found passed out in each other’s arms… and even as they all ate and talked, Ilima could easily spy him making soft goo-goo eyes at Sun, smiling so fondly and gently at him you’d hardly believe it.

Once everything had been eaten, the Pokemon receiving meals as well, Ilima went about his next order of business.

“Alright, so! I truly did have a special and wonderful Trial planned out for Sun! I truly did! But now you’ve all been through so much already… To the point some of you almost went and died on me! Considering that this all happened near my Trial site, and furthermore, near my home, I feel guilty that I didn’t intervene sooner. While I did notice the unnatural storm almost right away, and I did investigate, I didn’t notice you were caught up in it until you’d already gone through so much trouble… So, with that being said… In some way, all three of you did actually defeat Totem Pokemon. Not to mention, far more regular Pokemon than you would’ve had to defeat otherwise. So, Sun, Hau, and Lillie… I’m just going to hand out your Normalium Z now. Consider your first Trial done. More than done, really. Even in my special Trial, I was never going to put Sun in serious danger like that!”

Ilima passed out three Normalium Z-Crystals, and a Z-Power Ring for Lillie. Sun held his up and looked at it in wonder, focusing intently on it. Even without a Z-Ring, he could notice how it filtered tiny amounts of ambient Z Power, releasing it as a faintly pulsing aura of more refined power, giving it a steady warmth that didn’t fade. It felt good… and almost alive.

Sun carefully put it away, his bag and many Trainer-marketed bags in Alola being made with special compartments specifically for collecting and organizing Z-Crystals.

Ilima demonstrated the proper poses for the move, which Sun, Hau, and Zossie all seemed to think looked like a lot of fun… although Lillie and Dulse agreed that it was a bit embarrassing to imagine doing such a thing themselves.

“Just as a reminder, the poses are more to achieve the right mindset and psychological state than anything. If you have a different way of doing it, they become unnecessary,” Ilima said. “At this point, with Normalium Z, I don’t actually have to move at all. But if you have multiple kinds of Z-Crystal, your skill with each one will typically vary to some degree. After all this time, Ghostium Z is still the hardest one for me to personally use,” Ilima said.

“So, how would you figure out how to do that? Is there practice, or a certain technique, or something like that?” Lillie asked.

“Mostly, it’s practice. The more you feel a Z-Move’s energy, the more it becomes second nature. You can also meditate while your Z-Ring is slotted with your Z-Crystal of choice. That makes it much easier to experience the energy without having to fully commit to using a Z-Move. Very useful, given that Z-Moves take up a lot of energy. The ring will suck up your Field as fast as it can, and then blast it all at your Pokemon as Z-Power. It takes a lot for the Pokemon to process and properly use so much power at once, too. So, becoming more comfortable with Z-Power also teaches you how to adapt to the Ring’s demands, and lets you have more of a say in how much AWE it absorbs. Not to mention, its conversion and transfer rates will become more efficient too.”
Sun felt a pang of disappointment over not having his own Z-Power Ring, but he understood why perfectly well.

Tapu Koko could and would throw a royal fit. And there was nothing he could do about that.

Yet.

Part of Sun got the undeniable feeling that even after everything Tapu Koko had done, that was still only a fraction of their true power. That wasn’t even considering the fact that if they were really serious, they could use a far lesser amount of power by simply approaching to personally smite them, rather than going for a more theatrical, prolonged kind of torment with thunderstorms and hordes of controlled Pokemon.

If a Tapu wanted you dead, you’d die. There was virtually no getting around that.

It was said that the Tapu were Tier 6, but really, Tiers were broad things, and each category was broader than the last. Each category took more to reach and more to exceed than the last.

Honestly, Tapu and Legends around their strength were typically not just low Tier 6, but more along the lines of “the strongest being that a Pokeball will still theoretically work on”

Even then, theoretical capture rates assumed the target would make no effort to resist the ball before it could make contact. Meanwhile, actual Pokemon had many, many ways of doing exactly that.

There were more than a few stories of people attempting to capture irate Psychic-types and simply having the ball they were trying to use violently detonate in their hand.

So, despite the excitement of getting a Z-Crystal, Sun was largely just glad that everyone would be alright.

He’d think about how he was going to handle that rooster-themed disgrace later.

Chapter End Notes

Whew… I really didn’t mean for this to get so long, but the longer I kept it up, the more I had to add on.

Number One Rule Of Sun: DO NOT Fuck With His Friends.

Also, I did worry that Blissey might be a bit of a stretch this soon... But considering that Happiny are highly friendly and are one of the Pokemon that automatically has higher than average friendship upon capture, I figured it'd make a good example of how easily Hau gets along with Pokemon. Plus, in general, I imagine Hau is the kind of person who’s a lot more perceptive than they look, especially if he were to be aged up.

I also figured I didn't want to make old canonical mysteries out to still be worth really
long build-up all over again, so I decided to get a couple things out of the way earlier on, to clear room for My Own Personal Lore Fuckshit later down the line. Expect further changes along these lines as I go.

Plus, I went with Naganadel being a Luxian name despite it actually being derived from human language and folklore, since “Naganadel” feels like a bit of a stretch when it comes to a common name that people would actually think of in a relatively short time.

Also, just to be clear, Lillie doesn't actually know she and Brionne killed that Gumshoos. She's just fucked up about the situation in general.
Chapter 7: Sweet Yellow

Chapter Summary

Mostly a breather chapter. The group stays with Ilima for a while to train and recover... although Hau's Blissey finds them a new team member, and things get Extra Mushy between Hau and Sun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Although Zossie and Dulse ended up leaving before nightfall, citing the fact that their duties wouldn't allow them to stay longer, Ilima insisted on the group of teens staying in the cabin for a little while longer, still feeling rather guilty about not doing a better job of looking out for them.

A bit later, Professor Kukui stopped by, much to the surprise of the three teens. Sun immediately greeted him with a tight hug, glowing a mix of bright green and light pink at his arrival.

Kukui was a bit shocked, but returned the hug in earnest. “Glad to see you too, Sun,” Kukui said with a gentle but genuine smile. “I hear things have been… eventful. Is everyone gonna be okay?”

Sun frowned a bit, but nodded. Kukui noticed he hadn't actually let go of him yet, though.

“It was hard on you all, huh?” Kukui asked softly. Sun nodded again, flashing violet as he thought of Tapu Koko again. Kukui just sighed as he picked up on the thought, not sure what to tell the boy. Why would Tapu Koko go to such lengths just because of a few aliens? Especially when the one he knew personally was essentially just a sweet-natured teenager, beneath all the powers and physiology quirks... Kukui could hardly wrap his head around it.

“Well, things are gonna get better from now on, yeah?” Kukui responded. “We’re all here to support you, however that needs to happen,”

Sun was happy to hear that, and happy when Kukui was able to briefly talk with the three teens, but not so happy when Ilima ended up taking Kukui into a different room for a private conversation before long... But either way, it was less that Sun needed to know what they were saying, and more that he wanted more time to be around Kukui before they’d inevitably have to part ways again.

Sun just sat with Hau and Lillie in the living room instead, with Hau doing his best to pass the time by telling them lighthearted stories about his childhood, or about Hala. Fortunately, before long, Kukui and Ilima finished their private conversation and joined everyone in the living room. Sun tried to guess what they could’ve been talking about, based on their expressions or body language... But neither of them betrayed anything, and trying to read their minds for such information would be far too invasive.

“Alright, everyone! Ilima and I have a favor we’d like you all to do for us!” Kukui said.

“Oh, what kind of favor? Rare Pokemon hunting?!” Hau asked.

“It’s probably related to what just happened to us...” Lillie added in.
“Correct, Lillie!” Kukui said. “We’d like you all to stay here for about two weeks, to allow Ilima time to train with you all… and give you all some time to make sure you’re processing your emotions, in a controlled setting,”

“Training?!” Hau cried, only half-hearing the second part. “That’s awesome! We’re gonna train with a Trial Captain!”

“It’ll be challenging, but please do try to keep up! And speak up if you feel I’m pushing too hard!” Ilima said.

All three teens agreed, but with somewhat varying feelings on the matter, in spite of similar core motivations.

Hau was by far the most excited and vocal, thoughts already focusing in on how he could become better able to protect and support his friends.

Lillie was silent, only nodding with quiet determination, although she mainly did so out of obligation. Part of her still longed to not have to fight… but that was no longer something her conscience could bear avoiding.

Meanwhile, Sun was focused entirely on the prospect of becoming able to stand up to a Tapu…

Perhaps even stand up to a Luminary...

“Training will start tomorrow! For now, please focus on rest and recuperation!” Ilima said.

To Ilima’s surprise, both Hau and Sun ended up emphatically protesting.

“I can do it now!” Hau insisted, “I feel totally fine! And my Pokemon will be fine too, I know they will!”

Sun just silently backed Hau up, flickering white and violet, an intense and slightly unsettling look in his deep gold eyes.

Ilima felt a chill go down his spine at the sight, but he didn’t back down. “I won’t be changing my mind. You can’t just throw yourselves into intense regimens and expect everything to be fine. You need to pace yourselves, even when you’re trying your best.”

Hau backed down at that, but Sun continued to flicker violet, insisting it would be fine. He wasn’t that fragile. He’d been through worse!

“Just because you have been through worse doesn’t mean you should’ve been. And it definitely doesn’t mean you should be trying to push yourself so hard when you don’t have to anymore,” Kukui told Sun. “I appreciate how much you care for your friends, and your dedication to their well-being. But look out for yourself too, alright?”

Upon hearing those words, Sun backed down as well.

“Besides that… your Zorua took quite a nasty bite to the leg, and it’s definitely broken. It’s going to take a few days just to heal her,” Ilima told him, as Sun looked down at the floor, feeling more than a
And again, his Pokemon were so battered because of his own inadequacy…

And Tapu Koko’s selfishness…

Still, Sun relaxed a bit more when he felt both Hau and Lillie scoot in closer, each wrapping an arm around him to soothe him. He lit up with soft, soothing green light in turn, silently thanking them both.

Things weren’t all bad, he supposed.

By bedtime, Kukui had left again, Zorua had received more treatment for her leg, and Sun found himself wide awake even after thirty minutes of trying to sleep, despite the fact that he was genuinely exhausted…. He was just too worried to manage it. He gently held Sha to his chest, the little creature obliging for his sake even though they typically preferred to sleep alone or inside of a hanging mucus cocoon.

Sun worried about Hau, Lillie, the Pokemon…

Sun couldn't decide who he felt worse for. Hau had been outright knocked out, but Lillie seemed to be the one under greater emotional duress. For Hau, Sun was right there, watching it all happen… But then, Lillie had been crying right on top of him. Bawling, as a matter of fact.

But Sun knew there was another factor complicating his feeling too. Something he'd figured out back in that cave, after what Zossie had said.

...As humans would say, he had a crush on Hau.

A huge one, from the feel of things.

Which put him in a bit of a bind, considering that he barely had experience with that sort of thing.

Lillie was different. Sun loved her… but she was like family, more or less. It didn’t make him feel all weird and tingly when he was around her. It didn’t make him feel simultaneously full of life and exhilarating feelings, and yet somehow a little dissatisfied. Lillie was just… pleasant. Reassuring.

But Hau... something about Hau, something about his kindness and upbeat nature and how generally pleasant he was to be around… something about how he was so beautiful and full of warmth, the kind of warmth that seeped all the way down into Sun's soul…

Sun couldn't help but be taken in by it.

Sun could feel how much he craved to be next to at least one of them, just to know for sure that they’d be alright, just to be able to feel their warmth so close to his own. He tested the waters mentally speaking, being able to detect with relative ease that Lillie was asleep. He wouldn’t bother her, then. It was with that that Sun decided to silently call out to Hau in his mind, hoping he was awake. He got a response almost immediately.

Almost just as quickly, it was followed by an invitation to Hau's room.

Sun practically catapulted himself out of bed, much to Sha's alarm. Sun quickly apologized to them, offering Sha the chance to simply have the bed to themself if they wanted. Sha briefly considered
before deciding to just follow Sun instead.

Once Sun arrived in Hau’s room, Hau also came off like he hadn't managed to successfully sleep yet, as he was sitting up in bed and didn't show any signs of having just woken up. Sun did at least notice that his hair was down though… and noticed that it was really pretty, despite being kind of a mess, probably because Hau had been tossing and turning in his attempts to sleep.

“Hey,” Hau started, although his voice was still kind of shot, so he just coughed and patted the spot next to him. Sun tried not to come off as desperate as he hurried over, immediately nuzzling up against Hau with a profusion of vivid pink light. Sha just curled up at the foot of the bed.

Hau just laughed, ruffling Sun's hair. Sun immediately set to releasing his signature thrumming noise, amazed at how much better he already felt.

He was so glad Hau was okay.

“You know, when you glow like this, you remind me of cotton candy…” Hau silently told him. “Except even sweeter,” Hau added on, although he briefly paused, wondering if that was too corny.

For his part, Sun just started glowing even brighter, nodes vibrating slightly as a dizzying, exhilarating feeling shot through his entire body.

“...But really... I'm just glad you're alright. I wanted to look tough in front of Ilima, but... today was terrifying, honestly. I'm really glad Ilima is gonna help us train while we stay, too. I know power and winning isn't everything, but at the same time, I really hate feeling like I can't keep you safe... I still want this to be a fun journey too, but to be honest, can't have much fun if you're dead or too hurt to go anywhere, right?”

Sun wholeheartedly agreed with that, equally happy that Ilima was nice enough to assist them.

“But, still... I'm super glad I met you. Lillie too. I've had plenty of friends, but... You guys are special,” Hau said, quietly using his voice once more. “I don't like to judge people right away, but it has always been a little tricky to be sure who's really my friend. Most people are great, but there have been people who mainly just like me because I'm a Kahuna's grandson. Or people who were jealous just because of that,” Hau said. Sun briefly bristled at that, feeling somewhat protective despite not even knowing the people Hau was bringing up.

“And Iki Town is small, so even though that was hardly anyone out of all the other kids, I still had to put up with them more often than I wanted to. But then I would meet Hau'oli kids too, so even out of all the people who were nice, it was hard to keep up with everyone. Sometimes, I'd end up hurting people's feelings, or forgetting about them without really meaning to. Other times, it was complicated to choose who to be friends with because there'd be drama and fights between other people…” Hau said.

Sun frowned at that. He couldn't personally remember having many real friends before. He could faintly remember that he met and spoke to plenty of people, his age and otherwise… but overall, when it came to true closeness, there weren't many cases where he was even allowed to do that, whether he wanted to or not.

“Why did they like... want you to be cold and super disciplined so bad? Shouldn't they have liked how kind you are, because then you'd grow up to be generous and understanding? And it's not like there's any other countries for you to fight with anyway,” Hau said. “Plus... on top of that, you're like super pretty... So whoever ended up ruling with you, that'd be another thing they have to look forward to.” Hau briefly froze after saying that, internally bemoaning how things tended to slip out
more easily when you were talking in your head.

Sun's light went a mix of pink and green, nodes vibrating intensely as he carefully responded, looking Hau dead in the eyes.

If they were talking about wanting people in that kind of way… Sun didn't want any of those people…

Sun tried to find the courage to fully bring the point home, to make it clear who he did want… But his hearts were pounding like mad and his whole body felt weird and tingly enough, so he held that back.

“Oh,” Hau replied, similarly having a hard time actually asking the question of who Sun did want. He settled for an alternative. “So… uh, like… Is what we're doing… how we've been doing, how we act… is that… is that special for you?”

Sun was so shocked by the question he felt it dignified a spoken answer, just to truly solidify how much he meant it.

“Yes!” Sun spoke aloud, Hau surprised by the sudden voice… and how charming it was, passionate and yet still relatively soft and quiet.

Hau was very special.

“Yeah, of course, I just… You're so nice to people in general, so I was just… kinda curious…”

Sun frowned. Of course Hau was special, even if Sun was nice to other people too! Did Hau see him asking anyone else to travel with them? Talking with anyone else as deeply as they did? Cuddling with them, doting on them?

Hau was not someone that could just be replaced, just like how Lillie wasn't. Just like how his Pokemon weren't.

Hau briefly laughed at Sun's conviction as Sun reached up and cupped Hau's face in his left hand, which glowed with soft light as Hau once again relaxed into Sun's gentle touch.

It felt so… right to be near Sun. To receive his touch, his affection, and give that in return. The feeling never changed, never faded. If anything, it just got stronger over time.

It should've been odd, on some level, given that he technically wasn't human… but it just wasn't.

Once again, before too much longer, Hau and Sun ended up lying down and falling asleep by one another's side.

But unlike before, they didn't even bother trying to negotiate distance. Sun was content to cling to Hau as if he were a big teddy bear, greatly enjoying how soft and warm he was. Sha was content to sleep at the foot of the bed. For both Hau and Sun, the bed wasn’t especially roomy, but they made it work.

Hau stayed awake for just a bit longer, quietly listening to Sun's breathing, and once again noting that Sun's drifting light nodes had synchronized with his own heartbeat. As Hau watched the soothing display, he did feel rather self-aware that the exact nature of his friendship with Sun was rather odd… namely the level of intimacy displayed. But then again, no other friendship he'd had ever involved becoming telepathically bonded to the other party, so he was pretty sure that explained why the intimacy seemed to progress more rapidly than he was used to. Not to mention, he spent
much more time with Sun than many friends were typically able or willing to.

Hau frowned to himself. It'd been such a good chance to actually tell Sun how he felt... and he kind of had, but mostly hadn't. Not to mention, what kind of boyfriend would he be, not even able to properly protect Sun?

Still, Hau fell asleep shortly afterwards, soothed by Sun's presence. It was a little odd... But that didn't mean he wasn't grateful.

As they'd been told, the group remained with Ilima over the next two weeks. It took a few adjustments to his schedule, but it didn't require him to mess with anything too important, so Ilima was more than happy to help. Other trial-goers would steadily trickle in to challenge Ilima’s trial, but they’d typically be gone before long. Sun quickly realized that Ilima’s trial truly wasn’t supposed to be anywhere near as dangerous or difficult as what Tapu Koko had subjected them to. Really, it was just supposed to serve as your first introduction to the concept of a Trial in general.

Over the course of that time, the group also had free reign to train and capture Pokemon within Verdant Cavern, a sprawling cave system with many areas where light filtered down into it, along with relatively abundant Z-Power, leaving the entire interior astonishingly lush with plant life.

So, on their first day inside, the group marveled at the interior for all of twenty seconds before Nebby phased out of Lillie's bag and began darting about with reckless abandon.

“Nebby!” Lillie cried, racing off after them. “You have to be more careful!”

Sun and Hau just laughed, although Sun did notice something…

Namely, that Nebby was steadily soaking up ambient Z-Power as they flew about... Not exactly alarmingly fast, or nearly as fast as what was going on with the Pokemon that Tapu-Koko had been ordering about, but definitely a few times faster than usual.

Something to keep in mind.

Overall, the first day in Verdant Cavern was more about playing around and exploring than actively training... There was some training, but it often tended to happen as a side effect of Pokemon approaching for battle, rather than active efforts to seek out battle. Ilima still seemed to want them to calm down and take it easy for a while, rather than jumping straight up to full intensity.

For the group, catching Nebby in Verdant Cavern became more about convincing Nebby to at least stay close and not wander off, which fortunately went much better than outright trying to force them back into the bag.

Games of peek-a-boo and various shiny baubles were all it took to keep Nebby fully enraptured, although Sun also remained close to create an illusion if need be.

The rest of the Pokemon came out as well... besides Zorua, who was still recovering after her leg injury. Dartrix was content to spend all of his time preening and sunbathing, compared to the noisy games the others played.

After a short time, Sun ended up inviting Hau to make flower crowns together, after spotting a couple of large clusters of bright yellow ones, like a scaled down version of the vast meadows near Route 3. Although Hau wasn't typically interested in such things, he gave in almost immediately, freely letting Sun drape him in flower wreaths and make him a flower crown... He didn’t fail to notice how much Sun would freely compliment him, telling him how pretty he looked, how much
the bright yellow suited him. Hau also didn’t fail to notice how every compliment made him giggle like an idiot.

By time Sun had finished, a ray of sunlight caught Hau from behind just right, and Sun couldn’t help but silently gape, his nodes going vivid pink as he took in just how distressingly pretty Hau was…

Sun stared up at the flower crown Hau wore, unable to stop himself from briefly imagining if Hau were an Incanze too… together with him… With their own nation, a place better than Ultra Megalopolis could ever be. A place full of kindness, and warmth, and beauty…

*His* Incanze…

The one *he* wanted.

Sun snapped out of it almost as quickly as it began, but it was too late.

“…Your Incanze?” Hau replied, chuckling nervously.

Sun immediately vanished from sight as he realized that’d been 'out loud', proverbially speaking. His stomach churned and his hearts pounded, as he wished desperately that another wormhole would show up and take him somewhere else.

“…Sun?” Hau asked, his heart also pounding. He desperately wanted to press further, to say that he reciprocated, to say that it was all okay, it was all *more* than okay…

But something stopped him.

Was he… was he really ready for that?

Was he truly *capable*?

Was it enough to just *want* it?

If he did it, only to end up ruining it somehow… where would that leave them? If he did it, only for their separation to become necessary because Sun had to go back to some weird alien planet… Where would that leave them?

So, Hau took a deep breath…

And decided to play dumb.

“Hey, I… I understand. You meant that to be platonic and you’re just scared it came off the wrong way. That’s fine. Really,” Hau said, as Sun steadily relaxed, then started fervently nodding along to that.

Yes! Of course! That’d been what’d happened! Totally! Just that and nothing more, hahaha!

Hau could tell Sun’s agreement was just a further lie… But apparently, Sun was so deeply flustered that he couldn’t tell Hau was lying in turn.

Hau did his best to act natural after that, lightheartedly joking and switching the subject over to their Pokemon…
But wow, that’d really sucked ass.

After a while, Sha came to get Sun’s attention, apparently wanting to play some sort of game with him, having found a round, pretty stone that caught their attention.

Hau took it as the perfect opportunity to go talk to Lillie, figuring he could use her perspective on everything that had just started.

“Lillie, uh…” Hau started. “I have a question, and it’s pretty important…”

“Yes?” Lillie started, curious. She’d been using a string toy to play with Nebby, but she quickly picked them up, not trusting them to stay put while her attention was on Hau.

“There’s no easy way to say this, so I’m just gonna… Like… Do you think Sun likes me?” Hau tacked on the last part so unbelievably fast that Lillie only raised a brow in response.

“Excuse me?”

“Y-you know!” Hau stammered, despite being well aware he wasn’t really being that helpful. He’d make up for it later, but for the time being, he was too worked up.

“Uh… I’m sorry, but no I don’t?”

Hau took a deep breath, trying his best not to speak loudly enough for Sun to overhear him. As it was, Sun could easily eavesdrop through his connection to Lillie, but they’d agreed that either one of them could have a private conversation whenever they wanted. “Is Sun into me, that’s what I’m asking!”

As fun as it would be to play coy for a bit, Lillie also didn’t like the sight of Hau being so distressed, so she decided on a straight answer. “Yeah,” Lillie said simply. “Really into you, I’d say. For at least a month now, even though he was kinda slow to realize.”

“…Oh.” Hau said, getting a bit flustered as he realized that made up the bulk of the time they’d known each other in person. “Yeah, I kinda had a feeling… But I just didn’t want it to turn out I was being full of myself, or jumping to conclusions. So I waited a little, and now… Either I’m being ridiculously arrogant, or it’s starting to get really obvious. Still, I’m not sure if I should go for it,” Hau quietly admitted, averting his gaze.

“Why? You like him, he likes you…” Lillie said, before thinking for a moment. “…Or are you worried it would just end up making this all harder on you two?”

Hau’s head immediately snapped back up. “Yeah, that’s it! I feel like… This journey was supposed to be cool and fun, but everything’s all crazy and dangerous instead… So if I do this, but then end up letting him down, or letting something happen to him… I would never forgive myself,” Hau explained. “Plus, I don’t even know if he’ll really be here for the long term. Zossie and Dulse are a lot nicer than I first thought, but what if more of their squad comes and finds out about Sun?” Hau asked.

Lillie frowned. Hau was raising some pretty good points.

“Well… I definitely get what you’re saying. Sun worries me a lot too. That’s why I ended up asking for Popplio. So I could do more for him and Nebby, so I could protect them better… So he
wouldn't have to worry about me so much. It's... It's really not fun to think about what might happen if something goes wrong, even if sometimes I can't help it, and sometimes I even get nightmares about it,” Lillie said. Hau just listened solemnly, until Lillie added something else, her voice getting louder. “But... Even though it's hard, isn't it better to make the most of something while it lasts?” Lillie asked.

Hau was a bit taken aback by that. “Yeah, that actually is how I would usually look at things!” Hau said, at least glad that Lillie understood the merit of such a philosophy. “But like... that was a lot easier to say before, considering I've never had stakes anywhere near this high.”

“I see. This might be a bit of a dramatic example, and I apologize if it comes off like I'm making it about me or trying to one up you or something, but, uh... My dad died, a few years ago,” Lillie suddenly confessed, pausing as she made sure to choose her next words very carefully. She didn't plan to outright lie, but there were details it would just be too risky to mention.

“Woah... I'm really sorry to hear that...” Hau said softly, hesitantly rocking on his feet a bit as he tried to decide what else he could say or do.

“Thanks, but... Like I said, the reason I'm saying this isn't to make it about me. It's just that... it left me with a lot of regrets. There are so many things I wish I'd been able to do with him. So many things I wish I'd said to him. So many things I wish I hadn't. I always wonder, what I would've done differently, had I known...” Lillie said. “So... I decided, I can't live like that anymore. I can't just live regretting so many things, constantly, day in and day out! That's why I took Nebby! That's why I asked for Brionne! That's why I'm still here, even though it's been hard!” Lillie said, her voice growing increasingly impassioned before calming once more. “...It's not a perfect solution, of course. My advice isn't foolproof, and you're under no obligation to listen to it. So, I'm sorry if I sound bossy or anything. But still, be careful. Sometimes... thinking like this can make you reckless. Sometimes you still end up regretting your decision... But at that point, you just have to consider... What would you regret more?” Lillie asked. “There are things you can never take back, once you do them... But on the other hand, wouldn't you like to say that you at least tried your best?”

“Lillie... you're an absolute genius,” Hau said with a wide grin, flustering Lillie somewhat.

“I-I wouldn't go so far as to say that!” Lillie cried, waving the compliment off with frantic hand gestures “I'm just thinking, you know, if you want to help Sun, and you want him to be happy... Well, it is a good idea to be wary, but at the same time... Even if you didn't, it's not like the things you're afraid of wouldn't still hurt...” Lillie said.

“Yeah... you're right. I just... I think I need some time to think about it,” Hau said. “My mom and granddad always say I should think stuff through more anyway. Thanks for the help, though!”

“Oh, no problem!” Lillie said, while silently pushing down the urge to just tell him that all of her advice was stupid and he should just forget it.

“So, uh...” Hau said, seeming oddly timid. “What does he like about me in particular? Has he told you anything?”

“He says you're smart, and kind, and lots of fun to be around... you're helpful, pretty, brave, funny... and you're warm and comfy... and you have a nice butt.”

Hau looked like he wanted to melt into a puddle of mush, unable to keep himself from sporting a dopey grin. “R-really?”

“Of course! I mean, it shouldn't be that surprising, I would imagine at least a few people have had
crushes on you before…”

“Well, kinda?” Hau said with a laugh. “I’ve always been kinda on the chunky side, so it wasn’t always like how you’re thinking,” Hau explained with a chuckle. “But y’know, like, I’m kinda into girls, but not nearly as much as boys… so that’s probably the bigger reason. But however Sun wants to present, that’s fine too,”

“Oh, I understand. I never had anyone get a crush on me before, as far as I know… my brother and I got privately tutored for most of our lives, so we didn’t go to regular school much,” Lillie said.

“Oh, I didn’t know you have a brother!” Hau said cheerily, as Lillie stiffened. She’d just been thinking that she had to choose her words carefully! “I’m an only child, but I have a bunch of cousins and stuff! So, where’s your brother now? What’s he like? …Lillie?” Hau added the last part much more quietly, upon seeing her odd reaction.

“I… I’m sorry. He and I are supposed to be keeping a low profile, so I wasn’t really supposed to say that,” Lillie said in a hushed voice. “It’s not that I don’t trust you! It’s just, if the wrong people get their hands on Nebby…” Lillie trailed off, clutching Nebby tighter to her body.

Hau thought back. The Spearow crushed so tightly together they were suffocating, the distortion of space itself… The inordinate amounts of force that’d slammed them into the cliff face. Nebby throwing a tantrum that could sling pebbles at literal bullet speed, and punting Tapu Koko so far into the air with sheer willpower.


“Lunala happens,” Lillie replied simply. Under any other circumstances, Hau would just think that was some weird joke… But given what he’d seen and what he knew already, he knew it wasn’t. And something told him he didn’t need to confirm that. It just was.

“…So you’ve got a baby god just sitting around in your duffel bag?!” Hau cried, louder than necessary.

“Shh!” Lillie put a finger to her lips, looking deathly serious for a moment. Hau immediately shut up.

“But seriously, why? Why couldn’t Kukui keep them, if they’re that important?! You basically have Jevus in that bag! Or whatever the name of that one guy from that one old religion is, I’m not actually sure.”

“It became clear that keeping them around the lab wasn’t really doing much for them, even if they were safe. And for some reason, Nebby has that odd urge to seek out the shrines of the Tapu. Zossie told me something about a life cycle, maybe it has something to do with that…”

“Maybe it’s part of why Nebby is so powerful without actually training or battling….” Hau said, putting a hand to his chin in thought. “Maybe when they visit, they get some power from the Tapu…”

Lillie thought back to Nebby, on the brink of death… Tapu Koko, crushing a Z-Crystal for them, charging it with some kind of wondrous light… Nebby not only fully recovering, but immediately having the strength to throw a psychic tantrum as well.

Hau’s theory was looking surprisingly promising, at least for the time being.
Lillie silently nodded before quietly having Hau promise that everything they'd just spoken about was an absolute secret. Hau agreed.

The rest of the day went back to a surprising level of normalcy, as Hau made a focused effort to make sure that everything between him and Sun was still the same as before…

Still, it was admittedly rather hard to keep calm, given that he was saddled with virtually 100% certain knowledge that Sun liked him, on top of the knowledge that he now had even more reasons to help Lillie protect Cosmog. Hau could hardly believe it. If Sun were human, if Sun didn't have so many… circumstances surrounding him, that would already be that. Hau would already be getting ready to ask him out before the day was even over.

But in a strange way, those odd conditions were part of the appeal too.

Sun didn't come loaded with so many preconceived notions. He thought Hau was special because Hau was Hau, and Hau was helping him. Not because he was a Kahuna's grandson.

And Sun's true form, his alien form… It was beautiful. Breathtaking, even. So was his personality. The way he explored the world, his reactions and mannerisms so unique and vibrant… All of them, full of life and gratitude and so much honesty. So sweet and warm it made Hau's heart ache… But at the same time, so clever. So sharp and protective, when need be. Both literally and metaphorically, Sun shined in a way no one else did.

Still, Hau did his best to focus on his Pokemon, not wanting Sun to monopolize his thoughts too much.

That turned out to be a… semi-effective plan.

On one hand, Hau did get in a solid half hour of actual training.

On the other hand, he'd briefly forgotten how affectionate Sun was. Hau would think that Sun's upbringing would make him more averse to such things, but it seemed like it'd likely had the opposite effect, especially once Sun found himself in a culture that wouldn't discourage it.

While Hau was training his team, Sun had found a cozy hollow among the cave's many little divots and indents, standing out among them because of the fact it was large enough for a few people to squeeze in. Once he pacified a few Rattata, the hollow was all his. Sun quickly set about making it into a makeshift fort, having his Pokemon help him put in mats of vegetation, along with blankets. Apparently, Sun had gotten over his embarrassment to the extent that he was already wanting Hau and Lillie to join him in the little impromptu fort.

Hau couldn't resist.

Once again, he found himself sitting incredibly close to Sun, their shoulders and thighs brushing from time to time. The main consolation was that at least Lillie was sitting to the other side of Sun, just as closely, which made Hau relax a bit. Sun then draped a white sheet over the cave entrance, with a small gap that would allow them to check on their Pokemon now and then. Nebby was with Lillie, but the rest were fully capable of looking after themselves with their Trainers a short distance away.

Sun fiddled with Rotom for a moment, and Rotom then turned and projected a movie onto the sheet… Hau quickly recognized it as Captain Unova, which surprised him a bit. Neither Sun or Lillie watched movies particularly often, both of them typically preferring books instead. Zorua was sent out to sit on Sun's lap as he idly pet her, her lingering injuries discouraging her from playing
with the others. The actual break in her leg had already been set and mostly healed, but the area was still sore and vulnerable, and Sun would still need to keep her off of it for a while.

However, after about thirty minutes of the movie, an interruption came in the form of panicked squeaking noises, as Blissey came running in with a wounded Noibat in her arms. The Noibat was already weakly nibbling on one of Blissey’s eggs, but it’d only been able to do so much in such a short timeframe.

“Oh, no!” Hau said, as Blissey immediately handed the wounded little bat to him. Lillie was already rooting around in her bag for medication, while Sun was silently asking Blissey what was going on.

Blissey responded that some older Zubat had taken to bullying the young Noibat, and she’d found her in the middle of being viciously attacked by them.

That news elicited a low growl from Sun. While he knew that wild Noibat and Zubat often had trouble getting along, and frequently competed for resources, he didn’t like the idea of them ganging up on each other for petty reasons.

Hau continued to tend to the little Noibat as Rotom not only stopped the movie, but quickly noted that the Noibat was somewhat undersized for her species.

Hau only became more determined to tend to the little creature as a result of Rotom’s words.

By time another hour had passed, during which Rotom had cut the movie back on at a much lower volume, the Noibat had been fully tended to and was fast asleep, and being swaddled in an extra blanket while being held close to Hau’s body. Fortunately, from Rotom’s assessments and the group’s own medical knowledge, the Noibat didn’t need any more urgent care. Sun couldn’t help but twinkle with pink light as he saw how tender and nurturing Hau was acting.

Sun, apparently tired after all the playing around and exploring earlier in the day, casually leaned against Hau for a moment, briefly nuzzling against his shoulder before deciding it wasn’t comfortable enough. He lifted his head, looked at Hau with a slight pout, and wordlessly communicated what he’d prefer.

Hau’s heartbeat doubled in speed upon Sun’s request, but he folded immediately, briefly allowing Sun enough room to reposition himself so he was sitting in front of Hau, before Hau then carefully extended his legs so that Sun was sitting between them, and free to just lay back against Hau’s chest, giving a thrum of contentment as he nuzzled in close. Hau’s heartbeat was quick, but Sun didn’t seem to mind at all, just briefly calming Hau with a glowing hand before nuzzling in more, turning to the side as he lit up with seafoam green and vivid pink. Hau just gave Lillie a slightly annoyed look when she just giggled at the whole scene, clearly loving every minute of it.

Almost instinctively, not even led by any request from Sun so much as just a little tug at the back of his mind, Hau briefly handed Noibat over to Lillie, so he could drape an extra blanket over Sun before taking Noibat back.

Hau blushed darkly, hardly able to handle the whole situation. Sun had officially proven himself to be far less dissuaded by his previous embarrassment than Hau had expected… maybe even comforted somewhat, thinking that he could get away with such overt affection and Hau wouldn’t mind. After all, Hau hadn’t rejected him, only pretended to misunderstand.

And on one hand, Hau really would let him keep doing it. Part of Hau was honestly relishing in what was happening, hardly able to believe it at all. The other part of him was churning with nerves and conflicting emotion, constantly trying to think of what his next move would be.
It was… okay to be the way they were a little longer, wasn’t it?

Part of Hau felt that handling it the way he did was the correct choice, but…

At the same time, it did feel like he was indirectly lying to Sun, or playing some kind of game with him… Knowing the real intention of something but willfully choosing to ignore it.

But at the same time, it wasn’t really being ignored, was it? Hau was still there to dote on him, still there to give him plenty of affection… He wasn’t going to push Sun away. Sun said he was special. So… he’d just have to think about it for a while…

But still… He was probably going to have to work up the courage to at least let Sun know he actually knew, and wasn’t bothered by it, the surrounding circumstances simply created different reasons for not wanting to go through with it… at least not yet.

Until then, Hau did his best to relax.

More days passed, and as Ilima spent a prolonged amount of time around the trio, it became even more obvious to him than before that Sun wasn’t the only noteworthy one. Hau seemed to be excellent with pretty much any Pokemon he came across, having a lifetime of experience in dealing with them. Not to mention, the work ethic he displayed was truly impressive, despite an outwardly laid-back attitude. Ilima could tell, something about what he’d been through had definitely ignited a new level of passion in his heart.

Meanwhile, Lillie seemed to outwardly claim or believe that she was nothing too special, but Ilima honestly wasn’t sure who or what had impressed such self-esteem issues upon her. She was a very bright and inquisitive girl, with an excellent memory and a sprawling knowledge of Pokemon. At worst, she was somewhat intimidated by getting involved in intense or difficult battles, but her commands and tactics were definitely clever and sound, once she fully found her rhythm. And like Hau, she seemed to have a strong drive to do better, push higher, refusing to just sit and sulk in spite of her outwardly low confidence.

Besides just Sun's potential skill in and of itself, something about Sun's typical sweet, honest nature seemed to endear people and Pokemon alike to him, quickly gaining their respect and appreciation. Not to mention, the way he made people naturally want to please and protect him, despite the fact that he was largely able and willing to protect himself… and by extension, the way he made people want to try harder and go further than they would otherwise.

And yet, there was also the more protective, forceful Sun, the side of him that could repel a Team Skull Grunt with only a harsh glare, the part of him that could help Hau beat down over a dozen wild Pokemon and a powerful Totem.

That wasn't even mentioning the glaringly obvious curveball being thrown by the fact that Sun was an alien.

So, over the two week period, Ilima trained and sheltered the trio as best he could, while also notifying the other Captains and Kahunas of the unusual challengers coming their way. Still, he kept the matter of Sun's species to himself, wanting to wait for a time when he could better discuss such things with Hala and Kukui first.
Besides directly training Pokemon, much of the training also involved practice with using the Normalium Z.

Hau had elected to keep Noibat, especially since she didn't seem willing to return to her old life. So, Ilima worked with Hau's Blissey and Noibat to build up the basis of Hyper Voice, a move that would suit both of them better than the physical-based Return, and in turn use Breakneck Blitz with maximum effectiveness, if need be.

Apparently, when used from a non-physical move, Breakneck Blitz instead became a extremely fast, focused shockwave of sheer kinetic energy, hitting the opponent like an invisible cannonball.

On one hand, Blissey's voice wasn't naturally suited to such inordinate power and volume, even with her Field's help, but on the other hand, Hau showed extraordinary amounts of kindness and patience when it came to trying to help his Pokemon, which helped considerably.

Ilima didn't miss how training with Sun around seemed to make Hau especially determined… Part of it was just that Sun enjoyed cheering Hau and Lillie on, but if Ilima didn't know any better, he'd say Hau just really wanted to impress Sun regardless.

Overall, Hau and Blissey about broke even, ending up with a weak but perfectly usable version of the attack by the end of the two week period. Surprisingly enough, Noibat’s better-suited anatomy combined with Hau’s support ended up carrying her through, enabling her to learn the attack pretty much completely by time the two-week period was up. She’d also learned Agility, and even Air Cutter, with Sun helping Hau along.

Lillie and Brionne took part in the Hyper Voice training as well, making roughly the same amount of progress as Hau and Blissey had, but for different reasons. Lillie had been focusing all of her attention on Brionne only, allowing her skills to develop more, on top of how her biology was more suited to such a move. Lillie's understanding of the theory was flawless as well.

But on the other hand, Lillie's kindness could be more enabling, whereas Hau or Sun would try to kindly push their Pokemon to continue. She was quicker to give in to her Pokemon’s desires to stop or do something else, out of fear of losing any of the progress she'd made with Brionne… and out of fear of seeming too bossy or controlling.

Brionne herself was a great Pokemon with generally high work ethic, full of untapped potential… But there was also the general issue presented by Lillie still only having one Pokemon, not counting Nebby. Overall, Lillie's problems seemed to be more psychological, rather than a lack of knowledge, motivation, or resources.

Ilima didn’t really have much negative to say for Hau, beyond his occasional impatience and need to build more experience, but he was already ahead of the curve. Sun was much the same way, beyond the fact that he still sometimes tended to hold back too much in most low-stakes battles. Despite Sha having a combo of Venoshock and Toxic on their side, Sun often didn't even order the combo unless he felt he truly had to.

Even Zorua trained a bit more, although it was mainly just helping her get fully used to moving around again after her back leg healed. Still, after the first week, Sun was able to work in a lot more training with her as well, once her leg was fully healed.

Rhovera got Bug Bite down entirely, while Hau’s Pikachu ended up learning Electro Ball. Sha just improved on what they could already do, although Sun had potential plans for them in the future, based on some experiments he was trying with seeing what kinds of energy Sha could attune their
Overall, Sun ended up glad that Ilima had encouraged them not to rush themselves too much. He ended up having a lot of fun while still feeling like he’d made good progress, all without having to just joylessly throw himself into the task like some kind of robot.

By time the last night came around, Sun found himself once again being silently called to Hau’s room. His nodes twitched and buzzed at the call, as he honestly hadn’t been expecting Hau to call him back again. Since coming to Ilima’s cabin, he’d actually ended up sleeping in Lillie’s room three times… typically because she was having bad dreams, or trouble sleeping in general.

Once Sun came back into Hau’s room, Hau wasted no time. “Hey, uh, Sun?” Hau asked. His voice had fully recovered, but his words were restrained regardless. Sun looked at him with immediate worry as he sat down next to him, able to tell from just his tone that Hau must’ve had something rather difficult to tell him. Hau took a deep breath, knowing it was… but also knowing that he didn’t like keeping things from Sun, or feeling like he was misleading him in any way. “I have something to talk to you about,” Hau said.

Sun just nodded, to make it especially clear he was listening. Hau took a deep breath before continuing. “You know the other day, when you had that… that daydream, about us being royalty together?” Hau asked.

Sun nodded, and Hau immediately noticed his nodes vibrating a bit, even though the room was mostly dark apart from Sun and a small nightlight.

“Remember how I said I knew it was ‘platonic’?” Hau asked, looking down as his voice got especially quiet… But then again, Hau knew it didn’t really matter how loudly or quietly he spoke to Sun anymore.

Sun nodded again, already seeming to know where things might be going, his nodes vibrating like mad as he struggled to even stay visible.

“Well… I– I lied about that. I’m sorry,” Hau forced out. He chanced a look up. Sun was stiff as a board, unable to look at Hau, nodes still trembling with unreal fervor. Hau took another deep breath, clenching his fists and pressing them against his lap. “I… maybe it was just a one time thing. Maybe it was just some brief thought or urge or something, but… Not to jump to conclusions, but I get the feeling that’s not true. Either way, you should be the one to tell me yourself. So, Sun… Do you…” Hau struggled to find his words as Sun frowned a bit, wondering what exactly Hau’s catch would be. “Maybe we shouldn’t like… actually change things, right now. As in, we shouldn’t like… actually become a couple yet…”

Sun frowned even more at that, but Hau’s emotions and body language told him he must’ve had a
good reason for saying that, so he silently urged Hau to continue.

“T’m… worried about what happens next, if we do that,” Hau confessed. “Like… if you have to leave forever… or something bad happens to one of us… or I end up holding you back, or anything like that,”

Sun furrowed his brow as he thought that over… On one hand, it kind of made sense, but on the other hand… It really didn’t. Hau didn’t hold him back, not ever. Hau only made him want to try harder. Hau made all of his efforts feel more rewarding, knowing that Hau would be happy for him, knowing he’d be more able to keep Hau safe.

Hau couldn’t help but feel flattered by that, but his stance wouldn’t be swayed so easily. “Not to mention, I just don’t feel like I’d really be that good of a boyfriend for you! I let you get hurt too easily! I made you have bad flashbacks with a video game! I’m not a good enough Trainer! I try to help you, but half the time it’s like I don’t really know what I’m doing at all!” Hau said.

Sun couldn’t help but flicker violet at that. Hau would be such a good boyfriend! No, Hau would be the best! Who told him any different?!

“No one did, I just… I was worried about it,” Hau said. “Not because I don’t like you, but because I do. A lot. I just. There’s a lot at stake here…”

Sun was still obviously displeased. So what if Hau didn’t think he would be the perfect boyfriend? That had nothing to do with the fact that Sun wanted him to do it… and he wanted Sun in turn. From there, wasn’t the solution actually pretty simple? They’d just have to try their best to make it work, even if it was risky. It was worth it, wasn’t it?

“I just… I don’t know…,” Hau said quietly. Sun’s expression softened, as he saw and felt how difficult it was for Hau.

Sun silently, gently queried for more. Could they still be… like they were? The hugging, the cuddling, doing lots of fun things together?

“Yes! I don’t want to stop anything, I just want to really make sure that I can handle all this…”

Sun honestly felt like he already could… Hau was amazing, after all. But if Hau wanted to wait, Sun would wait too.

Still…

Sun flickered vivid pink and white, nodes shimmering and shaking as he tried to ask his next question as boldly as possible.

“…You want to know if it’s okay for you to try to change my mind sometimes?” Hau asked. Sun nodded, a bit flustered as he did his best to further elaborate. “Okay, so basically… you want to know how much it’s okay to pursue me,” Hau said, laughing with nervousness more than anything. Sun was being more assertive than he’d expected, and yet simultaneously asking permission. It was oddly adorable.

Sun nodded, his expression becoming rather determined.

“I mean… I guess it's fine?” Hau answered, his face growing hot as he squirmed a bit. He hadn't expected the conversation to go this way. “I don't want to feel like I'm leading you on, or manipulating you or something. You don't have to do anything, and I don't want it to be some
carrot-on-a-stick kind of thing. But… I do like you back…”

Sun's eyes glowed a brighter gold, and Hau could feel the determination radiating off of him. Sun insisted Hau wasn't forcing him into anything. If anything, it was a prime opportunity.

He'd prove how much this meant to him.

How much Hau meant to him.

With that, Sun steadily started coming closer, Hau finding that images were flickering through his brain all the while, images of what Sun was planning on doing, images of what he had in store. Silently asking permission, asking if any of it made Hau too uncomfortable. Hau shook his head, feeling as if there were a storm of butterflies in his stomach. He could tell there was in Sun's, too… but he'd become so focused that he refused to stop.

Hau allowed Sun to climb into his lap, and Sun cupped his head in a glowing hand, before looking deep into Hau's eyes. Sun's own eyes glowed a vivid pink, and his nodes were an intense, focused white that steadily softened as Hau was pulled deeper into his gaze, deeper into his mind.

Sun's nodes steadily pulsed, matching the pace of Hau's own heart as Sun smiled gently at him, and Hau felt a wave of warmth like nothing he'd ever felt before. Like he was completely bathing in it, like it was soaking into every cell of his body.

Hau giggled a bit dopily, hardly even focused on anything else but how good it felt as Sun maintained the gaze, wrapping his left arm around Hau and tenderly stroking Hau's face with his right hand. It was soft, slow, reverent, like Hau was more precious than gold, more delicate than silk, finer than the most flawless diamond.

Hau swore he could distantly hear soft, slow music in his mind, set to his relaxed heart rate, and he could feel every worry he'd ever had melting away like thawing ice…

He could feel something run along the side of his neck, hot and damp but weirdly pleasant, making shivers run up his spine.

In a moment of half-clarity, he vaguely registered that it was actually Sun's tongue, glowing a bright pink.

He tensed and backed away, just slightly. Sun's reaction, meanwhile, was significantly more dramatic. He reared his head back and disappeared from view in a flash, although Hau could still feel his warmth, and the weight of him in his lap.

“...Why'd you stop?” Hau asked slowly, as he fully came back to reality.

Sun responded with little more than a nebulous wave of embarrassment. He hadn't wanted to do anything too weird.

“I… I knew you were going to lick me. You did warn me. It was a little surprising when it actually happened, but… I liked it.” Hau said.

Sun invisibly shook his head. He hadn't even licked anyone before, he was pretty sure! He wasn't even entirely sure where he remembered it from, but he knew it was… very intimate. That was surely too much at once…

“N-no!” Hau immediately sputtered, his voice cracking a bit as he silently but fervently hoped Sun would just keep going. “It wasn't! I swear!”
Sun slowly appeared again, opting to just hold Hau tightly, burying his face in the crook of his neck.

Hau was a bit confused when Sun gave a silent apology, at least until he felt further clarification.

Hau had a good point. It really was scary. Sun had thought that if he just... did it, just sort of came at it with all his heart, that would be that... But besides just the embarrassment, there was the realization, then, of all the risks he was taking.

But then again...

He still wasn't giving up.

Hau felt like his face was on fire as Sun did his best to make it abundantly clear that he wasn't going to stop pursuing, pulling away from Hau just to look up at him with half-lidded eyes, dark pink and unmistakably full of desire.

It'd just be a bit more... restrained from then on.

Hau felt a strange mix of relief and disappointment. On one hand, it was nice that they didn't have to rush anything... on the other hand, whatever Sun had been doing... it'd been incredible.

Those thoughts prompted Sun to ask if Hau wanted more, looking up at him with a rather self-satisfied smirk. Hau nodded so quickly that Sun couldn't help but laugh.

They laid down together. There was no more licking, but everything was slow and peaceful as Hau met Sun's glowing gaze, eagerly submitted to his warm touch, reciprocating by holding Sun close and stroking his hair.

“So, uh,” Hau started, squirming a bit as nerves flared up again through the relaxation. “I... At this point, I guess we really are boyfriends. Or... partners, or whatever you want to call it. Since we’re not really just friends, and I... I still think it’s kinda scary, but I don’t want to feel like I’m leading you on... and I want to make you happy,” Hau said, silently tacking on the admission that Sun could be extremely convincing when he wanted to be. “We’ll just... take it slow.”

Hau felt a wave of smugness from Sun as he briefly flashed a brighter green than he’d already been steadily glowing.

“Yeah, awfully smug for someone who got as flustered as you did,” Hau said with a smirk, in a light tone that made it obvious he meant no harm.

Sun pouted, but quickly came up with what seemed like the perfect idea for a rebuttal.

He bet Hau couldn’t do any better if it was him kissing Sun.

Hau sputtered at that.

“I-I could! I totally could!”

Sun, ever curious, simply responded with further teasing and light goading.

“I could 100% totally keep my cool if I were to kiss you!”

Sun pushed further. On the lips?
“Even on the lips!”

Prove it.

Hau went silent for a moment, and Sun’s nodes trembled as he realized that it honestly felt like Hau was going to do it.

“Alright, I will!” Hau said, only making Sun’s nodes tremble even more, his whole body feeling weird and tingly as his hearts pounded and Hau did a bit of repositioning.

Sun became hyper-aware of just how close Hau was, every little detail of his face, down to the last eyelash… Sun’s nodes were as vividly pink as ever, trembling like the world would end, as Hau’s eyes steadily closed…

Sun, for all his nervousness, didn’t back away. He leaned in as well…

And their lips touched.

For all of maybe a fraction of a second, before Hau pulled away.

Now it was Sun’s turn to ask why he stopped.

“Well at least I did it!” Hau said, while trying to keep his voice down to at least some degree.

Sun pouted a little. That hardly counted! He barely felt it!

“Well, you never said how long!” Hau protested.

Sun pouted more. Either way, that didn’t count as winning the bet! That wasn’t nearly equivalent to the way he’d licked Hau! So unfair…

“Okay, okay! I’ll… I’ll try again!” Hau said. Sun didn’t even have much time to respond. One more deep breath, and Hau was kissing him again… and like he’d said, it was longer than before.

Sun’s mouth and lips were hot with all the light he was making, but not unbearably so. Hau found it unexpectedly pleasant, if anything… and also found that it ended up making him extend the kiss significantly more than he thought he would, out of continuing fascination.

Sun was thrumming steadily, the sound further encouraging Hau as he pulled Sun in closer, briefly breaking the kiss only to come right back in for more.

On Sun’s part, he was completely unprepared for how good it would feel, just the simple act of putting his lips against Hau’s…. And all the other things. The way Hau held him close, the way pleasure and excitement radiated off of him so richly that the emotions suffused Sun’s very being… the way the moment was so quiet, so dark, so intimate… and yet simultaneously so bright and loud with the emotion of it all. Sun felt like he could practically ignite, doing his best to keep his light under some modicum of control.

Sun could feel their consciousnesses steadily trickle into one another, thoughts weaving around each other like vines, fronds of feeling brushing up against one another before tying together like a mesh. And the kisses still didn’t stop.
Sun had honestly forgotten there was a bet at all, however lighthearted it may have been. It felt like he was lost, but in the best possible way. Like he’d chanced upon a new island, full of riches and opportunities, and he could explore it all, relish it, become one with it…

Fall in love with it.

Once again, he’d fallen into something new. Something wonderful.

Once again, he found that escape was one of the last things on his mind.

Finally, Hau stopped. But they were both satisfied by then, unlike before.

“So… do I win now?” Hau asked with a laugh. Sun didn’t bother to even jokingly protest, going for enthusiastic confirmation instead. Still, there was a twinge of suspicion from Hau, and then, realization. “…You only even started the bet because you wanted a kiss anyway,” Hau said. “You cute little sneak…”

Sun just gave off another wave of playful smugness, knowing he’d been caught. Hau just affectionately ruffled his hair, before it slowed into Hau gently petting it and playing with it instead. Sun couldn’t help but start up a thrumming sound again, his nodes softening from bright green to a dim, pastel green.

He licked playfully at Hau’s face a couple more times, shorter and quicker, not with the passion of before. He reveled in feeling how flustered Hau would get, feeling how his heart would skip a beat each time.

Hau was unbelievably cute.

Chapter End Notes

I was going to hold off a little longer on this, but I guess >70k words (and like 50k since they formally met) is long enough? Hopefully? Still, I really don't think I can call this slow burn anymore.

Like, the original plan really was that Hau would convince Sun that they shouldn't formally date yet... But given that both of them are rather optimistic and tend to act out of emotion, it ended up coming out like this. Hau's putty in Sun's hands, so he wouldn't really be able to put up much resistance if Sun would prefer to to just go ahead and take the plunge. Meanwhile, Sun is predominantly careful where it concerns the well-being of others... When it comes to himself, he'd much rather just do what makes him happy. And even though Hau said what he said, Sun still knew Hau liked him back, so... by extension, he had no qualms with giving Hau a bit of extra convincing.

But I do still want a Hau/Sun/Gladion endgame, and I haven't even gotten to Gladion beyond Lillie vaguely mentioning him, so... I guess it's still a slow burn in that regard?

Also, you can pry Chubby Hau from my Cold Dead Hands. Like yeah, he's active, but between his genetics and appetite, the main result is just that he has a lot more strength and endurance than you'd think he does.
Chapter 8: Thrum

Chapter Summary

In which Route 3 happens, Hau battles for a TM, and Hau and Sun are just... super, super gay, basically.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By the next morning, it was almost immediately obvious that something was different.

Sun was glowing bright green and humming contentedly, for seemingly no reason.

Hau seemed particularly upbeat as well, cheerily greeting everyone.

Still, what was actually going on didn't become blindingly obvious until Hau sat down at the kitchen table for breakfast... and Sun walked up from behind, pausing for a moment. Hau suddenly smiled shyly, which was the only further warning anyone got before Sun kissed him on the cheek, flashing vivid pink in the process.

Lillie and Ilima, if they had any lingering drowsiness, were wide eyed and wide awake after that. Even more so when Sun elected to move his chair as close to Hau as possible, sitting so that their shoulders nearly touched. The whole time, Hau seemed to be getting increasingly flustered. Lillie couldn’t help but giggle when Sun finally mentally addressed her just to complain that Hau wasn’t letting him feed him breakfast, even though he’d seen it on TV and it looked super cute!

Finally, Hau relented, putting his fork down and pushing his plate a bit more towards Sun, who literally made a small squeal of happiness before taking Hau’s fork and steadily feeding him bits of egg and sausage. Sun didn’t seem to care in the slightest that Lillie and Ilima were watching, fully enraptured by what he and Hau were doing. For his part, Hau was clearly a bit embarrassed, but fully going along with it, actually relaxing more as it went on.

“I suppose this is the kind of thing you’ll have to get used to from now on...,” Ilima teasingly said to Lillie. “My, they work fast...”

Hau blushed darkly when he faintly overheard that, fully remembering that he’d planned to take things slowly... But Sun seemed to have somewhat looser ideas of what constituted “fast” and “slow”, especially with so much less exposure to human romance norms... and Hau found himself not particularly minding.

Lillie figured she honestly should’ve seen it coming. Sun was affectionate enough as it was. Sun as someone’s boyfriend? That was just asking for things to be sappy.

The Pokemon ate as well, enjoying various things based on their taste. Nebby and Brionne were on the floor, eating near Lillie’s chair. Brionne had a bowl of small fish, while Nebby appeared to be trying to copy her, but not actually particularly liking the taste of fish. Meanwhile, Sha had already swallowed half a dozen raw eggs whole, and seemed fine with just that. Dartrix similarly took only moments to gulp down large chunks of meat, so he was busy grooming and preening. Rhovera and
Blissey were steadily plowing through a large pile of berries and leafy greens, being mostly herbivorous. Pikachu was calmly eating kibble and berries, and Zorua had eaten about half of her wet food before deciding it was more fun to whine for table scraps… which seemed to be more for the sake of getting attention than getting food.

After about half of Hau’s breakfast was gone, Sun seemed content to let him eat the rest himself, while Sun also just focused in on his typical odd breakfast… and both of them, as always, ate more like two people each.

Still, they all spoke about various things, how their Pokemon had improved, what they’d learned in the past two weeks, the fun they’d had, and more.

By time everything was said and done, the table cleared, and everything packed up, Sun couldn’t even bring himself to leave without hugging Ilima tightly first… although that time, he did at least actually remember to ask first.

It was a little bittersweet, but the group still had far further to go, and far greater heights to reach on their journey. Even though there was technically nothing stopping them from going straight back to Iki Town to challenge Hala, all three of them got the sense they weren’t entirely ready, even in spite of knowing that their first “Trial” had been harder than usual, offering evidence that they might actually stand a decent chance. Hala felt like he should be their conclusion to Melemele Island, despite the somewhat arbitrary nature of that feeling. Given that they’d only seen a fraction of the island, and a good chunk of that experience had been shaped by traumatic events, it just didn’t feel right for the experience of Melemele to end so soon. All of them knew that that wasn’t how Melemele was truly supposed to be.

North of Verdant Cavern, things lead right into Route 3, a path which slowed the group’s progress considerably. It was all steep, uphill mountainous terrain near the coast of Melemele, and also a prime nesting site for various kinds of Flying-type. Therefore, it wasn’t particularly uncommon to get harrassed by Flying-types swooping overhead as you tried to make decent progress.

Just to clear the path would take more than a day, and it wasn’t too long until Sun was offering to carry Lillie on his back, something Lillie accepted with an odd mix of gratitude and annoyance at herself for not being able to endure longer.

Lillie honestly had no idea how Sun managed so well in nothing but thin sandals, but she supposed having extra hearts and a third lung came in handy.

Slowing progress further was the fact that the path had many other Trainers and travelers the group would encounter, on top of wild Pokemon encounters. Besides being popular for providing a moderate level of challenge to newer Trainers, it was also popular among hikers.

Still, the encounters were of no particular difficulty, given the ordeal with Tapu Koko and then the training the group had just completed. After all of that, their Pokemon were more than prepared. Taking turns battling, the group found their Pokemon hardly wore down much at all.

Pikachu alone mopped the floor with pretty much any Flying-type encountered, striking it down with a speeding Electro Ball before it could even hope to fly fast enough to dodge.

Many times, the group was complimented on the strength of their Pokemon… and more than once, Lillie and Sun were mistaken for a couple, only for Sun to enthusiastically correct them and say that
Hau was his boyfriend. Although it made Hau’s heart race like no tiresome mountain trek ever could, he couldn’t deny the way it made him feel all warm and fuzzy whenever Sun corrected someone on the matter. He almost wished it would happen more than twice, even if it was still a little embarrassing.

But regardless, as much as the trip had its fun moments and gorgeous views, the exhaustion and slow pace involved did little to dissuade Hau and Lillie of the persistent, gnawing notion that they were inadequate protectors, if they were struggling to handle the physical demands of a path whose main challenge was just going uphill in the midst of tropical weather and limited shade… although both of them refused to say anything out loud about it.

Sun could feel the little twinges of frustration and discontent from each of them, and he did his best to try and keep them in a good mood without outright forcing them to talk about it.

By time the first night on the road fell, Sun didn’t even bother with his own tent, instead just helping Hau with his. Hau was immediately flustered, realizing that it meant that Sun had no intention of sleeping by himself. Not that Hau was going to complain.

The group made a relatively simple but satisfying dinner, helped by the fact that they had Blissey available to provide eggs. On one hand, Blissey needed quite a lot of food themselves in order to make a good supply of eggs, but on the other hand, the intake could be much less nutritious and palatable than the output. Blissey were fully comfortable with many tough, foul-tasting, or even outright toxic plants, having an immune system strong enough to stomach them with relative ease.

Just one egg was large enough that everyone, whether human or Pokemon, was able to have a generous portion with their meal. Knowing full well that they also came with a modest antidepressant and endorphin effect, Sun insisted on Hau and Lillie getting extra helpings. Meanwhile, Hau made sure to thank Blissey in the form of extra hugs and some delicate grooming of her plush fur.

The only downside was that breaking and cooking the egg seemed to attract Pokemon en-masse, even when Blissey generously allowed them to have a second egg, the second having already been waiting within Blissey to be laid when needed. At any given time, Blissey had a few extra eggs already developed within them, the exact number depending on the individual’s size, strength, and general condition.

Unfortunately, the second egg just ended up turning the camp site into an impromptu battleground for wild Pokemon, as various groups began to fight over the delicious meal…

Still, Blissey’s relatively young age became abundantly clear when the outburst caused her to start crying loudly, much to Hau’s alarm.

With a commanding shout, Hau had Pikachu fire off several warning jolts into the assembled crowd, immediately drawing the attention of all the assembled Pokemon.

“Everyone calm down!” Hau called out, as Blissey scurried to his side, only to cause a few of them to approach him as if wanting to challenge him. Sun quickly shut them down with nothing but a brief, violet-eyed glare.

“You’re all being really rude right now, and if that keeps up, none of you get to have anything. So either you all figure out how to get along, or all of you are leaving here with nothing.” Hau said, voice even but firm. Sun noted that Hau’s Field seemed to dilute as he spoke, broadening and
stretching outwards from him in a light haze before stretching into a multitude of thin lines, each one shooting out to a Pokemon and connecting with its Field. He didn’t even seem to actively realize he was doing it, his Field merely responding to his focused intent.

Lillie could hardly believe it when the scolding actually worked… even though Hau hadn’t even sounded particularly angry, just disappointed. The Pokemon all quieted and relaxed, some even seeming to be a bit ashamed as they averted their eyes and were suddenly much more timid and passive about acquiring the food.

“How did you do that?” Lillie asked quietly. “Did Sun do something?”

“Well, mainly, that’s just something Tutu showed me. Depending on how you confront Pokemon, your feelings can get through to them more easily… So, with the right technique, you can calm Pokemon more easily. It’s… not as easy as just talking, though. There’s a little bit of a trick to it, like a certain focus you need… It’s hard to explain, but it’s definitely more about the vibes you give off, rather than just the words,” Hau explained. “Still, Sun did help out some… and not just with his powers. He makes me feel braver when he’s around, so I think that’s how I was able to pull it off,” Hau said with a warm smile. Sun wrapped his arms around Hau and appreciatively nuzzled against him, flattered.

“…Could you show me how, some time?” Lillie asked.

“Oh, sure! It might not come right away, but I’ll have plenty of chances to help you out, so I’m sure you’ll get it down before too long! But I think the most important thing is… You can’t just like, shoot Feels Lasers at the Pokemon all willy-nilly! You have to relate to them, and calm down enough to consider them along with your own feelings.”

“…Feels… Lasers?” Lillie asked quietly.

“That’s what I call it, ‘cause that’s kinda what it feels like! Like you’re focusing all your feelings on them super tight, but at the same time, not like aggressively. It’s like, pew pew, not like kablam!, you get it?”

“…I’m sorry, but… I… don’t,” Lillie said with a sigh. Sun just enthusiastically reassured Hau that he understood perfectly.

“Well, thanks Sun, but you’re like… linked right up to my brain,” Hau replied with a short laugh. “And Lillie, I’m sure you’ll get it one of these days! And then you’ll be able to shoot every Pokemon with so many emotions its like you have a giant laser cannon full of ‘em!”

Lillie still didn’t entirely get it, but she couldn’t help but giggle at the mental image. “Thanks,” Lillie sincerely replied. Still, she idly wondered about just how normal or common Hau’s skill was. From what she’d read in books before, it sounded roughly similar to certain advanced training techniques involving higher applications of human AWE… But those techniques were supposed to take a long time to accomplish.

Then again, Lillie supposed most people weren’t directly descended from Kahunas or powerful Trainers in general… and also didn’t have personal experience with lots of Pokemon, including highly powerful Pokemon, from an early age.

But to be fair… Lillie herself had a lot of exposure to Pokemon too. With a twinge of bitter disappointment, she supposed that maybe she’d just squandered her privileges, while Hau had
actually gone and done great things with the opportunities he’d had growing up. It likely would’ve helped immensely if she’d actually spent years of her childhood already wanting and preparing to be a Trainer… not that her mother would’ve been very supportive if she had shown more interest...

Lillie just took a deep breath, managing to put the thoughts aside for the time being. She supposed her helping of Blissey egg had probably helped considerably in that regard, as she could still feel the pleasant warmth suffusing her if she focused.

Soon after, once the wild Pokemon all dispersed for the night, the group cleaned up camp and got ready for bed.

As Hau laid down next to Sun, almost automatically pulling him in close, he couldn’t help but feel a bit inconsiderate. He’d almost forgotten that Lillie was pretty much in an objectively tougher situation than him. She was both physically weaker and hadn’t even originally wanted to be a Trainer, leaving her less psychologically prepared as well… but there he was, focusing on his own worries and insecurity instead of more consistently focusing on trying to help her.

Hau felt Sun silently ask what was wrong, and he responded truthfully, keeping his voice low and quiet..

“I guess it’s just… I feel kind of dumb for being so down on myself when Lillie is the one in the toughest spot, and I should be trying to look out for her more…” Hau said.

Sun probed for why Hau was down on himself, although he already sort of knew the answer.

“I just… still feel like I’m not good enough. Just… in general. Even though I am trying, and I know I’m trying… People are their own worst critics, I guess,”

Sun let off a comforting glow, while gently stroking Hau’s undone hair. It’d already gotten somewhat longer since they met, Hau having always been too preoccupied to bother getting it cut.

Sun knew what Hau was feeling all too well. But either way… It wasn’t like Hau had to worry about either just himself or just others, right? Doing both didn’t make him any less caring or any less considerate.

“I guess you have a point,” Hau replied. “I guess I just get kinda worked up over wondering whether or not I’m really doing everything I can.”

Sun softly kissed him on the cheek, silently assuring him that he was. Not to mention, Sun would help him with whatever he decided he wanted to do in the future.

Hau couldn’t help but squirm a bit, flustered by the unremitting concern and affection he felt.

“...Seriously, how are you so nice?” Hau asked with a short laugh.

Because people like Hau reminded him why it was important.

Hau only squirmed even more at that. Sun just giggled before giving him another short kiss, his own body lighting up all over with various shades of pink… which fascinated Hau enough to kiss Sun back, half just to see what the lights would do. Sure enough, even more pink issued out of them, the wave of brightening pink spreading along Sun’s skin in undulating waves.

“Like cotton candy,” Hau said fondly, before kissing Sun lightly on the nose. Even that caused Sun
Hau kissed Sun on the lips, slow and gentle, which Sun eagerly reciprocated. The glow brightened as Hau continued, making up for his inexperience by focusing on Sun’s feelings, following the tiny shifts in Sun’s response. It led to their position changing a bit, Hau over top of Sun while Sun was beneath him, light dimming just enough that it wouldn’t bother Hau’s eyes. With Sun’s inner desires leading his every move, Hau took a break from kissing Sun to slowly run his tongue along the side of Sun’s neck, then along his lower jaw. Hau felt an especially strong wave of pleasure from Sun at that, rewarding him in kind with the same surge of pleasure shooting through his own body. Hau found reality falling away from him, the pink glow completely engulfing him, taking away his perception of practically everything but him and Sun. There was a faintly pleasant odor in the air, earthy and sweet. A similar taste in his mouth, too.

Hau paused for a moment as soft motes of dark pink light were floating up and off of Sun like little bubbles, his whole body hot as Hau felt a twinge of impatience from him. Hau immediately assuage it with a litany of kisses along Sun’s lips, neck, and collarbone, and Sun responded with waves of pleasure and kisses of his own.

The sweetness was especially evident in Sun’s saliva, and there was actually a somewhat tangy quality to it as well, Hau noticed. Furthermore, the taste was only strengthening as time went on… and the more Hau tasted it, the more Hau wanted. The more it pulled him in, the more it enticed him.

Everything started feeling even less real, almost like a lucid dream of sorts. Hau still had full control of his actions, but… everything was just formless pink light. Besides Sun. Sun was still there, as sharp, clear, and beautiful as anything. Hau giggled in spite of himself, euphoria crashing through him in massive waves as he silently told Sun just how beautiful he was in that moment as well.

Still, at the very crescendo of that euphoria, despite Sun being able to feel it too… Sun decided to steadily have Hau come down from the effect, not wanting him to get sucked in too much further…. As good as it felt, he could feel Hau slowly losing his hold on reality through their psychic bond, and it was starting to get a bit worrying. Sun loved it when Hau enjoyed himself so much, especially since the enjoyment created a sort of positive feedback loop because of their bond… But at the same time, Hau seemed quite vulnerable to Sun’s psionic influence, and Sun didn’t want to abuse that.

Not to mention, Sun could taste some odd substance in his mouth, and feel it collecting on his skin, especially around his neck and lower jaw…. And it was more than a little embarrassing, especially considering that he was starting to remember that it was because-

“Wait…” Hau suddenly said, shaking his head a bit as Sun’s psychic coaxing helped him come down from the high, and reality steadily pushed its way back into focus. He slowly stopped straddling Sun and opted to just sit down next to him instead “That stuff that tastes really good… You make it when you’re turned on?” Hau asked, picking up on Sun’s line of thought. He blushed darkly as he put a pillow over his lap, quickly realizing that Sun wasn’t the only one turned on. He was even more flustered when Sun nodded a confirmation.

Sun’s nodes dimmed and started to vibrate as he tried his best to calmly explain that it was an… aphrodisiac, of sorts, from what he remembered. He had no idea why or how it apparently worked on humans too… but there it was. So, both of them got to sit uncomfortably aroused in a tent in the middle of the night, even though they’d only been a couple for roughly a day. Sun audibly whined at how bad he was at the whole “taking it slow” thing Hau had wanted.

Immediately, Hau was doing his best to comfort Sun. “Hey, it’s no big deal! All we did was make
out, basically… even if it didn’t go how we thought because it turns out you’re basically full of fuck juice,” Hau joked.

Sun both laughed and partially faded from view upon hearing that term. As funny as that was, they definitely needed a less… blunt name for it.

“That sweet nasty sauce,” Hau suggested. Sun tried and failed to restrain more laughter.

“The doing-the-do goo,” Hau said, in an intentionally ridiculous tone that sent Sun into a helpless fit of badly-repressed cackling, with Hau joining in as well.

“But, seriously,” Hau said, once the laughter died down. “Thanks for thinking about what I said before… even though, to be honest with you, part of me wants to just completely throw that out of the window now. Like, I know it’s probably a little questionable to be getting exposed to some kind of… alien pheromone sweat, but… it felt really good,” Hau said.

Sun agreed… Despite being the one producing it, his mind had been bonded to Hau so intimately that Hau’s pleasure had been difficult to distinguish from his own. He almost hadn’t been able to stop himself…

He supposed that was all the more reason why Hau’s prior caution was probably still good to keep in mind.

But still, the awkwardness of it all had died down enough that the two had no problem lying back down together for a peaceful slumber, not nearly embarrassed enough to not tenderly hold one another as sleep took them.

The next day was another slog through the rest of Route 3’s unforgiving path, as the group’s Pokemon once again faced all of their own challenges with relative ease. Z-Moves were never even necessary, they’d only be overkill on the multitudes of weaker opponents.

Although Hau and Lillie’s clothing choices for the day were largely the same, Sun had switched to something a bit more feminine. Pastel yellow capris, a pastel orange crop top with a floral print, an orange flower in his hair, illusory orange-painted nails, and his signature clip-on star earrings.

Hau was more than a little distracted by the outfit change, and more than a little flustered by the fact that Sun had apparently remembered that Hau’s favorite color was orange... Not to mention, after nearly eight months in Alola, Sun’s body was really…

Hau mentally beat those thoughts back with a broom.

Sun merely giggled, flashing a somewhat shy but knowing smile at Hau.

Still, besides Hau’s own thoughts, Hau also noticed that Sun’s change in fashion had changed the assumptions other people made about the group considerably... Especially since Sun was no longer carrying Lillie around.

Suddenly, people were much more likely to comment on Hau and Sun being a cute couple, and there was a notable upswing in Sun being referred to as a girl… Developments which Sun seemed very pleased with, as much as it flustered Hau. Truth be told, being acknowledged as Hau’s romantic
partner was a little embarrassing for Sun too, but his pleasure at people knowing how much he
adored Hau easily overtook that.

By about noon, the group had nearly reached the end of the route's mountain section, most of the
remaining part being a far more forgiving downhill slope that looped back to Route 1. There was a
Pokemon Center nearby as well, much to everyone’s joy. It was getting to be the hottest part of the
day, after all.

However, they came across a group of five Trainers, seeming to range from their late teens to early
adulthood. They were apparently camping in a shaded area of the mountainous landscape. A blond,
leanly muscled young man came up to address the group as they passed by.

“Alola! I’m Makana, and I provide the valuable Roost TM for trialgoers, allowing people to save
weeks or even months of effort on training. Not to mention, all the energy you would’ve spent on
Roost can go towards something else instead. But… if you’re interested, you’ll have to beat me and
all four of my friends first,” Makana said, as he motioned to the small group of other Trainers behind
him. “We function as an optional extension of the Island Trial system, allowing trial-goers to get
extra rewards for proving their strength and competence. Somewhat like the Elite Four or Final
Trial, you have to beat all four of my friends in a row. However, each of them will only use one
Pokemon, while you are not limited to such rules. You will also be able to rest before you face me
personally.”

“Sounds like fun!” Hau responded almost immediately.

“Great! And your names?” Makana asked.

“I’m Hau!” Hau said.


Sun silently introduced themself, adding on that Hau was their boyfriend. Hau gave a nervous
chuckle, while Makana just smiled.

“Psychic girlfriend, huh? Don’t see that every day. You’ve got some real game, don’t you?”
Makana said to Hau, with a wide grin.

Hau just continued to laugh nervously while Sun just enthusiastically agreed that Hau had lots of
game!

“Ha, yeah, uh, can we… so, uh, when do we get to the battles?” Hau struggled to say, voice
cracking a little. Lillie did her best not to laugh.

“Oh, right now, if you want! Is anyone else here gonna challenge us?” Makana said.

Lillie and Sun refused, figuring that once Hau won, they could all share the TM anyway.

“Cool! Seems like your friends have a lot of confidence in you, Hau!” Makana said.

“Haha, yeah…” Hau said, still not entirely over how flustered he felt.
Fortunately, as promised, one of the challengers came forward for battle. A strong, stout young man with dark skin and thick black hair.

After the two shook hands, Hau immediately cleared an appropriate amount of space, and Noibat took to the battlefield rather hesitantly, although Hau called out words of encouragement that seemed to bolster her a bit. Really, she didn’t have too much of a reason to be afraid. With three new moves on her side, she was winning a lot more battles than she ever could’ve dreamed of in the wild. Still, Hau could see that the key to using her was speed and technique… Without that, she was still relatively frail and weak.

The first Trainer sent out a Pidgeotto, as the general theme of the Roost challenge was Flying-type. Hau debated switching out right away, but then again, being able to get Noibat to believe in herself more would benefit her greatly… Not to mention, Sun would be impressed… Part of Hau tried to distance himself from that thought a bit, not wanting to completely revolve a battle around impressing someone… But he’d be lying if he said it wasn’t a good motivator.

“Agility!” Hau called, knowing he immediately needed to get the drop on Pidgeotto in terms of speed, and it was naturally faster than Noibat as it was.

“Quick Attack!” Hau’s opponent called at nearly the same time, hoping to match sustained speed with one mighty burst of it.

Pidgeotto blurred towards Noibat like an arrow, but Noibat’s Agility did wonders for her reflexes, allowing her to suffer only a glancing blow.

Immediately, Hau ordered a Hyper Voice, the attack causing Pidgeotto to cringe in pain as it desperately went flying off to avoid the horrible blast of sound. Even the onlookers were somewhat affected, but the Noibat line did at least have a natural ability to guide sound waves more efficiently.

Pidgeotto’s Trainer already seemed to be losing composure, trying desperately to reign Pidgeotto in with commands. Hau moved on to the next phase of the plan… although it was admittedly a plan he was playing by ear.

With quick, excited commands, Hau had Noibat constantly harass Pidgeotto with Air Cutter, specifying to aim well ahead of Pidgeotto’s flight path.

Some of the blades of compressed air missed, but many hit their mark, corralling Pidgeotto into one general area while also drawing their ire. Pidgeotto’s Trainer opened his mouth to order a Wing Attack, but Hau was already ordering Supersonic.

Already frustrated and off their game, the Pidgeotto couldn’t successfully dodge the burst of horrendous noise. They promptly crashed straight into the ground in their desperation to avoid it, their body wracked with nausea and a blooming migraine… not helped by the fact that they crashed headfirst, then awkwardly flopped onto their back with a pained croon.

While their Trainer weakly pleaded with them to get up and use Roost, already losing hope, Pidgeotto did nothing but wearily look around for Noibat’s next attack in a dazed stupor, Hau and Noibat took the opportunity to finish Pidgeotto off with an Air Cutter, Noibat taking the time to focus the hit and take advantage of Air Cutter’s sharpness and high precision to land extra damage.

Pidgeotto crumpled to the ground, soundly defeated, as the last attack had even managed to get through their Field’s protective qualities and shave right through some of their feathers, leaving a
long, shallowly bleeding cut on their back, just between the wings.

Pidgeotto’s Trainer just returned them promptly and whispered reassurances to the Pokeball in their hand, before nodding at Hau in acknowledgement.

Another Trainer stepped forward, a young woman with a Hawlucha.

Hau considered the odds yet again. Hawlucha were impressively quick, and their general power growth was incredible right off the bat. Still, Noibat’s speed was already boosted, so Hau pushed his luck a bit, telling her to use another Agility for good measure.

Immediately, the woman had Hawlucha respond with an Encore.

Hau looked on in deep regret as Hawlucha gave a cry of encouragement, and Noibat was suddenly bombarded with a disruptive pulse of Field energy, giving her the irresistible compulsion to use the same move over and over again.

Unfortunately, Pokemon couldn’t bolster their capabilities forever, especially not a Pokemon who was still relatively inexperienced like Noibat. She couldn’t resist the unshakable compulsion to keep trying anyway, only exhausting herself as she aimlessly blurred through the air in erratic circles and zig-zags instead of actually attacking properly. “Noibat! Please calm down! It’s alright, you can fight it!” Hau called. Sun could see Hau’s Field doing just as it’d done before, stretching into long tendrils to connect more efficiently with Noibat’s, but Noibat’s own Field was in disarray, and clearly rejecting it even as Noibat tried her best to obey, only able to stop for a brief moment at a time before zooming off again. During that time, Hawlucha easily set up Hone Claws, then waited for the ideal time to strike.

The brief moments were all Hawlucha needed. But Hau knew that.

Just as Hawlucha readied an Aerial Ace with practiced flair, and prepared to dart in at utterly alarming speeds for what would surely decide the battle in a single hit, Hau returned Noibat during one of the brief pauses, causing Hawlucha to swipe at empty air… but still with enough force to kick up an impressive amount of dust. Hau paused as he considered his next move. Pikachu was likely the best option, but under the effects of Hone Claws, Hawlucha was a much better match for him. Dartrix and Blissey both had glaring type disadvantage… not to mention, Pikachu was the fastest out of the three… But also the most frail.

Still, Hau didn’t see what choice he really had. Pikachu it was.

Hau immediately gave the order to use evasive Quick Attack right as he released his second Pokemon, knowing he had no time to waste. At Hawlucha’s speed, Nasty Plot was a no-go and Electro Ball would barely have time to charge.

Hawlucha attempted a Karate Chop without delay, but Pikachu’s Quick Attack luckily put his speed above Hawlucha’s for a time, allowing him to weave between hits with a grace entirely unlike what he’d shown as a Pichu.

Hau did his best to wait for an opening as Pikachu was forced more and more on the defensive, having to repeatedly hop and dart backwards in response to Hawlucha’s fluid, merciless fighting style.

“Thunder Wave!” Hau called, when he believed he had the proper chance.
“Detect!” Hawlucha’s Trainer called in turn, with a rather smug grin as Hawlucha leapt clear over Pikachu with a brief flash of their eyes and a graceful frontflip, the Thunder Wave missing by a country mile. Immediately, the command was followed with the order to use Karate Chop.

“Look out!” Hau called, but Pikachu was just a hair too slow in activating Quick Attack once more, instead opting to go out in a burst of electrical fury. Despite Hawlucha’s attack being so nimble that Pikachu couldn’t really respond well, his fur was already primed with a truly impressive amount of static, giving Hawlucha quite the nasty surprise even as they knocked Pikachu out cold with a quick hit to the back of the neck.

Hau grimaced, but returned Pikachu with haste, quietly thanking him as he sent out Noibat once more.

Lillie, watching intently along with Sun, let out just the tiniest bit of tension, at least glad that the opponent wasn’t a Hawlucha with Limber. That probably would’ve cost Hau the whole match, if he planned to rely on Thunder Wave.

Hau immediately commanded Hyper Voice, although Lillie didn’t initially understand why he wouldn’t go straight for Air Cutter.

The deafening noise crashed against Hawlucha as they struggled to move forward… and similarly, failed to actually hear their Trainer’s commands in the midst of struggling to avoid it. The tables turned swiftly, Hawlucha being the one on defense, as Hau had Noibat start throwing in Supersonic as well, which made Hawlucha’s Trainer noticeably tense up. If Hawlucha got paralyzed and confused, they were almost definitely done for.

Still, as Hawlucha struggled to force their numbed, tingling muscles to comply with their desperate need to outlast Noibat, Hau just smiled, knowing that he didn’t actually need to go for confusion at all.

Hau had a better idea.

With a flourish, Hau held up the Z-Ring on his right wrist, the carved and polished stone twinkling in the light as it caught Hau’s Field and began to suck it in with vigor, the stone glowing brighter and brighter in the process.

The opponents knew precisely what was coming, but Hawlucha was half-deaf and still busily engaged in a dance of danger, Noibat’s insidious sonic strikes still plenty threatening even without the oncoming shitshow.

“Aerial Ace!” Hawlucha’s Trainer screamed, in a last ditch effort.

Finally, Hawlucha heard.

But it was too late.

Hau went through the pose with startling speed, grinning even wider all the while. Light came gushing out of him like he was a miniature sun, the radiant gold of its glow streaming into Noibat with great speed, as she lit up with blinding light as well.

Really, Sun knew that on one hand, it meant the attack wasn’t particularly efficient, as errant light
and Z-Power bathed the whole area, while Hau’s Field was practically nonexistent, all of it beingunneled into the ring as fast as Hau could possibly produce it…. But it was at least useful in that the
sheer amount was interfering with Hawlucha’s battling ability… and honestly, as Sun gazed into the
light, he immediately realized something else as well.

Hau looked utterly gorgeous in the throes of the move, the power radiating off of him, elevating him
to something that seemed beyond human, beyond perfect, when he was already so incredible to
begin with.

Nebby notably peeked out of Lillie’s bag a little, some of the excess power converging on them as
they quietly giggled. Sha bathed in it as well, seeming oddly contemplative as they hovered almost
perfectly still within its radiance, eyes closed and limbs outstretched.

Hawlucha’s body twitched and spasmed for a moment, delaying them for a moment before they
sprang up high, falling through the light with talons outstretched, trying desperately to stop it…

But it was far too late by then.

Noibat raised her head upwards and responded with an ungodly burst of energy for her size, a
massive stream of nigh invisible force blasting her against the ground with its sheer recoil, while
Hawlucha was sent rocketing into the air, eyes bulging with the raw oppressive power they were
exposed to.

Finally, the light faded, and Hau was left panting, hands on his knees, as Noibat wearily got up, but
struggled to actually take to the air.

Hawlucha took a solid twenty seconds to hit the ground, landing in a disheveled, unresponsive heap
when they did.

Hawlucha’s Trainer took a moment to return them, briefly distracting by just staring up into the sky
with their mouth agape. The fact that a small Noibat had actually handled that much power at once,
and it was a Z-Move based on an inherently powerful attack to boot… It was something that had to
be seen to be believed.

Noibat weakly flitted back to Hau, settling into his arms as they both continued to fight just to catch
their breath. She’d handled it… but not without paying a certain price.

“Noibat, you did so good out there! Return!” Hau said, knowing that he was essentially down two
Pokemon. There was no point in forcing Noibat to go on, even if she was still conscious. The little
dragon-bat was immensely grateful for the rest.

Still, Hau was almost relieved when the third opponent, a young brunette, sent out a Pom-Pom
Oricorio. Potentially rather tricky, and definitely another swift and limber sort… but nowhere near as
much of a threat as Hawlucha to his third choice.

Hau sent out Blissey, and the opponent immediately grimaced. She knew full well it was about to be
one hell of an annoying fight.

Oricorio was commanded to use Peck. In spite of it being a physical move, everyone knew just from
looking that the fierce beak jabs Oricorio inflicted on Blissey’s plush, downy body would just be
erased with a single Softboiled.
“Work Up!” Oricorio’s Trainer commanded, but Hau just responded with a command for Return and then Sweet Kiss as Oricorio danced about, their Field flaring brighter and causing a thin but plainly visible red aura to appear around Oricorio as well, before Blissey slammed into the sprightly bird, then assaulted them with a sudden kiss on the forehead before they could do anything about it.

Oricorio began to totter about unsteadily as Blissey was then commanded to use something Hau called ‘Burst Voice’. As Blissey’s Hyper Voice was still unmastered, Burst Voice was actually a stopgap alternative, designed to use shorter, more forceful and abrupt blasts of sound in order to distract and knock back opponents. Each burst was weaker than a Hyper Voice overall, but they still at least did more damage than Blissey’s physical moves ever could.

Blissey opened her mouth wide and fired one off, at a pitch almost imperceptible to humans… But the sheer force of the sound waves still blasted Oricorio a couple of feet backwards and caused them to shake their head in frustration before trying to respond with Air Cutter, against their Trainer’s wishes.

Even with Work Up in effect, Oricorio’s attack did a hopelessly low amount of damage. So little that without even needing to be told, Blissey and her egg lit up with a soft white glow as she pulled energy from it, immediately and nigh-effortlessly healing all the wounds she’d sustained.

Oricorio, in its dazed state, replied by just flailing around with such frustration that they ended up seriously hurting themself, while Blissey just responded with another Burst Voice, not even flinching when Oricorio sprang forth after the first one, trying to attack again… only to trip and immediately get blasted by another, which was enough to just completely take them out.

Blissey stood completely unharmed, trilling happily even as she immediately checked to make sure her opponent would still be alright.

Although it was already drained of part of its restorative potency, Blissey cheerily gave the third Trainer her egg, then laid another one within moments. She happily came back to Hau’s side for a hug as the third Trainer giggled at her kindness, and the fourth Trainer came to the forefront.

With a flourish, the fourth Trainer silently sent out an odd, towering saurian creature with leathery brown skin and vivid green foliage, the most notable of which were four broad, massive leaves on their back. Along with that, their neck appeared to be growing a bunch of banana-like fruit.

Sun excitedly managed to recognize the creature as a Tropius, and was even more thrilled to see the Tropius actually achieve flight, their Field allowing their wings to generate truly incredible amounts of lift with each flap. Meanwhile, internal pouches of accumulated gas further supported their flight.

Hau briefly covered his eyes as the great beast achieved liftoff, the power required to do so causing their wings to create massive gusts of wind and kick up an impressive amount of dust. Blissey mirrored his actions with her own stubby arms.

“Burst Voice!” Hau called, having Blissey blast out waves of power that temporarily dispelled some of the dust and pebbles.

Tropius’ Trainer went for Sunny Day, the beast charging up a ball of orange energy in their mouth before shooting it straight up into the sky, rapidly clearing away the clouds and creating a sort of lensing effect that magnified the sun’s rays over the area. Part of Tropius’ Field temporarily became ‘detached’ from the main bulk of its power, deployed from the Sunny Day sphere in a great burst of
energy in order to maintain the lens effect.

Tropius gave a low rumble of pleasure as they suddenly began to speed up dramatically, becoming far more swift and nimble than Hau would’ve ever thought possible for such an ungainly creature.

“So that’s Chlorophyll, huh? Good choice!” Hau called to his opponent. “Blissey, Burst Voice!” Hau commanded. Despite his light-hearted attitude, he was honestly in a bit of a bind, as much as he didn’t want to admit it. Switching into Dartrix was probably going to get Dartrix badly hurt, as he wouldn’t be able to compete with the massive speed advantage Tropius had gained. Meanwhile, Blissey was rather passive, and Tropius looked like a sturdy Pokemon.

Blissey’s attack hit its mark on Tropius themself, but Tropius hardly seemed to mind. With aplomb, their Trainer ordered Growth.

Hau quickly took the opportunity to order Copycat, almost immediately.

He could see the opponent grit their teeth at that. Apparently, they had no idea Blissey knew Copycat… But that was the benefit of raising her from a Happiny, Hau supposed.

Despite not being plantlike, Blissey briefly intertwined her energy with Tropius, understanding it in a brief rush of clarity and allowing herself to use her own version, directly integrating the energy of enhanced sunlight into her Field rather than utilizing true photosynthesis for a boost.

Both Pokemon surged in power at nearly the same time, Tropius’ coloration become notably more vibrant and saturated as their wings also underwent a sudden growth spurt.

“Seed Bomb!” their Trainer commanded, much to Hau’s dismay. He tried to have Blissey blast it off course with an empowered Burst Voice, but the large glowing seed fired out of Tropius’ mouth with such force that Blissey couldn’t react in time. With a loud bang of glowing vapors and bright green light, it detonated right in her face, sending her tumbling backwards with great speed and causing her to let out a high pitched scream.

“Blissey!” Hau called, getting a bit worried. He briefly considered his options. He didn’t want to risk a Z-Move off of an unmastered move like Hyper Voice… Even Noibat had barely struggled through the difficulty of all that sudden power. And Blissey was clearly wounded, as she struggled to her feet with one eye clenched shut and her entire body dirty and bruised.

But there was another option, he recalled, from his training with Ilima…

Hau once again pulled out his Z-Power Ring and took a deep breath. Worry immediately flashed across the faces of both Sun and Lillie.

Technically, Hau wasn’t using two Z-Moves in the same battle…

But in practice, his last usage of Z-Power had been mere minutes ago, even if Hau had mostly spent that brief time standing in place.

Could he handle it?

Sun frowned, not wanting Hau to hurt himself over a battle that wasn’t even strictly necessary to win… Part of him wanted to tell him no.
But at the same time…

Sun knew that part of what made Hau try so hard was him. He knew that even though it could be difficult to watch, to bear all that worry… Hau had chosen this, and Hau would see it through. He couldn’t tell him to give up before he’d truly given it his best effort.

“Hau!” Sun called out, the loudest Hau had ever heard him actually speak out loud. All it was was his name, but Sun conveyed so much further emotion than just that, so much so that Hau could scarcely believe it. Hau grinned widely.

“Blissey, let’s do this! Z-Refresh!” Hau called out.

“Seed Bomb!” the opponent called.

Once again, the battlefield was awash with light, as everyone else looked on at the scene in awe. The Z-Power Ring absorbed Hau’s Field, every last particle of it that Hau could muster, as Hau desperately willed as much as possible to come forth. Hau dimly noted, while bathed in the light, heart pounding and mind racing, that it seemed almost… *ravenous* in its nature. Ostensibly, of course, it was ‘just’ a carved and polished stone… but it was apparently also a fragment of a god. Still, Hau didn’t think too much harder on that, instead just focusing on how to beam all the energy into Blissey as best he could.

Another Seed Bomb hit Blissey with unbelievable force as she became engulfed in light and power, and for a moment, Hau thought that was the end… Like the first time, the attack landed squarely on her face. But unlike the first time…

Blissey took the hit as if it barely even existed.

Everyone watching just looked on in absolute awe. The remains of the detonated seed cleared away like nothing had happened at all, and Blissey’s glow intensified, energy surging through every cell of her body. She became cloaked in a glow so harsh she was barely even distinguishable from the light, as did Hau.

Sun urged Hau to keep going, as Blissey floated slightly off the ground, dirt floating away from her body, bruises disappearing with unnatural speed. Z-Power soaked into the core of her being, rather than only exploding outwards, and the result was impressive indeed.

It felt like such a long time, but in seconds, it was all over.

Blissey stood fully healed, positively glowing with health as the light faded. Hau was panting heavily, Sun themself able to feel just a twinge of the burning pain in Hau’s lungs, the heaviness of his limbs. Sun internally cringed as they did their best to utilize their connection to take on more of the unpleasant side effects, silently bearing part of Hau’s burden with him. Lillie immediately caught on, looking at him with questioning concern even as they did their best to hide it. With a stifled wheeze, Sun wondered if they really should’ve encouraged Hau to do that after all…

Still, Hau pressed on.

“All right…” Hau started, taking a couple of deep breaths. “We’re not done yet! Hyper Voice!” he gasped, taking advantage of the fact that the opponent had actually paused briefly to allow him a moment of rest. But he had at least given them a brief heads up while he quickly caught his breath, rather than ordering the Hyper Voice instantly, so he didn’t feel too bad about taking advantage of
their mercy.

Fresh off of such a potent healing move, and with a huge power boost from copying Growth, Blissey let out an utterly monstrous wail, shaking the whole area with its sheer power. In that moment of confidence and extra power, the move had finally been mastered, at least decently enough to use its full power. Even with the tremendous sound waves largely directed properly at Tropius, that which still seeped out of the directed cone was still so abominably loud that everyone present had to cover their ears.

Tropius dropped like an anvil, the fall doing yet more damage. They were conscious, but stunned and disoriented, and Blissey was breathing heavily with the effort of such a colossal scream.

“You can still do this! Seed Bomb!” the opponent shouted, their sheer intent managing to get through even Tropius’ temporarily reduced hearing.

Creating a brief updraft with sheer willpower, Tropius lifted themself to their feet with incredible grace, and readied another attack. However, it was slower than before, exhaustion clearly working against them as they struggled to properly enlarge and empower the small seed primed in their throat. Hau seized the opportunity without question.

“One more time! Hyper Voice!” Hau called.

Blissey took a deep breath, and at the same time, the attacks fired off.

Despite the sheer speed and power of the Seed Bomb, and the fact that a single bomb weighed several pounds, it didn’t matter.

The overwhelming power and vibrations of Hyper Voice caused it to detonate halfway to its target, in a brilliant spectacle of light and aerosolized volatiles, while Hyper Voice once again struck Tropius without mercy.

“Tropius!” the opponent called, but it was no use. Tropius fell to their knees, then crumpled to the ground like a sack of bricks.

Hau, as sweaty and exhausted as he was, couldn’t help but jump up in victory, adrenaline surging as Blissey ran back to him for a hug.

“You were amazing, Bliss!” Hau said with a laugh. The opponent returned his Tropius, and the intensified sunlight steadily faded back to typical levels. Although he lost, he couldn’t help but feel uplifted by the sight of Hau and Blissey celebrating together. That guy had truly given it his all, going for two Z-Moves so close together like that.

All five of the TM Trainers came to congratulate Hau on clearing the first part of the challenge… although Makana still remained. They both agreed that around that same time the next day, he’d be Hau’s opponent.

In the aftermath of the battle, Sun, Lillie, Blissey, and even Dartrix ended up fussing over Hau, moving him into a shaded area near a cliff and giving him plenty of water. Of course, Blissey provided an egg without hesitation. Dartrix, despite not even battling, seemed a bit annoyed with the whole affair, getting right up in Hau’s space and casting a dismayed gaze, apparently believing that Hau wouldn’t have had to use two Z-Moves if he’d just let him fight.
“You get to fight tomorrow, I swear! But they’re focused on Flying-types, and you have a
disadvantage against other Flying-types, and I was trying my best to not show them my whole team,”
Hau explained.

Dartrix made a sulking sound, puffing out his chest and nimbly hopping about, as if saying he could
easily just dodge any Flying-type move. Hau just laughed, gently petting his head. He knew Dartrix
honestly weren’t all that fast, their flight centered around stealth instead, but he felt they still had a
chance at figuring out a workaround.

After a bit of rest and rehydration, Hau ended up eating the entirety of Blissey’s egg in one sitting, in
spite of the fact that each one was large enough to serve as a generous side-dish for the entire group,
Pokemon and all. Fortunately, in the process of priming an egg for healing others, Blissey’s AWE Field
could influence dramatic chemical changes, quickly stripping the shell away and causing the rest to immediately boil, which only made its nutrients more readily available. That was how the
Softboiled move earned its name, despite the fact that for self-healing purposes, or urgent care,
Blissey tended to just draw out and rapidly absorb the energy as a glowing accumulation of vapors
and AWE.

Once that was all taken care of, the group made their way to the nearest Pokemon Center, situated
relatively close to Melemele Meadow. Hau couldn’t help but blush when he and Sun got a room
together, despite the fact that they’d done it before… But now they were going to share a bed… and
Sun was presenting as rather feminine that day.

Alola’s general homophobia was extremely low, but that didn’t change the fact that people would
still draw different assumptions about Sun and Hau sharing a room, based on how Sun looked at the
time.

Hau nearly choked on his own spit when Nurse Joy quietly reminded him to “use protection” in a
tell-tale tone that made it abundantly clear what kind of ‘protection’ she meant.

Sun had to fight with everything they had to not turn invisible.

Despite the initial embarrassment, Sun ended up spending pretty much the entire day with Hau,

Sure, Hau had won, but… maybe he really should’ve stopped Hau from using that second Z-Move.
A risk was a risk, even if it paid off sometimes.

“Sun, really, I’m fine,” Hau replied, although he appreciated the concern. “And, that thing you did
earlier… when you like, absorbed part of my pain… You really didn’t have to do that. Blissey
would’ve given me an egg after the battle either way, and I would’ve been able to rest. I don’t want
you suffering when you don’t even have to,” Hau said.

Sun just silently told Hau that it was their closest ability to ‘healing’, as their ability to suppress pain
and discomfort was just that… Suppression. But Hau was right. It was just that… They’d wanted to
do something as quickly as possible, if at all possible. Because Hau was precious.

Hau couldn’t help but giggle like an idiot at that. “To be honest… part of my motivation was to
impress you… Even though I didn’t want that to be the whole reason, because I wanted to do my
best for the sake of my team too, not just to look cool,” Hau said.

In turn, Sun couldn’t help but pulse seafoam green, pressing a quick kiss to Hau’s cheek. Hau
blushed at that.
Overall, the rest of the day passed by with little further activity for the group. Lillie hung out in Hau and Sun’s room for a while, and they mainly just watched TV, talked strategy for tomorrow’s battle, and spent some time with their Pokemon.

By about 7 pm, Hau was pretty much spent, easily beating out Lillie for the distinction of who was typically most tired by the end of the day. He laid his head on Sun’s lap as Sun sat up in bed to watch a nature documentary, although Sun rather awkwardly changed the channel when it got to the mating rituals of Passimian, which reminded them a bit too much of the previous night’s events.

For a time, Hau was still awake in Sun’s lap, silently conversing with them through their mental bond… But Hau ended up asleep before long, aided by the fact that Sun was gently running their hands through his hair. Sun soon followed suit, given that they’d sat still for so long, and quiet moments with Hau tended to put them at ease so quickly.

Both of them dreamed of sitting atop a grand, towering spire of light yellow crystal, overlooking a beautiful sea of glimmering lights, a sprawling night-time cityscape whose sky seemed to glow with a faint golden tint overhead. Hau could hardly believe the depth of color, how improbably far he was able to look out over the horizon, the way his eyes seemed to be able to zoom in with ease whenever Sun pointed out anything in particular.

Sun seemed a bit younger and shorter in the memory, with much longer hair, free-flowing and almost shining. Their clothes were white and silky with gold trimmings. They wore a sleeveless top with long, roomy shorts, and they had a necklace of small golden crystals. Even with all the changes, they still had their beautiful golden eyes, and their trademark star marking on their cheek. Still, Hau couldn’t help but be taken in by just how stunningly pretty they looked. Sun just laughed at the compliment, seeming to pick up on it the very moment Hau thought of it, before scanning the cityscape again and spotting a small party on the ground, quite a ways away from where they were.

Sun excitedly invited Hau to go down and see it with him.

Hau agreed, vaguely suspecting the tower probably had an elevator or something… Before Sun just laughed, telling Hau that the tower had been closed up and defunct for years. Hau tilted his head at that, about to ask how they’d possibly gotten to the top then. Sun responded by just suddenly going over to the edge and starting to climb down with unreal ease, excitedly motioning for Hau to follow.

Hau obeyed, despite the mounting anxiety rising in his stomach, only to find that it was actually an incredibly simple process. He realized first that he was barefoot, and next that both his hands and feet seemed to adhere to the spire with incredible ease… and at the same time, he realized his skin was cornflower blue, dusted with flecks of dark blue.

In the somewhat reflective surface of the tower, he could see his large, double-pupiled eyes, and sharp teeth. His hair was in its usual style, but a brighter green than usual, and its texture had changed.

Hau honestly didn't know how he hadn't realized what was going on sooner. He stopped, staring at his reflection in the crystal. In his mind, Sun repaid his earlier compliment, telling him how gorgeous he was.

Hau quickly found he wasn’t even entirely sure why he was confused. Couldn't even remember what he was supposed to be if he wasn’t Luxian.
Still, Hau could only faintly remember the rest of the dream. He knew there was more light, Sun coaxing him to keep descending when the height of the tower briefly frightened him… and then there was the party. Weird food that wasn’t actually very good, buildings a bit chipped and run down… People in thin clothing that had seen better days… But there was still dancing, laughter… then Sun kissing him, embracing him, seeming so vibrant and happy Hau had hardly wanted it to end.

Hau woke up to see he was still lying in Sun’s lap, and Sun woke up almost immediately after, affectionately running a hand through Hau’s hair. That’d been a fun dream, hadn’t it?

Hau just blinked as he realized what that meant, then blinked again at how Sun seemed to treat having the same dream as someone else like it was old hat. On Hau’s part, that definitely got him to sit up quickly.

Sun just shrugged. They did have psychic powers, after all. Hau supposed that was a fair enough basic explanation. For the most part, it was too early to be asking a ton of questions… But he still had one question, which caused him to frown a bit before he actually managed to get it out. Still, he needed to get it out of the way quick, before he tormented himself with completely imaginary responses from Sun. “Sun, do you… wish I were Luxian?” Hau asked. “Is that what that dream meant?”

Sun was immediately wide-eyed at that, rapidly shaking his head. That wasn't it! At least, not in the way Hau was thinking.

Hau was briefly a little confused, before an explanation began to filter its way into his head.

It wasn't that Hau should become Luxian, or that Hau needed to change anything for him. Hau was absolutely lovely just the way he was. Rather, it was just… Sun wished he could've known Hau sooner. Wished it was a simpler thing. Alola had so many people who Sun cared about, who Sun admired and appreciated and wanted to keep being around… but Sun's birthplace… Besides Sha, besides Zossie and Dulse, besides the barest inklings of Soliera… They couldn't recall anyone truly special to them.

Moreover, they couldn't recall having felt that they actually belonged. It was… like being some kind of fancy doll, stuck in a fancy display case. Everyone says you're so important, so wonderful, so perfect… but only if you do everything they say, exactly the way they say it. Everyone acts like you're too delicate and beautiful to even touch. They think you're some kind of god, some kind of perfectly manufactured jewel, and not just someone like them.

In Alola… people said Sun was important, said they were good, smart, and kind… and it actually meant something. There was warmth and sincerity to it. They respected Sun for being a person, and for respecting them in turn.

And Hau… Hau made Sun feel more special than any crowns, fancy clothes, or crystal castles ever could.

Hau actually felt his chest tighten for a moment, as touched as he was by Sun's feelings. He couldn't help but sweep them into a tight hug in response, although Sun joyously returned it, just as tightly.

With that, the two got ready for the day, then went across the hall to get Lillie so they could all get breakfast together.

After breakfast, the group chatted amicably on the way back to the place where Hau was taking the challenge for the Roost TM. Sun and Hau passed the time with a few warm-ups and light sparring
rounds between their Pokemon, while Lillie just played with Nebby, with Brionne keeping watch for anyone coming.

Before too long, four of the five TM Trainers showed up, soon followed by Makana, who was actually carried into the area by hanging onto the legs of a large and imposing bird. The bird was a truly imposing specimen, mostly dark blue in color, with some white and red as well. They had also had a powerful, stocky build, and an arrangement of head feathers that happened to look incredibly similar to a fedora.

The group soon recognized the creature as a Honchkrow. Sun tensed. It was still Tier 2, but definitely already pushing the bounds of it. Tier 3 was bound to be approaching soon for it.

Technically, he and Hau had indeed already fought a Tier 3 before, in the form of that Totem Raticate… But they’d been able to work together and use all of their Pokemon at once, that time.

For Hau to fight something nearly Tier 3 on his own, one Pokemon at a time…

Sun frowned. But Hau could do it, right? Hau and his team had been working so hard…

Makana cleared a certain distance between him and Hau, then looked up at Hau intently. “This will be your final match. If you win, you get Roost. If you lose, you will be able to rematch me without having to beat the other four again. I will only be using two Pokemon. You may utilize your entire team,” Makana explained. When Hau nodded, the battle began.

“Go, Honchkrow!” Makana shouted.

Hau tensed as he sent out Pikachu, willing his mind to work as fast as possible. He could remember a few things about Honchkrow. His granddad had told him Nanu had one. Apparently, they were somewhat more frail than they looked, and actually lost a bit of their nimble edge compared to Murkrow… but their bodies were packed with muscle, and their minds were incredibly keen, both factors together enabling them to generate and support incredible AWE Fields. Not to mention, not only could they use devastating physical attacks, but they could also employ intense ranged attacks as well.

The problem was anticipating which it would go with, if not both.

Still, Hau put his faith in Pikachu, hoping for the best.

“Quick Attack into Thunder Wave!” Hau called. Pikachu was off like a shot, darting along the ground with impressive speed, too much for Honchkrow’s wings to keep up with, even if they tried for Sucker Punch.

Hau was somewhat pleased when Makana ordered Pursuit in turn. If that was the case, it was less likely his Honchkrow had a good ranged option. But on the other hand, as Honchkrow dive bombed Pikachu while wreathed in a cloak of darkness and shadow, Hau knew they still had to be careful.

Honchkrow swooped back up and dived in again from a different angle, Pikachu briefly stopping and twitching his ears before managing to leap to the side at the last moment and execute his Thunder Wave.

It landed just as Honchkrow tried to pull up again, briefly stunning the bird as they felt their wings numb and lock up, forcing them to briefly land instead of gaining more altitude.
With a rush of confidence, Hau commanded an Electro Ball, and Makana immediately replied with Aerial Ace, planning to give Pikachu as little time to charge as possible. Still, Pikachu charged the attack to impressive size, boldly waiting for the last possible moment to fire it off directly into Honchkrow’s face, although Pikachu was still painfully struck by a failing wing in the process.

“Haze!” Makana called, causing Honchkrow to begin spewing incredibly thick, dark mist over the battlefield, spreading it with their wings.

Thinking quickly, Hau returned Pikachu, and sent out Noibat instead. Makana just smirked as he gave his next order. “Icy Wind!” Makana called. Hau blanched as Honchkrow, even in their paralyzed state, summoned up bitterly cold winds and relentlessly blasted Noibat with them. The move was even bolstered further by the fact that Haze was an Ice-type move in itself, providing a massive amount of pre-existing moisture and tiny ice crystals on top of the humidity of a day by Alola’s coastlines. Noibat never stood a chance, taken down in a single strike.

Hau returned her wordlessly, only mouthing an apology to the Pokeball as he considered his next move. He’d thought Makana’s Honchkrow didn’t even have a special-based move… Let alone Icy Wind, an attack that could ruin his team in multiple ways. Extreme effectiveness against Dartrix and Noibat, and the ability to slow Pikachu to a crawl… But even Blissey would be soundly beaten by Honchkrow’s sheer physical might, even though she could brave an Icy Wind without issue.

Sun and Lillie just cringed, both silently acknowledging that Hau had just been played like a fiddle. Of course he’d go for the Pokemon most suited to navigate in low visibility.

Still, Hau sent Pikachu out once more, only to face a different problem.

Bolstered by their success, and Makana shouting words of encouragement and affirmation, Honchkrow rose high into the sky and gave a cry of effort. At the same time, Makana closed his eyes for a moment, seeming to concentrate, and Hau realized what was going on with a sinking feeling in his stomach. Sun saw it too, saw the way Makana’s Field reached out to Honchkrow’s and seemed to stimulate its ebb and flow, working with it as one. Honchkrow’s movements suddenly becoming much sharper and swifter as their body stopped twitching and shuddering entirely, and they gave a cry of triumph as Makana shouted out his praise.

Their bond was strong enough to break status conditions.

“Thunder Wave!” Hau called, immediately wanting to re-paralyze the opponent. Unfortunately, Makana saw that coming as well. Honchkrow, keen eyes predicting the move in time with Makana’s focus, dodged almost effortlessly. Hau ordered it again, but the result was the same.

Makana responded with the order to use Night Slash, and Hau commanded Quick Attack, with Pikachu just barely getting out of the way in time. Hau cringed as he ordered Pikachu to keep it up, and Honchkrow continued to assail Pikachu with talons wreathed in a sinister aura. Ever since overcoming the paralysis, Honchkrow’s movements seemed cleaner than ever, more in line with Makana’s focus and intent.

“Quick Attack, Double Team!” Hau breathlessly commanded. Pikachu ran with everything he had, but still suffered glancing cuts and slashes as he weaved around Honchkrow’s flesh rending talons and managed to get well behind them, immediately using Double Team before Honchkrow could turn around.

A plethora of illusory Pikachu surrounded Honchkrow, running around them in a perfectly
synchronized circle.

Honchkrow fought back with another Haze, but Hau took that as his chance.

“Nasty Plot, then shock everything around!” Hau called. Pikachu quickly got the attack in while Honchkrow was busy blowing out thick mist, dispelling all the Double Team clones with ease. Pikachu then immediately followed up with a massively empowered Thunder Shock, spreading out in every direction with ease, and hardly losing any power thanks to the Nasty Plot that Pikachu had just gone through.

Honchkrow was hit hard by the attack, its squawk of pain immediately alerting Hau and Pikachu to its location.

“Honchkrow, look out!” Makana cried, but Hau was already ordering a Thunder Wave as Honchkrow’s frantic flapping about just cleared away mist for Pikachu. Once again, Honchkrow was paralyzed.

“Quick Attack, then Sweet Kiss!” Hau called.

Before Makana could even give a proper order, Pikachu flung himself at Honchkrow with amazing speed, only to latch on and gently kiss Honchkrow on the face before giggling and darting away again.

Hau could see Makana trying to reign himself in again, trying to get through to Honchkrow, but the great bird just started flailing wildly after the kiss, periodically shuddering and convulsing with the effort, a directed burst of Field energy having scrambled their mind.

Paralysis was one thing, but “Parafusion”, as many people liked to call it, was absolute hell to try and work around.

No matter how calmly and confidently Makana tried to give his orders, it was no use. Meanwhile, Pikachu even had time for a second Nasty Plot before Honchkrow tried to Aerial Ace him, only to crash down right in front of him instead.

Pikachu and Hau simultaneously gave shit-eating grins before Pikachu casually lobbed a crackling Electro Ball the size of Honchkrow itself directly at the bird’s face.

There was a screech like bloody murder as Honchkrow was instantly demolished, leaving Pikachu the clear victor, crackling with electricity and sporting a look of pure bloodlust under the effects of two Nasty Plot boosts. Hau lavished Pikachu with loud praise, and Pikachu just crossed his arms with a proud expression.

Makana looked rather uneasy for a moment as he returned Honchkrow, but he regained composure before long. “I gotta say, good job. I thought I had you cornered there for a minute!”

“So did I, honestly! You’re doing really good, actually!” Hau called back, with a genuine grin. Even in the midst of such a taxing battle, he was still having a blast. Sun could honestly watch it all day long.

“Still, I’m not done yet! Go, Mantine! Mud Sport!” Makana called.

One of the Pokemon most emblematic of Alola, Mantine was instantly recognizable to all present.
Sun looked on with glee at its beady, kind-hearted eyes and flattened body. Hau expected he’d be in the clear, against an opponent with a massive weakness to electricity.

That was a mistake.

Hau commanded an Electro Ball, but Mantine was already spewing out water and using its Field to churn it with the hard, dry earth of Route 3 with unnatural speed, creating a thick, chunky mud that rapidly coated it and caused the Electro Ball, even off of Pikachu’s greatly heightened power, to do startlingly little damage. Mantine winced for all of a second before automatically using Roost, getting right back to pristine condition within seconds.

Hau just stared in disbelief, completely thrown off his game by the display of… not exactly power or dominance, just… sheer nonchalance. Mantine just slid about happily on the muddy pond they’d created, seeming not even so much as annoyed with an attack that’d completely wrecked Honchkrow.

“Guess you don’t know just how good of a wall a Mantine is, huh?” Makana asked with a cheeky grin. “Now, Mantine! Spread that mud!” Makana called.

With a low pitched and oddly adorable squeal, Mantine sprayed out a deluge of water that mixed into the ground nigh-instantaneously, creating vast amounts of mud that allowed it to easily jet itself through with hydrokinesis, increasing speed, saving its energy, and rendering it practically impervious to Pikachu’s might all at once. That way, it didn’t have to waste any extra effort floating on land, which most aquatic Pokemon could do at the expense of it taking more energy to move about.

Still, Hau knew when to stop pushing his luck. With a sigh, he congratulated Pikachu on a job well done before returning him and going for Dartrix, remembering that he’d already agreed to let him fight today. With dramatic flair, the owl took to the air, and immediately gave a screech of distress upon seeing that his opponent was a filth-spewing menace, just waiting to ruin his precious plumage!

“Dartrix, it’s alright! We can do this! Even if you get dirty, I’ll clean you right up!” Hau reassured him. Fortunately, Hau’s words seemed to calm the bird almost immediately… But Makana just grinned once more.

“Icy Wind!” Makana called. Immediately, Mantine leapt up and spewed out a brutally cold gust of air, but Dartrix immediately responded by flapping hard, creating a Leafage gale strong enough to easily match the Icy Wind. Hmph. That filth-monster would have to do better than that.

“Great job, Dartrix! Now, Razor Leaf!” Hau called. Dartrix immediately sent out a flurry of fletchette-like leaves, piercing Mantine’s skin and causing them to squeal in dismay, even as they continued to leap and slide about in the mud to try and dodge.

“Confuse Ray!” Makana commanded. Mantine gave a squeak of affirmation before their two ‘feelers’, actually modified fins, began to glow with a strange violet light, the light building up between them rapidly before being blasted towards Dartrix, who just barely managed to swoop out of the way as Hau commanded a dodge, then another Razor Leaf.

The leaves continued to sink into Mantine’s flesh, but with another Roost command from Makana, Mantine paused for a moment and began to effortlessly close up all of their wounds, giving a trill of relief.
Still, with the small pause in action, Hau was quickly realizing that his idea wasn’t working. He needed something… better.

Hau held up his Z-Ring and gave the order as he began rapidly posing. “Z-Foresight!”

Once again, wondrous light spilled out of Hau, and golden aura suffused Dartrix’s entire body, accumulating especially in the eyes, which began streaming that aura out while glowing with a truly menacing power. Once again, Hau found the ring sapping his strength with everything it had, seeming almost alive, almost desperate as it sucked down every last drop of energy Hau could give it within the span of that brief, surreal moment. The stone heated up dramatically, seeming to dig into his skin with little burning pinpricks before the sensation subsided, and the light faded.

Mantine gave a trill of slight worry, and Makana tried to go for another Icy Wind… But already, in Dartrix’s eyes, Mantine’s movements seemed to have slowed to a crawl, their every move becoming as plain as day.

“Razor Leaf!” Hau called. Dartrix, eyes alight with incredible power, rained down Razor Leaves that pierced with unreal precision and accuracy no matter what Mantine tried to do, no matter how quickly they tried to flip and jump about.

Any attack on Makana’s part was avoided with little effort, Dartrix’s movements unbelievably clean and refined as he perfectly read every move Mantine made, always three steps ahead. Every Icy Wind was countered, every Wing Attack smoothly dodged, as Makana grew increasingly irritated with the incredibly slippery owl.

Still, it wasn’t quite so easy for Hau. Makana’s Mantine still had Roost on their side, healing off damage left and right… and yet, nonetheless, steadily slowing, steadily tiring, blood and wounds hidden in thick mud but there nonetheless.

Sun could notice it clearly, each time Roost was used. Lillie began to suspect it as she recalled her research.

Every time Mantine used Roost, they briefly relinquished their Flying-type, in order to direct more power to regeneration. In those brief moments, Razor Leaves sunk deeper, pierced the Field more easily… And overall, did far more damage.

Damage that Roost was no longer completely keeping up with.

Makana grimaced as he noticed Mantine slow, noticed them giving pained whines.

He focused one more time, with all he had, feeling twinges of burning pain across his body as his will muscled Mantine through two more Razor Leaf barrages, but caused him to feel a fraction of the creature’s pain as well. His heart pumped thickly as he felt his own stamina tanking, his own Field being almost entirely directed to supporting Mantine’s failing strength as well as it possibly could. With ragged breaths, he held Mantine’s Field in closer to their body, trying his best to stretch their last bits of energy as far as possible.

Mantine went for one more Icy Wind, the strongest of them all, trying in one last ditch effort to get rid of the troublesome Dartrix before it was too late.

But even as the attack landed, and even as Hau felt a terrible sympathy chill wrack his body despite the attack being aimed upwards, and not towards him in the slightest…
It was too late.

Dartrix, with a cry of pain, pushed through the Icy Wind regardless, and struck Mantine down with one final Razor Leaf, causing Makana to wince and recoil as if he’d been struck as well.

“Sorry!” Hau called out.

“No, no, it’s alright…” Makana tiredly called back. “That’s something you have to learn how to cope with, if you want to connect with your Pokemon as closely as you can,” Makana explained. “Anyone can do it in theory, but in practice, it’s not that simple. So, don’t worry about me. You won, fair and square. And you only lost one Pokemon. It happens. Time will make you better at reading your opponent, but you’re doing great already,” Makana said.

“Thanks!” Hau said, as Makana walked forward. In the same moment, Sun rushed towards Hau to pull him into a tight congratulatory embrace.

“Hau, that was amazing! I mean, it’s a shame about Noibat, but that was hardly your fault!” Lillie said.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean I’m not gonna train to do something about Ice-type moves! Especially when they’re powered up like that… I didn’t even know Haze could do something like that,” Hau said.

“There are things books, simulators, and databases alone won’t always tell you, when it comes to Pokemon battling. Certain techniques are often obscure enough to avoid mainstream mention. If you really want to do the best you can, you have to be willing to experiment and dig deeper,” Makana explained, before reaching into his pocket. “As promised, here’s the TM for Roost,” he said, handing Hau a CD. Almost immediately, Hau decided to test it on Dartrix, noting that in Dartrix’s state, it was as good a time as any. Dartrix twitched a bit as information briefly filled his brain, but by the end of it, he confidently started to glow bright, healing himself almost completely within only a minute or so. Besides some lingering fatigue, he was practically as good as new.

“Awesome! That’s gonna be so useful for training! And save so much medicine!” Hau said, as he put the Roost TM away.

“You should still work on refining it further, but that looks like an excellent start,” Makana said with a small but genuine smile.

With that, the group’s business was done. Lillie fully healed Noibat, saving the group a trip back to the Pokemon Center, and then they all said their goodbyes. Once again, they were off.

Although it wasn’t strictly necessary, the group decided on Melemele Meadow as their next destination, considering it wasn’t far at all.

“I hear it’s a wonderful date spot, too!” Lillie added on, looking pointedly at both Sun and Hau with one of her tiny, knowing smiles.

Hau nearly tripped over the tiniest pebble possible, his cheeks darkening a bit. Sun just beamed, the concept making them feel incredibly eager.

They were gonna have a date! ...Even if in all fairness, they already spent most of their time together
anyway, and that was a lot of fun too, so Sun didn’t entirely see what exactly the distinction of an “actual” date would be… But it didn’t make them any less excited.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is like 50% because Semi-Awkward Fluff and 50% because it was Hau's turn to do something cool.

Given the increased size of Alola in this fic, the TM/Item Trainers would have no way of knowing that you beat “everyone on the route”... not to mention that this is no longer an unchanging number anyway. So, I decided to tinker with their concept a bit.

Makana is a real USUM opponent, but in keeping with what I said before, I just buffed him. And like I said, anyone close to their Pokemon can access Pokemon Amie/Refresh benefits in this story. It’s a skill, and a whole Thing, not just RNG benefits for the player alone.

Also, I feel bad for how shafted Tropius is, tbh. It's like it only exists to be a silly concept with mediocre stats, even though I think it could be a much better Pokemon if they actually gave it the time of day… Even in the original RSE, you probably already have something better by time you actually find a Tropius anyway.
Chapter 9: Ultraviolet

Chapter Summary

Training/dating at Melemele Meadow and Kala'e Bay.

Dulse and Zossie show up, too.

And... new team members?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Melemele Meadow really was absolutely gorgeous. Hau noticed the flower in Sun’s hair quickly shift to yellow, matching the ubiquitous flora of the meadow. Yellow flowers were everywhere, to the point that the only time any other species of flower seemed to get even so much as a single stem in edgewise was in somewhat shadier or rockier areas, near cliffs or trees. The sun was shining strong, with just a few white, fluffy clouds in the sky otherwise. The rays being cast over the meadow were absolutely lovely,

Hau blushed at the fact that Sun seemed to be taking the “date” thing to heart so much, but at least they were having fun.

Without Hau noticing, Lillie flashed a small smile as she came up with a sudden plan, upon seeing that Sun was actually taking her ‘date’ joke rather seriously. May as well roll with it, right?

Lillie silently relayed her plan to Sun, who just smiled wide, silently communicating it to Sha as well.

With that, Lillie intentionally opened her bag a touch wider, and Sun silently gave Nebby permission to go free.

Instantly, Nebby was off like a shot, crying out with glee the entire time. Sha immediately followed, cackling all the while.

“Oh nooo, Nebby’s run off again! Oh, this simply won’t do!” Lillie put her hands over her mouth for added drama, which struck Hau as a little odd. Sun tried not to laugh. “Guess I’d better go catch them again, the little rapscallion!” Lillie cried. Hau squinted slightly. He’d… never heard Lillie use the word ‘rapscallion’ for Nebby... “You guys should just have fun without me! This’ll probably take a while, after all. I’m not very fast, and this meadow is sooo big...” Lillie said. Hau got the brief sense she was acting sort of weird, but he didn’t have time to comment on it before she dashed off after Sha and Nebby.

Lillie knew the plan was a slight risk, and also knew that she probably shouldn’t be implying to Nebby that it was okay to run off sometimes... But still, she hadn’t said they could go without permission, she’d just had Sun provide that permission more discreetly. Sha also made her feel far better about the situation, as they were quite powerful, and she had Brionne with her too... Not to mention, the grass and flowers grew tall enough that Nebby had a natural cover, with Sun also instructing them to move by phasing through and between them, rather than flying over them or
pushing them aside.

Hau didn’t have much more time to wonder if Lillie was being weird or not, because Sun immediately wrapped himself around one of Hau’s arms and nuzzled up against him affectionately, allowing the star marking on his face to clearly shine vivid pink even in his disguised state. About 90% of Hau’s perceptiveness towards anything that wasn’t Sun immediately vanished.

“Well… I guess she’ll be fine,” Hau said, before he and Sun began to explore the meadow together.

The two held hands as they walked through the pristine wilderness, although the mere act of doing so attracted over a dozen Cutiefly and even a couple of Ribombee to them, who took great interest in the two.

“Wow, there’s so many!” Hau said. “These guys can see auras and Fields, and they come to people whose auras they like… So they must really like you, Sun! …Of course, not nearly as much as I like you…” Hau added on a bit shyly, causing Sun’s star marking to slowly become a deeper pink as even more Cutiefly arrived, apparently attracted by Sun’s unique and powerful aura, especially when he was busy being completely lovestruck by Hau.

Hau looked up, and then back at Sun, smirking as an idea formed.

“And you know why? Because you’re incredible, Sun,” Hau said, with a huge smile that made Sun’s hearts all skip a beat. “You’re sweet, thoughtful, caring, but so strong and brave at the same time… you make everyone around you feel happy and comfortable, and you’re always trying your best no matter what,” Hau said, as Sun’s illusion shattered entirely, their emotions in too much of a tizzy to keep it going. Hau was speaking gently, softly, honeyed words rendering Sun with a tingly feeling all over as they sparkled with pink light and pulses of green, racing through their nodes at regular intervals.

Hau came closer, holding Sun close, continuing to give soft and gentle praise directly into their ear. “You’re more gorgeous than every flower in this meadow put together, and there’s nowhere in the world I’d rather be right now. Even though I get scared sometimes, or nervous, or think that what we have is risky… I want you to know, you’re absolutely worth it. Not because you’re Halo. Not because you’re Incanze. Because you’re you. Because you’re one of a kind, and I love spending time with you,”

Sun was on the verge of tears, despite the fact that there wasn’t a fleck of dark blue anywhere on their nodes. He honestly felt like he could die happy.

Hau had all of a split second of prior notice before Sun had pulled him into a deep kiss, feeling so utterly giddy he hardly knew what else to do with himself.

The resulting flare-up of both Hau and Sun’s Fields immediately brought more Cutiefly, then more, the growing swarm steadily calling more and more to the sight. Two Fields, rising up like a great, intertwining spire, cradling one another, conforming to one another, both reaching to the very heavens, casting a soft light that was briefly visible even to human eyes as they merged into one… Before the kiss ended, and the effect quickly retracted, just leaving a flustered Hau and a delighted Sun.

“Wow, your tongue is… uhm… long…” Hau said quietly, cheeks much darker than usual. “Not
that that’s a bad thing…”

Sun just giggled, briefly kissing him again before taking notice of just how many Cutiefly and Ribombee they’d attracted. The air was thick with them, the sounds of constant buzzing suddenly abundantly clear once Sun wasn’t so utterly taken in by Hau.

Sun felt a little embarrassed suddenly, knowing they’d all seen him kiss Hau like that… But that faded quickly, once his attention was taken by one in particular… They were a different color than the rest, and their body seemed to refract light in such a way that they were oddly sparkly. Sun quickly drew Hau’s attention to it as well. Hau immediately gasped.

“Sun! That one’s a Shiny!” Hau said.

Sun immediately reached for Rhovera’s Pokeball as he silently called out to the Cutiefly, gently asking if they wanted to battle. Touched by the consideration of his feelings, the Cutiefly agreed, flying down from the rest of the swarm, the whole thing backing away a bit, but staying close enough to see what was going on.

With so many Cutiefly and Ribombee in one place, several other people had started coming as well. Sun felt fortunate that they’d come after his kiss with Hau, given that the meadow was large enough that even those who noticed the swarm the fastest needed time to reach the area… Still, he probably would’ve done it anyway, if Hau let him.

Sun sent out Rhovera, some of the people present immediately curious… But as Hau gasped, Sun realized that Rhovera wasn’t the only thing they were curious about.

With a start, Sun remembered that he’d never actually disguised himself again, the cover having failed temporarily because of his powerful emotions…

He stood stock still in front of at least a dozen different sets of human eyes, nodes trembling, noticing how all eyes were before Hau stood out in front of him and began to speak quickly.

“Hey! This is a pretty cool cosplay, huh? This is Sun, and he’s got illusion powers. He made this character called Halo, so he decided to cosplay as them today because we were gonna do some roleplaying out here later! It’s really pretty, huh?”

The small crowd all came a little closer, each of them avidly agreeing as they looked at Sun, and Sun just looked back in moderate bewilderment… which everyone merely assumed was Sun being shy… which in turn, just resulted in further encouragement, much to Sun’s surprise.

Sun silently thanked Hau profusely, hardly able to believe an excuse like that actually worked. Hau just grinned, even though he was honestly pretty shocked himself. He’d had times where he vaguely thought of what to do if someone were to see Sun’s true form… But that’d been about 80% improv, honestly.

After answering a menagerie of questions, and trying to politely dissuade people from the Shiny Cutiefly, Hau and Sun managed to respectfully excuse themselves… but the Shiny Cutiefly had since escaped, with all the noise and human activity around. Sun carefully combed the landscape for it, only just barely managing to catch a glimpse of the little pink fly before quickly alerting Hau. Both of them, along with Rhovera, sprinted towards it. Sun did his best to silently call out to it again.

Even so, the Cutiefly led them on a wild chase for at least a few minutes, exacerbated by the fact that
several other people were doggedly pursuing as well, or happened to spot a glimpse of the Shiny Cutiefly as well.

Shinies had that kind of effect on people. Even if someone normally had no interest in a Pokemon, a Shiny was difficult to pass up.

Eventually, Sun put on a burst of speed, while Hau stayed behind as a diversion, abruptly calling out to several people to challenge them to a battle for the Cutiefly.

Many, but not all of them agreed. Some were still in a mad dash for Cutiefly.

Hau sent out Dartrix, waiting for the first challenger. Meanwhile, Cutiefly was chased further, and further still…

Until finally, the group lost sight of it.

With several groans and cries of frustration, everyone slowly dispersed. Sun, panting, scanned the whole area, waiting several minutes to make sure everyone actually left, while he also cleared more distance from them.

He finally exhaled, and Cutiefly suddenly appeared from thin air, no longer hidden within an illusion.

The Cutiefly silently thanked him, on the basis that while it was interesting to challenge someone, it was always overwhelming when humans tried to gang up on him like that.

Sun was rather surprised when the Cutiefly merely requested that he just hold out a Pokeball, wanting to get it over with quickly before anyone realized what’d really happened. Still, Sun obeyed, and the Cutiefly went inside with little fanfare at all.

Rotomdex popped out of Sun’s bag at that, after a while of having cut himself off for the sake of giving Sun and Hau more privacy.

“Good work, Sun! Lookzzz like you wrangled yourself a Shiny! I wazzn’t watching, but from my gyroscope function, seems like you were doing a lot of running around!”

Sun paused at that, silently admitting that other people had been trying to catch Cutiefly as well, but he’d tricked them.

He couldn’t help but feel a little guilty.

They hadn’t really done anything wrong, exactly, they just wanted the same team member he did. And he hadn’t exactly proven himself more worthy in any real way. He’d just taken advantage of his abilities to outpace and deceive them… abilities that none of them could reasonably hope to match on their own.

“...True, but they all had Pokemon,” Rotom said. “If they wanted to win that badly, they would’ve found ways to have their Pokemon help them. That’zzz what we’re for, after all, zzt.”

Sun felt a little better upon hearing that. Still, he merely put the ball in his pocket and then scanned the landscape for Hau, feeling relieved when he managed to spot him, in the middle of beating the last of the people that he’d distracted with a battle declaration… although Sun also quickly noticed
that the area had a rather thick haze of residual Z-Power over it, which made him worry a bit.

Sun raced off towards Hau, soon catching up to him as he held up Cutiefly’s Pokeball, telling Hau that the capture was a success. He also quickly noted that Hau was still breathing somewhat heavily, and seemed to be sweating a lot more than before...

The Trainer Hau had just been facing, a rather moody looking boy with a blond buzzcut, returned a battered Rockruff to their ball in a huff. Dartrix was out of his ball, looking quite smug and only moderately tired out. Roost must’ve served him well. Blissey was just behind Hau, looking up at him with a small but slightly worried smile. The surrounding meadow definitely looked like it’d taken a beating and a trampling. “Well, at least we know that you didn’t get that Shiny Cutiefly either. It was Sun. So, you basically distracted me and beat my Pokemon for nothing,” the boy said, rather smugly.

“I never wanted Cutiefly in the first place,” Hau said with a curt smile. “I was just covering for my boyfriend, that’s all,” Hau continued, as Sun nuzzled up next to him and kissed him on the cheek.

“Kyle, you dumbass, wasn’t that obvious already?” a girl with moss-green hair mockingly called. Kyle momentarily paled before muttering an apology and scurrying off. “Sorry about him, he’s kind of a sore loser sometimes!” the girl called.

“It’s fine!” Hau responded.

With that, the girl went after Kyle, who Sun offhandedly caught mentioning “Dude was fucking crazy though, whipping out Z-Moves on almost all of us…”

But after that, Hau and Sun found themselves alone once again. Sun wasted little time in showering Hau with even more short kisses, while lavishing him with praise for his help. That’d been so cool! How many Trainers had he even fought off, anyway?!

“Pretty sure there were eight people, but not all of them actually tried anything. So in total, I beat like five people and thirteen Pokemon. Most of them weren’t too crazy. Overall, it was nothing like Makana, so my team should be fine,”

Sun stopped for a moment then, and Hau saw something abruptly shift in his eyes before he asked his next question, doing his best to keep his emotions as calm and direct as possible.

So, how many Z-Moves had he used?

Hau tensed for a moment before finally, silently revealing the number.

Four.

Sun’s eyes widened, burning blue-violet as his nodes all restlessly twitched about. Four?!

Hau just nodded, somewhat guilty. “That was like, part of the plan, you know! I wanted to try and make some of them chicken out so they wouldn’t fight! It seemed like a good idea… Blissey was there to give me some energy between fights, so that’s how I pulled it off…”

Sun frowned as he glowed white for a moment, deepening his connection with Hau… and in the
process, being met with the sensation of a blossoming migraine, a racing heartbeat, chest pains, and various moderate cramps around the body.

Why would he go so far?! It was just capturing a new team member!

“But… beyond that…” Hau started. “You’d have a new friend. Someone… special, like you. Someone who’s not like the others. Someone who could help you have a better, less lonely life than before. And you could understand Cutiefly like no one else here could. So… I just thought, you were the best match for Cutiefly anyway. So for both of your sakes, I had to help keep everyone else away.”

Sun calmed down a bit. Okay, he had to admit, that was really sweet, and thoughtful, and it was kind of awesome that Hau could pull off four Z-Moves that close to one another, even if Blissey did help him… But that didn’t erase the fact that it was definitely still reckless and unnecessary.

“高殺_capacity” Hau said quietly. “Like I’ve said before, it’s just… I feel like I have to do whatever I can, or else it’s not enough…”

Not if it ended up hurting him too!

“...Now you sound like my mom,” Hau said with a laugh. “But seriously, I’m sorry!”

Sun just growled quietly, pouting for a moment before moving on to the next order of business. They needed to have a picnic, immediately! Hau needed food! And Sun was going to make the food, and Hau better not help, because he needed to rest! And it was _not_ a reward picnic! The picnic was because Hau needed to sit and think about what he did!

Hau frowned, slumping a bit, and Sun couldn’t help but immediately cave a little...Okay, maybe it was kind of a reward picnic. Maybe Sun was going to make him his favorite sandwiches after all. Sun was still grateful for his help. And Hau was so cute it was hard to look directly at him and still be upset. And picnics were apparently a popular date thing, so Sun had to admit he kind of just wanted to do it for that reason too… But still! Hau was _at least_ going to take a nap once he was done eating, and he was going to like it!

The two found a large, shady tree, and Sun went about setting everything up, remaining adamant about Hau focusing on resting the entire time. About an hour later, after Hau had demolished a veritable feast of Blissey egg and whatever Sun had that could be eaten or the spot or prepared quickly, he’d taken Sun up on that offer within moments of finishing, despite briefly trying to resist. Once again, he was sleeping away on Sun’s lap, while Sun sat against the tree. Having never been returned, Dartrix and Blissey joined in as well, cuddling closely with their Trainer, also tuckered out by using Z-Moves. What was a bit more surprising was that Noibat and Pikachu came out for a nap as well, apparently not wanting to be left out, which turned things into a somewhat haphazard pile.

Sun tucked a stray lock of hair behind Hau’s ear and gently ran his fingers through it, hardly able to believe how precious he looked. The mere act of listening to Hau’s peaceful breathing made Sun pulse with soft green.

Sun silently reached out mentally for Lillie’s presence, attempting to check in on her without having to use Rotomdex and make any noises that might disturb them… Then again, Hau was definitely sleeping like a log.

Lillie seemed to be… somewhere out of view, but less than a kilometer away. She was a bit startled,
but Sun could feel her thoughts coming in decently enough.

“...Nebby, Brionne, and I are all fine. Sha is here too. Nebby went into a cave, so we followed them. Also... Zossie and Dulse are here too, surprisingly enough. They apparently caught a Furfrou, but... not to be rude, but they don’t have much battle experience yet.”

Sun responded with a bit of shock at that, but gave their own status report. For the most part, they’d had a lot of fun! The meadow was super pretty, and he’d even caught a Shiny Cutiefly, with Hau’s help! He’d decided he was going to name him C.C., short for Cotton Candy, because he was pink and Hau had compared Sun to that before. He and Hau were finishing up a picnic, but he was a little held up because Hau was sleeping like a brick, given the fact that he’d decided to be ridiculous and totally reckless, and use four Z-Moves to keep other people from catching Cutiefly. Even if that was kind of incredible and just a little bit hot, that wasn’t the point, the point was that it was really unsafe and he shouldn’t have done that!

“Okay, besides the absolutely incredible luck of that Cutiefly... I’m going to be honest here. I mean... considering that you came here all weak and helpless, and then nearly got electrocuted by a god, and then we thought Zossie and Dulse were gonna take you away, and then hordes of Pokemon came after you, and then you passed out from poison gas, and even now you keep having bad memories... Not to say there was nothing wrong with what Hau did, but... The fact that he wants to protect you so badly isn’t surprising at all.” Lillie responded.

Sun whined a bit, knowing that was perfectly true. Still, he was grateful that things had at least calmed down for them.

With that, Sun concluded the conversation with Lillie, and fell asleep before long. He was beginning to notice he always had trouble staying awake if Hau was asleep on him or near him. It probably had something to do with their bond.

Another dream came, but that time, the dream was... odd. It was Hau'oli City, unmistakably from the architecture, but... Things were off.

Trees had slick, shiny black bark and deep purple leaves. Their branches were rather wavy and sometimes in whorls and spirals. Grass was a similar shade of purple, and its texture was oddly velvety, along with the blades being more like little tendrils, and preemptively bending and twisting out of the way with every step Hau took.

The sun was shining bright, but had a moderately more orange-ish tint to it than usual. The sky had small flocks of Poipole, and some kind of... ‘Pokemon’ that Hau couldn't recognize. They were about Spearow-sized, and shaped like black arrowheads with long, ribbonlike, iridescent tails of violet. They pierced through the sky with oddly pleasant whistling sounds, and the main body's sides were lined with little holes. The arrowhead segment seemed to have a rasping underside mouth of some kind, and several trailing tentacles that seemed to contract and extent as the creatures needed.

Hau walked onwards, past strange ‘insects’, past a frog-like creature with six eyes that were so pearly they may have actually been pearls it was merely holding in what seemed like eye sockets, and past a rather cute, shaggy-looking quadrupedal creature with iridescent black fur. It could've almost been mistaken for a canid, if not for the glassy compound eyes and the pawless feet that instead each terminated in four sturdy black hooks.

It was all a little weird, but for some reason, none of it felt as weird as it really should've. It wasn't
scary, confusing, or offputting. Just weird. Hau kept walking. There was even almost a spring in his step.

He came upon Professor Kukui’s house. Sun came out in a gorgeous lavender sundress and their human form, followed by Lillie in a pastel blue dress of the same design. Both were wearing backpacks. Apparently, they were all walking to school together.

Hau immediately took Sun’s hand with a smile, kissing him good morning.

“Hau, it’s so good to see you again!” Sun responded. “I missed you over the weekend, but that’s okay! Let's go get Dulse and Zossie next, before we’re late for first period!” Sun said cheerily. Hau agreed, barely even thinking about the fact that Sun had never, ever said that much human language out loud before.

He also barely thought about the fact that Sun felt like a human to the touch, his skin texture not the same cool, smooth, slightly slippery feel that Hau was used to even when Sun was disguised.

Hau figured it wasn’t really important anyway.

“Hau, c’mon, gimme a piggyback ride the rest of the way!” Sun said warmly. Hau obliged, laughing when Sun put their arms out like they were an airplane and mimicked the associated noises.

Hau still didn’t bat an eye when Zossie and Dulse joined as two normal teens in normal clothing. They got to homeroom, and the teacher called off names for rolecall. Sun Kukui, Zostera Kukui…. Nothing off about that at all. Hau still didn't think anything was off when biology class was about some kind of slimy, vaguely crustacean gliding creature called Musopovos, and its symbiotic relationship with a mobile, hexapodal anemone-like creature called Kaveniqon, protecting them both from the dreaded 300 pound mass of crystal-spear-tipped tendrils that was a Masvolak cluster, psychedelically colored and constantly blasting off nauseating waves of psychic energy from its dense, spongy core...

Apparently, such a creature wanted nothing more than to deposit their parasitic larvae before the breeding cluster ran out of nutrients and fell apart into nothing but hundreds of feeble, emaciated Masvo… But Hau was barely listening. He and Sun just snuck and texted each other the whole time anyway. It never even occurred to Hau that they could or should be able to speak telepathically. That’d be silly, wouldn't it?

At lunch, Sun, Dulse, and Zossie all ate completely normally. The only change Hau saw Sun making to his food was just Sun trading his baby carrots for Lillie’s grapes. She and Sun idly discussed some kind of science project about cold fusion. Hau figured he just hadn't been listening in class. He and Sun split a packet of cured Amavajeve eggs. They were bite-sized, and a milky yellow color, slightly chewy and yet soon melting in your mouth. Each one flooded Hau’s mouth with a savory, salty, slightly tangy taste. Oh, they always had been Hau’s favorite! Hau laughed as Sun stuck out his tongue, revealing it’d been temporarily turned yellow.

A bright yellow Tarlevoo idly pecked at the window, their huge, vacant eyes glowing a solid sage green. A kid came up to play with them through the window, making various faces. The Tarlevoo stretched their sinuous, flexible body to full eight foot height, trilling and rattling their scutes delightedly before finally extending their iridescent head sail. The little claws on its four wings scraped gently against the window as the kid just laughed.

Hau didn’t question it for a moment. There were plenty of Tarlevoo, everyone knew that.

The day continued. History was Hau's favorite, since the teacher had a Nuixin with thin, beautiful,
crystalline spikes of cyan growing along their back in two rows. Their iridescent exo-scales reminded him a bit of Sha, only black in color. Plus, they knew how to play a good game of Harseveggor, which never ceased to amaze Hau.

After class, it was time for xolorog practice, while Dulse and Zossie went off to tennis practice. Lillie watched Sun and Hau intently from the bleachers the whole time. Hau had a lot of fun, even if Sun kept distracting Hau with little kisses whenever the coach wasn’t looking. Not to mention, he had no idea how in the name of Incardiel he was supposed to properly focus on aiming the darts at the xolo balloons with Sun in that clingy xolorog uniform of his… and trying to tackle him to steal his points at the same time. It didn’t help that every time a tackle was successful, it was another chance for one of them to steal a kiss as well.

Still, practice concluded soon enough, and the group all walked home together, Sun and Hau staying just slightly behind the others to hold hands and whisper sappy things to one another. They made a detour to swing by the power plant and check on the baby Xurkitree that’d just passed its newly-planted sessile stage last week.

Oh, Incardiel, new Xurkitree sprouts were just the cutest little things! It was just too bad the population was too fussy to breed faster, being an extraterrestrial species and all...

They could really use the extra power….

With that, there was another rolling blackout, the second one in three days. A handler tried to coax the Xurkitree to put more effort in, but the dull grey of their faceless white heads signified that they were already rather spent.

In the brief darkness, Sun protectively drew Lillie close to him, and Hau instinctively hugged them both tight.

There was a gust of bitter, horrendous cold, and an unholy cry that could shatter glass.

Architecture flickered back and forth from wood and brick to crystal and mirrored spires.

From above, a piercing, whitish blue light. A cold light, that against all logic, seemed to sap heat away...

A false light.

A false god.

From the freezing light, there came a deceptively beautiful aurora as well… But under the circumstances, the soft greens, blues, and purples were more disquieting than anything. Soon after the aurora, there was a glimpse of a massive, roughly draconic head emerging from the light, made of ice crystals and billowing vapors. An Ice Beam too broad for words crashed down from the heavens, seeming like it could freeze the very stars… Everyone ducked down to the ground.

“So it didn’t work...” Sun said quietly, voice choking up. “Even though Soliera said it would…”

“What? Sun, what’re you talking about?”

“She said we could… the endless winter could be our salvation, we could mold it to our desires! So that the ice could bring us light, so that we could make something from nothing, wring a miracle
from a nightmare, turn winter against itself!” Sun yelled, before his voice quieted again. “…But… but we’re all still going to die…,” Sun whispered, more to himself than anything.

“Sun, please,” Hau started. “I don’t understa-”

“I love you all so much.”

The unholy not-light washed over them in a relentless wave, and they knew nothing more.

Hau and Sun jolted awake, both sitting bolt upright.

“Wh… what was that, Sun?” Hau asked. The more he tried to think about the dream, the faster it slipped away from him. For the most part, it’d all made so much sense in the moment, but now…

Sun was just silent, wreathed in dark blue glow, steaming tears dripping slowly from his face. Hau held him close. Sun curled in on himself.

Hau was deep in thought for a moment, but he took a chance on silently asking Sun what in the world the thing at the end had been.

Sun responded with a thought so ‘quiet’, so guarded, that Hau almost didn’t pick it up. The False Light.

The thing that hurt him.

Even though it was supposed to save everyone.

Hau held Sun a bit closer and tighter, stroking his back in a comforting manner. Sun relaxed slightly, the dark blue becoming more of a deep teal as he uncurled a little. Hau felt a silent, subtle request for a kiss and obliged, gently kissing Sun on the cheek. Sun brightened silently more, the teal gaining just a touch more green.

Still, it wasn’t much longer until Sun telepathically picked up on the fact that Lillie was on her way over, along with Dulse and Zossie. That cheered him up a little. They’d make things more fun again, after he’d messed the date up with more of his weird dreams.

“Hey, that dream wasn’t all bad. It was mostly pretty cool, honestly! I mean, those little cured egg things were delicious… Plus, xolorog is a lot of fun, whatever the heck it is, and you look great in a xolorog uniform…” Hau responded. Sun giggled for a moment, pink light briefly trickling through some of his nodes, letting Hau know that he did too.

The others arrived soon, although Hau flinched slightly at the fact that Zossie almost immediately had a knowing smirk on her face.

“A little Kyflii told me you two are a couple now!” Zossie gushed, before even so much as a greeting. “Sun, tell me all about it!”

Hau squirmed a bit, but didn’t protest as Sun happily did just that, with Hau trusting that he wouldn’t divulge anything that Hau wasn’t comfortable with.

“Oh, that’s so cute! This is great!” Zossie squealed.
Sun giggled, but then remembered the picnic, and asked if Lillie had eaten, informing her of the portion he’d saved for her.

“Oh, I did earlier, but… it has been a while. I suppose now is as good a time as any for dinner,” Lillie said.

“Yes, let’s eat!” Hau cried.

“...Didn’t you just eat before you fell asleep?” Lillie asked, somewhat incredulous. “Four Z-Moves in a short time-frame must really be a lot to cope with…”

“I guess that’s one upside of using them a lot. Free excuse to eat more!” Hau joked, with a broad grin.

Sun immediately frowned a little at that, silently urging Hau to please not keep using tons of them at once just for some dumb reason like that! Even if it was a joke!

“Alright, alright! I promise, I’ll space it out more from now on,” Hau said. Sun seemed pleased at that, thanking him with a kiss on the cheek. Zossie squealed at the display of affection, while Dulse actually seemed a bit embarrassed, if anything.

“I… I’m sorry, we’re… we are intruding, are we not?” Dulse said quietly.

Sun assured him that they weren’t. Dulse relaxed slightly, but still squirmed a bit,

“Admittedly, I do not know much about romance... I was… about to be politically matched, but then, the accident with Sun-Incanze… and having to join Ultra Recon…” Dulse continued, seeming the most flustered that Hau or Lillie had ever seen him. His nodes were white and all kinds of cyan, and they were vibrating all over the place. Everyone graciously decided it was probably better to change the subject.

Sun in particular had a sudden idea, before dinner started properly and everyone would be distracted by food…

Could Dulse… train him for a while? Not him as a Pokemon Trainer, but him as a Luxian, and a combatant. He was especially interested in the ability to wield hard light.

Dulse paused at that, his already large eyes only widening further. “We were scheduled to move on soon… but… a direct order from the Incanze…” Dulse said, eyes lighting up light pink with an almost reverent glee. “It’s been so long…”

Sun frowned at the “order” part. He wasn’t going to make Dulse do it if he didn't want to…

“Of course I do!” Dulse responded. “This is what I was quite literally born for, after all…”

Sun squirmed a bit. He found that more disturbing than heartening.

“You always did complain about it, before... And I would always tell you, it's fine,” Dulse said.

But it wasn’t fine!

“It suits me just fine,” Dulse said. “The Luminaries may have been harsh, but… I have always
believed you make a wonderful Incanze. Our home did not properly recognize what an honor it was to have you.” Dulse continued.

Sun thanked him for that with a gentle smile, although he was still a little uneasy about it all.

But they still had dinner to worry about, first. Once again, Sun insisted on the cooking, seeming excited to be.

Hau and Lillie were a bit apprehensive at that. With recipes to follow, Sun was actually a decent cook… But when he was cooking to Luxian standards...

Lillie recalled a crab-fudge-lima bean stew that she was pretty much convinced had also had maggots in it…

The first dish Sun made for dinner turned out to be some kind of curry. Probably. Allegedly. It at least had the sort of coloration that signified a human could eat it, Lillie supposed…

Meanwhile, it somehow smelled like fish guts, cinnamon, pine resin, and popcorn… not to mention that the texture was weirdly gooey, clumpy, and stringy all at the same time, for whatever Tapuforsaken reason. Not to mention, Sun paired it up not with rice, but… Sweet potato fries, drizzled in Nomel Berry juice?

Zossie and Dulse took one bite each and didn’t even say anything further, their nodes suddenly glowing bright green before both of them started plowing through it like they hadn’t eaten in months.

Sun just beamed, literally glowing with pride as Hau and Lillie stared in complete bewilderment.

In an attempt to support his boyfriend, Hau bravely attempted to stomach at least one spoonful of The Concoction, and found that it briefly tasted like a weirdly sour, slightly pungent, and yet oversweet fish stew… at least until it grabbed your tastebuds by the balls, then twisted with all the force of an enraged Machamp. Not to mention that the texture was about what he imagined it would be like to eat the fresh, warm, chunky snot of a severely ailing geriatric.

The only real consolation for Hau was how much Sun fussed over him and gave him water afterwards, apologizing as if he’d personally held Hau down and forced him to eat it. As a plus, neither Zossie or Dulse were in a position to tease him, being too busy being absolutely spellbound by The Concoction to bother saying anything.

Lillie just solemnly patted Hau on the back. She’d learned long ago that Sun’s Experiments And Concoctions were not for the faint of heart. Or most humans in general, really.

Meanwhile, for Hau and Lillie, and partially for the Pokemon, Sun made a large and perfectly serviceable pot of pasta with meat and vegetables mixed in. It was even quite well seasoned, actually. The ingredients were all pre-cooked and then frozen, lasting essentially indefinitely inside of an energy-storage bag, which allowed them to be prepared quickly. Sun had also worked out a clever trick of briefly strengthening and focusing his bonds with Hau and Lillie while they were in the middle of tasting something, allowing him to vicariously taste in the way they would, rather than him.

Hau and Lillie chanced an attempt at trying it in reverse, while Sun was eating. To their absolute bewilderment, the Luxian Hell Sludge that Sun had whipped up really was, somehow, incredibly delicious. Furthermore, the pasta he’d made them was apparently still fine from his perspective, but
something about it seemed noticeably blander, and generally a bit off.

Meanwhile, the Pokemon all received their respective preferred foods, and both Dulse and Zossie had finished in record time.

Zossie appeared to have some kind of religious experience, while Dulse had actually struggled not to cry tears of happiness, the dark teal of his nodes giving him away.

Once Sun was done making Hau and Lillie’s food, he was already happily giving them more before Dulse could say anything further, much to Dulse’s mortification.

“I… wouldn’t want to impose, I—” Dulse started.

“Awesome, seconds!” Zossie interrupted. “This is incredible!” Still, Hau and Lillie couldn’t help but feel a bit sorry for how intensely positive the reactions of the two aliens were.

“This isn’t particularly fancy or expensive food, so… Did you really not have anything better than this? Couldn’t you have… I don’t know, kept at least a small stock of artificially grown luxury foods?” Lillie asked, hoping she wasn’t coming off as too rude, but it was an important question to her.

“Kind of, but that’s for people who have sufficiently proven themselves. I snuck some of the premium flesh-pod cultivars once… oh, I got the Icebox for so long that my luvekke fluid turned to slush!” Zossie said with a laugh.

“Icebox?” Hau asked, as Sun trembled slightly at the word.

There was a sudden flashback, Hau and Lillie finding themselves laying in an incredibly cramped, pitch-black box half-full of bitterly cold fluid, absolutely exhausted, heart beating at a crawl. It was so cold... so terribly cold they could barely breathe, barely even think. They could barely get their nodes to do more than flicker as the box seemed to slowly close in smaller and tighter, the water rising in the process. Panic built steadily in their cold-dulled mind, the mounting fear they might even pass out and drown their most pressing concern as they desperately tried to generate heat, only for the water to immediately sap it away… The mounting hallucinations as their mind desperately strained to continue functioning, the snarling and pounding sounds that they couldn’t allow themselves to listen to, the far-off crying, the jeering and laughing…

But before long, the flashback fell away, and Hau found himself holding Sun close as Sun gripped him tightly, struggling not to cry. From his other side, Lillie gently rubbed his back.

Zossie became only a vague, faded distortion in the air as she struggled not to disappear completely out of shame. She didn’t speak aloud, but regret and apologies seemed to pulse off of her in waves. Suddenly, she wasn’t so keenly interested in her food.

“You didn’t mean to,” Lillie said gently, as Zossie slowly became more solid in appearance again, her nodes a deep blue.

“Zostera…” Dulse said with quiet concern, as he put a hand on Zossie's shoulder.

“So they would… they would basically put kids in what amounts to torture chambers, just for doing the dumbest little things wrong?” Hau asked, while still carefully stroking Sun's hair. “And how old are you, anyway, Zossie?”
“I turned seventeen last month, going by your years. But we're considered adults by ten in our years. Twelve in yours. There are 438 days to our years, as I've told Lillie before,” Zossie said. “So, by that logic, I wasn’t a child.”

“But… there's no way that's right! Sun's teeth hadn't even finished developing when he got here!” Lillie cried.

“It's law, not biology. Really, we mature at about the rate humans do,” Zossie responded. “I've heard that pre-collapse, we weren't legally adults until 20 in our years. But things changed… they've gotten sort of desperate…”

“No matter how old you were, they shouldn't be doing that to anyone!” Hau cried, his expression hardening.

“Well, as humans say… them's the brakes,” Zossie replied, smiling ruefully.

“...But if they would do that just because you stole food… what'll happen if they find out you're keeping Sun a secret? And not doing anything about Nebby either?” Hau asked. Lillie almost wished he hadn't asked at all. Sun just gripped Hau tighter, closer.

“As it is… being in the Ultra Recon Squad wasn't entirely our choice,” Dulse said. “The position has a massive mortality rate… So, it's likely that they'd assign us somewhere else. Somewhere much worse.”

“Or they'd force us to participate in all their… less-than-ethical experiments to further improve the race and rediscover lost medical knowledge. That was another ‘choice’ they gave us, besides doing this. So, no matter what, they want to continue getting use out of us. We don't use currency anymore… so our society goes by how useful and productive a person is to determine what resources, titles, and rights they get.” Zossie explained. “So… despite being Sun’s cousin, I haven’t been considered nobility in years. They took me away from my parents and made me train for this instead.”

“...I had to do it after my failure to save Sun-Incanze…” Dulse added on, his shame permeating the entire area.

“The… False Light?” Hau quietly asked.

“...False light? What… how do you know about Aryzma?” Dulse asked.

“Aryzma?” Lillie immediately asked. Sun tensed.

“We found that we could use genetic engineering and nanotechnology to create a new, partially artificial strain of cells from those suspended within Necrozma’s crystalline matrix, cells that would spread through a matrix of altered ice instead, somewhat like a powerful creature in this world, the one you call Regice…” Zossie started.

“Zossie, they shouldn’t-”

“The only way they'd know is if Sun already started to remember anyway,” Zossie interrupted. Dulse went silent at that, before he took a deep breath and began to speak.

“Alright. So, the goal was… Aryzma was supposed to save the world. It was supposed to thrive in the cold, toxic wastelands, harnessing winds, absorbing toxins, and scavenging ice and chemicals for
energy... All while providing light and steadily warming the land again. As a Tier 6 creature, its Field should’ve allowed it to do as such more efficiently than our technology ever would, given our resource issues. But Aryzma... we couldn’t make it obey. Our people didn’t want to give it a strong will, wanted to make it pliable to psychic commands... It was never meant to lead us. It was always meant to be more of a living tool, than anything... But all that resulted in was a nearly mindless monstrosity that could barely control its own power or its own impulses. I’m quite sure it somehow inherited Necrozma’s rage issues and instability as well, although we tried to edit those things out of the new cells.”

“Even when we thought Aryzma was destroyed, many pieces of it got scattered throughout the city in the process of doing so, and those pieces managed to survive and grow into new constructs,” Zossie explained. “Even though those pieces were much weaker, they were so spread out, and so much less anticipated, that our defenses couldn’t respond right away…”


“...Three of them... got in the castle,” Dulse said quietly, nodes trembling, a dark blue light overtaking him. “The security system wasn’t enough for them...” Zossie gently put a light pink hand to his back. “Neither was I... And the others, just barely... but at what cost...”

“You don’t have to keep going. I think we... understand enough, for now,” Hau said gently.

“Thank you,” Dulse said. “Even after all this time on this world, the kindness humans are capable of is truly astounding. I see why Sun-Incanze likes it here so much. Even up to the very last moment... Sun refused to allow me to die for them. Denied me my ultimate purpose. Stood in front of me, and not behind me... That, that act of such needless, reckless kindness... Without that, I don’t think any of this would’ve come to pass.”

“Sun didn’t deny you anything,” Hau said quietly. Dulse just stared at him, silently urging him to continue. “...Because... in the first place, no one should live just to die for someone else,” Hau continued.

“...You’re a funny sort, are you not?” Dulse said calmly. “To think... to even suggest...” Dulse chuckled for a moment. “I do apologize. But for me to think otherwise, that would truly be the height of selfishness.”

“...But, even right now, isn’t it... aren’t you doing something ‘selfish’, by not reporting Sun to anybody?” Lillie asked. “N-not that I mean that in a bad way, it’s just... it’s normal for everyone to be at least a little selfish sometimes. So you can make your own decisions, and try to find your own way,”

Dulse cringed at that, his nodes flickering through a range of color. Lillie tensed slightly when they landed on dim violet, but it was gone in seconds. “This is... This is what is ultimately best for everyone, I am certain. Even if it is against countless laws and protocols. I don’t matter. I already failed. It’s not about me at all.” Dulse said, steam wafting off of his face as his nodes shifted to white, and began to buzz in place.

Sun was silent. Zossie was silent. Hau wasn’t.

“...Didn’t you just agree, right before dinner, to prioritize a favor to Sun over your actual duty? Even though, technically speaking, your official duties to your people have nothing to do with Sun anymore?” Hau asked.
Dulse twitched.

“Hey, maybe, maybe we should talk about something else?” Zossie asked quietly, her nodes also buzzing slightly. “I know, uh, in that cave we were in, there was this one place with-”

“I’m not selfish! I’m not! Shut up! Shut up, both of you!” Dulse snarled, eyes burning violet as both Hau and Lillie flinched away. Sun and Zossie just looked at Dulse with wide eyes and gaping mouths. His rant continued telepathically rather than verbally, allowing every single thought to transfer with both utmost ease and utmost fury.

“You know what would be selfish? Reporting Sun! Reporting the Incanze, which would probably make Zossie and I both heroes, would most likely restore her nobility status, and let her see her parents again! Something that would allow me to stay by the Incanze’s side again, like I was born to, like I loved doing, rather than traipsing around the land of our failed invasion in this stupid suit, getting all these pointless readings for reasons I’m not even entirely sure of! Having to keep these ridiculous secrets from the person I used to tell everything! And Lillie! Do you understand how hard this really is? Having to be complicit in your mother’s ridiculous, megalomaniacal, utterly childish antics, even as she obsesses over plans that will probably decimate your biosphere?! Even as she recklessly wastes her company’s resources?! Even as your brother skulks about, Necrozma knows where, with a tortured, man-made, barely stable creature that might even have the capacity to achieve Tier 7! Even as she thoughtlessly inflicts harm to a being that is a larval god, honestly not even thinking of what’ll happen if they end up calling their parents, what will happen if this world ends up forsaken like us, just because she’s such a selfish, degenerate life form that she can’t even see past her own fucking-”

Dulse was stopped by a pair of burning violet eyes, glaring into his very soul.

Sun’s eyes.

Lillie was huddled against them, softly weeping. Hau was glaring at Dulse as well. Even Sha and Brionne were, their Fields flaring violently. Most unsettling of all…

Dulse could see several Tier 6 AWE globules manifesting, and a pair of beady eyes, glaring from within Lillie’s bag…

Dulse immediately stiffened, sitting like a statue, nodes going stark white and betraying no particular emotion at all.

“I am terribly sorry. That was incredibly out of line.” Dulse said stiffly, almost robotically.

“Shit. Shit, shit, shit, Dulse, this is bad, you told them so much…” Zossie said quietly.

Sun just continued glaring, their Field blaring with incredible energy as violet light poured out of them. But beneath it, beneath the silent rage, there was just… disappointment. Crushing, unrelenting, suffocating disappointment. Dulse fought the urge to disappear, doing his best to stay strong under the punishing gaze.

“Sun, no…” Lillie said quietly, as she wiped her tears away and also did her best to calm Nebby, who was causing her bag to writhe like mad. Sun eased back in three swift heartbeats, although he still gave a low snarl. “We were… overstepping. They keep telling us that we shouldn’t be hearing these things, but we keep asking and prodding anyway. We keep acting like we’re entitled to
everything,” Lillie said.

Sun frowned at that. Didn’t change the fact that Dulse was even less entitled to act like that towards his friends.

There was an indignant squeal from within Lillie’s bag.

“I promise, I will do whatever I can to make amends,” Dulse said stiffly. “My behavior was unacceptable. I understand if I cannot be completely forgiven, or if you are too uncomfortable with my presence to continue associating with me.”

“Listen… as uncool as that was, you’re not like, uncool all around,” Hau said. “I’m sorry too. I didn’t realize how much I’d offended you. I didn’t mean selfishness as in like, a character flaw. I just meant… like Lillie said, it’s okay to be kind of selfish sometimes. And I hardly even considered the kind of pressure you’re under.”

Sun quietly forgave Dulse.

“And Lillie… you don’t have to talk about that stuff he was bringing up, if you’re not ready…” Hau said, looking at her intently.

“I’ll… I promise, I’ll tell you more in a little while… But for now, I think that’s enough, if that’s alright with you” Lillie said quietly. Hau just nodded. He honestly had a hundred questions for Dulse too, but both he and Lillie were too afraid to ask any. Invasion, Lillie's mother, being forsaken, some man-made thing that might become a Tier 7... it was all A Lot, and it was all kind of terrifying.

“Are you still interested in the training, Sun-Incanze? If you would like to change your mind, I do not wish to make anyone uncomfortable,” Dulse said.

Sun silently consulted Lillie and Hau for a moment, then nodded. He felt it was deeply important he did so.

After that night, the group ended up staying in the general area of Melemele Meadow for about three weeks, training and exploring not only the meadow, but even Seaward Cave and Kala'e Bay

While Sun and Dulse focused largely on Sun's training to extend their power and wield hard light, Hau was often helping Lillie learn how to better connect her Field with other Pokemon. Still, during the parts of Dulse’s training that pertained more to strength and endurance, the others often joined in as well.

The group also thoroughly explored Seaward Cave, where Lillie had first encountered Dulse and Zossie after being led there by Nebby, and trained within it as well. It was somewhat pretty, with countless pools of cold, clear water and several branching, downhill pathways of stone, as well as several large, glittering deposits of Nevermelt Ice, which was technically not ice at all. Rather, Nevermelt Ice was merely a very similar-looking mineral noted for being incredibly endothermic. The substance could take in such inordinately high amounts of heat that it rendered the entirety of Seaward Cave surprisingly chilly, to the point it was even able to support a healthy population of a few Ice-type species.

Still, with its strangely cold nature, Sun had mixed feelings about the cave. The cold was rather
unpleasant, even if it was still well above freezing. However, it was also good for personally training in to build stamina, and it was good training for the Pokemon as well. Rhovera had an especially easy time with most of the Pokemon present. That was good, since it allowed Sun to start slowly train her to learn Leech Life, given that she already had Bug Bite. Not only would it be her most powerful attack, but it would give her opportunities to regain energy as well. Meanwhile, Zorua kept up work on Hyper Voice and Dark Pulse, while Sha just continued improving on the arsenal they already had. C.C. got Silver Wind and Draining Kiss down quite quickly, so Sun and Hau had him work together with Blissey on learning Light Screen… After all, it tied in very well with Sun’s own training to use hard light.

For a slightly less serious reason to enjoy the cave, Sun also loved that it gave him a free excuse to cuddle up with Hau more… not to mention that Hau bought a light jacket that was technically for himself, but Sun got to wear it a lot too. It was sort of big on him, but that only made it better, in Sun’s opinion.

Of course, not everything was incredibly structured and disciplined. There were things that helped in other ways, despite just being fun on the surface. Even the simplest training or messing around in Seaward Cave was also a constant act of navigating long, winding, uneven paths up and down. Then there was swimming in the bay, having games of tag, having practice battles for fun, and befriending local Ribombee and Cutiefly to be able to get shares of their pollen and honey.

The Cutiefly line had the ability to radically change the properties of their honey and pollen through a combination of enzymes and Field manipulation, creating a broad variety of different effects… some surprisingly dangerous, or even outright lethal. A common configuration known by Ribombee even allowed them to transmute pollen into a highly irritating and incredibly explosive substance, making Pollen Puff a far more powerful battle option than most would reasonably suspect. However, other effects were incredibly beneficial, being densely packed with nutrients and aiding healing and regeneration.

As such, Ribombee’s pollen could fetch a high price on the market, and even a Cutiefly could be a potential source of supplemental income for a Trainer, generating pollen and honey while requiring little food in return.

C.C. in particular had the Honey Gather ability, which Sun knew was far less practical than Shield Dust from a perspective of just winning fights… But from a utility perspective, the little creature definitely came in handy. In just one day, with no formal training, the industrious insect could fill several small jars of honey. Unlike typical insects, Cutiefly had a mechanism of using their powers to delicately vacuum the nectar and pollen out of dozens of flowers at once. What that also meant was that as a Cutiefly or Ribombee grew more powerful, so did the capacity to make honey.

With Sun’s further training of their team, and the pre-existing team members allowing C.C. to draw from their Fields to get stronger every day, the speed of his honey output slowly grew even over just the three-week course of the group’s stay near the meadow. Sun could reasonably expect around a dozen small jars a day, just from C.C. alone. Whatever he didn’t actively use, he freely sold or simply gave away, not particularly hurting for money. Even with his and Hau’s appetite, most kinds of food simply weren’t particularly scarce or expensive in a world full of Grass-types and advances in biotech..

By the time three weeks were nearly up, as a combination of the factors they had going for them, Hau and Lillie could also already feel the progress they’d made.

Both clearly had more stamina and energy than before, no longer thinking much of climbing all the
way back up to the meadow and walking all the way back to the Pokemon Center, even after a long
day of swimming, training, and playing in Kala’e Bay.

You would likely never guess that Lillie’s upbringing had regularly involved her being forbidden
from too much sunlight or physical activity, only just enough for her general health, while making
sure she had plenty of time to focus on quieter, more refined endeavors.

Meanwhile, Lillie also proved a quick study with her efforts to learn how to better connect to the
Fields of Pokemon, from Hau… even if Hau’s wording of things was still kind of weird sometimes.
Then again, she was more accustomed to books full of technical terms and information conveyed in
formal tones… while Hau was definitely far from the most formal person in the world.

Speaking of Hau, his advances were just as surprising as Lillie’s, if not moreso. He’d come
somewhat farther, having already been in a position to push himself somewhat harder from the start,
while Lillie had needed to work her way up a bit more gradually. Despite the physical activity, he’d
barely lost any weight, thanks to a strong appetite and genes that tended towards a natural stockiness,
but that only made his energy and enthusiasm all the more noteworthy. Besides stamina, there was
also an appreciable increase in his physical strength, which was something, considering he’d already
been somewhat stronger than he looked to start with. It definitely helped that he’d been even more
motivated to work on his strength by the fact that it doubled as a good way to impress Sun.

Hau could lift Sun with ease, even though Sun wasn’t even done growing. Since leaving Kukui’s
lab, he’d become nearly 5’8, and gained a bit more weight, his build growing modestly thicker as
time went on. There was a mild, pleasant softness to his body, but a deceptive amount of power
hidden beneath that… Hau would definitely know, as he found himself ogling Sun’s thighs more
often than he was willing to admit.

Hau and Lillie had also both worked on their proficiency with Z-Moves, having grown significantly
in that regard. Although two or more within a few minutes was still a heavy burden, their respective
comfortable limits had increased to about one per half hour for Hau, and one per hour for Lillie. As
much as both of them were dying to know what Sun would be able to do too, they didn’t dare risk
having Sun borrow one of their rings.

Still, Z-Move stamina was only partially connected to general stamina. While physical condition did
contribute to Z-Move stamina, it was largely a mental matter. Above all else, state of mind,
experience with handling Z-Power, and experience with connecting to Pokemon impacted Z-Move
stamina the most.

Out of many studies performed to ascertain the best methods, the results formed a clear hierarchy. If
you had one group prioritize exercise, one group prioritize focus and meditation, and one group
prioritize working closely with Pokemon, all three methods would work. However, the third group
would improve the most, followed by the second, followed by the first. Emotional>Mental>Physical,
as many liked to put it. However, combining all three was the fastest method of all.

And besides just physical changes, every Luxian present could also notice that Hau and Lillie’s
Fields seemed to slowly change as well, becoming a bit larger and brighter… and notably, quite a bit
stronger than the Fields of most other humans they saw. They still weren’t Tier 1, so it was nothing
that really caused major alarm, but still… It looked like something to keep an eye on.

Zossie and Dulse cursed the fact that they didn't know enough about humans to be entirely sure of
how quickly they were supposed to improve under typical circumstances, but both of them got a
strong sense that Hau and Lillie’s speed was at least moderately unusual… and it was almost certain
that it had something to do with Sun… Specifically, how often their Fields synchronized and interacted with Sun's, especially as Sun himself became stronger at a rather impressive rate.

Over the course of the training period, Sun had advanced to Tier 2, and learned the basics of ‘solidifying’ light. He was still nowhere near Dulse's ability, but he was freely able to form simple objects and shapes. With that, he could form and hold a serviceable battle staff for a little while, or a full-body shield for a minute or so. Still, the strength left something to be desired. They could take a few strong hits, but even Hau could break one with sustained effort, let alone a Tier 2 Pokemon.

If need be, Sun could also project lasers much further and stronger than before, able to burn objects at a range of over 100 meters, within seconds. He could also cast larger and more complex illusions, spanning a radius of about ten meters. Unfortunately, such things were still very tiring and metabolically costly for him.

Zossie and Dulse seemed to change slightly as well. Sun could swear Zossie had gotten somewhat taller since their first… reunion, he supposed it was. Dulse seemed a tad stronger, and a little more broad. Their nodes were freely multiplying as well, especially with Sun typically being in charge of cooking. The Furfrou they’d challenged Lillie with was also doing well, although they still had somewhat lackluster skill in actually battling with it.

Zossie seemed as outspoken as ever towards Hau and Lillie, but Dulse seemed to have adopted a rather quiet, distant, and guarded approach to handling the two… and Sun wasn’t entirely sure what he and Zossie had come up with to get away with delaying their actual assignments, but they repeatedly told him that it mainly involved excuses about “interesting new lifeforms” and “misplaced equipment components”. He wasn’t even exactly sure where exactly they went when it got late. He just knew they were always waiting when morning came. Sun half suspected there was cloaking technology involved.

But eventually, there came a point where the strange pair didn’t seem to be able to put things off much longer… and Sun didn’t feel comfortable with holding them up any longer.

With that, they ended up departing once again, leaving just Hau, Sun, and Lillie to stay in the area for a bit longer, before they too would move on.

Sun could almost immediately feel that Hau and Lillie considered their departure something of a relief, which bothered him slightly, but he understood… After all, Sun couldn’t say he wasn’t also happy to get more time for just Hau and Lillie as a result.

It also allowed Lillie a chance to do something she’d been holding off on, after being so caught up in training, exploring, and trying to stay on good terms with Dulse, even though everything still felt pretty much fine between her and Zossie.

One afternoon, after the group decided to go back into a small nearby town for lunch, Lillie ended up stopping by a small shop, and coming back with a small, unremarkable, white ocarina with a simple flower engraving. It had a transverse design, with 12 holes.

Hau commented on it about an hour and a half later, when they were all simply relaxing by the bay, and Lillie had decided to sit on the sand and tentatively get it out.

“Wait, you can play an instrument?” Hau asked, since he and Sun were sitting close by, Sun nestled between Hau’s legs, and Hau’s arms wrapped loosely around his waist. “That’s so cool! I can
technically play drums, but I haven’t actually done it in like six months, so I’m probably super rusty,”
Hau said. “Oh, and I know how to whistle with a leaf or a piece of grass! There’s this really pretty
song you can do called Oración, and Pokemon love it, but I’m not actually that good at it,” Hau
said.

“I… can play more than one, technically. My mother was very insistent on it. She said music made
you more ‘cultured’. But, since leaving home, I wasn’t able to bring any instruments with me… and
I never had the heart to keep playing anyway. But lately, I just thought… since a lot of the time, it’ll
just be you and Sun, and Brionne loves to dance so much… why not try to get back into it?”

“So, about your mother…” Hau started, although he quickly tensed a bit. “I-If you want to, that is!
No pressure!”

“No, it’s fine. So, my mother… to start with… Everything Dulse said a couple of weeks back is
basically true. She is… how to put it… an erratic sort of person,” Lillie explained. “Sometimes,
she’s actually really nice. Sometimes, she’s really sweet and thoughtful… Other times, she’s… the
opposite,” Lillie continued.

“It was weird, growing up there… One minute, she’d get you literally whatever you wanted. You’d
feel like a princess, and it’d be the best! But then the next minute, you’d make some little mistake, or
her mood would change, or something like that… and all the sudden, you can’t even use any of the
stuff she just got you. You get locked in your room and you can barely do anything at all.
Sometimes, it could go on for days. And that would be one of the lighter punishments. There was
no telling what else she’d decide to do! And she was always such a terrible listener, whenever that
happened. You could never argue, it’d only make it worse. The only good thing about it was that it
was never forever. It wasn’t easy to predict when she’d decide to calm down, but it’d always come
eventually. And every time, it was always pretty similar. All the sudden, she’d come back crying
and hugging you and giving you fancy imported ice cream, or a pretty designer dress, or she’d even
plan parties, or vacations… For a while, I wanted to believe this was all because my dad is gone,
and eventually she’d get over it… But in retrospect, the same thing happened even when Dad was
around, just not as much… and Dad was there to help fix it if it did happen, so that made it seem like
it happened even less,” Lillie quietly explained.

“I hate to say it, but… my mother has, you know… problems … And I don’t think Dad dying was
actually the total cause. I think it was just… he was the one keeping everything subdued,” Lillie
continued. “Either way… it can’t fully excuse how awful she could get…”

Sun’s eyes burned violet at hearing Lillie talk about her mother’s cruelty.

In Hau and Lillie’s minds, there was a sudden, foreboding image.

A woman who looked vaguely like Sun, but her skin was a deep, midnight blue. Her face was in a
rather disgusted sneer, as she looked down at them, a harsh light behind her. There were no nodes
discernible on her body. Wavy bands of violet simply pulsed across her entire body. It briefly
occurred to Hau and Lillie that her skin may in fact have become saturated with them. Her hair was
incredibly long, nearly floor length in fact. It was nearly all an iridescent black, with the ends
glowing whitish-gold. She seemed to stand over seven feet tall, her eyes the same piercing gold as
Sun’s. Her clothes were lavish and flowing, gleaming white and glimmering gold. She was full-
figured, and yet clearly possessed inordinate physical power as well. She was both unspeakably
gorgeous and unspeakably unsettling. Behind her, she had a long, powerful, lizard-like tail, freely
prehensile. There were no scales, nor was there hair or fur on it, but there was a long row of little
crystalline bumps of cyan, along the dorsal side of it. Slowly, she reached out a harshly glowing
hand. Hau and Lillie could feel the horrendous heat radiating off of it, as her Field extended to fill the entire room, raw and oppressive... and the hand only slowly drifted closer, closer, closer to their face, letting off so much heat and steam the air shimmered. But they dared not move a muscle. Even when it got so terribly close that it started to hurt. *Especially* not when it started to hurt. No weakness. No cowardice.

Before the hand could fully make contact, the memory ended. In the hand’s place, Sun himself was blazing violet instead, so hot that Hau briefly had to let go of him and scoot back a bit.

Upon noticing that, Sun calmed quite quickly, immediately apologizing to Hau. Regardless of the close call, Hau wasted no time in effortlessly accepting the apology and letting him snuggle up close again. After all, he’d been able to sense the shift in mood well before it got dangerous, so he wasn’t afraid.

Sun could hardly express the relief he felt, knowing Hau wasn’t afraid.

No one felt the need to ask any further questions. It was already obvious what that’d been about, and who that woman was. Wanting to lighten the mood, Hau thought quickly.

“Lillie, why don’t you play something on that ocarina?” Hau asked, smiling gently. “I bet it’ll sound really pretty.”

“Oh, um, okay...” Lillie replied, looking a bit flustered... But she obeyed, regardless. A light, cheerful song began to fill the area, and Brionne immediately leapt out of her Pokeball to begin dancing. Lillie marveled at how quickly and easily she could feel a connection to Brionne, could feel their minds almost ‘touching’, the process aided so well by their song and dance. Even Nebby came out to rhythmically wave their arms about, next to Lillie.

But that wasn’t the only surprise. As Lillie played, and Brionne danced, a stout little blue reptilian with stubby arms, two legs, and a thick, grey bone covering over their skull came running over. Everyone present quickly recognized the Pokemon as a Bagon, apparently attracted by the musical display. So, Hau did his best to contain his excitement as Lillie continued to play intently, not stopping out of fear that the little dragon would leave as soon as they’d appeared.

After several more seconds, Lillie paused just long enough for a deep breath, and the song hit a more lively stride. With that, Bagon suddenly gave a cry of excitement, and began to dance along with Brionne. Considering their stout body and short legs, they were doing a surprisingly good job. Rather than just nodding or stomping along, they were outright leaping and twirling to the rhythm, displaying such vigor that Lillie honestly felt a bit flattered they were enjoying her playing so much.

Brionne began to create a variety of large water bubbles, jumping between them with graceful flips and twirls, which apparently enraptured Bagon so much that they tried to follow suit... only for their heavier, denser body to completely destroy the bubble they tried to leap on, the resulting shockwave knocking the other bubbles out of place, much to Brionne's irritation.

Lillie cringed, abruptly stopping the music and hoping things wouldn’t get too bad. “Brionne, wait, I'm sure they didn't mean to-” Lillie started, but Brionne was having none of it.

She began some kind of tirade of grunts and squeals at Bagon, who shrank back for a moment and then defensively fired back with their own string of grunts and growls.

Unimpressed, Brionne just continued to lay into Bagon, until Bagon said something that seemed to appease her, and the young dragon started up a little jig once again.
Both Pokemon looked at Lillie intently, and she just blinked as her new improvements with Field synchronization allowed her to vaguely make out what they wanted.

“...So you want me to play again… because you want to have a dance match?” Lillie asked. Both Pokemon nodded at the same time, glaring at each other with fire in their eyes.

Lillie just shrugged. It was a lot better than them hurting each other, she supposed.

With that, she continued to play the ocarina, the song becoming fast and upbeat, more impassioned, yet still cheery all at once.

Upon hearing the song, the Bagon suddenly cried out loudly, attracting even more Pokemon. Lillie quickly gathered that they were probably going to serve as a mixture of audience and judges. Rotom even came out to record the whole thing. Sha came out simply to watch.

The small crowd began to cheer as Brionne went first, creating a show of spinning around on large floating bubbles and flipping high into the air, then jumping from bubble to bubble and landing on each consecutive one with just one flipper at a time, displaying incredible balance and poise.

The crowd cheered, along with Hau and Sun. Bagon just snorted before going into their routine. It was a louder, more frantic affair, and Lillie found herself changing the song slightly as she watched, making it faster and louder in turn without even really realizing.

Bagon twirled about, firing off thin streams of beautiful dragon fire all the while, interspersed with small bursts of Ember, the little fireballs exploding within the regal, blue-violet dragon flame and creating a stunning scene of spiraling embers and wisps of draconic energy.

The crowd of Pokemon grew louder and more excited, and Nebby twinkled with glee. Even Hau and Sun had to admit, that Bagon was good. Sha was excitedly flipping through the air, squealing and clicking in delight.

Lillie almost wished she were doing Pokemon Contests instead of Trials. Both Pokemon honestly had great acts.

But not to be outdone, Brionne began to get more inventive, filling bubbles with Icy Wind attacks and using tricks of the light to get them to refract light in stunning ways as she danced amongst them, using short Aqua Jets for more maneuverability, and firing off a weak Disarming Voice now and again to add a lovely pink tone to all the swirling ice crystals and sparkling bubbles. Brionne had them all nimbly drift about in smooth, almost hypnotic patterns, before rhythmically popping them all in time with Lillie's music.

Once again, the crowd of Pokemon got even more worked up, and the Water-types in particular were clearly latching onto Brionne as a favorite, feeling well-represented by her impressive skill.

Still, the few Bagon present urged the dancing Bagon to try harder, rhythmically crying out in encouragement.

So, the dancing Bagon launched into another wild dance, fiercer than ever. Lillie noticed that they quite literally used Dragon Dance, suddenly becoming wreathed in a beautiful violet aura as their movements became faster and more powerful, their leaps and jumps going higher and further than ever. More fire of both varieties blasted out of their mouth, and they leapt into it, cloaking themself in it completely. It was fascinating enough, watching the little dragon go from a stubby, awkward
looking creature to what seemed like a fierce yet beautiful being born from fire itself, even creating little makeshift fireworks for themself with salvos of small Ember and Dragonbreath fireballs projected several feet into the air. As they went, the crowd of Pokemon got even bigger.

Finally, Bagon concluded their turn by using a second Dragon Dance and leaping high into the air while using a low-pressure Dragon Breath, wreathed in stunning Dragon-type energy as they twirled rapidly in the midst of the jump, the flames streaming out of the sides of their mouth creating a great spiraling cone of burning violet as they went.

Bagon landed, panting from the exertion, but they were met with strongly impassioned cheers and excited movements of all kinds, and the Water-types in the crowd seemed more than a little uneasy.

Brionne did her best to look as bubbly and carefree as ever, but the pressure was getting to her. Her opponent was honestly a lot better than she'd expected… and worse, the crowd was eating it up!

“Brionne, you can do it! I know you can!” Lillie said, taking a break from the ocarina to focus as much of her encouragement towards her Pokemon as she could. After all, even with how much more she'd bonded with Brionne, she'd had to adapt pretty much all of her training with Brionne to accommodate her burning desire to practice dance.

Brionne nodded, and proceeded to clear a bit more distance from her before blowing the largest bubble Lillie had ever seen her make. The great sphere was incredibly roomy, and even forced Bagon and some of the crowd back a bit. Then, Brionne smoothly leapt inside and began blowing even more bubbles within, leaping and twirling about while also blowing out frigid winds, rapidly filling the whole bubble and even subjecting herself to the icy temperatures.

As an answer to Bagon, Brionne shrouded herself thickly in the swirling ice crystals, still making sure she was easily visible as the ice crystals seemed to change colors rapidly, catching refracted light in myriads of ways as Brionne deftly controlled the winds and bubbles within the great bubble. She acrobatically bounced around on the bubbles and used them to build up speed, twirling and jumping and batting the bubbles around with everything she had. Every Aqua Jet she used was transitioned into more twinkling icy vapors, only increasing the ethereal beauty of the display.

She then exited the bubble from the top, and concluded with a short song, while perched right on top of the main outer bubble. It was perfectly in time with Lillie's fervent ocarina playing, still causing the bubbles within the sphere to move elegantly within it all the while.

Finally, with a deep breath, Brionne had the whole display go up in a beautiful, rhythmic display of carefully timed explosions, leaving her deeply panting but full of cheer as she floated back down to the ground on a single bubble, just large enough to support her.

The crowd went absolutely nuts, and Brionne was gleefully eating the attention up.

By time the fanfare was finally dying down, Bagon had grown more than frustrated with their clear adoration of Brionne. Bagon gave a loud, keening cry before leaping high into the air in a fiery backflip, then landing square on their head, apparently on purpose as a sudden wind started to kick up and swirl around them. Lillie was a bit fascinated. They knew Twister?

The wind sped up dramatically, and Bagon starting spitting out a mix of both kinds of fire, as much of both as they could muster, while they began to spin with everything they had, helped along by the wind.

The crowd stared in awe as a fiery vortex of reds, oranges, violets, and purples formed, stretching several meters into the air as Bagon spun faster and faster… but although Lillie was sure there was
supposed to be more to the routine, the fire steadily began to die down, and the spinning began to slow... leaving Bagon flopped on the ground, completely unable to continue thanks to sheer dizziness and exhaustion.

Brionne's cheery expression slipped as she saw Bagon fall and then stubbornly struggle to get back up, whimpering and trembling as they tried to summon the strength to continue. The crowd chattered quietly, seeming a bit worried.

Lillie just frowned, quickly going to her bag for medicine. Brionne just silently went towards Bagon, slowly helping them up.

Bagon didn't look at her, glowering at the ground instead. Brionne just patted them on the head, much to their confusion.

Even if Bagon had lost, they'd tried their hardest until the very end, and their skills were still no laughing matter. Lillie emphatically agreed, trying her best to communicate it by getting in sync with Bagon’s Field, rather than putting it into words.

Brionne figured she could do with a dance partner anyway. Nebby was fun to play with, but they were a bit too young.

Lillie was more than a little surprised when Brionne was suddenly excitedly insisting that Bagon could join them... but when she saw Bagon’s eager expression, she couldn’t say no.

She prepared a Great Ball, figuring Bagon deserved something a little more special for that performance. She gave it a gentle toss, and Bagon didn’t struggle in the slightest.

Well. That was that, then.

Welcome, Bagon

“Man, that was awesome! You didn’t even have to actually battle and it was still awesome!” Hau cried. “With that Bagon being so passionate and creative, just think of how well that’ll translate to battling!”

Sun passionately agreed, happy that something so uplifting had happened after Lillie’s story about her mom.... and that brief memory of his...

Lillie quickly sent the Bagon out again, getting Pokedex information on the little dragon. They were a male, apparently, and they did indeed have Dragon Dance, Twister... and even... Hydro Pump, although it didn’t seem like it was actually mastered or easily usable. When Lillie healed Bagon and gave him a bit of meat, he was happy to show it off, but it was only about as good as any run-of-the-mill Water Gun.

Although the idea of a dancing Bagon was a bit odd to Lillie at first, it steadily made more sense with more context from Sun and Rotomdex’s communication efforts.

Apparently, Bagon had befriended several Oricorio soon after hatching, on top of already having the potential for Dragon Dance inherited from their father, a Gyarados. From there, Bagon would even watch dancing humans who would pass through Route 3 and especially Melemele Meadow, attracted by the scenic location and the scores of Oricorio. Then, Bagon realized that the adrenaline rush of dancing and leaping about provided a comparable feeling to the rush of jumping off cliffs and trying to fly, only further encouraging him to pursue his passion. The other Bagon thought it was a
bit odd, apparently, as Bagon would often rather practice dance instead of cliff-jumping or boulder-smashing, but Bagon had never been dissuaded.

“Alright, so… would you like a nickname?” Lillie asked. Bagon thought for a moment before nodding.

“So… you can be… um… Wow, this is a little tricky…”

“Oh, I know! Name him Salsa!” Hau suggested.

“Salsa?” Lillie asked.

“You know, like the dance, not the food. Even though salsa is delicious… Aaand I just made myself want nachos. Crap,” Hau said, knowing they hadn’t packed anything of the sort and it took over an hour to get back to the nearest town from the bay. Sun placated him, promising to buy him some nachos the next time they were in town.

“Well, okay then! Bagon, is that a good name for you?” Lillie asked. Bagon excitedly leapt up and down, apparently appreciating it greatly. “Okay, then I guess you’re Salsa from now on!” Lillie said. “I’ll do my best to take good care of you!”

Not wanting to be left out, Brionne suddenly chimed in as well.

“Oh, why didn’t you say something sooner?!” Lillie said with a laugh. “Okay, you can be… Euterpe. Eu, for short. I’ve actually thought about this one, but I wasn’t sure if you actually-”

Brionne seemed very pleased, apparently able to parse the reference Lillie was making thanks to how in-sync they were. Yes, she did deserve to be named after an old human goddess, thank you very much.

“Try not to let it go to your head,” Lillie said dryly.

“Huh… I wonder if this means any of my team members would want new names…” Hau said. “Pokemon don’t really seem to need them the way we do, but… I have heard that it can help with bonding a little,”

Sun just flat out admitted that Zorua didn’t have a different name not only because she never indicated she did, but because ‘Zorua’ sounded cool enough by itself anyway.

“Well, if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” Hau said with a smile.

Sun smiled back in agreement, before looking over at Salsa, who seemed to be motioning for Lillie to play the ocarina again.

Once again, Lillie started up a song—only that time, Hau found it was actually rather familiar. Not perfect, as she was somewhat out of practice, but still surprisingly good. It was a slower song than before, but Salsa still matched the pace, apparently fine with it being a little slower.

“…Wait a minute… Is that… is that a Zelda song?” Hau asked.

Lillie paused her playing. “Song of Storms, specifically.”
“Ah, I see you’re a woman of culture as well!” Hau said, causing Lillie to laugh.

“My brother loved the Zelda games… whenever Mother wasn’t acting strange and was actually letting him play his video games. I may or may not have wanted an ocarina specifically because of one of those games. I know that probably sounds really nerdy of me, but…”

“Well, kinda, but its not actually a bad thing. You’re allowed to like whatever you want, as long as you’re not hurting anyone,” Hau said. “Life’s too short to be ashamed of things that make you happy.”

“I… guess so?” Lillie said, with a somewhat nervous laugh. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” Hau said.

Sun silently asked what ‘Zelda’ was, although his bond with Lillie had already supplied him a vague sense of it. When you played it, you weren’t Zelda, you were some guy with pointy ears and a sword. Plus, you fought monsters.

“Oh, Sun, I can tell you all about it!” Lillie said.

And so, she did.

Hau gently stroked Sun’s hair, during the conversation.

Sun relaxed completely, thrumming happily as he leaned back against Hau, no longer thinking of anything sad or difficult. Sha was contentedly curled up on his lap.

It was just them.

And everything was just right.

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy, this chapter was dense. I considered splitting it in two, but I just kept going anyway. Hopefully, the line breaks are enough to make it less overwhelming.

I was originally like “It’d be way too cheesy to have a Shiny Cutiefly be attracted to Sun and Hau’s aura by the power of love” but… Then I went… “You know what? It’s so cheesy, in fact, that I have to do it now,” So, that’s how that happened. It’s because I’m a huge sap.

Also, I get the feeling Lillie would actually be pretty good with music, since like… I feel like Lusamine lets her kids have their “own” interests, but only the ones she co-signs on.

And yeah, new captures! I’ve actually seen a fic where Lillie has a Bagon before, but I didn’t keep up with it, and the execution was much different from what I did see.

Teams:

Sun:
Sha the Poipole
Zorua
Rhovera the Larvesta
C.C. (Cotton Candy) the Shiny Cutiefly

Hau:
Dartrix
Pikachu
Blissey
Noibat

Lillie:
Eu (Euterpe) the Brionne
Salsa the Bagon
Chapter 10: Liftoff

Chapter Summary

Basically a training chapter, but also has character stuff, and more fluffiness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Soon, the group was ready to move on, but before leaving, Salsa apparently wanted to say goodbye first.

The group climbed back up to Route 3, using a somewhat hidden and rather precarious alternative path up the cliff that Salsa knew about. It was sturdy, and luckily not crumbling, but it was thin and steep enough that they had to walk single-file on many sections, Hau holding Sun's hand and then Sun holding Lillie's hand. Sha, still out of their Pokeball, had no such issues.

Hau may or may not have screamed in an unexpectedly high pitch when a different Bagon suddenly decided to jump from above, streaking right past them as they ascended.

Lillie and Sun failed not to laugh, although they immediately apologized.

“Hey, Bagon are heavy! I'm pretty sure that one coulda killed me if it actually hit my head!” Hau meekly defended.

Sun's eyes went as wide as dinner plates, and he immediately created an umbrella-like light shield for them all from then on.

Lillie sort of wished he could make guard rails too, but she was grateful nonetheless. Sha made a few squeaking noises and seemed to suggest something along the lines of being able to mix their polymers and adhesives in such a way as to improvise some gelled grip pads to her shoes if she was afraid of losing her footing. Although Lillie was somewhat surprised at the creativity of the idea, and the fact that it seemed to have occured to Sha without any input from Sun, she politely declined. All the dirt would probably mess with their effectiveness anyway.

Fortunately, before too long much longer, they'd reached the top. As nerve-wracking as it was, they did have to admit it saved a good chunk of time. Sun dispersed his shield with a sigh of relief.

They immediately noticed from the somewhat far-off coastline that wherever they were, it was more to the east and at a higher elevation than the main part of Route 3 that travelers used. There were also much more Bagon around, to the point they were actually the main Pokemon present. Few other wild Pokemon were brave enough or stupid enough to spend too much time near such an established colony of carnivores.

Besides Bagon, there were a couple of Shelgon, although many Shelgon preferred to spend most of their day quietly sequestered away in caves or shaded areas. Then, besides Shelgon…

There were Salamence.
Most of the Salamence present were actually “small” specimens, “only” weighing a bit over 100 kg. They largely evolved through high food availability, good environment, and living long lives of slow but diligent practice and perseverance, making them quite wise, but notably weaker than usual.

There was a massive exception, sitting smack dab in the center of the flat, plateaued area, atop a large raised rock formation that made them seem even grander.

The great Salamence spotted the trio with a burning gaze. The whole group froze in place, while Salsa immediately cried out in delight… a sound everyone was able to roughly interpret as “Mommy!”

“T-th… That's your mother?!” Lillie said quietly. Salsa just nodded happily, apparently wanting Lillie to follow him closer as well.

To add further shock, they apparently weren't the only humanoids in the area. The Salamence was so large that they managed to completely hide a grown woman who'd apparently been standing off on the other side of them all along, until she casually climbed up on top of the Salamence and sat on their back, apparently just to get a better look at them. The group couldn't help but notice she was rather beautiful, and her Field gave the sense she was definitely strong. It was still Tier 0, but Sun could tell it flowed incredibly gracefully, with nary a drop of wasted energy. She'd even synced up to Salamence with utmost ease and efficiency. Even Lillie could feel how focused and refined it was, and the way it slightly tingled her skin.

The young woman was a bit on the tall side, and had long periwinkle hair. She was clad in sky blue and white, and… was that a golf bag on her back?

Sun felt a wave of pleasant shock from Lillie, followed by a mix of faint awe and a rush of attraction. He fought the urge to smirk…. but then realized that he once again wasn't disguised, having never expected to see another human up in such a remote place.

“Young lady, that's a very…. interesting costume! And I don’t recognize that Pokemon, but they’re adorable!” the woman said, with initial alarm that soon switched to a genuine smile as her brain jumped to a more comforting assumption for the group, rather than them having to make anything up. “I especially like the lights! How are you doing that?”

Sun did his best to calmly explain that he was psychic, and that Sha was from a “remote, far off island”. The powers in themselves weren't a secret, but he was starting to ask himself if it might be good to start being a little more cautious about the actual secret again. He switched to his human disguise again.

“Oh, fascinating! My name is Kahili. I was here to visit my old friend, but I just flew in on a Pokemon. How are you all doing, after climbing all this way?

“Uh, fine! H-how doing you today?” Lillie stammered, only to immediately go brick red. “How are you doing today, I mean!” she corrected, forcing Hau to have to bite his lip as he struggled not to start cackling on the spot. Sun didn’t have to tell him a thing. It was just obvious already.

“I’m doing pretty well, thank you. I understand if you’re a little nervous… it can be hard to be around a Salamence, especially an older and more powerful one like this. Trainers tend to end up with younger and smaller ones,” Kahili said.

“Mhm. Yes. The. The Salamence. That’s why I’m nervous, yes, of course, certainly, thank you for noticing, ma’am,” Lillie said quickly, not daring to admit that she’d actually been around such an
enormous variety of Pokemon that she wasn’t all that strongly frightened by Salamence beyond the initial shock at their size. She just knew not to try any funny business.

It didn’t help that Salamence herself looked a little suspicious of that as well.

Salsa jumped up the rock formation to get to Kahili and affectionately hugged her leg, making grunting and crooning noises.

“...The little one here tells me you’re his new Trainer now, though. That’s a little odd… do you plan to try and overcome your fear of Salamence through Bagon?”

“O-oh, yes, of course!” Lillie responded, wringing her hands and trying not to look too sweaty as she silently begged Salsa to not blow her incredibly flimsy cover.

“A noble goal. I wish you luck. I myself specialize in Flying-types. This one is actually one of my Pokemon, in the loosest sense. As is the Gyarados who is this little one’s father. I decided it would be best to let them live here together to raise a family and lead the others. Nowadays, my active team focuses mainly on avian Flying-types,” Kahili said, smiling gently.

“Uh, um, ..th-thanks nice! I mean, thank you, that’s nice!” Lillie awkwardly forced out, too hung up on the horrible fact that she was technically lying to a beautiful lady to properly articulate much of anything.

“So… how many Trials have you three beaten? It’s not just anyone who can get Bagon to like them,” Kahili said, as she idly scratched the huge Salamence on the underside of their neck, causing them to give a low rumble of pleasure.

“Just one each, so far. We were in the middle of training. There was some weird unplanned stuff that happened with the last one, so we're trying to be more careful now,” Hau explained.

Kahili’s eyes widened at that. “It wouldn't be because of that freak storm a few weeks ago, would it? I've heard about that… Apparently, Tapu Koko was incredibly upset about something,”

The group all went stony-faced at that.

“...I see. If you don't want to talk about it any further, that's fine,” Kahili said. As one, the whole group sighed in relief. “Still… if you were that unfortunate, and yet didn't decide to give up, I find that commendable. Here's something for your trouble,” Kahili said, as she reached into a different part of her golf bag and retrieved a TM.

She gently handed it to Lillie, who looked like she was going to either melt or combust in the process. “This is for Aerial Ace. Although it can be blocked, it will never miss. I suspect it will help you all against Hala,” Kahili said.

The whole group thanked Kahili profusely.

“Also, if you don't mind, Ms. Kahili, how did you get that Salamence to get so big? Because I have a Noibat, and she's still kind of small. Plus, I don't want to have to worry that she can't carry me once she evolves,” Hau said.

“Oh, Noibat and Noivern… You do have a Z-Power Ring, so for that, I recommend you give your Noibat a wide variety of fruits and proteins, along with making sure to use Z-Moves relatively often. Don't hurt yourself, of course. Since you're doing the island challenge, you can also train her in Trial
“Sites. I say this because Z-Power is a growth stimulant, when Pokemon are repeatedly exposed over time. Of course, to end up with a true Totem Pokemon is a much taller order, but this should at least help.”

“Thanks! I'm not totally sold on trying to get an actual Totem anyway, so that should be fine,” Hau said, still smiling in spite of briefly remembering the sheer ruthless ferocity of the Totem Raticate.

“And on the topic of Z-Moves… Are you aware of Ten Carat Hill? There may be something of great use there, if you're willing to search for it…”

“So you can't be any less mysterious than that, huh?” Hau asked teasingly.

“This is half the fun of it, of course!” Kahili said with a brief laugh. Lillie felt her stomach go all weird. Wow, her laugh was cute... “It's the journey, not the destination. But speaking of that, would you all like a ride there? This Salamence is big enough for all three of you… Meanwhile, I have my own team members.”

Sun and Hau were immediately and clearly thrilled at such a prospect, along with Salsa, although Lillie was a little more hesitant. It didn't help that Sun briefly showed her a mental image of her holding on to Kahili's waist mid-flight, and she had to pray to several gods that she didn't look too ridiculously red-faced in that moment, even if she knew that Kahili wasn't even going to be on Salamence with them.

Kahili was already sending out a Braviary, which was also noticeably larger than usual, and obviously incredibly powerful. She dismounted Salamence and then jumped down and pulled out a small green and white device before pointing it at Braviary, then at Salamence. The group was shocked to see beams of energy hit the two Pokemon and briefly engulf them, before leaving them fully equipped with perfectly fitted flight gear.

Sun already recognized the device as a Ride Pager, but he hadn't known they could just outfit a Pokemon already in front of you. He'd thought they could just use teleportation to summon and dismiss Pokemon who were properly equipped with receivers.

Kahili got on Braviary with ease. Meanwhile, things were a bit more awkward for the trio of trial-goers, but they all managed. Hau got a little flustered when Sun took the chance to press himself up against his back as closely as possible. Lillie, meanwhile, had to make sure Salsa was secure in her lap, since she knew he wouldn't possibly be satisfied with staying in his ball during the flight. Sha, obviously, wouldn't have any real issues.

Sun's breath caught in his throat when both Pokemon briefly extended their Fields out so wide they easily engulfed the entirety of the plateau, the power so brilliant it almost reminded him of the Tapu, then brought them in close as both of them achieved liftoff with ease.

Sun silently but excitedly asked how Kahili had possibly trained such powerful Pokemon, given how bright their Fields were. They had to be high Tier 5, easily.

“Ah… You can see the Field? That's... highly unusual…” Kahili called back. “Of the few psychic humans I've met, they merely feel it more effectively. Even my Xatu can only tell me so much.”

Sun was dead silent, but Kahili's suspicion passed before long, and she continued speaking, making sure Braviary was close enough for it to be audible. “Anyway, to answer your question… I have actually been a Trainer for a decade now. I completed my Final Trial seven years ago. From there, I traveled. But recently, I've been called back to this region, for... various important reasons.” Kahili explained.
“It can help to specialize and optimize where you can, and not overburden yourself with excess captures. If a person focuses on particular types of Pokemon, or a particular theme or common thread, their Field becomes further attuned to that theme. In turn, you will be better able to improve your Pokemon’s battle performance and growth rate. A good schedule also works wonders,” Kahili said.

Sun thanked her for the advice… with that, Kahili silently signaled Braviary and Salamence to speed up, shocking the younger Trainers with the sheer speed they could achieve, as they artfully guided the winds to increase their speed while shielding everyone from the buffeting gale.

In a shockingly short window of time, far less than anything a car, bus, or Tauros ride would’ve ever achieved, the group was right near the entrance to Ten Carat Hill. Sha managed to keep up by himself for a short time, but even they eventually needed to hitch a ride, unable to match the stamina of the two vastly superior Pokemon.

The group dismounted and thanked her sincerely, but she, her obscenely strong Braviary, and the overgrown Salamence were off again within moments.

As soon as she was gone, Hau was already looking at Lillie. “So… Kahili, huh?” Hau asked Lillie, with a massive grin. Salsa looked just as amused.

“Hau, please!” Lillie said, with a slight whine to her voice. “Okay, fine, yes, I’m gay, but I… There’s no point in dwelling on this! She’s obviously too old for me! And I was lying to her, to boot! I feel terrible!”

“Aw, come on, everyone has or had a crush like that at some point!” Hau responded cheerily. “And Sun had to lie too, kinda. It does suck a little, but at least these aren’t actual hurtful lies.”

“I guess you’re right… But… about that crush thing, even you’ve had one?” Lillie asked.

“Alright, since I brought it up, guess I gotta tell you now. When I was 13, I had a thing for Captain Kiawe for about six months straight.” Hau admitted. “I saw him dance on TV and… I mean, how could you resist after seeing that?”

Sun wasn’t exactly jealous, but he quietly filed away the knowledge that dancing could impress Hau.

“Yeah, but, how’d you make it stop after that?!” Lillie asked, sounding a bit desperate. Sun just gave her an amused smirk. “And is it possible that it could end sooner? I don’t wanna deal with this for six months straight!”

“Just try to focus on other things, and stay busy. It ends up fading,” Hau said. “It helps that Kahili doesn’t seem to come on TV, or at least not anything my family watches much, since I definitely didn’t recognize her.” Hau paused in thought for a moment before adopting a rather sly expression. “Ooor, y’knooowww, if you want a girlfriend closer to your age, Sun and I could help you find one…” Hau said, doing a surprisingly good eyebrow waggle. “People used to come to me for relationship advice a bunch of times! Even though a lot of the time, they were assuming I was a lot better with girls than I actually was, until I just straight up told people I’m bi and usually prefer boys,” Hau said.

“No, no! There’s no need for that! I don’t think I could handle it as well as you do… But, just for reference… Did that… impact anything, telling them that?” Lillie asked.
“Mmm, not really. People teased me a little, but mostly in a joking kind of way. Before Sun, I had kind of… been hoping for a boyfriend, a little, but at the same time… No one was coming to me, and I’ve always heard all those things about young love not lasting. So I always figured I would just give it more time… Until Sun came. And ended up being mad convincing, like, you wouldn’t believe how bold he was! He was smoother than silk! Felt like I fell right into some sappy romance movie!”

Although Sun had disguised himself again, his star marking pulsed a smug wave of greens, as he gave a rather self-satisfied grin. He did aim to please, after all.

“Yeah, that’s awfully bold of you too, considering you got all cutely embarrassed and turned invisible right after,” Hau said.

Sun blanched at that. It sounded better before he had to tell her that! …But then again, she probably already suspected anyway.

Sun shrugged it off soon enough, as he’d already seen from the air that Ten Carat Hill was actually within walking distance of Kukui’s lab. So, the group ended up deciding to stop by… it was possible they could even stay there while they trained.

When they knocked, there was a sound of something four-legged scrambling for the door before it abruptly burst open with a startling bang, revealing Rockruff on the other side. He immediately began jumping up on them affectionately, but instinctively paused when he saw that Lillie seemed irritated.

“I missed you too, but I thought I told you before to stop doing that! You’ll break it again!” Lillie cried, with a long-suffering sigh. Rockruff just whined a bit, bowing his head rather guiltily. Salsa curiously came up to sniff at him, having only ever seen other Rockruff from afar, with other humans. Before long, Kukui was there as well. Immediately, he grinned widely.

“Oh, you three! I didn’t know you were coming back to visit!” Kukui said, as Sun almost immediately greeted him with a hug. Kukui was hardly surprised about that part, accepting it purely on reflex.

Lillie and Hau greeted him with significantly more subdued affection, while Sun excitedly told him about Kahili and her Pokemon, along with Lillie's new Bagon, something which made Kukui's eyes widen.

“You met Kahili?” Professor Kukui asked. The group was a bit curious about the way his tone immediately implied he knew her too. Despite that, Professor Kukui decided to play coy. “Yeah, I'm the main one who wanted her to come, along with a few other Trainers like her. There's something very special and important we want to do, but we can't do it without powerful Trainers,” Professor Kukui explained.

“Yeah, Kahili was being kind of mysterious too… even though in her case, she was talking about something special being in Ten Carat Hill. Probably a Z-Crystal, from what it sounded like,” Hau said.

“Oh, I would definitely go check it out, yeah! There’s a lot to see in Ten Carat Hill, after all,” Kukui said with a knowing grin.

So, the group’s training in the area commenced. Sun liked training in Ten Carat Hill far more than
Seaward Cave, even if Melemele Meadow and Kala‘e Bay were beautiful too. The reason was relatively simple. They got to stay with Kukui again… Even if, technically speaking, Kukui’s house wasn’t home… but it felt like it, and Kukui took efforts to make it feel like it, so Sun figured that was good enough.

On his end, Kukui was enjoying it just as much. Although it was mildly nightmarish to deal with the appetites of both Hau and Sun, along with all the Pokemon the trio had brought back with them, Kukui hardly minded. With Professor Burnet only able to return every once in a while, and him only being able to go to her every once in a while, he had to admit he’d been getting a bit lonely, even with plenty of Pokemon around. The trio livened things up considerably.

Sun had that unique way of being very talkative and yet completely silent all at once, animatedly telling Kukui all about the things he had seen so far on his journey, about what he’d been doing with his Pokemon, his new team member, and the progress he’d made with his powers.

Of course, that ended up including the fact that Sun and Hau had gotten together, and all sorts of Sun passionately gushing about how great it was, and how good it felt, and how great Hau was.

Kukui couldn’t say he was particularly surprised. By time the group was leaving a couple of months ago, he could already notice there was a bit of something going on between Hau and Sun… and since he’d occasionally been in touch with Hau’s mother Konani since then, she’d confirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt that Hau certainly had feelings for Sun.

Even if Sun had wanted to keep it a secret instead, it was ridiculously obvious regardless. They were practically always in rather intimate contact in some way, whether it was all their hugging, holding hands, Hau casually putting an arm around Sun’s shoulders, Sun gently caressing Hau’s face with glowing hands, or the way they could hardly sit down anywhere without cuddling.

Their conversations were pretty much all silent, or outwardly only Hau speaking, but that did nothing to hide how tenderly they looked at each other… or the way Hau would be smiling like an idiot, and Sun would be glowing all kinds of pink and green.

All in all, the training period lasted a bit over three weeks, the group deciding it was best to take their time… Part of the reason was that Lillie was a bit insecure about having only two Pokemon, but nothing in Ten Carat Hill really caught her eye either. Therefore, Sun and Hau were more than happy to make sure she would have enough time to properly train just Euterpe and Salsa.

Furthermore, Hau didn’t seem to be in a particularly great hurry to fight his grandfather, and seemed to cling quite readily to excuses to keep holding off on it, as he began to display certain perfectionist qualities to his training that no one else had seen very often before. He was no less outwardly kind to his Pokemon, but he gave subtle hints that he wasn’t satisfied as easily as before, often encouraging them to train longer than they used to, and repeat practice drills more.

Fortunately for all of them, they were helped out by the fact that Kukui had an upgrade of some kind installed into Rotom’s system. Apparently, it was partly inspired by his research with Sun, and some of the insights he’d gained from Sun’s abilities had been what allowed him to truly perfect it. Rotom took great pleasure in explaining the resulting upgrade to Sun, on one of the first days that Sun spent training.

“So, I have a fancy-schmancy new set of abilitiezzz!” Rotom said cheerly, flitting around Sun’s head while he was in the central fields of Ten Carat Hill, with Hau and Lillie a short ways off.

“Well, technically, I kind of had them before, but they weren’t perfected and I had a good feeling you wouldn’t be particularly interested in them as they were.”
Sun queried about what they were, respecting Professor Kukui’s request to let Rotom explain it himself.

“I now have the fully refined power to give your team various benefits, created and powered by me abzzzorbing a cut of the excess AWE and Z-Power you and your friend produce when you train. So, basically, it’s kinda like charging a battery! With no real cost to you, because what I’m collecting is just the wazzzte energy that would passively radiate into the atmosphere anyway. And when that battery has enough charge, I can use that energy to create Rotom Powers!”

Sun looked a bit unsure. Normal Pokedexes couldn’t do that, so wasn’t that kind of… cheating?

“Well, everything I can do, there’zzz an alternative method of reaching ezzzzentially the same outcome. I can increase the rate of AWE development in Pokemon. Lucky Eggzzz can do that too, zzt. Or Rare Candies, in short bursts. I can bolster long term improvement of zzzpeed, power, and endurance, which we used to refer to as ‘EV Training’, although that system is inaccurate and outdated now. I can also attract more Pokemon to you, make it easier to catch Pokemon, and speed up the development of eggzzz. There are plenty of other ways to do those three things. So in short, we are not cheating. I am merely providing you with... alternativezzz. Furthermore, zzt, this value system of yours is why Professor Kukui and I agreed it should be set up this way. This will only really benefit you if you train and battle frequently so I can collect plenty of that spare waste energy from the inefficiencies of Fieldzzz. Therefore, you are working for these benefits!” Rotom explained. For the most part, he seemed to be getting through to Sun, but he knew what would definitely seal the deal.

“Aaaand… this helps your friendzzz, too... You’d like to help your friends, wouldn’t you, Sun?” Rotom added on with a smirk, their voice abruptly becoming quieter, lower, smoother on the last sentence. They knew full well it was a bit manipulative… but it worked like a charm. Sun’s remaining hesitation pretty much evaporated on the spot.

With the new Roto Power system installed into Rotom, Sun had to admit that there was a significant boost in the fruits of their training labor. Even without activating it at all, the mere fact that it was powered by excess AWE was a good motivator.

Sun focused predominantly on two powers in particular. Roto Train could optimize and increase the impact a Pokemon’s AWE Field had on specific tissues, greatly accelerating what used to be called “EV Training”. This affected not only the efficiency of a Pokemon’s own AWE Field when it trained in things like speed, stamina, and weight lifting, but also the specific impact that absorbed AWE from various species of enemy Pokemon could have on specific tissues, a mechanism that’d previously been referred to as "EV Yield". But in the modern age, it was well known that "510 Max EVs" was actually a very flawed and inaccurate way of trying to quantify the system, and it'd been proven that the limit was completely arbitrary and based in flawed research. It'd also been shown that EVs couldn't even actually follow a precise formula for how much "one EV" actually was, or what would cause a Pokemon to gain a given number of EVs, especially not for every single species. That'd been nothing but a result of lazily trying to shortcut and average things based on limited knowledge.

It was already known that there were all sorts of anomalies and oddities among Pokemon in their capabilities, further showing just how much misunderstanding had gone into the creation of the EV and IV system. Strangely fast Turtwig, incredibly physically strong Happiny, unusually shock-
resistant Taillow… Oddly powerful Pikachu, oddly powerful Eevee, both with larger movepools than usual as well.

Meanwhile, Roto AWE could make Pokemon absorb AWE from their opponents more easily. Both together was an incredible combo. Unfortunately, they were also the two most energy-intensive powers, but they were incredibly useful regardless.

With everyone consistently training and battling together, Rotom had enough absorbed power to create about an hour’s worth of those two effects for them per day, if they refrained from every other power. Still, Sun sometimes subtracted from that a bit to build up a decent amount of Roto Restore for healing, even though they had Blissey.

Lillie did well under continuous praise and positive reinforcement from Sun, Hau, and Kukui. Training was even rather fun, as long as she didn’t have to participate in any overly intense battling.

Brionne, re-named to Euterpe, seemed thrilled that Lillie had taken up the ocarina, the music guiding her and motivating her in ways that kind words and treats alone couldn’t quite match. With some research, Lillie also found that she could take Eu into Hau’oli to learn Water Pledge, provided she could prove a strong enough bond with Eu. Still, it took her until about two weeks in to pluck up the courage, even with Hau continually insisting he’d come with Dartrix and vouch for her. She still managed to be a bit surprised when she passed with relative ease, although Hau passing with her was far less of a shock.

Other than that, Brionne didn’t learn any new moves, focusing on refining what she could already do. Lillie also looked into toughening Eu’s bubbles to form shock-absorbing barriers and “armor”, going for something akin to a Water-type Cotton Guard.

Over the course of training in Ten Carat Hill, Salsa managed to learn Focus Energy with relative ease, accompanied by Aerial Ace from the TM. Then, with significantly more trial and error, and a lot of help from Sun and Kukui, Zen Headbutt.

Everyone had heard that dragons were supposed to be difficult to raise, and Salsa wasn’t exactly a cakewalk, but he was relatively straightforward once Lillie observed his habits closely. Noisy, hyperactive, gluttonous, stubborn, and often accidentally destructive to some degree… But other than that, he was friendly, determined, and typically obedient. If he ever did get frustrated or unruly, Lillie found that her ocarina was able to calm him down. In a pinch, even humming to him could work, as long as she focused intently on synchronizing with him at the same time. Still, it was all the more motivation to try and practice ocarina at least five or six days a week. Ten Carat Hill was good for that too. There were a lot of quiet areas where she wouldn’t be interrupted.

No doubt thanks to his dance training, Salsa was exceptionally quick and graceful for a Bagon, already having an excellent sense of how to work within the limitations of his large, heavy head and stout, dense body. His ability to project flames and perform special attacks was also notably advanced for his species, as he’d relied extensively on that to add extra flair to his dance routines.

The tradeoff seemed to be that because he didn’t participate as much in other, more typical Bagon activities to toughen up their bodies, his defenses were surprisingly lacking. Especially if he was hit anywhere besides his skull helmet.

Lillie decided it would be best to approach it with an emphasis on compromise, playing to Salsa’s unique strengths while trying to ensure he was still well-rounded. So, although they trained plenty in defense, they also worked out ways to increase Salsa’s speed and evasiveness further.
By modifying Twister and using it in conjunction with Aerial Ace or Dragon Dance, Salsa was able to both briefly improve his mobility and discourage close-range attacks with powerful gusts of wind, a technique that Lillie decided to call “Dragon Gale”.

Hau’s Dragon-type, Noibat, was surprisingly simple to keep happy, although she seemed to be getting a bit spoiled. Hau was very particular about what to feed her, and on top of her regularly eating Blissey egg and training to better cope with Z-Moves, she was definitely growing well… However, she’d taken to wanting to be out of her Pokeball more, and being rather needy towards Hau.

Overall, her focus was undoubtedly speed, followed by improving her ranged attacking power as much as possible. Her defenses were still pretty much paper, but Hau figured that relying on air and evasion would be good enough to keep from having to split her training focus. Kahili had said it was better to try and specialize. Hau had refrained from having her bother with Aerial Ace in exchange for learning Tailwind through regular training, which could not only benefit the speed of the entire team, but paired excellently with Agility. Tailwind also had the added bonus of being an indirect way of boosting speed, having nothing to do with stimulating nerves and muscles, allowing it to be used even if Agility had already been used as much as possible.

From there, confident in her aerokinesis, Hau focused on having her learn Heat Wave. Largely, he actually had defensive purposes in mind, to start with. If Noibat could cloak herself in intense heat, he figured it would greatly help counteract her huge weakness to Ice-type moves. Salsa had a similar concept already, using his fire to cloak himself like he had during his dance.

To Hau’s joy, she managed to master a somewhat weaker version of the move just before their soft “deadline” of facing Hala, although he repeatedly reminded her that it was still okay if she couldn’t get it before then. Still, he was certain that without Sun’s further guidance in how to help Noibat do it, and without the Rotomdex upgrade, it would’ve been impossible… and the Rotomdex upgrade was apparently only possible to perfect because of things Kukui had learned with Sun’s help, so that was still Sun. It only made Hau realize all the more that Sun really was the best partner he could ask for.

Hau was just as proud of all of his Pokemon, really. Dartrix learned Grass Pledge right along with Brionne, and Hau gave him Aerial Ace before having him learn Steel Wing as well. Once again, with Sun’s help, Dartrix had it down quite well. Hau’s plan was that Steel Wing would usually be more of a defensive move, relying on the temporarily hardened wings to allow Dartrix to tank hits better, even if he did have many weaknesses and wasn’t particularly fast. But even then, Noibat’s Tailwind could alleviate that. However, Steel Wing could also pair excellently with Aerial Ace, making Dartrix’s wings temporarily incredibly swift and bladelike, or the effects could be transferred to Dartrix’s blade quills, allowing Steel Wing to become a ranged attack instead.

For Pikachu, Hau taught him Swift, which didn’t take particularly long, along with Iron Tail, which he learned alongside Dartrix learning Steel Wing, because the attacks were so similar, and would have similar purposes. If Pikachu’s speed failed him, he could block and parry using Iron Tail… Plus, it was admittedly just really cool to practice by having him cut fruit and stuff in midair. Meanwhile, Swift was largely for annoyance and tactical purposes. As it was an attack that took no effort at all to aim, using it allowed Pikachu to continue focusing largely on evasion, as well as home in on Pokemon that tried to outdo him in the evasion department.

Blissey’s movepool was honestly so versatile that Hau found it a bit overwhelming, but Hau focused
in on Psychic, since learning Light Screen beforehand had already given Blissey familiarity with Psychic-type energy. And Psychic alone was so versatile that it was pretty much all Blissey had to focus on for the training period, although she still thoroughly practiced her older moves as well.

Sun’s team proved just as hard-working as all the others, and exceptionally harmonious, thanks to the unique nature of their Trainer.

C.C. the Cutiefly was a much calmer, quieter sort than Salsa, being so used to busily finding flowers and guarding their territory that they had no qualms with the effort and structure that went into being a trained Pokemon. Despite their unusual coloration, they had a way of being a subtle and unobtrusive presence when it came to interactions with others, allowing them to get along with the rest quite easily.

A Shiny was not necessarily any stronger than a regular Pokemon, but C.C. did prove to be an especially slippery and evasive sort, as a result of a life spent being easier to notice than everyone else. Their flight was noticeably quieter than usual as well, as they'd apparently learned a way to manipulate the air to reduce noise. It was quite a clever alternative way of becoming harder to notice, provided they could evade someone's line of sight.

Sun focused on having C.C. learn Dazzling Gleam over Bug Buzz, knowing that were going to be up against Hala and would probably evolve and learn Pollen Puff in another month or two anyway. Since it was a natural move in his movepool and matched his typing, it didn’t take especially long, so Sun went for Aromatherapy as well, knowing that Chansey would appreciate help with healing.

Aromatherapy was interesting because in battles, it didn’t outright restore energy or heal wounds much, it just cured status conditions. The user would leave a lingering haze of soothing aroma that would take care of that for all team members. But outside of battle, where the user had the time and focus to carefully shift and moderate their scent production, producing a wider and more complex array of chemicals tailored to the patients while also applying prolonged treatments, it actually was a full and proper healing move.

Sha learned Iron Tail, after coincidentally showing signs of being able to copy it from Hau’s Pikachu. They also managed to learn Echoed Voice, while Sun experimented with trying to copy Hyper Voice, but Sun figured Echoed Voice would do just fine. It paired well with Beast Boost, to boot. Aerial Ace wasn’t compatible with Sha as a TM, but still, Sun recognized its worth too much to ignore it. And since Sha already had Peck, as well as rather impressive speed, Sun saw no reason why they shouldn’t try.

So, with that, Sha learned… Drill Peck. Not what they’d actually been going for, but Sun would take it. Sha had rapidly taken to the power required to use Aerial Ace, but had been struggling with technique… and essentially stumbled upon the concept of taking a note from Twister and rapidly rotating wind in the process of trying to form blade-like wind to use Aerial Ace. From there… Drill Peck arose.

Rhovera learned Flame Charge, along with Will-O-Wisp. Zen Headbutt was an option, but the move was a bit too situational on a Larvesta, and Will-O-Wisp was almost certainly much faster and easier for her. Sun figured his other team members could cope with Hala well enough that he would prefer to just have the ability to inflict burns with greater ease.

Finally, there was Zorua, who got Aerial Ace and Agility. Sun hoped that if she had to fight Hala, she could trip him up with the pure speed and precision of the combination, throwing in a Hyper
Voice if she could in order to further knock them off their game. But if all went well, only his other three Pokemon would be necessary. He didn’t want Zorua to get more unnecessary injuries, like that broken leg she’d suffered… Still, she didn’t seem to hold it against him at all. If anything, she was surprisingly peaceful for a Zorua, her pranks becoming increasingly mild and generally harmless. Sun wondered if it was the influence of being around generally friendly, peaceful team members and travel companions… that, and regularly eating Blissey eggs.

Of course, besides all the training, there was the matter of finding the highly probable Z-Crystal… but that was accomplished within three days of exploration, even with Sun refusing to look through cave walls in the spirit of finding it just like everyone else.

It turned out that the Z-Crystal was in one of the highest parts of Ten Carat Hill, up a winding series of rocky paths and through several twists and turns, seeming intentionally set up in a way that it was likely one of the last things you’d find in the area. It still took a huge chunk of the third day to find it, although they did all take their time to an extent.

It was located on a rather ornate pedestal, on a cliff overlooking the entirety of Ten Carat Hill, and the instructions for the move were simply engraved into the front of the pedestal by way of drawings. They also indicated that it was apparently Flyinium-Z… and since they’d heard about it from Kahili, the group realized in retrospect that it seemed rather obvious, really.

Although it initially seemed like there was only one placed upon the pedestal, which everyone turned out to be too polite to take for themselves, an unusually large Crobat swooped over in absolute silence, holding two more Flyinium-Z in one of its winged feet.

The Crobat didn’t utter even the slightest noise, but the group could immediately tell the Z-Crystals were for them. They took them with wordless thanks, feeling grateful that they wouldn’t have to fight for them. That Crobat was honestly sort of terrifying. Just by looking them in the eye, you could tell they were an unspeakably strong creature. Perhaps even a Totem, possibly.

Sun supposed Crobat likely trained under Kahili too, but he found himself too intimidated to bother asking. The Crobat left as quickly and quietly as they came.

The group nearly left right away… but stopped when they realized that because they’d already spent so much time looking, it was actually time for the sun to set.

Together, the three simply sat down at the edge of the rocky outcropping, overlooking everything, and watched.

It was absolutely breathtaking.

“Almost as pretty as you,” Hau silently communicated to Sun, as he also surreptitiously reached over a little further to hold Sun’s hand. Lillie couldn’t help but laugh when Sun, undisguised, seemingly went deep pink out of nowhere.

Still, as that color faded away a bit, in time with Sun’s attention being drawn to the landscape, Sun could notice the Z-Power radiating softly throughout the entire area… Notice the flow to it, beneath the rays of the setting sun, notice how it seemed to nearly pulse and beat…

How the world breathed, how the light spoke, how the land hummed…
Sun thought of… the other place.

Harsh, fake lights, never offering the warm, sunkissed glow he saw before him…

Hard, angular, lifeless shapes, nothing like the soothing, gorgeous wonder that brimmed with vitality before his very eyes…

Climbing up high, to places with similar elevations… but alone. Alone and not even supposed to be there. Having only a few moments of fitful, guilty silence before he risked reprimand, or an Iceboxing, or Dulse fretfully coming to get him down. Dulse was great, and he hated to make him worry… but he never had understood that gnawing, suffocating need to get away. He was born not to understand. Made not to understand. Back then, all he’d understood was Service. Perfect Service. But Sun thought back to Dulse’s outburst, weeks ago. In the moment, it’d upset Sun horribly… But upon reflection...

Did he understand now, finally? By the light of a new world, could he see now?

Sun quietly shed a few tears, nodes shifting and pulsing between all manner of blues and greens. Both Lillie and Hau turned and leaned towards him, gently enveloping him without a word.

They stayed like that for quite some time.

Beyond just the training of Pokemon, the trio themselves continued to train themselves as well. Hau and Lillie’s Z-Move practice was still an ever-ongoing process, with the two focusing on trying to get the energy transfer as efficient as possible, using more manageable amounts of Z-Power rather than giving up the entirety of their strength at once. ‘Less is more’ was the key line of thinking.

Sun noticed that Lillie had actually grown a touch taller, although he wasn’t entirely sure if it was all recent or if it was merely getting to be enough that he was properly noticing. It was a little tricky, considering that he wasn’t done growing either.

Hau was only continuing to steadily get physically stronger, and Sun would be lying if he said he didn’t love every minute of it. Sun didn’t know what exactly about seeing Hau sweat and lift heavy things was so damn appealing, but it definitely was. It was a similar story the other way around, although Sun was also continuing to make progress with his light-based abilities.

Still, with Sun’s general well-being as high as it was, there were also the somewhat less predictable aspects of being an alien in the midst of puberty. Sun’s hair steadily began taking on an iridescent quality over the course of the three week period, still a deep black but also shining with various streaks of blue, green, and violet depending on how the light hit it.

On one hand, pretty much everyone seemed to love it, and Sun was happy to be told repeatedly about how pretty it was, to the extent he only briefly bothered hiding it while he was disguised… but on the other hand, with the ability to remember who his parents were…

Part of him just realized he looked even more like them.

When it came to the sleeping situation, Lillie was still fine with her loft, but Professor Kukui had
invested in a pull-out sofa for the main room while Sun and Lillie were gone, which Sun and Hau were able to use freely… although Kukui did occasionally sneak in joking quips about “behaving themselves”, he knew Hau was trustworthy.

So, with their stay winding to a close in just a few more days, Hau noticed Sun’s mild internal conflict with ease, as they laid together in the darkness. Pikachu was at the foot of the bed, fast asleep. Hau didn’t even need the special bond he and Sun had formed to see something was wrong. It was the way he held Hau close with a particular sort of need, giving a short, soft whine, tiny flecks of dim dark blue briefly flickered across his skin, almost too quick and tiny to notice.

“…You’re worried about your hair?” Hau asked.

Sun whined softly again.

“You almost sound like Dartrix,” Hau lightly teased. “Still, your hair is beautiful. And just because it’s like your parents’ hair doesn’t mean you’re too much like them…”

As Sun often did not ‘speak’ in a way that literally involved transferring mental sentences, instead typically sticking with a method that was more about streams of images and ideas, he could convey a lot of information very quickly when he wanted to. So, from what Hau gathered, black was hardly anything special for Luxian hair color, much like how it wasn’t for humans… but iridescence was something far more peculiar. Not only because it was intentionally limited in the gene pool, but because it was also related to multiple other factors, including age, environment, stress levels, and proper nutrients.

With that information, Hau spoke further. “So, basically… your hair was only able to change because you’re really happy here, right? And because we really care about you?”

Sun nodded.

“...Well, if that’s the case, they never would’ve been able to get it to change, unless they did some weird stuff on you to force it to happen. Even though your hair can only potentially do that at all because you’re related to them… that potential was still unlocked here with us. So, that hair isn’t just some symbol of being related to them… It’s a symbol of being loved, happy, and well taken care of here, right?” Hau asked.

Sun slowly nodded again, pulsing with soft pinks and greens at Hau's logic as he sincerely thanked him. Hau really was the best boyfriend ever. Just like Sun knew he would be.

Hau was flustered enough that he just made a vague, feeble sound of protest, barely even having time to come up with anything more eloquent before sensing that Sun was about to kiss him. A lot. Of course, Hau was perfectly fine with the distraction. Kissing was a lot better than having to come up with a good way to convince Sun that his assessment was really the other way around.

Once again, as had become relatively common, Hau noticed Sun's saliva steadily becoming sweeter, tangier, and more enticing as they went, making his mind slightly fuzzy as pleasant heat suffused his entire body… But Sun had learned more, since the first time. Hau could feel him like a proverbial hand steadying his mind, warding off the brunt of the intoxicating euphoria, but letting it through just enough that it still felt really nice to kiss him. Hau vaguely theorized that the way Sun tasted was also actually a mental thing in some way, given that he never tasted quite as amazing and irresistible as he had the first couple of times he’d produced pheromones, but he did taste better whenever a lapse of focus interrupted his suppressive influence.
But with that display of affection, Sun was successfully calmed when it came to the matter of his hair… although there was still something else that Sun believed needed tending to, after he’d spent the last few weeks watching it subtly build. So, they stopped for a moment, and Sun silently asked.

Why was Hau so hesitant to face Hala? Lillie had a valid issue of having only two Pokemon to count on, and being reluctant to capture more too quickly… But Hau typically seemed more sure of himself.

“...I dunno, I just feel… kinda obligated to impress my granddad. ‘Cause I don’t wanna end up like Dad,” Hau said. “So I feel like the battle has to be like, super crazy good on my part, or else… I don’t know.”

Sun silently queried further, leaning against Hau a little more and making a low thrumming sound to help comfort him.

“Dad’s not terrible or anything, but… he never did like being a Kahuna’s son. So he and Tutu only really got along when Dad was a little kid, but once he grew up and started battling, things kept getting worse between them. They… kind of sort of, I guess, made up, but it’s always been awkward. Dad is a powerful Trainer, so he sends money, and even gifts sometimes, but barely ever visits... Even though we all know full well he has more than enough money to, and he’s got no official position or job other than battling, so his schedule can be whatever he wants it to be…” Hau said. There was a brief twinge of bitterness to his voice, but it was gone in a flash. “I have gone over to Kanto to visit, but Tutu always gets a little weird about it, so I usually don’t stay for too long. Like, the longest I was ever there was about half a summer,” Hau explained.

Sun quietly asked what exactly would make Hau’s dad dislike it so much. Hala seemed very kind.

“It’s only sort of my granddad. He’s told me things about it. He tried his best… but at the same time, he didn’t know as much as he did now, so he wasn’t perfect either. Still, it was just, no matter what Tutu did, everyone else would still always put all these expectations and comparisons on my dad, totally unprompted. And to be honest, I get it. I get why that bothered him so bad. It happens to me too. Everyone expected me to always be getting A’s, and always be doing a bunch of after school stuff, and always be the fun, happy one with lots of friends… even if half the time, I could hardly open up to them, because they might just think it was weird or dumb of me to complain when my granddad’s the Kahuna.”

Sun frowned slightly, silently assuring Hau that it wasn’t weird or dumb in the slightest.

“I know, it’s just… sometimes, I get the feeling that I’m like granddad’s ‘redo’ son, or something. Like, I know he doesn’t actually feel that way, but I still feel like I have to do everything better than Dad, and be nicer than Dad, and be the one who does a better job at carrying on the family legacy rather than just… running away,” Hau said. There was no missing the disdain in his voice.

Sun just stayed quiet, silently comforting Hau with the gentle touch of his softly glowing hand.

“And it wasn’t like Lillie’s situation. She had a right to run, and not only that, she did it to save Nebby too. Dad just left because he felt like it. Because he was stubborn,” Hau said. “I literally have no other relatives in Kanto. I’m not Kantonian in the slightest. He isn’t Kantonian in the slightest. Sometimes a few people even look at me weird whenever I do go over there! So he’d really rather be over there, just him and his Pokemon, wandering around all the time, when he could be here with his family? I don’t get it. I want to get it, but I don’t, and I never have!” Hau said, his voice about the loudest a whisper could be. “Plus, people act different there… I don’t exactly hold it
against them, but everyone’s usually more reserved, and my accent is weird to them, and it’s harder to make friends because I hardly have the time before I have to go home again,” Hau said. “Like, I know I could just get their numbers or internet accounts, but even then it usually doesn’t go anywhere.”

Sun just continued to hold Hau close, quietly, gently. He understood. It was going to be alright. Sun would make sure of it.

“That’s part of why… I wanted to help you. And Lillie, too. I don’t want you to be lonely. I don’t want you to feel out of place. I want to take care of you. And protect you. And support you… Because, you know, Lillie’s my friend… and as for you, I…” Hau paused, squirming slightly.

Sun was quiet, dim pink in the darkness. He was already feeling what was about to come next.

“I love you, Sun.” Hau said quietly, but there was such soft reverence and sincerity to his voice that Sun immediately found himself glowing an obnoxiously bright pink before he could stop himself, to the point that Hau had to briefly flinch back and cover his eyes. Still, Hau just snorted as he only halfway managed to stifle his laughter. “Knew that would probably happen,” Hau added on.

But then, Sun took a deep breath, and did something Hau hadn’t been expecting nearly as much.

“I love, you… too,” Sun said, having to say it slowly and a bit awkwardly, but he said it regardless, following it up with a kiss to Hau’s cheek and a long, low, vibrating thrum that caused Hau’s body to vibrate by proxy.

Considering that he was still a little sore after training earlier that day, Hau definitely wasn’t objecting… and with that, he in turn said something that Sun hadn’t quite been expecting.

“Imose lak yavay Ahz, Sun.” Hau said, quietly and carefully. Sun had to quickly put a blanket over himself as he immediately lit up like a burst of rose-colored fireworks. When did he even learn that? He remembered what that meant?!

“Lillie helped me,” Hau said quietly. “Back when you were training your powers with Dulse, I wanted to know how I would say I love you in your language, to surprise you later. Glad it worked,” Hau said with a cheeky grin.

Sun responded by just pulling the blanket over both of them and impatiently coming in for another round of making out.

Neither Sun or Hau had any idea that the next morning, another feature that would make Sun look more like his parents would begin to make itself known.

Sun woke up to an odd, slightly tender feeling at the base of his back, an odd bulge that wasn’t there yesterday. As he tentatively felt it, and even managed to wiggle it slightly without touching it, he realized what was happening with an audible yelp, quickly waking Hau and even Lillie, although that was more because of their bond than the noise itself.

Hau and Lillie had never quite expected to wake up to the news that Sun was growing a smooth, lizard-like tail, even after learning that at least one of his parents had one, but they figured it may as well be happening, considering all the oddities that came with Sun in general. Even when they told Kukui, his reaction was about the same. After all, he’d already dealt with months of trying to figure
Sun out, and essentially concluded that he needed to be ready for anything.

It was still short, and not all that noticeable, perhaps all of an inch and a half in length… but it was definitely nowhere near done growing. Lillie surmised that if it’d gone from unnoticeable to an inch and a half in one night, its growth rate would be relatively fast to boot. Sun noted with a bit of frustration that illusions weren’t going to help him much when the tail got big enough that he’d have to modify his clothing.

Sun could dimly remember that tails had also been intentionally suppressed in the gene pool, with the species no longer requiring them. Although their size and highly prehensile nature still meant they had practical purpose for combat and general utility, they’d been shifted to another kind of status symbol. Given that a Luxian tail was packed with muscle along with being made to store extra fat and nutrients, it’d been deemed inefficient for most people to waste the effort and resources growing them at all, and even in the upper class, it’d been deemed better to delay their development in the youth.

Meanwhile, after over nine months of unrestricted food, natural sunlight, and a generally much lower stress level, Sun had no such issues. If anything, he’d gotten a little chubby, easily concealing the highly efficient muscle underneath. It didn’t bother him, really. He was moderately aware of the way humans could obsess over weight… But he personally thought it looked cute on him. Not to mention, he knew Hau liked it just by the way Hau acted, let alone what their psychic bond told him. But either way, it meant the tail was likely going to continue coming in fast.

That proved to be very much the case. In three more days, the tail was already about seven inches long, and steadily getting a little thicker and stronger as well. Still, it remained simple enough for Sun to hide, and position in a way that sitting wasn’t awkward. Overall, it was the least of his worries, considering that the group was finally gearing up to leave and challenge Hala.

They’d talked strategy with Kukui, and Sun felt relatively confident. Kukui had been a little cryptic, but he’d revealed that Hala was going to challenge them each with a team of four, and he was definitely going to include counter-measures against his type disadvantages.

Considering that she only had two Pokemon, Lillie was still the least confident, but Sun and Hau did their best to reassure her. She’d consistently trained Salsa to both further improve his nimbleness and be able to take more hits… and Brionne had received the bulk of her attention ever since Lillie first got her.

But she didn’t want to slow everyone down too much more. She’d have to face Hala sooner or later, if she was really serious about trying to prove that she had the strength to accomplish her goals. And together, with Sun, Hau, and all of their Pokemon, they could do anything.

Hopefully.

Chapter End Notes

As I said before, I essentially kind of do what I want with moves and event timelines. Hopefully you’ll continue to bear with me.

I also hope that my partial re-interpretation of Hau is also something that at least some people are enjoying. Like, I get that a younger kid might not dwell on their father
fucking off to Kanto too much… but considering that Hau’s father had negative reasons for doing so, and Hau is older here, I couldn’t imagine that he’d really be totally fine with that in this AU. Especially considering he’s already flat-out stated that he never wants Sun to leave either.

I reworked Rotom’s boosting powers to a certain extent, to better fit the story. So, that’s why certain powers don’t exist, and why I threw out the RNG aspect. So, a quick rundown of what they are now, in order of ascending absorbed energy costs:

- Roto Stealth
- Roto Encounter
- Roto Hatch
- Roto Catch
- Roto Restore (This story has less of a distinction between HP and PP)
- Roto Train (The vague equivalent of boosting EV training)
- Roto AWE (Basically Roto Exp.)

And yes, in a way, EV Training does exist in this universe. Canonically, I’m torn. Let’s Go’s AV system is nice because it adheres more faithfully to “all Pokemon can be good” narratives, but being entirely reliant on candy is weird. The EV System feels like it has to make sacrifices for the sake of balancing gameplay, and for Gens 3-5, it was honestly a nightmare unless you enjoyed being a min-maxing tryhard.

So, my changes:
- Stat training can largely be done by just training in various ways without actually battling.
- However, depending on the species fought, certain AWE Fields also further stimulate certain organs/tissues/muscle groups in particular. This is basically the analogue to EV Yields in the core games.
- Stat training no longer improves all Pokemon at the same rate. Also, Pokemon don’t all have the same limit on how much you can train their stats either. Even between individuals of the same species. So “252 EVs, 31 IVs per stat” is an arbitrary and useless sentiment here, as is “Iron increases Defense by 10 EVs”.

“Strangely fast Turtwig, incredibly physically strong Happiny, unusually shock-resistant Tailow” Huehuehue, anime references...

Also, I was originally gonna go for like, most Luxians are willowy and thin, sort of elven, but then I thought: Actually, Sun is a perfect candidate to be Soft and Friend Shaped. Plus, I imagine nearly all Luxians view trying to lose weight as an utterly ass-backwards concept anyway. Emphasis on proper rationing would still be important, but even that doesn’t apply much to the elites, who “deserve” more food than everyone else.
Chapter 11: Afterimage

Chapter Summary

Sun remembers things he would've preferred not to.

The battles against Hala commence.

Warnings for potentially disturbing imagery of illness/injury and memories of trauma/emotional abuse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The night before the battle was scheduled, Sun slept with Lillie instead of Hau, noticing that her nerves were so high she was having trouble sleeping. Hau didn’t mind at all, not really finding himself jealous of the bond between Sun and Lillie. Even though he’d joked about their relationship earlier on, it’d been long enough for him to feel quite secure in the knowledge that they really didn’t seem to interest one another in that sort of way at all… They were just… really good friends. Family, in a way, but even then, Hau wouldn’t precisely describe them as siblings. Their relationship was generally such a deep and peaceful sort of thing that it didn’t really feel like most of the sibling pairs he was familiar with either.

With some gentle, soothing light from Sun, Lillie found herself successfully drifting off into slumber before long… and then, into the depths of a dream.

Lillie found herself in her room, her old room and not the loft. It was dark, but she still easily recognized the huge space, with light pink walls, dozens of perfectly-organized plushies on shelves, an oversized premium-quality bed, and an expansive walk-in closet full of clothes that were all always light, soft colors.

Lillie was lying in bed, and Dulse was next to her, far younger and shorter than usual, but still significantly taller than her. For some reason, his presence didn’t strike her as strange at all. He was wearing a white and dark blue gown, matching her white and gold one. His magenta hair was longer than Lillie had ever seen it, but still a bit wavier than her own long, black hair. It didn’t occur to her that her hair wasn’t supposed to be black.

Mother came in, looking the same as ever with her long, platinum blonde hair… But she was wearing an odd sort of dress that seemed to be dark blue and white, a uniform of some kind, with a matching apron. Still, that didn’t bother Lillie much either.

“I-is it really okay for me to keep sleeping here?” Dulse asked, voice much higher and lighter than usual.

“Of course. I’ll make sure no one else sees you, just like last time. It’s really comfy, isn’t it? And you get to be next to Halo all night! Isn’t that wonderful?” Mother said.

“Mhm. I… I like it a lot…” Dulse said quietly. Lillie silently agreed. It didn’t really occur to her that her name was Lillie Celeste, not Halo.
“Now, who’s ready for storytime?” Mother said with a smile.

Lillie and Dulse both squealed with delight at that, as Mother retrieved an odd, translucent green slab with a hexagonal pattern from one of the shelves. When she turned it on, an incredibly realistic holographic illustration came up, with words along the top and bottom as well, something like a fancy picture book.

“Incardiel and Incanze,” was the title Lillie recognized. There was a child who looked a lot like her, rendered from a side perspective, holding out a handful of strange but beautiful flowers to a massive, rather humanoid creature, several times the child’s height… It was… almost like an angel.

The body was like some kind of smooth, flexible crystal, pitch black and yet lustrous. The entire surface was covered in all sorts of radiant, dynamically shifting nodes of orange, red, and pink. There were four massive black wings, covered in something soft and iridescent, and giving off ethereal flames of orange and purple as they slowly, gently, majestically flapped… although Lillie wasn’t sure it was actually feathers covering them at all.

The arms were like a cross between arms and wings, black and iridescent like the two full pairs of wings on the creature’s back, and the face was very humanoid indeed. Sharp-featured and wise, lacking a nose but having six eyes and a huge mouth, both glowing with a powerful orange aura. The mouth had powerful crystalline teeth as well. There were long, pointed ears as well, and iridescent black hair flowed from the head in massive volumes, periodically twinkling with orange and red light as well. The being had no legs, its lower body instead being covered in short fuzz and serpentine in nature. The upper body was all still humanoid, and vaguely feminine in nature.

Spiracles along their sides glowed with orange aura as well.

As Mother began to read it, the hologram became animated, playing in time to what she was describing. Every time she stopped or paused, it immediately did so as well.

The story described how Incardiel, beloved child of Light and Sound, She Who Hears What Can’t Be Heard And Sees What Can’t Be Seen, advised and protected good Incanze children for generations, helping them grow up to be the best Incanze they could.

Surreal, beautiful, pristine landscapes of majestic purple and violet appeared before Lillie’s very eyes. Massive, sprawling forests of trees with violet leaves and slick black bark, people climbing and leaping amongst them, living and sleeping in them, children playing. There were the tell-tale black, arrowhead-like bodies of Kyflii whistling through the air and transferring messages and small packages.

But there were those who became corrupt. Those who tricked and pleaded with Incardiel, who convinced Her to let them get away with more and more bad things, because they said it would make everyone happier in the end.

The scene changed to hexagonally patterned crystal spires instead of trees, drones instead of Kyflii, twisting roads and odd vehicles...

But Incardiel still had a very big secret. A secret She didn’t like to tell anyone, no matter how terribly She loved them, no matter how much She cared for them. A secret the Light and Sound forbade Her from divulging.
Incardiel knew how to open the portals. To space, to other planets, to... anywhere.

And so, after many Incanze asked, over and over, trying countless arguments and shows of intelligence and devotion to convince Her that they were ready... The day came.

She told the world Her great secret. She convinced the Light to help provide the energy to make it all possible.

The great Lunar Titan was wary of this, and the Solar Beast was quite angry for a time, neither of them liking Incardiel's creations messing about with their domain, but Incardiel managed to quell them both. Everyone was so happy! Surely, that must've been worth it. Everyone was happy, and exploring, and finding out so many new things!

There were lots and lots of holograms, then. It looked so fun, so beautiful, so bright, that Lillie even tried to reach out and touch it, almost crying when she remembered it wasn't real.

One was especially, strangely beautiful.

The plants were all green, the sun was more yellow, and the tree bark was more rough and brown... There were creatures there. Creatures she swore she'd seen before, even though she knew she hadn't. People, too, clearly another species and yet so strangely familiar. Smaller eyes, with only one pupil per eye... Different skin, blunter teeth that permanently stayed white, hard flat coverings on the tips of their fingers and toes...

But she could swear she'd seen them before.

Cooperating with those people, wonderful things were possible. Beautiful inventions, timeless creations. Lillie saw they had a beautiful princess, hugging some sort of metallic, red and gold creature with long ears. Its body gave the impression of wearing a poofy dress of some kind, and its head gave the impression of it wearing a gear-like headband. They built a grand, beautiful looking altar too, able to concentrate so much energy from the heavens that Lillie could hardly believe it.

Two wondrous flutes were its keys.

There was a strange, massive creature of black and green, too. It was patterned with hexagons, and even able to change forms, or split into countless smaller components...

There were huge ships, taking people through equally massive portals, and the ships were full of so many lights and games and so much delicious looking food that Lillie could scarcely believe it. So many strange creatures and people, all getting along and having a good time together...

Surely, Incardiel thought, it was lovely.

Surely, that must've been worth it.

But time passed.

The greed and malice grew. Necrozma grew weaker and weaker, the more strain was placed upon Him. She tried to take it all back, tried to shoulder the burden with Him, tried to revitalize Him. But it was too little, too late. The Cataclysm befell everyone, man, woman, and child alike.

Incardiel, dear, sweet, lovely Incardiel, defended Her precious children from the wrath of Her
Her defiance enraged them all the more.

At the end of everything, just one city remained.

At the end of everything, Incardiel disappeared. The Sound sank to the bottom of the world, where all prayed that They would not rise to raze the city into a cacophonous oblivion. The Light shattered, sequestered away into a grand tower to try and quell their unending agony and fury. The Lunar Titan and Solar Beast forsook the world, leaving the people to lie cold and afraid in the mess they’d made.

But perhaps, if there was an Incanze good enough, and smart enough, and strong enough… They could call Incardiel back. They could save Her dear father. They could appease Her dear mother. They could win back the favor of the Lunar Titan and the Solar Beast. They could save everyone, and start the world anew.

With that, the story concluded. The little green slab shut off. Mother went silent.

“Mama… another story?” Dulse asked, voice small and sleepy. “The Incanze says they want another.”

“Shh, Dulse. I’ve told you. It’s… Soliera. Just Soliera,” Mother said, her image flickering from the tall, lithe figure she knew to a modestly thicker, more muscular, yet still feminine figure. Her hair was suddenly dark blue, and her skin a bit of a dark powder blue, thoroughly interspersed with darker midnight blues, so much so that it made gracefully marbled swirls across the surface. A long, thick, crystal-studded tail idly swished behind her.

“But you said we can call you Mama when no one else is around,” Lillie said with a small frown.

“Yes, but… I never know who’s listening these days.” Soliera said, her voice changing as well, become a bit huskier.

“But… if the Incanze wants to call you Mama, shouldn’t they be able to?” Dulse asked. “They are the Incanze… Soliera looked around for a moment before speaking. “Okay. Both of you can, just for tonight. But, Dulse, remember… it’s okay to call them Halo,” Soliera said.


“Oh, it’s okay, little star. I know the conditioning is a lot to handle… We’ll keep working on it, alright?” Soliera said. “Halo, always be sure to help your big brother. Don’t treat him like they tell you to. He’s special too, right? Just as special and wonderful as all the other kids, no matter what the mean ones say.”

“Mhm! I love my big brother a whole lot!” Lillie responded, hugging Dulse close.

“But… the Incanze, I mean, Halo-Incanze, should still have a real sibling… not just a slave…” Dulse said quietly.

“Dulse, don’t say that…” Soliera softly chided.
“You gotta do it, Dulse,” Lillie said quietly, shining a dark blue. “‘Cause… ‘cause everyone else is gone. ‘Cause we got hit with some of that bad stuff from Necrozma, ‘cause Necrozma got really mad when the science people tried to help them some more… so that’s how come everyone had a bunch of stuff wrong with them… and how come Daddy, Papa, Mommy and Sasa all call me mean names… ‘cause I came out wrong, even when they tried to fix it.”

“But… I’m just supposed to serve you. I’m not as cool or smart or good as Saccha was…”

“…Saccha was always mean to you anyway. They were just a big bully,” Lillie said, pouting. “And everyone but Mama liked them better…” Lillie continued. “I-I… I still miss Fucus and Codi a lot, though…”

“Shh. I know. But you’re both beautiful, and smart, and very brave and wonderful children… Don’t compare yourselves to them. Because I love you just the same, no matter what the tests and the gene pools say… You’re both going to grow up, and make this place so much different and better together. I just know it. You’re going to make everything warm and pretty again, and we’ll grow lots of yummy food. Aryzma will be done some day, and they’ll help a lot. We’ll have a big festival, with all the real meat you want, and no one will call either of you mean names, or make you do all those mean tests and procedures ever again. And then, we’ll be able to fix Necrozma too. And Aryzma and Necrozma will be friends too! They’ll be a family, just like we are, and help everyone!” Soliera said, with a warm, light-pink smile. Lillie and Dulse alike were comforted by that, as Soliera transferred fantastical imagined scenes of what it’d be like to their minds.

With that, Soliera softly kissed both Lillie and Dulse on the head and tucked them in.

“Goodnight, you two,” Soliera said quietly.

“Goodnight, Mama… goodnight, Dulse… goodnight, Sha…” Lillie said, to a strange container holding a pulsating, spherical, purple egg with a soft outside and a steady cyan glow in its center. It hadn’t been there a moment ago, but she didn’t really question it.

Lillie awoke to Sun bawling his eyes out, the screeching wails strange and inhuman as steam poured from his eyes.

Immediately, she moved to embrace him, with Hau racing up the ladder to the loft to join in soon afterwards. Sun's Pokemon were out before long as well, and Kukui was right behind them.

By the time they were all gathered, a bit awkwardly since the loft wasn’t especially large, Sun was still just as inconsolable, as he kneeled on Lillie’s sofa bed, hugging her tightly.

“Another nightmare?” Kukui asked, frowning.

“It… wasn’t a nightmare this time. It was more of a memory. A big one. It was a little bit mine, but mostly his. Overall, the memory itself was good, but… there were a lot of layers to it, and a lot of things it brought up more indirectly… He’s having trouble processing it.” Lillie explained.

“Codi… Fucus…” Sun whimpered in misery.

“Who-” Kukui started.
“Siblings,” Lillie said softly. She didn’t need to say anything further. The pure, all-consuming misery radiating off of Sun was enough to reveal that it was much more than a matter of simply missing them.

“Saccha…”

Hau tentatively reached out with his mind and heart, trying to keep himself as calm as possible as he attempted to calm Sun through their connection… But the emotion shooting through him, cutting through him, shredding through him the moment he established stronger contact was almost unbearable, nearly making him want to break down on the spot.

Images flooded his mind at a breakneck pace, unbidden and relentless.

A frail, petite child of the palest, sickliest grey-blue, on the floor, slowly bleeding from their mouth, lengthy seafoam-green hair all askew. It was always such lovely hair. Such a happy color.

Someone, midnight blue with a powerful build and shoulder-length silver hair… lifted the child with telekinesis, their expression blank, holding them away as if they were no better than diseased vermin. It was bound to happen soon, after all. Codi had been promising, but that was the past.

A somewhat older one, cauliflower blue with wild, iridescent hair, locked away in quarantine like some kind of animal, snarling and firing off lasers and hard light shards at the walls, flailing wildly as crystalline machines moved to restrain them, smearing dark blue all over their hard armor… Poor Saccha. Cold, intense, brilliant Saccha...

A towering woman of midnight blue came the closest to tears that Hau had ever seen. A moment of weakness she'd never once show for him, or anyone else...

Another green-haired child, with solid black, unseeing eyes. Bleeding from every orifice in some kind of medical facility, convulsing and screeching incoherently, before midnight blue hands dragged Hau away, kicking and screaming.

The towering woman was hard and unmoved, that time. The Light’s Curse had taken Fucus’ lovely eyes. Blinded, forsaken, essentially untouchable by science and medicine, they were better off dead anyway…

Then there was screaming and snarling and yelling, towering beings hurling accusations at Hau.

Why did he survive? What gave him the right to live? The other children all had higher scores than him. They were better, they were stronger, they deserved to live more. It wasn’t right. Hau wasn’t right. Hau was a disappointment, a disgrace. A spineless, over-sensitive, needy, spoiled little retard whose only redeeming quality was lacking physical deformity. Surviving the Light’s Curse upon the royal children… He didn’t deserve it.

Hau stubbornly maintained a closer link with Sun even as tears began spilling out of his eyes as well, even as he shuddered all over. Sun would not be alone. Sun would not feel alone. Hau swore it.

Slowly, painstakingly, with everyone there, Sun finally managed to calm down. Kukui quietly brought him Pinap berry juice with salt and vinegar, which he gratefully accepted. Lillie rubbed his back in slow, steady circles. Hau had come close and grabbed his hand tightly. His Pokemon nuzzled against him as best they could.
Sun silently thanked everyone, the dark blue of his nodes slowly shifting to soft greens, whites, and cyans.

In the aftermath, everyone did their best to tend to Sun. The challenges against Hala ended up postponed for a week, much to Sun’s dismay. He hadn’t meant to be such an inconvenience to everyone. Even worse was that Hala had an opening for the next day, but everyone insisted on passing that up too. So, they’d all have to spend another week worrying about him instead of fully focusing on their original plans. Great.

It really wasn’t fair.

He’d been doing so well. He’d honestly felt so good, so happy…

And then those memories just had to come and run him through the mud again.

Hau and Lillie spent the whole week reluctant to ever leave Sun’s side. Lillie had a bit more experience with Sun’s bad dreams and flashbacks, and harsh lapses in Sun’s mood, but it was especially disconcerting for Hau. Beyond a couple of glasses of juice, Sun didn’t even actually eat for the entire first day after his dream. Hau and Lillie had to silently plead with him to do so on the second.

Sun didn’t reject Hau’s attention, but Hau could palpably feel the difference in their interaction. Sun was usually silent yet loud, warm and excitable. But he’d become quiet, genuinely quiet, and more withdrawn. Hau could tell he didn’t want Hau to talk as much either. Hau could usually still quietly cuddle with him just fine, but Sun didn’t want lots of kisses anymore. He didn’t flirt and tease, and he didn’t light up as brightly as before either.

Sun barely slept for the first couple of nights, seeming outright afraid to try. He didn’t want to remember anything else. He didn’t want to relive something that did nothing but hurt him.

Hau and Lillie would softly talk to him, stroking his hair, humming to him, until he finally went to sleep. He would still spend the next day obviously worn out, quiet, drifting off at random, but it was better than nothing.

Things got better from the third day onwards. Sun was still sleeping more fitfully, but at least he slept longer. The group went to the beach, Ten Carat Hill, any place in general that seemed quiet and relaxing. On the fourth day, Hau visited home again with Sun and Lillie.

Konani managed to piece together the shift in Hau and Sun’s relationship in about ten minutes. In retrospect, Hau couldn’t say he was that surprised, given that he and Sun were sitting really close together on the couch… and then Sun nuzzled up against him in a way that usually meant he wanted Hau’s arm around his shoulders, so Hau just did it without really thinking about it… and then Konani brought out homemade malasadas, and Sun didn’t need his disguise around Konani, so when he tenderly wiped a bit of stray malasada off the corner of Hau’s mouth, and then lingered and stared for a moment, Hau supposed the combined expression and light configuration Sun had been sporting really did make it incredibly obvious that his desire to kiss Hau was quickly returning.

Past the initial congratulations, Konani immediately set about teasing Hau about it, while in the same breath being perfectly polite to both Sun and Lillie, cheerily asking them how their Pokemon were getting on and complimenting them on their outfits.

Still, her little jokes and mannerisms did manage to make Sun genuinely laugh, so Hau was quietly
grateful for that, even if he outwardly whined as she made quips about how she’d bet Kukui they’d be together by the time they fought Hala, or how she’d always known Sun could never resist such a handsome boy.

Lillie was just quietly fascinated by how easily Konani could pull the jokes off without genuine irritation on Hau’s part. There was usually a pretty obvious difference between light-heartedly annoyed Hau and genuinely upset Hau. But regardless, even in jest, Konani seemed to know just how to avoid crossing any actual lines with Hau. If anything, many of the jokes actually seemed to be based in his good qualities to begin with.

A far cry from the time Mother finally bought Lillie skinny jeans, since Lillie had been curious, but promptly began making “lighthearted” remarks about her “Bellsprout legs” until she didn’t even want to wear them anymore, figuring it was proof that Mother was right to decide her outfits...

After a while, the group went into Hau’s room and played Smash Brothers, which Lillie already seemed surprisingly at least somewhat familiar with, stating that she used to play Brawl with her brother sometimes, even if they usually hadn’t been allowed to play video games for particularly long each day. Hau and Sun sat closely on the Togedemaru beanbag, while Lillie opted for the bed.

Hau had already made sure to tell Konani to make it a bit warmer in the house… and for good measure, he immediately gave Sun blankets and cuddled up closely to him as they played, silently insisting that Sun immediately tell him if the game was bothering him at all.

Hau chose Incineroar, while Sun chose Kirby, and Lillie chose… Olimar, which Hau hadn’t really expected. He also hadn’t expected that Lillie would actually win a couple of times, once she got back into the swing of things. Oh well, at least he’d never claimed to be especially good at the game or anyth-

“So, Hau, what happened to you being the ‘Smash Bros Champ of Iki Town’?” Lillie asked with a small smirk.

Oh, crap. Yeah, he did just kinda offhandedly say that at one point, didn’t he?

Stupid brain, always falling over itself to impress Sun…

“Well, you know, I said that for your benefit! To scare you into playing better!” Hau meekly claimed.

“Well, I’m sure you’re just a bit rusty,” Lillie said with a giggle. “Even if I should be just as rusty, by that logic…”

“Yeah, well, once I pull out my main man Sonic, you’ll see!” Hau responded.

...Aaaand, Lillie still won. With Yoshi. Damnit, how was Hau supposed to know she was good at Yoshi too?!

Hau had helpfully told Sun that Kirby was a good beginner character, but Sun largely seemed drawn to him anyway, due to the fact that he seemed cute and friendly, and had a star motif going.

There was also a round where Sun tried out Fox, apparently entirely because he was from a series named “Star Fox”.
Hau was barely even surprised when Sun moved on to Rosalina and Luma after that, although the character seemed rather tricky for him.

Sun largely never won a round, insisting that the others not go easy on him, but he notably kept doing better each time, until he managed to scrape by a couple of times towards the end. As always, Sun was an impressively quick learner. That, and the fact that he had really good reflexes.

After how he’d been a few days earlier, the sound of Sun’s genuine laughter and mirth made Hau and Lillie feel warmer and fuzzier than winning the game ever could. Not to mention, how glad he was that the game wasn’t accidentally triggering Sun, like what’d happened with Mario Kart. Hau rewarded him with a kiss, which Sun enthusiastically returned, pulling Hau close. Both of them ended up forgetting about the game for at least a solid two minutes.

Lillie didn’t even particularly mind the display of pure mush going on next to her, coloring at least a third of the room with pink light, she was just glad to note that Sun’s more aggressively affectionate behavior had returned.

Besides purely focusing on Sun’s recovery, the extra week also offered up more training time, which everyone took full advantage of. Sun seemed to insist on continuing every day, trying his best to prove himself after his lapse in mental health… even though the others insisted he could take his time if he wanted. After all, it still seemed to be implicitly off limits to discuss his memories in too much further detail. The more he talked about it, the more he’d remember, so the logic seemed to go... and neither could really fault him for not wanting to have to remember even more of a situation like that.

Eventually, the new date of the battle came, and Sun successfully managed to get through a night of sleep without incident.

Konani insisted on the three teens coming back to her house for breakfast, where she prepared a massive spread for everyone, with the help of an egg from Blissey, some honey from C.C, and various high-quality berries from the market. To be fair, Z-Moves and high levels of Field-sync were both taxing on the metabolism, but Lillie could hardly believe how much there was, especially since Konani had made it herself. She’d even gone out of her way to prepare things Sun would like too. Meanwhile, Lillie's own mother didn’t even cook, and she’d never have the chefs make such sprawling portions if there wasn’t a party or gathering of some kind.

Still, it was all absolutely delicious. Between that and Konani’s repeated insistence that they all ate their fill, even Lillie ended up more full than she’d been in ages. But in spite of that, she didn't feel sick and sluggish like she'd feared. The various special ingredients actually made her feel surprisingly energized and content... although Konani just smirked and said it was a “secret” when Lillie asked about the details of her recipes.

Meanwhile, the Pokemon all received a breakfast of fresh foods and quality patterned Pokebeans, to motivate and energize them all as much as possible, to various results.

Lillie’s team was practically bouncing off the walls in anticipation, seeming more than ready. For the most part, Hau’s was the same way, although Noibat required extra reassurance from Hau that things would turn out alright. Blissey worriedly hugged her Trainer close, wanting to do her best but simultaneously very wary of the type disadvantage Hau had told her about.

Sha was just as excited as Lillie’s Pokemon, C.C. seemed to be actively trying his best to steel his
nerves, and Zorua was rather quiet and sulky, as Sun had told her she wouldn’t be wouldn’t be participating unless it was an emergency. Rhovera seemed to be the most calm about it by far.

The group briefly contemplated whether the person with the most eager team or the person who actually felt the most eager themself should go first when they went to meet with Hala… Eventually, they decided on the latter.

Knowing that both Hau and Lillie still had a few reservations, each for their own reasons, Sun insisted on going first.

He’d spent the whole extra week thinking everything over carefully, often fervently studying Rotomdex’s articles on Fighting-type Pokemon when he couldn’t sleep well. He’d held his friends up and allowed their anxiety to quietly build further as they had to think about both his own well-being and their upcoming battle, so he figured he needed to make it up to them. If he battled as well as he possibly could, using everything he’d learned and everything he’d been told, then hopefully he could do so well it would inspire them to be more confident in their own battles. After all, he was highly familiar with the concept of being told to lead by example.

So, the group set out with Kukui to visit Hala. Sun sort of wished Professor Burnet could come see too, but she was still busy over on Akala Island.

They came to the same wooden arena as the place where Hau and Sun had fought before, but there was a much larger crowd than before, and there’d even been bleachers set up. Apparently, hearing there were three challengers in a row, and one of them was Kukui’s grandson, was enough to attract people from neighboring areas as well as most of Iki Town itself.

Lillie couldn’t help but tremble slightly, taking it all in. Definitely more people than she’d thought…

Sun silently did his best to soothe her, a calming presence at the back of her mind.

Introductions went by in a flash, as did all the preamble of the battle. Hala’s four Pokemon vs. however many the opponent had. Substitutions allowed. Sun went first, after double-checking to make sure his current outfit and disguise held up. A lavender sundress, and a matching flower in his hair, along with his typical star earrings and the star marking on his cheek. He especially wanted to make sure because his tail had reached a solid foot and a half long, and he needed to be sure it was well hidden beneath the dress, and make sure the illusion accommodated any accidental swishing or flicking on the tail’s part. It was largely under his conscious control, but it also responded to emotion. Hala announced his name with aplomb.

Hau, Lillie, and Kukui watched intently, receiving front row seats.

A Medicham, Tier 4 at least, set up a powerful protective barrier around the arena that quickly went almost completely invisible, although it was still fully permeable to sound and Pokeball beams.

Sun sent out Sha, relatively confident that it was a good choice. Resistant to Fighting-type moves, strong, reliable…

So, of course, Hala just had to follow by sending out a Lucario, of all things. Immune to Poison, not weak to Fairy, Flying, or Psychic. And it technically wasn’t that unfair of a choice on Hala’s part, considering that evolving a Riolu had little to do with its Field intensity. Still, it was probably the best possible way Hala could immediately let them all know that things wouldn’t be as simple as they thought.
Sun had to think fast. Rhovera was probably the best option, but then again, Hala obviously knew he had Rhovera, given that he was the one who gave her to Sun. It felt too much like a trap.

In just that brief space of Sun’s thoughts, Hala had already ordered a Bone Rush, and Lucario immediately lunged, manifesting a glowing bone-like staff from various extra metals and minerals within itself. Sha tried to dodge, but Lucario was remarkably swift, leaping up and soundly smacking them down to the arena’s floor as they tried to ascend, then sweeping the bone staff with great force and sending Sha flying several meters to the side. The only upside of the painful assault was that Sha managed to right themself in midair, and being sent flying so far enabled them to easily dodge any further hits.

Sun immediately commanded highly adhesive poison, realizing that even if Lucario was immune to the damage, he could at least slow them down. Sha obediently fired off a rapid-fire flurry of adhesive shots, splattering against the floor of the arena even as Lucario weaved between them with ease. But Sun had expected as much. They were faster than Sha, but at the same time, being given increasingly less room to move. And although Sha’s rapid-fire projectiles were individually small, they didn’t give Lucario much time to think or process at all.

So, with that, Lucario eventually made a mistake. On Sun’s command, Sha suddenly fired off a larger, thicker burst designed to splatter messily… Lucario jumped to avoid, but too high, high enough for Sha to immediately nail them in midair; where their trajectory was relatively easy to predict.

The force of impact was enough to mess up Lucario’s landing, causing them to get a paw stuck to the floor, covered in a mess of stringy, goopy purple.

Sha didn’t waste time in continuing the glue assault, thoroughly coating Lucario… but Hala just grinned, apparently having further tricks up his sleeve.

“Blast it off with Psychic!” Hala called. Lucario’s eyes immediately began to glow a chilling, ominous blue as their entire body flared with a similar aura. With that, psychic energy began blasting out of them in truly impressive amounts, rapidly scattering much of the toxic glue over the battlefield and even blasting Lucario’s paws and feet free of all the mess on the floor. Sha was forced back by the sheer energy as well, but given that it was omnidirectional and unfocused, Sha did at least take significantly less damage.

Sun grimaced, but still commanded a Drill Peck as soon as he saw the psychic energy fading, figuring that the exertion of a move like that would create a solid opening. Fortunately, as Sha shot forward, spinning like a top, Sun proved correct. Sha soundly struck Lucario in the stomach with their primary nozzle, powerfully concentrated winds tearing away at fur and abrading skin as Lucario grunted in pain. Sha then darted away as Lucario made to swipe at them, but the damage was already done… even if it wasn’t as much as Sun was hoping.

Sun belatedly wished he’d tried to see if Sha could do Drill Run rather than only Drill Peck, but he supposed he’d have to be satisfied with what he had.

Immediately afterwards, Lucario was surging forward with another Bone Rush, but Sun quickly had Sha fire off a spurt of glue right into their eyes, causing them to just grunt in alarm, wildly swinging at the air. It wouldn’t work for long, given that Lucario would just focus immediately on using Aura as soon as the initial shock wore off, but Sun knew it gave him at least a moment to set up his next plan.
He had Sha rapidly coat themself in a thick, frothy, elastic goop of toxins and adhesives, formulated to rapidly stiffen just enough that it became something like a purplish foam rubber.

Lucario angrily turned on their heels and smashed the bone staff into Sha with everything they had… Only for Sha to go rolling a few feet backwards through the air, then easily right themself, looking far less bothered by the impact than before.

Hala notably flinched a bit, and many in the crowd gasped as Lucario came forward and made to batter Sha with the staff three more times, never holding back in the slightest. Still, Sha immediately prepared Iron Tail, parrying effectively enough that only one hit fully connected,

Sha responded less with pain and more just with launching a well-timed Drill Peck straight into the underside of Lucario’s jaw. The crowd flinched in sympathy as the sheer force sent Lucario flying in a backwards arc, all the way to the other side of the stage. The creature dropped like a ragdoll before doing a quick roll and pushing themself to their feet. They hissed in pain as some blood dripped from their mouth, and stringy toxic goop from the floor clung to them. Sun silently apologized for the rough treatment, but he knew he wasn’t there for a soft fight. Hala wanted them all to fight like they meant it.

Hala ordered a Psychic next, apparently figuring he had to start keeping Lucario away from those nasty Drill Pecks, even if they weren’t super effective. Still, Sha’s impropmtu armor was multipurpose, so airy that it allowed Sha the freedom of movement to easily dodge some of the psychic bursts while easily tanking the remainder. Quickly, Hala saw he needed another approach. And so, within moments, he found one.

“Psychic Rush!” Hala called with passion. Lucario gave a grunt of effort as they suddenly threw out a bone staff and then focused on it with their eyes glowing a harsh blue. With speed so fast it left light blue streaks of energy, the staff began wildly swinging at Sha with the power of Lucario’s mind, rather than their muscle.

Sha dodged frantically, blocking with Iron Tail now and then, and Sun started to feel a bit fearful again, seeing that the move had aspects of both a Ground and Psychic move at once.

Sun did his best to focus in deeply on his bond with Sha, willing him to keep on dodging, contributing his own focus and attention wholeheartedly to the quick mental processes needed to pull it off. Ducks, rolls, twirls, lunges, frantic twists and dives...

Until finally, with a sting that Sun felt personally, the staff soundly bludgeoned Sha right in the back, so hard that it sent them flying towards Lucario with great speed… But Sun commanded Sha regardless, his conviction firm.

Sha used the momentum to lapse straight into another Drill Peck, Lucario having been so focused on the mere act of hitting them that they couldn’t react in time.

Another brutal hit to the stomach, where they’d already been struck hard once before, the skin and muscle already weakened and bruised.

Lucario crumpled to their knees after that strike, gasping for breath as Sha rocketed away, but the little Poipole was clearly getting rather tired themself.

Still, Sun followed up immediately with an order for another, knowing there was no time to lose.
Hala barked out a command. Counter.

Sha nailed Lucario soundly in the shoulder, as Lucario became wreathed in reddish energy, drawing in the AWE of the attack and focusing it to a single point, then building it even further in their fist.

Sun read the attack, read the movement of the Field with practiced speed and grace.

Sha evaded the almost invisibly fast strike of Lucario’s fist by the skin of their teeth, although it was so ferociously powerful and imbued with so much of Drill Peck’s energy that it created a powerful straight-line wind that still pushed Sha backwards a few meters.

But with that last strike, Lucario fell to the floor, defeated.

Sha cackled in victory as they claimed Lucario’s stray AWE for their own, their own body lighting up with a vigorous blue aura in response.

The cyan glow in their eyes intensified as they leered at Hala.

Got any more Steel-types, friend?

Meanwhile, the crowd was going wild. Sun felt his hearts briefly go out of rhythm when he distinctly heard Hau, cheering louder than just about anyone.

Hala was stalwart as he returned Lucario, betraying almost no emotion beyond a brief twitch of his hand when he chose his next Pokemon.

There were no more Steel-types…

Hala sent out his Hariyama, immediately ordering a Fake Out.

Hariyama, with illogical speed, charged up to Sha and clapped with booming force, creating a shockwave that barely did any damage but did make Sha briefly cringe.

Sun ordered a Toxic, knowing the combo he definitely needed to pull Sha through a fight against such a bulky adversary.

Despite the harsh flinch, Sha managed to douse Hariyama in a relentless torrent of stinging, burning fluid, making Hariyama gag as it dribbled all over the floor of the battlefield as well… but in turn…

“Whirlwind!” Hala had sternly called. Hariyama, even with the burning pain of Toxic starting, managed to pull it off, blowing Sha away by simply swinging its hands and arms with such force they acted like massive fans.

Along with the effect of merely being physically blown away, Whirlwind also had a curious effect of ‘blowing away’ and heavily disrupting the foe’s Field, which was mostly harmless, but made the enemy feel so vulnerable and disoriented that they would instinctively retreat.

With that, in spite of Sun’s best efforts to encourage Sha to resist, Sha disappeared back into their ball with a cry of alarm.

Sun briefly whined in annoyance, but sent out C.C. regardless.
The entire crowd, especially anyone with a weakness for cute Pokemon, immediately began fawning and murmuring in excitement at the sight of a Shiny Pokemon. C.C. seemed a little… embarrassed, if anything, flying lower to the floor and trying not to look particularly noticeable.

Still, Sun ordered a Dazzling Gleam right away, and C.C. delivered in a literal flash. A disproportionately strong burst of beautifully deadly light began to instantaneously sear Hariyama’s skin even more than Toxic already was, causing him to grunt in distress, holding up his massive hands to try and block it out.

Hala commanded a Whirlwind again, but as Hariyama moved his arms in massive, whooshing sweeps, Sun noticed it was different. Hariyama didn’t force C.C. to switch, but the incredible force of the wind did force his light, fragile body to go essentially wherever Hariyama pleased.

Thinking quickly, Sun commanded a Silver Wind to counteract it, just as Hariyama began summoning forth stone out of nothing but sheer spirit and Whirlwind-gathered dust, compacted and magnified vastly in mass and volume as AWE poured into it, working its magic.

C.C. very nearly got forcibly smashed against a flying boulder, managing to blow himself off course at the last moment, then lashing the irritating powder-laced wind towards Hariyama as well, dealing a bit of damage and further stinging the stalwart giant’s skin.

Already, Hariyama was looking tired, wincing in pain, while C.C. just looked a bit ruffled from all the blowing about.

Hala went for Rock Tomb, hoping to trap his and Hariyama’s tiny foe, but C.C. evaded the tired Hariyama’s attack with relative ease, the attack’s sheer force partially crushing some of the wooden stage instead.

In the crowd, Lillie sighed in relief, but also idly wondered how much that happened, and who exactly had it fixed each time.

Unlike what Hala originally expected, Sun returned C.C… and once again, out came Sha.

Hala winced, sweating slightly, feeling a phantom burn escalating on his skin as he tried to will Hariyama further, the great creature panting heavily. There was a valiant effort to go for a Knock Off, but Hariyama’s massive hand cloaked in shadow was easily enough for Sha to slip out of the way of.

One Drill Peck to Hariyama’s chest didn’t bring it down, as Hala began to sweat more, his own Field stubbornly pushing Hariyama forwards, synced into it with surprising depth for a Pokemon that wasn’t even on his main team…

But Sha fired off a Venoshock, as Sun quietly apologized, and nothing in the world could’ve prepared Hala and Hariyama for the searing hell that was, as a gout of steaming violet fluid splattered against Hariyama’s entire upper torso. The main consolation was that it only lasted a couple of seconds, before Hariyama collapsed into unconsciousness.

Once again, Sha surged with cyan aura, and Sun could dimly feel what Sha felt, the invigorating sensation of raw power pulsing through every cell.

Hala returned Hariyama quickly, giving them a brief, quiet word of thanks before sending out
Heracross. The massive blue beetle was surprisingly quick, dashing forward and completing an Aerial Ace of incredible force before Hala could even finish the order… Wind-cloaked claws assaulted Sha, but they reflexively used Iron Tail, clashing harshly with Heracross's claws blow-for-blow.

Heracross was swift and relentless, movements flowing with uncanny grace, and it took everything Sha had to adjust their levitation to balance out the force of each Aerial Ace strike, even if they were blocking it with Iron Tail. Sun briefly thought to return them and fight on with another team member… But he could feel Sha’s presence, their consciousness, fighting so hard, refusing to give up…

And so, Sun watched carefully, waiting for just the right moment. There was a pattern to Heracross’s strikes, a methodical sort of thing even in what seemed like fast-paced chaos. When Sun saw just the briefest lapse, he instantly had Sha move to briefly blind them. Heracross cried out in shock as the neutral blue goop splattered against their eyes, more taken off guard than hurt... But when Sha smashed against the hard exoskeleton of Heracross with an Iron Tail, that definitely hurt. They went reeling backwards, creating yet another opening even as Hala tried to speed up their reaction time. But Sun was faster. The bond Hala had with a secondary team member was one thing, but it couldn't really compare to what Sun and Sha had. Hala knew that was how things often were. It was often enough to become the prime difference between victory and defeat for his challengers.

The ensuing Drill Peck into Heracross’ thorax ended the tough-shelled creature’s run quickly, as Hala couldn’t overcome the pain of Iron Tail quickly enough to help them through the incredibly effective move.

Along with the rest of the crowd, Hau cheered with all his might, chanting ‘One more!’, along with Kukui, and even Lillie joined in. Although she was notably the hardest to physically hear, her supportive presence in Sun’s mind was undeniable.

In that moment, Sun felt like anything was possible.

Sha’s cyan aura built brighter, denser, more menacing, the adrenaline and power dancing through their veins and allowing them to more easily shrug off the pain and heavy exertion they'd endured.

Hala realized with a start that he was down to his last Pokemon, and all of Sun’s were still conscious.

“Passimian! This is our last chance! Make it count, my friend!” Hala called, as he sent out his final Pokemon, a black and white lemur-like creature that was taller and more muscled than most men.

The Passimian gave an intimidating, screeching cry, but Sha had a Toxic fired off faster than Hala could believe, causing Passimian to give a howl of discomfort as they were hit with a rush of searing, steaming slime, with the added difficulty of the Toxic being highly adhesive.

He’d honestly expected Passimian to be faster…

But then again, Sun had been training well. That much was obvious. Sha seemed to have become much more optimized towards speed, since the battle with Hau, Rowlet, and Pichu. Sha dashed in with Drill Peck, roughly forcing Passimian to the floor and then firing off even more adhesive, which pinned the lemur completely.

Hala shouted out for Passimian to use a combination of Bulk Up and Thrash, hoping the powerful
combo would be enough to break Passimian free and finally put an end to Sha’s reign of terror.

Unfortunately for him, Sun and Sha both looked ready to end it. Hala could feel it. It was a lesson Sun seemed to have learned well. Being too soft did nothing but give your opponent more chances to attack.

The ensuing Venoshock came with such searing fury it may as well have been a volcanic eruption, and with such speed and pressure Passimian couldn't possibly react in time. Behind Sha, Sun’s eyes glowed a deep, impressive gold, brimming with power that Hala could barely believe.

Hala realized he’d never even gotten a chance to pull off a Z-Move as Passimian just wetly collapsed to the arena floor.

That was that, then. Four Pokemon down.

Hala still congratulated Passimian on trying their best as he returned them.

The crowd was quiet for just a brief moment, almost as if they couldn't believe it was over already, having never seen any of Sun's Pokemon faint. People were still recording and taking pictures on various mobile devices and cameras.

Still, once the reality hit, the crowd practically lost their minds. A mysterious psychic girl with a strange Pokemon, crushing Hala's team without losing any team members at all? The drama and buzz practically created itself.

Sha tiredly half-flew and half-crashed into Sun's arms, and Sun held them close, silently lavishing them with praise. C.C. had done excellently too, and he made sure to transfer those sentiments to him as he rested within his ball.

He called out silently to Hala as well, wanting him to know he'd done a great job himself. Sun had managed to pull off what he'd wanted to do, what he’d wanted to show his friends, but it really hadn't been easy.

Hala just grinned widely, coming to a better understanding of what exactly had allowed Sun and his Pokemon to battle so well.

He'd found a way to make it a battle not for only his sake, but their sake as well.

Hala congratulated Sun, and Sun stepped down from the arena, quickly going over to

“Sun, holy crap, you and Sha were so awesome up there!” Hau cried, following it up immediately with a massive bear hug, which Sha reflexively moved out of the way of, not wanting to get caught in between after all the fighting they'd just done. They might seriously faint after something like that. Sun enthusiastically returned the hug with full force, giggling all the while.

It seemed platonic enough, but after all the excitement generated by Sun's victory, people couldn't help but immediately start to get That sort of idea in their heads… especially since some people had already been there when they fought at the festival, adding fuel to the juicy new rumor that perhaps something else could've happened to their relationship since then.

Sun pulled away and stealthily put up a quick, subtle illusion, only cluing Hau into it. Hau became a bit flustered as Sun also quickly told him why there was an illusion at all. Not that he was complaining, though. Everyone saw what was apparently just Hau and Sun standing and idly chattering for a moment longer. What actually happened was mostly that… but with the addition of
a quick kiss, followed by a tenderly whispered “Good luck, Hau,” in Hau's ear.

Hau was lucky the illusion hid how flustered he was in that moment too, or else everyone would see him blushing and grinning like the biggest idiot in Alola.

Sun wasn't exactly unaffected himself, but still. He figured Hau could use all the motivation he could get.

Sun followed it up by hugging Lillie as well, but more with the aim to simply comfort her, reflected by its gentler nature in comparison to Hau.

Still, with the hug being a little shorter, Lillie being basically unknown, and with Sun striking most people present as a girl, it had nowhere near the same impact on the crowd's rumor formulation.

There was a small intermission for Hala to heal his team, swap the order around, and get the stage patched… Hau used it to talk over some last minute strategy with his team, synchronizing with them through their Pokeballs to avoid giving anything away. He’d seen Hala’s team, and he’d said he was only switching the order and not the lineup… But that didn’t change the fact that they undoubtedly had more moves than what the battle with Sun had displayed.

Meanwhile, with people having little else to do but talk and use their devices, a torrid slurry of fact and speculation was propagating through various websites at an astounding pace, along with videos and pictures.

A mysterious silent girl, known only as “Sun”. At least, her Pokemon were adorable, and she was in cute clothes with cute star tattoo on her cheek, and a lavender flower in her strangely iridescent hair, so everyone generally believed her to be a girl. There were people who were uncertain, but either way, the main points still stood. She’d seemed cute, in a mild, unassuming sort way. Just a tad bit chubby, a soft face, a gentle smile...

And then she’d gone and annihilated Hala without losing any Pokemon. And she was psychic to boot.

No one even knew where she was from. Was she related to Kukui? Some people who’d already seen Sun claimed she was. Her skin was the same shade. She looked a bit similar. She’d interacted with him. Did Professor Kukui really have a psychic relative? There was only a 1 in 20,000 chance of being psychic… What was it she could do, exactly? What’d been up with the way her eyes glowed? How was she so close with the Kahuna’s grandson, too? What was their relationship?

But all of that went essentially unnoticed by Sun and Hau, everyone careful not to make their speculations too loud or noticeable.

Soon, Hau was up on the arena instead of Sun. Hala smiled warmly at him. Somewhere in the crowd, Hau heard his mother.

“Remember, Hau. I want this to be real. I want you to go all-out. But at the same time, please do enjoy yourself,” Hala said.

“I will,” Hau said, in spite of the fact that his heart was already pounding at a mile per minute, from a mixture of both excitement and mild terror.

That time, Hala started right off with Passimian, who looked hungry for a proper victory after being
so soundly trounced by Sha.

Hau started right off with Dartrix, figuring that he’d take a page from Sun’s book and lead right off with his first Pokemon.

“Steel Ace!” Hau called.

“Bulk Up!” Hala called, almost simultaneously.

Passimian, with great haste, suddenly became wreathed in reddish aura, muscles bulging and tensing just as Dartrix slammed into his powerful chest and slashed with razor-sharp wings. The reinforcement of Steel Wing allowed Dartrix to do a bit more damage, but overall, the effects of Passimian’s Bulk Up had allowed it to shrug off quite a lot regardless.

“Smack Down!” Hala called, allowing Passimian to put their killer throwing arm to good use.

Dartrix darted away as best they could, and Hau had him ready Steel Wing to help endure the blows he couldn’t avoid. Still, Passimian manifested not just one boulder, but several, all levitating within his Field as he deftly grabbed one and threw it with utterly preposterous force.

The boulder whistled through the air with dead-on accuracy, and even with Dartrix’s best effort to block it, it caught his wing in such a way that he went harshly tumbling to the ground. Hau called out worriedly, but Dartrix took to the air again with a croon of effort. Hala looked on with interest. So, they didn’t fully block it, but they did manage to avoid Smack Down’s special effect? Intriguing.

Still, Passimian had more ammunition, stones and boulders fluidly floating to its hand as it slung each one with speeds that would be the envy of all baseball players. Dartrix stood their ground as Hau commanded Steel Ace, hoping it could have the desired effect. Luckily, it did.

Standing his ground, Dartrix had significantly more leverage, using Steel Ace’s combination of speed, power and durability to slice and shatter every stone as it came. Fortunately, the AWE-generated boulders had plenty of structural flaws, and were still rather lacking in hardness.

Dartrix survived the onslaught with relative ease, the crowd looking on in delight as Dartrix then took advantage of Passimian briefly running out of ammo to return fire with a flurry of hardened, wind-empowered quills, causing Passimian to grunt in pain as they did their best to take the returned fire.

“Acrobatics!” Hala called, and Hau cringed, having honestly not expected that. Hala didn’t use Passimian that often. But Hau figured he probably should’ve guessed anyway, given that the swift, graceful, freestyle movement of the attack not only made Passimian harder to hit, but Hala obviously must’ve had to fight off plenty of Cutiefly, Butterfree, Hawlucha… and Dartrix.

In spite of Passimian’s pain, the large primate lunged with unreal speed, flipping and twirling towards Dartrix in complex and difficult patterns, as Hau tried to have Dartrix counter with a Grass Pledge.

With a loud hoot, a whirling storm of leaves manifested from Dartrix, much more potent than the mere Leafage he’d began with.
Passimian was caught up in it, but with determination, Hala’s support, and their massive physical strength, they powered through, even as Hau put everything his Field had into trying to help Dartrix make the best Grass Pledge possible.

Of course, that left Dartrix wide open for Acrobatics, unable to get out of the way in time.

Hau felt dull pain blossom throughout his own body as he cried out for Dartrix, in the process of Passimian mercilessly battering and ramming them with such speed they were nearly a blur… But as Passimian tossed Dartrix up like a ragdoll and then gave him a literal tornado uppercut form beneath, Hau knew it was over. His connection slackened instantly, his body unable to cope with the sudden shock of feeling like someone had personally hit him in the stomach too, although not nearly as ferociously. The crowd made various noises of sympathy, while some cheered for Hala.

“Dartrix…” Hau started, his voice small for a moment. “You did really good! Return!” Hau called, as he held out Dartrix’s ball, sucking Dartrix back inside.

Hau could feel Sun in the back of his mind, offering silent comfort.

Hau gave a small smile, and sent out his next Pokemon.

“Noibat, Tailwind!” Hau called. Noibat obeyed immediately, even as Hala responded with another Smack Down.

But Dartrix’s downfall hadn’t been for nothing. After a Grass Pledge that would’ve fainted Passimian without Hala’s help, Passimian couldn’t respond quickly enough to prevent Noibat from establishing a strong gale behind her. Not only was it strong, but the gale had the uncanny ability to flow perfectly with her every move, making her so nimble and swift that Passimian’s Smack Down boulders all whizzed straight past her, wounding the pride of the Pokemon who put so much worth on how well he could throw.

A quick Air Cutter was all it took to finish him off from there.

Hau felt Sun warmly congratulate him, and his confidence picked back up considerably.

Hala once again returned Passimian, and sent out Lucario.

Hau did his best to keep a poker face, but couldn’t help but smirk a bit.

Hau first had Noibat use Agility, building her speed to the point she was nearly a blur, flitting around the arena.

Hala responded by taking the opportunity to have Lucario use Swords Dance, and Hau immediately understood the sort of game they were playing. A ‘one hit and the bat’s fucking toast’ sort of game, to put it bluntly. He was almost certain he wouldn’t be able to do a Field-sync well enough to get Noibat to endure a hit like that. With that, Hau figured he might as well go on and reveal the rest of his hand.

“Heat Wave!” Hau called.

Noibat, bolstered by her own Tailwind, summoned up a burning gale of wind towards Lucario, who took plenty of damage, but clearly not as much as Hau wanted, judging by the way they gave a fitful howl but then just sprinted right out of the attack, looking only a bit singed and irritable.
Hau realized with frustration that if he’d gone ahead and used Z-Tailwind, that huge boost to Noibat’s critical damage chances probably would’ve helped a ton.

Hala commanded a Foresight into Bullet Punch, and Hau just looked on in terror as Lucario immediately locked on, eyes briefly flashing before they then entirely disappeared, only to reappear in a whirlwind blur of blue, socking Noibat into next week even as she tried her very best to dodge as fast as possible.

Noibat dropped like a fly, and Hau returned her with warm praise, although he couldn’t help but feel frustrated. If he’d been able to sync better in that moment instead of getting so surprised, he probably could’ve allowed Noibat to dodge or tank it.

Sun continued to quietly soothe and encourage him in the back of his mind, but there were cheers for Hala still, and murmurs about Hau throughout the crowd.

Hau sent out Pikachu. The Tailwind wasn’t quite done yet.

“Thunder Wave, then Electro Ball!” Hau called. Pikachu fired off a quick jolt, almost missing his nimble foe before he rapidly corrected with another, nailing Lucario soundly. Pikachu squeaked and chittered in triumph as he began rapidly charging up an Electro Ball, darting about like mad while Lucario tried to cut him off with Bullet Punch… But just before Tailwind sputtered out, Pikachu nailed Lucario directly in the face with everything he had, Hau focusing his Field on the little Pokemon as best as he possibly could.

Hala focused as well, both he and Hau shutting their eyes with the effort… But after the great flash of light and the pained noises of a harsh electrocution, Pikachu stood triumphant before a lightly twitching Lucario, splayed out on the arena floor in a daze. The crowd was back on Hau’s side in a flash, rather impressed with Pikachu managing to prevail so quickly over something as famously strong as a Lucario.

“Lucario, you did well to get that far! And Hau, good hustle! I like the spirit!” Hala called.

“Thank you,” Hau responded, even if he did feel a little nervous regardless. They were two for two, and Blissey had one hell of a disadvantage. It would still be incredibly easy to lose… and so far, he hadn’t battled anywhere near as beautifully or creatively as Sun…

Still, Hau took a deep breath and did his best not to dwell on that.

“Next, Heracross!” Hala shouted, as Hau internally scowled at himself for already burning through his two Flying-types. Dartrix probably could’ve completely bodied Heracross.

“Pikachu, Thunder Wave!” Hau called. Pikachu didn’t have a Flying-type move… but his movepool was quite scummy, regardless. Once again, Thunder Wave landed before Heracross got much of a say in it, causing Heracross to chitter in discomfort as they tried to resist the mounting numbness in their muscles.

“Brick Break!” Hala called. Heracross charged forth with a battle cry, but much slower than usual. Pikachu used Double Team in the meantime, causing Heracross to chop with rib-shattering force at a mere illusion. Hau had Pikachu use Double Team again, intensifying the illusion and upping the clones, but Heracross went for Aerial Ace, instantly finding the correct one. Hau sucked in a breath, his heart pounding like mad. He’d briefly forgotten Aerial Ace could just… Just fucking do that.
“Stay sharp, now!” Hala called.

Pikachu rolled to his feet, as Heracross luckily had to take a moment to breathe after forcing themself to move so quickly and suddenly, and Hau was able to get Pikachu to use Sweet Kiss as well, then immediately follow with Nasty Plot as Heracross abruptly rammed themself into the arena floor with a spasming flail, much to the shock of the crowd. Hala just quietly tsked.

Hau just frowned, knowing full well that Pikachu’s main strategy was honestly kind of scummy as all fuck, between paralysis, confusion, _and_ evasion… But Blissey would probably get eaten alive out there, and he had to win _somehow._

After Nasty Plot, Pikachu flung out a nasty Electro Ball, while wreathed in a shadowy sort of power, chittering mischievously.

The attack landed with full force, but unfortunately, wasn’t quite the power Hau was looking for. Heracross withstood it with frightening gusto, and Hau belatedly realized that he’d probably activated Guts in the process of paralyzing Heracross.

Damn.

Heracross and Hala gave a cry of effort as one, and the paralysis suddenly broke, Heracross suddenly seeming far more nimble as they leapt into the air and took flight.

_Double_ damn.

The jig was up when it came to Electro Ball, but Hau still had his Z-Power Ring, and Heracross still looked rather confused, their flight a bit erratic.

“Pikachu, Breakneck Blitz!” Hau called, as he did the pose, and golden light came pouring.

The crowd was in an uproar, although Hau’s light was actually less overpowering than it’d been several weeks prior. More of his Field was successfully converted, and significantly more smoothly than before, resulting in a smoother and softer look to the light as well. Hala just stared in brief wonder, a mixture of pride and awe filling him as Hau shone radiantly on the stage, and people went wild with pictures and video. Even Rotomdex came out, too curious to resist recording.

Sun could definitely see that Hau had significantly more Field energy to give than he used to, to boot… Although the attack was dimmer, even a normal person could see that the transfer was also lasting just a touch longer than usual. Professor Kukui looked on in rapt attention.

Breakneck Blitz exploded out of Pikachu like a great, radiant cannon, blasting Heracross out of the sky like they were a mere cockroach.

Heracross gracelessly careened into the psychic barrier, only for Pikachu to give a cry of pained effort and suddenly blast out _a second and third_ giant golden energy blast, each just as extraordinarily fast as the first two, hammering Heracross like twin comets, and even nearly shattering the barrier, much to the alarm of the Medicham keeping it up. Konani just gaped in silence.

It was incredibly fortunate Heracross was a tough bodied Fighting-type, but even then, they collapsed to the ground, singed and with all sorts of cracks in their shell.
Hau panted, and Hala just stared at him as he returned Heracross. With little further warning, Pikachu collapsed, totally spent even though he’d only been hit by a single Aerial Ace. It was after a Guts boost, sure, but still only one Aerial Ace against an Electric-type… Hadn’t they been training to withstand Z-Moves better, all that time? Hau himself was in no pain at all, just saddled with some moderate fatigue and a thickly beating heart.

Why was granddad looking at him like that?

The crowd’s wild activity calmed down a bit, as Hau just focused on the battle again. “Pikachu, return. That was really cool!” Hau said, as he recalled Pikachu to his ball. He really didn’t want it to come down to Blissey… but, if it had to… He’d at least prepared a few tricks.

Blissey came out with a joyous trill, the crowd murmuring at the appearance of such an uncommon Pokemon, although anyone who knew about Blissey’s typing and didn’t mistake her for a Fairy found themself a bit confused about what exactly Hau was playing at.

Hariyama came out right after, as Hala regained his focus. He supposed he could get to the bottom of what’d just happened with Hau’s Z-Move later. Hau had probably just been feeling exceptionally passionate, was all. It was probably so strong because of Nasty Plot, too. Yes, Hala had to keep that in mind as well...

Hau was just fortunate that Blissey was at least up against the one opponent that likely wasn’t faster than her. Hala’s Hariyama was one of the big ones, after all.

“Brick Break!” Hala called.

“Psychic, defend!” Hau responded.

Hariyama charged forward, baring down on Blissey with his raw, undeniable strength… But as Blissey’s eyes glowed an eerie blue, and Hariyama performed a chop, Hariyama suddenly found that it was as if he was moving his arm through invisible pudding. It was even readily apparent to the audience that the arm suddenly slowed down dramatically just before impact. Blissey was still hit in the side, but she just stood there and took it, eyes still glowing blue. It was absolutely nothing like either Hala or Hariyama were anticipating.

“Charm!” Hau called, as Blissey’s eyes faded back to normal, and she put on a face so unremittingly sweet and kind that all of Hariyama’s muscles slackened, and he briefly paused.

Hala commanded a second Brick Break, but the result was essentially the same as the first. Hariyama’s arm moved at a proper speed, but it lacked the same power and conviction, Blissey giving only a soft whine as the attack landed.

“Sweet Kiss!” Hau called. Blissey casually bounded up and jumped to kiss Hariyama on the cheek, immediately setting his senses into a complete tizzy as Hala tried to order Brick Break, focusing his resolve to try and land a critical strike.

Hariyama complied, doing their best to remain imposing and powerful, but delivered the attack in a haphazard, strangely off-balance sort of way. Blissey once again just summoned up her telekinetic field and slowed Hariyama entirely to a stop, as Hau focused intensely in return. He could almost feel the sheer weight of Hariyama as he silently willed Blissey to extend the attack, going on the offense to engulf Hariyama in her psychic grasp entirely. The effort of supporting her, making sure to help
her focus and contain her Field as much as he possibly could, made him strain nearly as much as her.

But the end result was that Hariyama was, against all expectation, picked up by invisible force, steadily vaulted over Blissey’s head, and then abruptly smashed into the arena floor behind her, once again breaking it in the process. That made two gaping holes on top of what’d already been patched.

Blissey spun around towards Hariyama, gleefully using a Softboiled to restore herself to near-perfect condition. Some of the audience actually laughed at how utterly unbothered she looked, in the face of a titan like Hariyama.

Hariyama rose from the wreckage of the stage. Hala called out “All-Out Pummeling!” and began a familiar set of powerful movements. A wild orange light poured out of him, tendrils of it feeding into Hariyama with urgency. It was incredibly smooth and efficient, the visible aura bright but still clearly more subdued and controlled than Hau’s… The overall waste of energy was by far the least Sun had seen yet. But still, Sun noticed one thing above all…

Overall, Hala actually put out less power than Hau, despite Hala having vastly more practice and experience. From what Sun could tell, Hala’s Z-Ring had taken his AWE just as greedily as Hau’s always did, sucked it in as fast as Hala could churn it out, so it didn’t really seem like that was because he held back. After all, he seemed serious about it being a real fight.

Meanwhile, Hau once again urged Blissey to set up her kinetic dampening field at full power, as Hariyama began firing off massive orange blasts of palm-shaped energy, crashing into Blissey with utterly monumental power, despite everything.

The slightly off-kilter nature of the attack under the influence of Hariyama’s lingering confusion, as well as the effects of Charm, caused it to break up even more of the arena in an incredibly loud, chaotic display of somewhat unwieldy power… But regardless, when the chaos cleared, and when the blasts of detonating energy ended…

Blissey was still there.

Still standing, even after all that.

Hala took just one deep breath, and already seemed to have his stamina back in nearly full force, but Sun could see how his mouth was pressed to a thin line as he took in just how well Blissey had actually taken that. She just turned back to Hau and gave a genuine smile amongst the wreckage of half the stage, being bruised and battered but overall still more than ready to continue.

The crowd seemed just as stunned as Hala.

“Softboiled!” Hau called.

Once again, Blissey restored herself to pretty much perfection, and merely giggled.

Hariyama went for Brick Break, heedless of the stage’s chaotic, messy wood, but Blissey just countered with Hyper Voice, stopping Hariyama dead in his tracks with utterly horrendous sound, as Hala tried to help the behemoth power his way through.

But there was a look in Hau’s eyes, a look that told Hala everything he needed to know, to his simultaneous pride, joy, and frustration.
The battle was already decided.

Hau gave his order, a single simple one out loud, but a specific, complex command through his connection with Blissey. She let off a Psychic as a great, lancing blow of energy, concentrated in such a way that it hit Hariyama in the leg like an invisible spear, causing Hariyama to give a long, low groan of pain as he stubbornly tried to press onward… But as soon as he tried to apply any more weight to that leg, he collapsed, and didn’t move again. Hala returned Hariyama, congratulating him for trying his best, before looking up at Hau with genuine pride in his eyes. The crowd was in an uproar, but none were more excited than Sun and Konani… although Konani had Sun beat by about a lightyear when it came to how loud she was being.

“Ho! Wonderful, wonderful! To think my own grandson has already come so far… It fills an old man’s heart with pride…” Hala said. “Your father issued his first challenge to me much sooner… only to end up taking longer to win, in the end. Meanwhile, you understand the importance of being thorough!” Hala told Hau.

“Thanks,” Hau said, although there was a slight stiffness to it. It should’ve been nice, to be compared favorably to Dad… But it wouldn’t’ve been nice if there was no comparison at all.

The two left the stage and walked around it to hug and talk a bit further, given that it’d been reduced to quite a mess.

Meanwhile, the crowd was circulating more information and speculation at a breakneck pace, cheering and making all kinds of fuss as Hau unknowingly fired up their rumor mill yet again. The battle had been somewhat sloppier than Sun’s, and Hau had lost three Pokemon… But by that same token, it’d also been significantly more suspenseful, and it’d also included Z-Moves. Sun, for whatever reason, didn’t seem to have the ring at all, which only sparked more rumors. Why did such a powerful, mysterious psychic not have one? Did she give hers up? Or was Sun just so confident in herself that she decided she would battle Hala without one, as a show of sheer dominance?

In a shadowy area, off between some nearby buildings, a diminutive creature watched all the excitement in rapt attention. Even the piercing orange-yellow eyes was shrouded, making them nigh-indistinguishable from their darkened surroundings. They’d been watching all along, really. But no one seemed to have noticed. Good, good. Stealth was ke-

Wait. That child. That child, with the star marking and odd hair… were they… were they looking at them? Someone had seen them? How?

The little creature turned directly towards Sun and gave a piercing, distorted warning cry, like if the scream of a child were put through a blender and given an unholy, spine-chilling, rasping undertone to boot.

The crowd looked around in alarm, some trembling slightly. Lillie hid behind Kukui, who covered his ears, and Sun winced, briefly closing his eyes.

When he opened them again, the creature was nowhere to be seen.

Hala just looked blankly at the spot where the sound had originated for a moment.

Sun focused his mind on Hala, trying his best to ‘hear’ him over the chatter of the crowd.
He heard a name, a name thought of with a quiet, hesitating mix of hope and disbelief, denial and slight desperation.

“... *Marshadow*?”  With that, Hala seemed to come to his senses, and went about calming the crowd down instead, assuring them that everything was fine, it’d merely been an ‘unusual Pokemon’.

Sun frowned.  He’d thought he was doing excellently so far, keeping up with all of the planet’s Pokemon in spite of having never heard of any of them before his arrival.

But just what in the world was Marshadow?

Sun promptly moved through the crowd a bit to ask Kukui about it.  Kukui had an odd look on his face the moment Sun brought it up. He motioned for Lillie to listen in too, given that she was still near him.

“First off,” Kukui said, adopting a serious tone.  “Marshadow is an incredibly rare creature, just as powerful as the Tapu, if not moreso.  There are many conflicting stories about what it *is*, or *does*, or *wants*, but we *definitely* know it's strong, and most likely a combination of Ghost and Fighting, which exists nowhere else among known Pokemon.”.

Interesting.  So what did Hala have to do with Marshadow?  He was a Fighting-type Kahuna, so could he capture it?  Were they friends?  Did they know one another?  They had to, with the way Hala reacted, right?

Kukui tensed at that.  “Hala… doesn't like to talk much about things regarding that…”  Kukui said.  “There's a history between the two.  But from what I can tell, it's complicated.  Very.”  Kukui said.

Sun was a little put out by the fact that it seemed abundantly clear that nothing good would come out of trying to ask Hala too, but he was at least grateful for what Kukui did tell him.

Hau came over a moment later, and Sun once again hugged him close, congratulating excitedly on his victory.

“Thanks!  But it still wasn't anything like how you fought…”  Hau said, with a smile just forced enough that Sun felt a sinking feeling in his stomach.  He remembered how Hau had spoken the other night, how he felt like his battle with Hala had to be perfect if he truly wanted to prove he was good enough.

And Hala had said one thing, but Sun could tell Hau still wasn't entirely convinced...

Sun began silently but strongly apologizing, a wave of guilt overtaking him, much to Hau's confusion.

Sun explained further.  His logic, his driving motivation, had been to inspire Hau and Lillie.  “If I can do it, you can do it.”.  “See, there’s nothing to worry about.”.  Things like that.  He’d done it all for them, and his team.  That was how he’d done so well.  That was how he’d steeled his resolve.

He’d never meant to apply more pressure to the situation.  He’d never considered the implication of upstaging Hau in front of so many people...

“This,” Hau said quietly, so close that Sun’s hearts sped up a bit.  “I'm not mad at you just because your battle went better.  That's dumb.  I'm proud of you. I've *always been* proud of you.  I'm just frustrated with myself, more than anything.  I mean, I won, so I should be just fine, right? I have no right to be upset, but at the same time... it's just... I've known my granddad all my life, seen him battle a ton of times... and *still* got three Pokemon fainted.  That's three team members who still had
to go through a bunch of unnecessary suffering and disappointment, when I probably could’ve done better. And if I was struggling so much to beat an opponent I know, what happens when it’s time to handle something I don’t know?” Hau asked, shoulders slumping as he looked down towards the ground.

Sun put a soft, comforting hand on Hau’s face, assuring him it would be fine. They were stronger together. And they’d only continue to get stronger. One battle wasn’t indicative of the whole course of the future… and either way, no matter how Hau’s battles went, Sun wasn’t going to love him any less.

“Thanks, that honestly helps a lot,” Hau said with a short laugh, as his cheeks darkened a little.

In that moment, Hau came forward to briefly kiss Sun on the cheek, not thinking much of it and merely expecting that Sun would just make an illusion again.

Except Sun didn’t, so caught up in the pleasure of Hau kissing him and Hau being successfully comforted that he just kissed back, giggling as he did so.

And of course, despite both kisses being rather quick, tame things, there were quite a few in the crowd who didn’t fail to notice.

The rumor mill promptly shifted into Maximum Overdrive.

The next intermission was a solid hour long, thanks to the state of the battle arena. Apparently, Medicham was also in charge of the repairs, murmuring incomprehensible things as they meditated above the arena, and the wood glowed gently, slowly knitting and piecing itself back together. It was highly fascinating on a technical level, but happening slowly enough that it tended not to keep anyone’s interest for longer than a few moments. There were more fascinating things for everyone to discuss anyway.

Sun and Hau went over strategy with Lillie, sharing what insight they’d gained. Lillie fervently went through her Pokedex for last-minute research, seeing if there were any more insights she could glean from the information.

Hau helpfully brought her some water, figuring it’d help to stay calm and hydrated rather than spend the whole time stressing… Even if it wasn’t quite as oppressively hot outside as it could be, and technically already the middle of winter. Sun had arrived in the midst of spring, well over nine months ago.

Eventually, Lillie’s time came. The stage had been restored to pristine condition, and Medicham had gotten a bit of rest after their handiwork, so they were all ready to put up the barrier again as well.

Lillie took her place as Hala wished her good luck. Lillie returned the favor, trying not to betray her mounting nerves.

Hala sent out Heracross first, and Lillie responded with Salsa. Both Hala and the crowd seemed notably surprised as the little dragon did a graceful twirl upon exiting his Great Ball. Someone who looked as small and meek as Lillie was hardly expected to be packing a Bagon.

Lillie’s first command was quiet, but reached Bagon regardless.
Dragon Gale, combining Twister and Aerial Ace.

Salsa sprang forward and accelerated with unbelievable speed for such a stout creature, a strong wind whipping around him.

Heracross made to counter with Brick Break, but Salsa unexpectedly transitioned into a forward roll at the last moment, causing Heracross to just barely miss the chance to whack him clear across the arena and instead get hit by Salsa coming out of the roll with a brutal wind-powered headbutt, followed by repeatedly and excitedly slashing at Heracross with blades of wind, rapidly twirling and crying out with effort the whole time.

By time Salsa stopped, landing in front of Heracross with incredible poise, the huge bug was just barely standing, and Hala was already sporting a rather strained expression. Lillie immediately took the chance to have Bagon retreat.

“Pin Missile!” Hala called, hoping to punish the decision to retreat. Heracross fired off a barrage of painful glowing needles from their mouth with impressive speed, and it seemed the plan would go off without a hitch.

“Dragon Dance,” Lillie quietly said.

With a cry, Salsa began to passionately and rapidly dance about, generating a reddish aura as he steadily became faster and fiercer in movement… completely avoiding every Pin Missile in the process. The actions of Dragon Dance, combined with an actual passion for dance, made for a surprisingly effective evasive maneuver.

The crowd went wild, cheering at the incredible grace and finesse displayed. Salsa lifted his head and gave a boastful grunt before quickly blasting a brief gout of draconic flames at Heracross just to show off, which was enough to take him out.

Lillie felt a bit sorry for Heracross, not being able to land a single hit… But she was highly pleased with Salsa, unable to keep herself from smiling.

Hala returned Heracross, frowning slightly. He had to admit, he’d completely misjudged the Bagon, and the fight had been so brief he didn’t really have time to rectify it. He was fully expecting him to be a headstrong, risk-taking thing, always facing attacks head-on with his rocky helmet, and it would be up to him to rectify that overly simplistic line of thinking… But under Lillie’s command, the Bagon was swift and evasive, every movement still carefully calculated despite the wild passion and enthusiasm.

Hala sent out Lucario next. Lillie tensed, immediately returning Salsa and going for Euterpe instead. She really didn’t have time to be risking Ice Punch, which was probably significantly more likely than Thunder Punch. Hala was once again rather taken aback. So, the Dragon Dance really was only an evasive maneuver? She wasn’t going to stick with her guns and capitalize on the power boost? He should’ve expected as much. Lillie was a rather cautious sort.

“Aura Sphere!” Hala called. Lillie cringed as Lucario charged the attack and slung it at Eu with incredible speed. Lillie knew that not even Aqua Jet was going to get her out of it, but she at least had Eu attempt Disarming Voice to try and weaken it a bit.

The Disarming Voice struck the Aura Sphere in such a way that it destabilized and detonated just before fully hitting Eu, but the resulting explosion of blue light still did a good chunk of the damage
it should’ve. Eu shook herself off, looking slightly battered and singed but otherwise fine.

“Eu, Sing,” Lillie said, fervently hoping the move actually worked. Sing was notoriously a rather finicky thing.

Eu began a slow, beautiful melody as Hala tried to command, but Lucario was already looking a bit woozy, staggering slightly.

“Water Pledge,” Lillie continued. Before Lucario could fully respond, Eu suddenly spat out a glowing orb of water that shot along the wooden arena floor, then powerfully exploded into a towering geyser, blasting Lucario high into the air before they crashed back down in a wet heap.

Hala winced at that. Lillie kept taking him off guard. Even her style of giving orders was odd. Sun at least still bothered to tell his opponents his commands telepathically, due to his inclination towards fairness, but Lillie’s idea of ‘fair’ evidently didn’t include such things, as there were no rules against what she was doing. She just spoke too quietly for Hala to hear, and let Field-sync do the rest… Moreover, he honestly never would’ve expected that she could already Field-sync with both Pokemon well enough to get away with that in the first place, but he was quite proud regardless. He wasn't about to begrudge a sign of skill and hard work put in.

Then again… with her past, he supposed she had been around a lot of Pokemon already, making it a bit more apparent how she already had such a skill…

“Sing,” Lillie commanded again, as Hala called for another Aura Sphere… but knocking Lucario off their game and getting so much solid damage in had been exactly the missing key that Lillie needed.

Lucario rose to their feet, but Brionne was already in the midst of the song by time they did, and especially by time they started charging the Aura Sphere.

Hala tried to help Lucario resist, but Brionne was already well-practiced, and incredibly persistent. In the battle of wills, Lucario finally folded.

With a second Water Pledge, blasting Lucario with little mercy, Hala just couldn’t keep up. Between trying to will Lucario to wake up and trying to will them to endure a second Water Pledge, it was too tall of an order on such short notice. With that, Lillie claimed victory over a second Pokemon.

The crowd went loud with cheers, as Eu bowed gracefully, thriving off of the attention.

With that, Hala sent in Passimian. Once again, Lillie swapped too. There was a non-zero chance of seeing Seed Bomb, given that the species’ entire schtick was throwing Berries.

“So far, excellently done, Ms. Celeste!” Hala called. “To think such a calculating challenger was right under my nose!”

Lillie went slightly red at that, not exactly expecting such praise, especially with the added impact of so many people watching and hearing it as well. “T-thank you, sir,” Lillie responded, with what was probably the most volume she’d used for the whole battle.

“You’re welcome! But now, we continue our battle! Passimian, Bulk Up!” Hala called.

“Salsa, Dragon Dance,” Lillie quietly requested
Both battlers set up and built power. Lillie was a bit upset that the boost to Passimian's defense was basically going to nullify Salsa's attack boost, but at least he could benefit from the extra speed.

Lillie told Salsa to follow up with Zen Headbutt, combined with another boost from Twister.

Salsa rushed forward, brutally slamming his hard head into Passimian's upheld arms, and Passimian responded with Brick Break, managing only a glancing blow to the side of Salsa's head as Salsa jumped away in a burst of wind and dragon fire. Even so, Salsa lost his footing due to the impact, and it was clear that even the glancing blow still did significant damage. It was only thanks to Dragon Dance that Salsa managed to dash out of the way of Passimian's next merciless swing, and then another, before jumping clear over Passmian and then twisting as soon as he hit the ground to deliver a Zen Headbutt straight into the small of Passimian back, causing the lemur to screech in pain and alarm.

Lillie could tell that neither Passimian or Hala expected that Salsa could jump anywhere near that high.

Hit in such an unexpected and unguarded area, Passimian whirled around but then found themself briefly unable to move, muscles abruptly and painfully locking up. Hala could do little to help as Salsa took the chance to do another Dragon Dance, then seamlessly chain it into one last devastating Zen Headbutt, causing Passimian to shoot backwards as if he weighed hardly anything. Passimian collapsed in a rather uncomfortable looking fashion, and didn't rise again.

Salsa did a victory dance as the crowd cheered yet again, and started rapidly generating buzz about the new, smaller girl as well. Was she going to be like Sun? How crafty she was, able to give such quiet orders!

Hala sent out Hariyama, and once again, Lillie went for Zen Headbutt. Salsa crashed into him, but even after two Dragon Dances, the Hariyama was so utterly solid that there was no way they were going to take him out in one hit.

Hariyama promptly went for Vital Throw, a move that made Salsa's speed basically irrelevant. It was going to go last, so Hariyama could have time to focus, but it was definitely going to happen.

With incredible speed and power, Hariyama kicked Salsa into the air, seized him in a crushing grip, then threw him upwards with great power… Only to follow it up with an Ice Punch as Salsa came down, sending the little dragon flying back to Lillie's side of the arena, and plastering him against Medicham's barrier.

“Salsa!” Lillie cried, before quickly returning him and murmuring quiet praises and apologies to the ball. She briefly thought about what else she could've done, but she really wasn't sure. Vital Throw was really difficult to stop, outside of just defeating the opponent before they could finish.

She sent out Eu next. The plucky Brionne had already taken some damage, but Salsa had at least done a good chunk of damage to Hariyama as well, and it was likely that Hariyama also didn't have Thunder Punch in favor of Ice Punch… but there was still the possibility of both.

Lillie immediately went for Water Pledge again. Hariyama was so large he didn't really have the luxury of trying to dodge the fierce geyser, but also didn't really have to fear being knocked out just then. He was solid. It didn't even knock him over.

Hariyama rushed in for a Brick Break, harshly knocking Eu to the left. Lillie grit her teeth in time with Eu, feeling a dull, distant ache herself. That was the price of learning how to sync better, she supposed. Not only that, but she had to discern when she needed to sync more closely and when it
was okay to slacken it, which took a great deal of planning and prediction in itself. She had Eu attack with another Water Pledge, and even then, Hariyama didn't go down. Hala briefly wheezed, and Hariyama staggered a bit, but Hariyama definitely still had a bit of fight left.

Lillie asked her Brionne to use Sing, knowing it was a bit of a gutsy move, but fortunately, it worked, by the skin of Eu's teeth. Hariyama charged, readying a powerful Brick Break, but at the last moment, the Sing began taking effect, making Hariyama teeter briefly in place as Eu kept the song up, carefully hopping backwards at the same time in case it still didn't work.

Hariyama slowly trudged forward, eyes drooping… Hala called out to him, but he barely seemed to hear, only lethargically raising an arm in one last attempt… But just as soon as he managed that, he collapsed.

Eu wasted little time in disposing of him with her third and final Water Pledge, although even that only managed to very briefly lift Hariyama just a little off the arena as the geyser slammed into his stomach.

Hariyama just let out a low, prolonged grunt, going from sleeping to unconscious in the space of seconds.

Eu once again began excitedly bowing and waving to the cheering crowd as Hala took a deep breath and returned Hariyama. Medicham lowered the barrier, giving a contented hum at the fact that they had no further repairs to do.

Lillie took a moment to even fully realize that she had won, but the feeling was… nice, in a way. She couldn't help but go red, fidgeting in place a bit as she heard all the cheering around her, but… Eu seemed absolutely elated. She could feel it, down to her very core, and she couldn't deny that it was a bit infectious, actually helping to make being the center of attention a bit less daunting.

If Eu was happy, then she supposed it was all worth it.

“Congratulations, Lillie! Truly, you've already come so far! You, your Pokemon, and your friends! All of you battled with all your heart, and it truly shows!” Hala called. “Now, I'd like Hau and Sun to come up as well. It's time for your rewards,” Hala said.

Hau and Sun obeyed, quickly coming up onto the stage along with Lillie, leaving Lillie's bag with Kukui. They heartily congratulated her in the process. Even though the crowd had as well, something about hearing it from her friends made her feel particularly warm and fuzzy inside.

Hala walked forward, and retrieved three Fightinium Z from his pockets, handing them out to each of the three. He would've desperately liked to give Sun a Z-Power Ring as well, but… Tapu Koko still didn't seem fond of him. The normally battle-loving deity hadn't even shown up to watch the battles at all.

He also handed out three oblong, green and white electronic devices, which the group recognized as Ride Pagers.

“A Ride Pager is a little like a Pokeball, except instead of the Pokemon being inside, the Pokemon is somewhere else, wearing a receiver device that allows it to be summoned. Be aware that this will take a few seconds, and the Pokemon is freely able to further delay your request in one minute intervals, or cancel it if they're unable to make it at all. When you're done using them, you can simply dismiss them, teleporting them back to where the home location is set,” Hala explained.

“They also store safety equipment and riding gear. Currently, these Ride Pagers only have a couple
of the Ride Tauros I help raise registered. However, you'll have more Pokemon to choose from as your Island Challenge continues. You'll also be able to register your own Pokemon for personal use, if they're eligible,” Hala said. “You'll have nothing to worry about with the Tauros, I guarantee it! They look tough, but they're really sweethearts. Most of the ones we have don't even like to battle! And of course, there is a safety course. It won't take all that long, and there's no charge, so don't worry about any of that. We’ll get that all scheduled and squared away later. Hau has already done it with me, so he'll be able to help you if you have problems,”

“Oh, totally! It's been a little while since I've done it, but it's so much fun, once you get the hang of it!” Hau said.

Sun briefly lingered on the thought of Hau gently guiding his hands, prodding his body into the correct positions, maybe even riding behind him to keep him steady, pressed closely up against his back… Maybe when he did a good job, there would be soft, warm kisses, and the way Hau would stroke his hair just right, and do that pretty smile, and tell Sun all sorts of nice things in that warm voice of his...

Sun had already been fascinated by the concept of riding a Tauros regardless, but he suddenly found the thought of learning to ride a Tauros much more fascinating.

As the group left the stage, Kukui came up to talk with them next, specifically starting with Lillie.

“Bold move, Lillie, not using a Z-Move at all! Wanted to be a bit more like Sun, eh?” Kukui asked.

“Actually, no, I just…” Lillie said softly, her voice growing even quieter. “The little dance you have to do is still too embarrassing around that many people…. What if I messed it up in front of everyone?”

Everyone just paused for a moment, realization sinking in. “Wait… is that kinda why you gave really quiet orders, too?” Hau asked.

“Yes,” Lillie quietly responded. “I mean, if I ever stuttered or something and everyone heard me… oh, that'd just be the worst… Mother always hated stuttering, she says it makes you sound like an idiot.”

“Man, I thought that was like, your secret strategy or something! I didn't know you were just being shy!” Hau cried. “Even though it is okay to be shy, especially on your first Grand Trial,” he added on.

“Well, it worked, yeah?” Kukui said with a laugh.

“Y-yes, I suppose so…” Lillie said.

“Well, I don’t have anything fancy to give you all anymore, but I’d say this calls for celebration. All of you, make sure to give your Pokemon something nice for all the great work they did!” Professor Kukui said.

“Yes, even though Sun didn’t actually have to use all of his Pokemon…” Lillie pointed out. “I struggled with two even though they were the only ones I had to raise… But meanwhile, Sun had to help me so often, while looking after four Pokemon himself… and still won with only two. It’s incredible, honestly.”

Sun, not liking the implication that Lillie held him back, insisted that he couldn’t have done it without Lillie. As much as he’d previously insisted on fighting Hala right after remembering what happened
to his family, he had to admit it probably wouldn’t have worked out. And he wouldn’t have been ready so soon without Lillie there to help support him. Then, going back further than that… *Lillie* was the main one who taught him to read, which was indispensable for obvious reasons. Lillie gave him so much, out of the sheer goodness of her heart.

“Lillie, you have to admit he’s right, yeah? It’s okay to take a little more pride in yourself,” Kukui said, quietly but kindly.

“Yeah, Lillie, you’re really cool! You’re smart, thoughtful, focused, caring, and you have good advice!”

Lillie went a deep red at all of their words, not knowing how to actually respond, feeling a mixture of pleasure and odd guilt at the fact that so much praise was being focused on her in particular… it felt a bit like she’d just unintentionally hogged attention to herself. She honestly had to fight back tears, for a moment.

But even though she couldn’t quite say it… she was more grateful than they could ever know.

Chapter End Notes

Please don’t jump down my throat for having Sun not lose a single Pokemon to Hala, because I promise there was a point to it besides Sun being a “Mary Sue”. (A term I dislike, honestly. I’d rather say ‘unbalanced’ or 'poorly developed'. Clearer, gender neutral, and easier to work with.)

Also, the last name I chose for Lillie is Finally A Thing. *Celeste*.

I gotta admit, this is half because Gladion’s last name being *Celeste* would make him sound like a magical boy, and that’s just a hilarious concept to me.

Plus, when you consider that *Lily = Yuri* in Japanese, and *Celeste* comes from celestial/heaven...

You could roughly re-interpret Lillie's name as Yuri Heaven, which might be even *more* hilarious. Truly, a name with Peak Lesbian Energy.

Also, just for a little clarity:

*Fucus*: Genus of brown algae
*Codi*: From "Codium", a genus of seaweed.
*Saccha*: From "Saccharina japonica", or Kombu.

"Daddy, Papa, Mommy and Sasa" As I will be getting into more in the next chapter, polyamory isn't particularly unusual by Luxian standards. Also, Sasa is basically a gender-neutral parental term.
Chapter 12: Sunbeams and Sunburns

Chapter Summary

In which there's Mantine surfing, a birthday, and some lost tempers...

Also, warning for violence, and a couple of people giving Sun a hard time about gender.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After everything seemed to be said and done, the group still had to deal with being promptly swarmed by a good chunk of the audience, apparently looking to ask all kinds of questions.

It was all well and good, until Sun picked up on Lillie’s mounting distress, as she shrank away and took refuge behind him.

With that, just as Hau was nervously trying to navigate a question about him and Sun, Sun’s eyes suddenly flashed violet, then shifted to a burning gold, as he broadcasted a single, headache-inducingly powerful sentiment in no uncertain terms.

Back off.

The crowd immediately obeyed, everyone clearing no less than ten feet from the group. Another command, rushing out over the crowd with absolute conviction.

Single file.

Again, everyone obeyed. They were suddenly absolutely, almost eerily silent as they focused solely on that single task of organizing themselves into a lengthy line, extending outside of the actual battling area itself. There were no arguments or disagreements. Everyone just silently found their place.

One at a time.

True to the command, only the person in front began to speak. The rest were still utterly silent.

Good job!

Sun gave a broad smile as he added in the last thing, so cheerily and nonchalantly it was as if he were simply praising a child’s drawing, instead of praising a large group of people he’d just ordered around like it was nothing. It was honestly to the extent it’d almost looked like mind control. But Hau, Lillie, and Kukui trusted Sun enough to know it wasn’t. It was more just the sheer, unexpected authority he’d suddenly emnated, making everyone much too wary to risk acting out of line.

The others could see that a good chunk of the people were even leaving already, apparently still rather unsettled by the unexpected reaction from Sun.
After all of that, Sun seemed completely fine with answering any question given… Most of them were for him or Hau to start with, although quite a few were for Lillie. There were questions about where to find Sha’s species, questions about the battle, requests for advice, questions about Sun’s powers, questions about Hau’s Z-Move… Sun mostly took it in stride, hiding or stretching the truth slightly when necessary. Kukui and Hala were there too, discouraging anything too rude or invasive. Still, Hau and Sun couldn’t help but get a bit flustered when someone else asked about their relationship… and Sun answered briefly but truthfully, figuring that trying to claim otherwise would be rude to Hau.

There were murmurs of interest at his answer, but fortunately, he didn’t have to divulge much more. Eventually, the group managed to work their way through the whole line.

With that taken care of, the group was more than ready to go home and get their team members fully rested.

The rest of the day was rather uneventful. Everyone treated their Pokemon to whatever food they liked, and took them into the city for professional grooming, but not much else happened for the most part.

By nightfall, everyone was once again staying with Professor Kukui.

Lillie was up in her loft, hugging Nebby close to her as they quietly slept. Hau just laughed in a muffled fashion as Sun and Pikachu had an intense staring contest for the right to use Hau’s stomach as a pillow, which Sun managed to win by a matter of about two seconds. Pikachu was placated by getting to nuzzle against Sun’s midsection instead, although it wasn’t quite as soft. The height difference between Sun and Hau was slowly disappearing, but Hau still hadn’t lost any weight and wasn’t really trying to in the first place, so Sun was significantly lighter.

Hau briefly wondered how tall Sun was going to get exactly, as Sun contentedly claimed his “prize” and rubbed his cheek against Hau’s stomach with a pleased thrum. He could recall that every time he saw Sun’s memories of any parent, they all seemed to be towering, easily over seven feet tall, maybe even eight…

On one hand, Hau sort of liked being the taller one, but on the other hand…

It was… well, far from unpleasant to imagine Sun at eight feet tall, pinning him up against a wall, hungrily staring him down with those gorgeous golden eyes… Or the oddly touching sentiment of a being that could sear through his flesh and crush his bones, instead handling him like a precious work of art, singing soft praises, nibbling gently at his neck with those sharp teeth. Oh, and that tongue...

Hau gulped as he did his best to quiet that line of thinking, seeing that it was getting a bit out of hand…

Sun just giggled at him, and Hau’s face darkened, knowing that Sun could easily pick up on what he was feeling. Hau frowned as it reminded him of what he really wanted to talk to Sun about, ever since Sun’s latest batch of bad memories from the week before… But every time he wanted to, he could almost immediately tell that Sun didn’t want to.

Still, much to Hau’s surprise, when he thought about it again, without even necessarily thinking about trying to make Sun answer him, Sun actually started to relent.
“You still don’t have to, if you don’t want to,” Hau said softly. “I know a week isn’t actually that long, so don’t force yourself…”

Sun shook his head quietly, communicating his sentiments. Hau deserved to know more. Because Sun could tell that Hau not knowing really worried him… and Sun loved Hau more than he could ever hate the discomfort of speaking up. Not to mention, he wanted them to understand each other as much as possible. Because they were partners. They were bonded. And Sun wanted them to stay that way for as long as possible.

Sun spoke, in his silent way. About the cruelty of Daddy, Papa, Mama, and Sasa. About always being the “worst” of the batch. About how they practically kissed the ground Saccha walked on. About how he was the only one who survived the Light’s Curse, the horrible, unnatural illnesses that not even the best medicines they had were able to ward off… Although it did ultimately, end up spurring more research into medicine that was probably vital in developing the experimental healing machine he ended up in after the Aryzma incident… So, in a really messed up kind of way, losing all of his siblings had set him up to meet all of his new friends and family. That was one way to try and put a positive spin on it, he supposed… morbid as it was.

“...So, wait, you have four parents in all?” Hau asked. Sun gave a small grunt of confirmation.

“I’m sorry, you’re gonna have to explain to me how this whole family situation goes then...” Hau said, sounding more than a little confused.

Sun did his best to explain, going off of what he could remember. Out of the annual batches of eggs created, there would be certain, special subsets of children, created specifically with blends of royal genes… But they would not specifically become true Incanze until they passed a lot of physical, mental, and medical tests at a young age… Most of them wouldn’t make it. The Great Luminaries, adult Incanze, would only take in four children. Those who couldn’t make it were assigned to other noble families… if they survived.

“...Wait, if your race is struggling so much, what the heck is the point of tests that end up killing some of your ‘genetically elite’ children just for being slightly less ‘elite’ or just less lucky than other children?” Hau asked. “Isn’t that like, really dumb, actually?”

Sun just responded with uncertainty. The deaths were usually accidents, but the brutal, excessive nature of the tests ensured there would always be a steady stream of completely unnecessary accidents. Sun was pretty sure there’d always been something wrong with his parents anyway. There were various quirks of their culture, combined with his parents’ strange whims, that often ended up undermining logic, but never getting fixed because his parents could just disregard any criticism they wanted.

“So… your race is after ‘genetic perfection’, but has a completely fucked up standard for what that actually is, on top of having terrible standards for what good leadership is, which honestly means they’re probably gonna end up with a constant stream of tyrants no matter what they do?” Hau asked.

Sun just sighed, wishing Hau were wrong.

“And like… how common is it to have more than two parents, where you’re from?” Hau asked.

Sun just shrugged. Pretty common. Definitely common enough that it’d never come off as weird to him.
“...So, this is a little off topic, but... um...” Hau trailed off briefly before plucking up the courage to finish. “As far as relationships... Would you ever want to have anyone... besides just me, then?” Hau asked. "Like, as in, having them at the same time?"

Sun gave an odd series of light pulses at that. In theory, if they met the right person, and Hau wanted to, maybe. But Sun wouldn’t ever try to pressure Hau into something like that. He’d already gathered that humans weren’t as predisposed. Besides... Hau was definitely more than good enough on his own.

“Well, honestly... I think that if you did see someone else you like, you could still go after them, as long as you tell me about it...” Hau said. “If that’s what would make you happiest.”

Sun frowned at that. If he were going to do something like that, he wanted Hau to like them in the same way. Besides that, wouldn’t Hau be jealous?

“Well, yeah...” Hau admitted, knowing there was no point in lying. “But there are ways of dealing with it. And I love you. Plus, you’re not a human, so I would be stupid to go into this thinking everything will be exactly like a human relationship. That’s why I’ve been doing my best to be really open-minded about it. I’m not entirely sure if I could end up falling in love with anyone besides you... but I have to admit, the thought does make me... sort of curious...”

Sun was wide-eyed as a rush of pink pulsed along his skin, his insides going all gooey at just how thoughtful Hau could be. Before Hau knew it, Sun was quickly repositioning, his face getting much closer to Hau’s as he went in for a kiss. Pikachu whined tiredly, upset that Sun had moved. Sun gave a quick apology, but it didn’t stop him from continuing to kiss Hau’s face all over as he straddled him.

In the middle of it, Sun suddenly had another thought. Hau’s birthday was February 14th, wasn’t it?

“Yeah, it’s apparently the same day as some old, dead holiday about love... part of that old religion with the Jenus guy, or whatever his name was,” Hau said.

Sun smirked. He’d have to get Hau something super nice, then.

The following week was largely centered on learning to ride Tauros... which wasn’t really as hard as expected, given that all the Tauros had been trained to be quite cooperative towards anyone who could manage a half-decent sync with them, but Sun still took the opportunity to occasionally pretend he didn’t understand something as an excuse to flirt with Hau... much to the exasperation of the others. Sure, it was adorable, but they were still in the middle of something important. Meanwhile, both Hau and Sun had to repeatedly try and fail not to stare at each other in their riding outfits... they were rather form-fitting, to say the least. Sun was at least glad that his tail wasn’t in the way too much, since it was a pretty flexible sort of fabric. To say the most, you could say that Hau was so utterly taken in by how Sun looked while wearing one that he felt like he had to repeatedly smash the hormone-gremlin in his brain with a sledgehammer, about once every two minutes.

But overall, being able to use Tauros was a massive benefit. Tauros were deceptively fast and nimble creatures, to the point that in ages past, their speed and power made them one of the most effective and dangerous Pokemon to use in battle. It was only with the advent of more advanced and varied training knowledge that ways to counter Tauros became far more prevalent, and Pokemon that could do so became more accessible, vastly impacting their potency in battle. Regardless, they were
naturally blessed with incredible strength and endurance. A decent, healthy Tauros could comfortably run at about 50 miles per hour over long distances, even with a large adult as the passenger.

Despite the enormous benefit when it came to travel times, such a Pokemon was typically only granted to Trainers after they beat their first Grand Trial for safety reasons, as an ornery Tauros could still be a massive hazard to the inexperienced, especially if they had no backup.

Once the training was complete, all that was really left was for the group to make their way to Big Wave Beach, and from there, Akala Island. Despite Akala being to the east, and Big Wave Beach being to the west, it was still generally accepted as the common departure and arrival point due to the workings of ship routes, wild marine Pokemon territories, and ocean currents.

Thanks to the Tauros, getting to Big Wave Beach only took about forty-five minutes. Kukui accompanied them all as well, wanting to get to Akala Island for his own reasons. Once they did all reach the beach, there were two options available. Either they could go by boat, or by Mantine surfing.

Lillie chose the boat, even though Sun and Hau both tried to gently talk her into trying Mantine surfing with them… but for Lillie, turning them down was about more than just giving them another chance to date in peace. Mantine surfing was simply a terrifying concept for her. Ride Mantine regularly swam about as fast as Tauros could run, which struck her as completely unacceptable if it was her on the back of one.

That fear was exacerbated by the fact that she’d only ended up with Kukui in the first place because she’d washed up on a beach after escaping with Nebby. So, Hau and Sun soon relented, and Lillie simply went off with Kukui to board a somewhat aged and mildly dubious boat. That left Hau and Sun alone to try Mantine surfing, which was further up the beach.

Hau and Sun hastily went to see the Mantine, Hau hyping Sun up a bit by telling him how much fun it was, only to see that there were a couple of Team Skull grunts harassing them, along with a very harried looking woman in a bathing suit.

“I’ve been trying to tell you, you Team Skull grunts can’t Mantine surf because you aren’t even good at it! You keep nearly drowning because you keep trying to do stupid poses and made-up tricks! Then you get angry and blame the Mantine, so no wonder they don’t like you anymore!” the woman shouted, but the two men were undaunted.

“Yo, you can’t lie to us! We know that’s just your cover story! You’re just tryin’ to keep us tied down! Tryin’ to keep us from usin’ these Mantine ‘cause you’re jealous of our sick moves!” one grunt replied. They were both young men, probably still teenagers from the looks of things.

Sun and Hau looked at the two Mantine the pair was in front of, noting that the Pokemon both looked uneasy, slapping the water with their fins as a warning. Silently, Sun and Hau made a joint decision to try and step in.

“And what are you- wait a minute… ain’t you that girl?!” one grunt said, looking at Sun. “The one who beat Hala with one Pokemon?”

“Nah, Rod, that’s a boy, ain’t it? Dressed kinda gay, but a boy,” the other grunt said.

To be specific, Sun had decided on a sky blue tank top and pastel pink shorts, with pink nails and blue sandals to boot… but that was besides the point.
“He can dress how he wants!” Hau shot back, as Sun just cocked his head a little, puzzling at the grunt’s choice of words.

“Oh, so I’m right?” the other grunt responded with a sneer.

“No, no, she was in a dress and shit before! I’ve seen the videos! C’mon, Crush, don’t be such a dumbass!” Rod said.

Sun just shrugged, telling them that it didn’t particularly matter very much to him… although for what it was worth, he supposed he liked being ‘cute’ more than ‘handsome’.

“So you’re one’a those kinds of weirdos, huh? What, psychic powers crossed some wires in your head?” Crush asked.

“Stop it!” Hau said, balling his fists as he reached for a Pokeball. For Sun’s part, he just looked genuinely confused that someone was talking to him like that, frowning slightly as his only response.

“Pfft. Man, we all know you did way worse in that fight, don’t even waste your time tryin’ to play hero to your little whatever-it-is freak,” Crush said with a laugh, as Rod just gaped.

“Man, don’t even talk like that, you’re gonna-” Rod started, but it was already too late. Hau had sent out Pikachu, honestly intending to just challenge the two to battle… But Pikachu immediately picked up on how his Field was already buzzing with anger, and instead just immediately let loose with an electrical blast.

Crush gave a shriek of pain as the impromptu shock made him writhe and convulse in a moment of brief, exquisite agony before unceremoniously collapsing to the ground.

Rod could swear that for just a moment, there’d been a flash of green in Hau’s eyes, but he was more focused on his lightly smouldering friend. “Man, that’s what I was trying to fucking tell you! You just had to go and open your big ass asshole mouth, and look where that got you! That’s the same Pikachu that pulled off the crazy ass Z-Move! You don’t wanna mess with that shit! Now he’s gonna kick my ass too, all ‘cause you can’t keep your damn mouth shut!”

“I’m not,” Hau said quietly, shortly, as Rod just looked at him with a nervous grin. Sun just remained silent. Even the exasperated woman in the bikini was unsure of what she could actually do.

“S-so you’ll let us off the hook? I’m sorry, cousin, I really-” Rod started, looking rather small and weasely. He was actually about Hau’s height, but a lot scrawnier in build.

“Don’t call me cousin,” Hau said, in perhaps the coldest tone Sun had ever heard him use. “If you’re really sorry, you’ll stop being friends with an asshole like him.”

“I… yeah, I get what you’re sayin’, but Team Skull sticks together, man, we got a whole system-”

“Does it look like I give a shit about that?” Hau flatly interrupted, his face hard. “Do you really think I care at all about your excuses?” Hau reiterated, before looking down at the ground, where Crush was struggling to get back up. “Look. I didn’t actually mean for Pikachu to shock you like that… I just got mad, and he reacted. But, if you don’t want me getting mad again, you’re going to apologize to Sun. Now.”

‘M sorry…” Crush said, quietly and blearily. Rod just backed away a bit further.
“Couldn’t hear you,” Hau said, coldly and dismissively.

“I’m sorry!”

“Sorry for what?” Hau asked, impatience and disdain clear in his voice as he glared down at Crush.

“I never should’a’ called your friend that. I never should’a’ been mean to either one of you, and I didn’t think about how bad it would sound, but now I know it was a really shitty thing to do… I won’t bother you again. I won’t even show my face around this beach anymore… so please, just don’t sic that rat on me again…”


Crush was up off the ground and running in practically the blink of an eye. Rod was right behind him.

Sun just stared at Hau for a moment, as Hau stared back, a bit self-consciously.

“Yeah, I uh, kinda got a little carried away, but… are you oka-” Hau started, before Sun was suddenly pulling him into a tight embrace.

Hau was so cool! So strong, so gallant, so amazing!

On his end, Hau just silently and passively accepted Sun’s excited hugging and kissing, until Sun realized something was wrong. Hau?

“I mean… it was wrong of him to say all that bad stuff about you… but I still shouldn’t have gone about things like that,” Hau said quietly, stepping away from Sun.

Terrible to him? Crush insulted Hau’s battling! That was way worse!

“No, Sun, anyone who thinks they can call you a ‘whatever-it-is’ is a huge piece of shit, way more than just someone being mean to me about my battling. That second thing’s just an insult. There’s way more of a… history… behind the kind of stuff he said to you,” Hau said. Pikachu just looked up at him worriedly.

Sun nodded slowly at that, beginning to understand.

The woman who’d been trying to talk the two grunts down before came over as well, giving a sigh before beginning to speak.

“I’m sure that you know full well that technically, you’re not supposed to attack people with your Pokemon… But given the hard time they were giving everyone, and the way they were talking, I’m not gonna say anything,” the woman said. “I’m just glad you dealt with them. I’m sorry you even had to in the first place, but what’s done is done. Were you here for Mantine surfing?"

“Yeah! Sun has never done it before, and he was really excited about it… So, now that those two losers are gone, there should be nothing stopping us,” Hau said.

“You’d be right about that! If you both have Ride Pagers, I can get you all set up for lessons right now,” the woman said.
Both Hau and Sun immediately agreed to that, only having to hand over the Ride Pagers for a moment before they were apparently all set. Hau returned Pikachu back to his ball in anticipation.

Soon afterwards, a well-built man in swim trunks came over to explain things to Hau and Sun, and also had them go through a simple beginner’s course in somewhat more shallow water. Much like what’d happened with the Tauros, their Ride Pagers were able to easily outfit them in the appropriate gear and outfits for the task. Once again, Hau already knew the general gist of how it all went, but Sun seemed to pick it up with incredible ease. One of their very first lessons was to trust the Mantine, who’d already been trained their entire lives to ferry passengers… and given Sun’s abilities, that step was almost trivially easy. The next step was balance and posture, but thanks to having the benefit of an invisible tail and enhanced alien abilities, Sun pulled it off with ease.

The other thing that struck Sun as incredibly intriguing was that the Mantine were outfitted with special devices containing a specialized gyroscope, speedometer, and various sensors that allowed them to keep track of how well people surfaced, and all the tricks they did in the process, tallying up a score that could then be exchanged for points called BP… and from there, prizes in the form of various new moves and various items. The devices were also able to quickly send out a distress alert, when necessary.

Knowing there were rewards for doing something so fun, Sun was all in.

On the first day, once basic training was done with, the two were accompanied by a more experienced surfer to Akala Island. Sun was instructed to just stay low to the Mantine and let it do everything for him… but that still didn’t stop him from managing to communicate with the Mantine well enough to catch a sudden wave and pull off a few flips and twists regardless.

Both Hau and the guide surfer just stared blankly at Sun for a moment afterwards, hardly able to believe he’d pulled that off so casually.

Sun just shrugged, replying that Mantine had told him what to do.

Besides that, Sun and Hau made it to Akala Island without incident, quickly drying themselves and changing back to their regular clothes before meeting up with Lillie and Professor Kukui just as night started to fall.

Fortunately, although Ride Mantine were significantly faster than boats when instructed to build up to their best sustainable speed, the prior training before they actually set off made it so that their arrival times were only about twenty minutes apart.

Sun and Hau were starting to see the merits of Lillie choosing the boat, given that she seemed completely fine while they were both still damp and exhausted.

“Yeah, Mantine surfing is great, but it takes a lot out of you,” Kukui said. “Did you have fun?”

“Mostly, but we had to deal with Team Skull first…” Hau said. “And I sorta, accidentally, uh… got mad and had Pikachu shock the crap out of one of them, but he got up right after, so I think he’ll be fine.”

“Not that I’m doubting you, but I just have to ask… How do you… accidentally do that?” Lillie asked.

“Well, it does happen, so there’s nothing to be ashamed of as long as you resolve to do better. Pokemon who have a good connection with you can interpret subconscious impulses from your Field… especially if your Field is more intense than usual, which strong emotion will do in a hurry,
yeah.” Kukui explained. “And the strong emotion adds a sense of urgency, to boot. So your Pokemon will be falling over themselves to do something you never even said out loud.”

“So, what did they even do to make you do that? I mean, you're such a nice person, after all,” Lillie said.

“One of them wasn't all bad, but both of them were making the Mantine nervous, and one of them was a huge jerk… He was giving Sun a hard time about gender… and called him a freak,” Hau explained.

Kukui immediately cringed, and Lillie actually stiffened in alarm. “He what?!” Lillie cried, her expression darkening for a moment before her voice softened. “Sun, are you alright? I can't believe someone would be so rude…”

Sun just shrugged. He could easily recall worse. Besides, Hau had been so cool! He couldn't be down for long if Hau was around!

“Well, Team Skull may make me nervous… but even I would have a few choice words for them if I ever caught any of them pulling something like that again,” Lillie said, frowning slightly.

“Well, we can at least be happy that it's over with, yeah? Now, who's hungry? I haven't eaten since before I boarded that boat, and I know a good buffet here in Heahea City,” Kukui said. “My treat!”

Everyone was quick to agree with that.

Over dinner, Lillie also quietly told Hau and Sun of her plans to meet her brother the next day.

“I'm really relieved I'll be able to see him again… It's been so long…” Lillie said.

Sun thought briefly of Codi and Fucus, but put on a smile and busied himself with a pile of Pepsi-soaked seafood pasta before Lillie could catch on.

“I think you would like him, Sun,” Lillie said quietly. “Even though you and him aren't all that much alike… But he cares about Pokemon, and he's very sweet, in his own way,” Lillie said, idly stirring her straw in a glass of lemonade. “If it weren't for how the situation is, I'd want you to meet him… But he's rather paranoid. And the kind of Pokemon he's with… isn't one that's particularly good with strangers,”

Sun paused for a moment. Did her brother… Already know about him?

“In a way. I've discretely kept in contact with him every now and then, but I've never told him anything about your species, or given many important details. I only mentioned that I made a good friend in the area while I was staying at the lab.”

Sun just nodded. He wouldn’t have minded if she said more, but it was nice that she was still trying to be cautious.

“It’d be cool if he could hang out with us some time!” Hau added in, pausing his meal just long enough to say as much.

“Maybe someday,” Lillie said, as she looked down at her food and idly picked at it.

They all just quietly hoped that maybe that day would come sooner rather than later.
The next morning, Lillie set off to meet her brother, while Sun immediately set off for more Mantine surfing. Hau and Lillie knew Sun definitely had a strong fondness for Mantine Surfing… but they hadn’t expected him to cling to it with a borderline obsessive passion for about three weeks straight, getting in as much as he could while still having time for them and his Pokemon.

Overall, that meant he spent around six hours a day out on the water, practicing tirelessly. He'd taken to providing much of his preferred Mantine's food and healing himself, wanting to make sure Mantine had the energy to put up with him.

Hau did his best to keep up, but Mantine Surfing was a significantly more tiresome process than you'd think, even for the rider. He could typically manage four hours or so before he was pretty much done for the day.

Natural wave condition on a day-to-day basis was only a mild obstacle for Sun, given that Mantine had the ability to manipulate waves rather than just passively waiting for the right ones, which was another factor that fed into Sun being able to ride consistently for such impressive stretches of time.

Besides just the sheer fun he was having, it was also incredibly good for getting his Pokemon new moves. With his strong knack for Mantine surfing, Sun could quite comfortably get six or seven BP per hour… averaging around 40 per day. Within days, he had all the moves he wanted to teach his Pokemon picked out and paid for, along with anything Hau and Lillie wanted. Even though Hau was steadily building his own BP, at about a fourth of the rate, Sun insisted on paying because he had such a lead.

All in all, Sun ended up buying eight different tutoring sessions in total.

It started out humble enough, with just Sun. Signal Beam for Sha, Snatch and Bounce for Zorua, Giga Drain for Rhovera, Defog for C.C.

Then came Hau, with Heal Bell for Blissey, Shock Wave for Pikachu, and Water Pulse for Noibat. Sun and Hau figured that they could just memorize things from C.C.’s tutoring and help Dartrix to learn Defog that way. It was the same with teaching Blissey Shock Wave and Water Pulse. Sun didn’t necessarily feel like he was cheating the tutoring ladies out of anything, really, given that he didn’t actually pay them any real currency. Overall, it was a tidy 56 BP, which Sun could easily recover in less than two days.

Even though Sun probably could've eventually done it himself, he easily saw why people used Move Tutors. Even with his abilities, he’d practically never taught his team member any moves as fast as the trained professionals could. Sha’s Acid Spray was the only exception, being so similar to Acid. They had all the information, technique, and advice they needed, and they knew precisely how to properly sync with just about any Pokemon to rapidly deliver that information in an easily comprehensible fashion. Once paid, everything was already taken care of in just two days.

As for Lillie, she didn’t find that any of the available compatible moves caught her eye, finding them all to be unnecessary or redundant. Sun just got her some medicine instead.

But there was more to Mantine Surfing than just the moves Sun could get. Given that special high-quality vitamin blends for Pokemon sold at 5,000 pyen per jar, and Sun could get them at 2 BP per jar… that was a profit of nearly 100,000 pyen per day, although Sun cut into it a little by also stocking up on healing items, just in case there was a situation where he needed especially powerful medicine.
Hau had been so surprised about it he had to ask a surfer overseeing the Mantine if that was
allowed… surprisingly enough, the answer was yes.

“So aren’t you like… basically paying people just to be good at Mantine Surfing?” Hau asked the
surfer. “What do you get out of it?”

“The more the Mantine connect with people, and the more they’re pushed to the limit and doing all
those tricks, the better they get. Then, the better they get, the faster and more reliable they are,
improving our service. We’re funded by the government, based on the health and performance
history of our Mantine. So, basically, people are helping us just by Mantine Surfing at all, let alone
being good at it. It’s a similar thing with Trainers, really. The more people we have out there raising
Pokemon to their full potential, the more we can learn about Pokemon, and the more skilled, good-
natured Pokemon we have who will be able to help the world become a better place. It’s a lot better
than people turning to Team Skull or any other problems, right?” the surfer had said.

Hau had just nodded, more satisfied with the explanation than he’d been anticipating.

But of course, Mantine Surfing wasn’t always sunshine and rainbows, although it was often a lot of
fun.

A little over two weeks in, in the late morning, Sun and Hau were surfing to Melemele and back, just
to see how fast they could do it.

Sun was comfortably able to go a bit faster than Hau most of the time, but he patiently waited for
Hau, always making sure not to lose sight of him… although, given how Sun’s vision worked,
genuinely losing sight of him was a significantly harder prospect for him.

Going to Akala Island was one thing, as the route was generally clear and simple… but Sun and Hau
chose a somewhat longer, more complex route back to Melemele, due to the fact that it was a bit
easier to rack up points on that route.

Unfortunately, the route was also home to multitudes of Sharpedo, although they normally weren’t
so bad. They primary reason no one bothered to try and keep them away was that Sharpedo were
largely entirely capable of understanding that Mantine surfers were completely harmless, and not
really bothering anyone. Typically, when they lunged, it was more of a game or a prank to them
than anything, meant only to startle and disorient the riders rather than inflict genuine harm.

But of course, when Hau and Sun sped through just as an especially large and mean one was looking
to ambush a small Wailmer idly coasting along the current near the surface, that oblivious act was
enough to constitute “bothering” in its mind.

The Sharpedo turned and put on an utterly ridiculous burst of speed, water jet basically exploding out
from behind them as they accelerated with a speed that the Mantine couldn’t even hope to match on
such short notice.

Sun and Hau both heard it, jetting up behind them with a cold fury, but they could only do so much.
Sun mentally called for Hau to ride up a wave and jump with him, hoping they could both clear
enough height to avoid it… but Hau was just a bit slower. The Sharpedo slammed into his left side,
roughly and brutally, knocking him clear off his Mantine as the Mantine themself gave a squeal of
pain and alarm.
Sun looked back, eyes widening as his Mantine landed and he immediately commanded them to turn around. Hau was a good swimmer, but the Sharpedo had hit so hard that the wind was knocked out of him, and he could feel a good chunk of his left side stinging like mad, and he could see that the water was tinted red as well. By the feel of things, it’d hit his outer thigh and his side, just by his stomach.

His Mantine helped him, carefully holding him above water, but Hau still felt bleary-eyed and weak as Sun came back around, passing him in a flash and intercepting Sharpedo.

Hau looked on. Sun was a deep, burning violet, literally sizzling and steaming as he outstretched a hand towards the Sharpedo and blasted it with a violet laser so painfully bright it forced Hau to look away… He heard a cry of anguish from the Sharpedo, and when he looked again, Sun had the situation completely reversed. He and Mantine circled the Sharpedo a couple of times before coming to a slow stop. A sphere of translucent, violet light enclosed a ball of water, entrapping Sharpedo as both Sun and Mantine seemed to work in perfect unison. Sun hissed with the effort as Sharpedo uselessly tried to escape, weakly thrashing against the barrier while showing clear signs of heavy burns, especially near its eyes. Sun outstretched both hands and raised it out of the water in perfect time with Mantine, hissing and muttering under his breath as he directed more and more heat and energy at the sphere, blasting off lasers and psychic energy at a constant, wrathful pace. Hau frowned a bit at that, trying to work out what exactly Sun planned to do next, but he just felt… so much rage, so much primal fury, emanating from him without end. So much rage he could scarcely believe it. Vague memories flashed through Hau’s mind, memories that weren’t his, but only further stoked the rage.

Meanwhile, Sun was able to spare just enough focus to lower one outstretched hand and send out both Sha and C.C., the two hovering near him in a deceptively cute and innocent way as Hau realized exactly what Sun was going to do next.

He thinned the light sphere, making it more permeable to their attacks, before Sha fired Signal Beam and C.C. followed with Dazzling Gleam, both attacks causing Sharpedo to writhe in helpless agony before abating… Only for Sun to command them again.

Hau could feel Sun’s boiling, hateful sentiment as he weakly watched on, almost paralyzed by shock and fear.

But while he remained quiet, Sun was in his mind, loud as anything. If he were to be using words, Hau could practically imagine them.

“How does it feel, monster? How does it feel? Does it hurt? Does it? Good! It should! It should be unbearable! It should be insufferable, for lowly, selfish, disgraceful cretins like you!”

There was a… sadism to it. A feeling that Hau had never felt before. The wholehearted, unremitting feeling that the creature before Sun deserved every last moment of agony they received, as Sun mercilessly blasted them with one Signal Beam and Dazzling Gleam after another.

“Sun…” Hau said weakly. “Sun, c’mon, stop… please,” Hau quietly pleaded, hoping his mind was louder than the actual sound he could muster.

The attacks continued, as Sharpedo continued to writhe in agony, but its struggles were much weaker than before.
“Sun!” Hau called, voice still weak. “Stop it! That’s enough! That’s enough, seriously!” Hau called, mustering all of his remaining strength.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Sun calmed down. The light faded, and Sharpedo abruptly collapsed into the sea with a loud splash, bobbing listlessly on the water, alive but just barely. Sun glanced at it with all the emotion one would afford a smashed cockroach, then quickly had his Mantine go over to Hau. Hau noted that Sun’s Mantine and his Pokemon didn’t seem to have tried to do a thing to stop him. They all seemed completely on board with him, however far he’d wanted to go.

“Sun…” Hau said, before figuring it was easier to just communicate in their silent way. Why had he done that?

Easy. The Sharpedo willingly and intentionally hurt Hau, and there was a possibility it was going to keep going. The Sharpedo had to be dealt with.

But was Sun… going to… kill them?

The answer was a startlingly impassive, unflinchingly certain yes, as Sun pulsed white and various shades of violet.

But… that wasn’t necessary. Hau knew he’d be fine. He had Blissey, and medicine, and C.C., and hospitals to go to. The Sharpedo had none of those advantages.

Sun’s answer was flat, impassive, and essentially no more than a mere ‘Who cares?’

Hau did.

Sun’s nodes vibrated at that, as things finally seemed to start to sink in.

In seconds, Sun had gone from searing with rage to quietly weeping, nearly falling off his Mantine as he repeatedly apologized to Hau, awash in dark blue light the whole time. C.C. used Aromatherapy, which was a bit interesting when mixed with the heavy scent of the ocean, but it was effective regardless. Hau felt himself regaining some energy, his pain abating slightly, wounds mending in a rudimentary fashion. Sun calmed down just a little, but still found himself wracked with misery and regret.

Now Hau would probably end up thinking Sun was some cruel, scary, bloodthirsty freak, and he’d ruined everything… Not only did he let Hau get hurt, he just ended up scaring him even worse…

“Sun… it’s alright…” Hau said, although he noted that Sun honestly still didn’t seem to give an actual damn about the Sharpedo. His thoughts were entirely about what Hau would think. Still, Sun’s deep blues were unyielding.

“Really, Sun, it’s fine,” Hau insisted. “It’s alright. I’m not mad. I’m just… surprised…”

Sun calmed slightly at that, as he focused on their connection and found Hau was telling the truth. “I’ve seen how it is for you. I know. You spent so much time getting hurt, watching everyone else get hurt, never being able to do anything about it… You saw people you love die… So, I think I would probably do something similar, if I were you,” Hau said.

Sun was silent, still quietly apologizing once more.
“I’ve already said it’s alright. Just… next time, try to be a little bit calmer about it. Nothing productive will come out of killing a Pokemon, even if it did hurt me,” Hau said. “But… I still love you,” Hau said, smiling softly at Sun in spite of the dull, stinging pain he still felt. To be fair, he did feel significantly better already, with C.C.’s help. “And I know you did that because you love me. And I know you’ll try not to do it again, but at the same time…” Hau paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts. “I know you’re not human, and you’ve been through stuff no one should ever have to go through… So I understand that there’s probably a lot of things you don’t necessarily have the same opinion on…”

Sun teared up a bit at that, but as he glanced at Hau’s abraded, raw, only semi-healed skin, he decided it was probably best they go and get it properly tended.

“Oh, yeah, definitely. I’ve been bleeding into the water long enough, it’s time to get out of here. I mean, I’m probably the most delicious I’ve been in my entire life! Eating Blissey eggs and Cutiefly honey all the time… Not to mention all this exercise, but I’m still fat too, so my meat would probably be marbled like a dream!” Hau joked through his pain and unease, hoping to dispel the tension.

Sun frowned, insisting that no one was going to be eating Hau on his watch… although that didn’t mean that Hau wasn’t a total snack. A gourmet meal, even. And more than fit for royalty.

Hau almost choked despite being in no danger of drowning. “W-when did you even learn that slang?!”

Sun just winked. Hau couldn’t help but get a bit flustered.

With that, they quickly worked out that they were closer to Akala than Melemele, just by distant landmarks and the time spent on the water so far, so they decided it was best to just turn around and focus purely on reaching the maximum sustainable speed of their Mantine.

Once they got back, the surfer overseeing the Mantine winced sympathetically at Hau’s injuries, even if they were healed up a bit and the pain was greatly reduced. He helpfully offered some treatment advice and human-oriented medical supplies, if they didn’t already have any, but it’d fortunately already been bought, waiting in their Ride Pagers along with all their normal clothing and supplies.

They went back to a Pokemon Center, Hau insisting he could still walk fine. Luckily, beyond Hau moving a bit gingerly, no one else could really notice the wounds with his clothes back on.

Regenerative medicines for humans weren’t quite on the same level as the ones for Pokemon, largely because Pokemon’s bodies were better designed to heal and regenerate as it was. Still, it was far better than nothing.

Sun carefully made sure the areas of injury were clean, then tenderly applied topical healing ointment and bandages using guidance accumulated from the internet, the surfers, and various things about first aid that Kukui and Burnet had shown him before he left… Given Kukui's method of working with Pokemon, the professor couldn’t afford to go without extensive knowledge of it.

Things were silent throughout the process, beyond Sun quietly humming something as he worked, hands glowing a soft, comforting pink to try and further ease the pain. Hau couldn't help but be taken aback by the sheer contrast from before.
Back there, Sun had been fully prepared to kill, full of literally boiling rage… But now, he was ever-so-carefully and delicately tending to Hau, with a serene expression and a reverent sort of fondness that made Hau's heartbeat unusually swift.

But both situations were for the same core reason. In both situations, it was all for Hau.

Hau silently contemplated the concept of having someone who would actually, demonstrably kill for him at a moment’s notice. He'd heard the expression plenty of times… But someone who would've done it without a second thought, and likely without even regret, had he not stopped them… That was on a completely new level.

But still, Hau meant what he'd said before. He wasn't angry. He didn't feel any urge to flinch or recoil at Sun's touch. It was just… a lot to take in. Part of him was grateful, in a certain sense, given that he had no idea how much further the Sharpedo would've been willing to go… But another part of him worried.

Still, in the grand scheme of things, Sun only seemed to get truly furious over genuine threats to Hau or Lillie. He didn't really come off as the jealous type, or the controlling type. He could be persuasive, but he never forced Hau to do anything, and he was always willing to listen.

So, overall, Hau didn't hold it against Sun. It largely just made him worried for Sun's sake, imagining the kind of horrible past experiences that would cause him to have such a visceral, unforgiving reaction to seeing his loved ones hurt or threatened… and there was a twinge of guilt as well, as he thought about how if he'd managed to avoid that Sharpedo, Sun wouldn't have gotten so terribly upset.

Once Sun had Hau all patched up, and they’d made sure the whole area of injury was clean, Sun put all the supplies away and just contentedly nuzzled against Hau, glowing soft pink. Hau just gave a pleased sigh, the areas on his outer thigh and the right side of his midsection going pleasantly numb as the medication went to work. A healing process that should’ve taken over a week was reduced to a matter of a few hours, provided Hau remained still and got proper rest.

Hau steadily drifted off to sleep… By time he woke up, feeling had returned to his injuries, but they scarcely hurt at all, mainly feeling sort of itchy instead. Sun was nowhere to be seen… but he'd left a message in Hau's Pokedex, saying he was bringing lunch and malasadas… followed by a copious amount of heart emojis.

Hau carefully removed the bandages, revealing just slightly inflamed and tender patches of skin where the injuries had been.

He still couldn't resist having part of an egg from Blissey in the meantime, trying to hold back to an extent to save room for the food Sun was bringing… But he still got through about two thirds of it before Sun returned, plenty of food from a malasada shop and one of Hau's favorite restaurants in hand.

Hau got flustered as Sun sat next to him, clearly wanting to feed it to Hau as a way of further pampering him… but given that no one was watching, Hau quickly relented.

That was all well and good until Nebby suddenly appeared, merely slipping under the door with ease, followed by Lillie bursting in shortly afterwards.

Hau was lucky they'd caught him just before he took another bite of food, or else he likely would've choked a bit in surprise.
“Sorry! I really should've knocked, I know, but Nebby just slipped in and I came in to get them without even thinking about it!” Lillie cried. “Sun told me you got hurt, but I didn't want to bother you earlier while you were resting… and now that you're well, Nebby couldn't wait any longer,” Lillie explained.

“Oh, don't worry about it!” Hau said. “I'm fine now. There was this big Sharpedo, but they didn't bite or anything, they just rammed up against my side. So, everything's cool now. Sun was probably more upset than I was… if anything, I'm just sorry I worried him like that…”

“So how did you deal with the Sharpedo?” Lillie asked.

Hau flinched slightly at the question, while Sun just very plainly and candidly replied that he'd been planning on killing it before Hau stopped him.

“Wait... You were going to kill a Sharpedo?” Lillie asked. “I mean, if it were completely and absolutely necessary, I suppose, but... Sun...” Lillie trailed off.

Sun's nodes vibrated a bit as he did his best to explain that moment. It was just... he'd just been so angry, so utterly appalled that any Pokemon would dare do something so terrible to Hau. And his thoughts had raced with how it could've been worse. What if Hau's ribs broke? What if Hau started drowning? What if it cut Hau too deep? What would he tell Hala and Konani? Hau's team members?

Lillie's expression softened as she slowly stepped forward.

“I understand,” Lillie said quietly. “Just... in the future, please be a little more... conscientious, I suppose? Sharpedo are still very social creatures, and highly important to the environment. I'm sure that someone would still be sad, even if it were just that Sharpedo dying,”

Sun nodded slowly. Hau had said something pretty similar. He was still never forgiving what they'd done to Hau, though.

Satisfied with that, Lillie decided it was best to leave the two to what they'd been doing, as she called Cosmog over to her and quietly left the room.

Sun was more than happy to refocus all of his attention on showering his boyfriend with affection.

By time all the food was gone, Hau was left full, sluggish and content, lying in bed as Sun cuddled up against him, thrumming lowly while slowly rubbing Hau's full belly with a warm, soothing, gently glowing hand. In the back of his mind, Hau felt a bit restless, not having planned to spend so long just laying around in bed... but he was extremely comfortable, and he was pretty sure Sun's hands must've been blessed by an alien deity at some point. To add to that, the medication had temporarily spiked his metabolism to facilitate the regenerative process. With the whole process leveling out again; he was left feeling a bit drained and unusually lazy, even though he wasn't exactly sleepy anymore.

He and Sun elected to just put a movie on instead, even though Hau didn't really remember most of it because Sun was even more affectionate than usual, out of relief that Hau was okay. Wasn't easy to actually watch a movie when you had someone straddling you and kissing you until you could barely think... but it was definitely still enjoyable.

Near the tail end of Sun's Mantine obsession, Hau's 16th birthday arrived.
Sun awoke early in the morning, smiling excitedly as he looked over at Hau, sleeping next to him, and silently stroked his hair a few times with glowing hands, subtly gauging the state of his consciousness. Given how much he typically did in a day, Hau typically slept like a log, but Sun wanted to briefly check, just to make sure. Upon seeing that Hau really was nowhere near waking up on his own, Sun grinned and crept out of bed.

Sun mentally alerted Lillie, and they quietly made their way outside, summoning up a Tauros and making their way to a hotel. Unfortunately, it wasn’t Tide Song or Grand Hano Resort, but it was still the best one they could find and book about a month earlier, when the idea first occurred to Sun.

Neither Sun or Lillie actually knew much about wrapping presents, figuring it was okay to just pile them on the dresser in the hotel room instead.

Lillie carefully handmade him a birthday card, but she wasn’t all that terribly experienced with getting people gifts, so she bought things largely on the basis of what she thought he may actually need, especially since she’d studied up on what the next few Trials were about. With that in mind, she bought a thick pair of boots for wading through mud and river banks, a set of Ultra Balls, hiking supplies, more camping equipment, and finally… a can of “dehydrated water”. Completely useless, but Lillie figured he’d be the kind of person to get a kick out of something stupid like that.

Beyond the stay at the hotel, Sun had gotten him a few TMs, a couple of interesting shirts he’d found, a plush Stufful holding a big plush heart, and a beautiful bracelet, colored in a mix of glossy forest green and deep cyan. He could barely wait to see how Hau would react as he made his way back to the Pokemon Center.

Sun make a token effort to act casual. He had it all planned out. He’d pretend to wake up at the same time as Hau, then just pretend not to remember his birthday for a bit. Then he’d ask him to go somewhere completely unrelated to the hotel, but on the same general route. And then, that’d be when they’d make the ‘sudden’ detour into the hotel, on the basis of Sun just ‘casually wondering’ if they could ‘potentially’ stay somewhere nicer for a while… and that would be when Hau would finally find out that Sun already had his room and his presents ready.

That all fell through within about twenty minutes. Within moments of waking up, Hau could immediately tell Sun seemed way too alert and bubbly for first thing in the morning… He was all sorts of bright greens and yellows, poorly kept as dimly as Sun could bear it, given how early it was… and weirdly giggly and coy about why that was.

Still, Hau figured that if Sun was that excited about Hau’s birthday, it was probably better to play along. The only thing was that Sun could easily tell he was just playing along, which struck Sun as a bit disappointing, but he got over it pretty quickly.

Sun remained as strong as possible for about the time it took them both to shower and get dressed, at which point he was already bursting at the seams with impatience, quickly urging Hau to follow him outside and through the streets.

Sun tried his best to be nonspecific, doing all he could to prevent the image of the hotel from drifting into Hau's mind… Fortunately, it paid off. Hau's eyes briefly widened as they arrived, and he took in the elegant decorum of the lobby, complete with fine paintings, elegant sculptures, and a fountain in the center of the room.

“Sun, you didn't…” Hau started quietly.

Sun flashed an unnaturally wide grin, holding up the room keys with a proud flourish.
“Sun, holy shit…” Hau said, doing his best to restrain himself as Sun led him to an elevator.

Hau was an excited mess of questions and gushing during the entire ride up, although most of the answers were just along the lines of “you’ll see” on Sun's part.

By the time Hau actually saw the room, and the gifts, and Lillie already there waiting, he couldn't hold himself back any longer. Lillie was hugged to within an inch of her life, to the point she was strongly reminded of a Bewear. Sun was pretty sure that every square inch of his face received a kiss at least once.

“You guys are the best!” Hau cried… He was, in fact, literally on the verge of tears. “Outside of like, Mom or Tutu, this is literally the nicest thing anyone's ever done for me…”

Both Sun and Lillie couldn't help but be overcome by warm, fuzzy feelings at those words.

“Well, it was mostly Sun's idea, and Sun paid for it all… He insisted on that. He had this planned about a month in advance. I just helped him with some of the details and bought my own presents for you. Then he insisted that I should have a room too, and I still couldn’t turn him down… It's a five night stay, so-

“Wait, you got us five nights here?! Sun, holy crap, how much would that even cost?!”

Sun just told him not to worry about it. “I love you,” Sun vocally added on, as both an affirmation and a simple way of conveying that price was no object. He gave an incredibly tender smile, given his mouthful of razor sharp crystal teeth. Hau was unsure if he wanted to melt into a puddle, cry, or explode into a burst of happy rainbows, so he just decided to rush forward, pulling Sun into a tender embrace before happily crying his eyes out.

“I love you too…” Hau said softly. “Still…” Hau continued after a few moments, once he managed to collect himself. “Your birthday is in about a month, right? Now I have to think of how to make it just as awesome!”

“Don’t get too stressed about it, alright?” Lillie said softly. Honestly, Hau could probably get Sun a pack of gum and Sun would wax silent poetic about it.

“I’m sure I’ll figure something out,” Hau said, before looking at Sun and mischievously smirking, silently conveying something that made Sun pulse with a litany of pink lights.

“I’m sure whatever that was, it was completely wholesome and appropriate to say out loud,” Lillie said, in a sarcastically over-sweet tone.

Hau weakly insisted it was, but Lillie just laughed.

The hotel was chock full of various amenities. Ornate decor, lovely food, beautiful views, a spa, a gym, quality room service, and fancy electronic beds with various features to fiddle with. Hau had briefly worried that the place would tempt him into slacking off too much with his Pokemon, but it was actually a lot better for training than he’d expected. There was a section of the gym specialized to Pokemon training, along with top-quality Pokemon food and trained groomers. With the team generally in a better mood than ever, training actually went surprisingly well. The group found themselves shifting to worries of how all their Pokemon were going to react when they had to leave, rather than just worrying about their stay.

Sun would still go and Mantine surf on a daily basis, but not nearly as much as before, being more focused on spending time with Hau… and being so busy being taken in by the experience of human
luxury. It was… relatively similar to his memories of being Incanze… but the architecture, the
general vibe, what tended to be prioritized, how people behaved… it was all so distinct that it
simultaneously felt completely new.

Eventually, almost too quickly, the stay came to an end. They still had an Island Challenge to be
getting on with, after all. And after spending a bit over a month in one place, training thoroughly
while also enjoying themselves, everyone figured they were probably as ready as they’d ever be to
go ahead and get the show on the road again.

With that, Route 4 was their next destination.

Chapter End Notes

*Casually slides in a conversation confirming that polyamory is hypothetically on the
table, as I carefully dust the narrative and make room for Everyone’s Favorite Runaway
Emo*

Also I looked at some maps, took my own worldbuilding stuff about Alola into account,
and figure the distance between Big Wave Beach and Hano Beach is like ~90 miles/145
km.

So from there, a skilled rider traveling at least 50-60 mph (about 80-95 km/h) takes less
than two hours, and can reliably get 10 BP for that trip, like the game… (You can get
more than 10, actually, but I didn’t want to make Sun that brokenly good at Mantine
Surfing yet)

So that’s how I arrived at a rate of 6-7 BP per hour. I figured tying it to time was
important, because without the restrictions of the game, you probably wouldn’t have to
go to another island every time you use a Mantine. Was it necessary to think this hard
about it? Probably not. Do I regret it? Only a little.

I also assume that pyen is about the same as yen, where 100 is roughly a dollar, but the
actual purchasing power of a dollar would often be higher in this world.

So, this is why the group has rarely even talked about money. In my headcanons,
sufficiently prepared Trainers don’t typically have money issues. Poverty exists, but is
more unusual than it is in real life. Much of the point here is that the Pokemon world
generally *is* a happy and positive sort of place, despite the fact that many bad things
still happen.
Chapter 13: Kaleidoscope

Chapter Summary

In Which The Boy Arrives

Some violent battle stuff, but other than that, nothing much as far as warnings go.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Route 4 was relatively simple and uneventful, taking just about a single day to travel on foot. It was mainly just fields and sparse forests, with nary but a winding dirt road to make it more than just a patch of surprisingly quiet wilderness, given Heahea City nearby. There were several battles to be had, with the group typically taking turns accepting them... but beyond that, not much else was going on. Still, it was a pleasant sort of uneventful. Rather peaceful, even. The “winter” weather was pleasantly mild, there were various sounds of Pokemon if you listened closely, and there was a gentle breeze making the trees and grass sway in a somehow comforting way.

Some people recognized the group... Sun supposed he did stand out, with his hair and the star marking on his cheek that he'd grown so attached to, so he wasn't exactly surprised.

A bit more surprisingly, some people seemed to recognize Sun for his Mantine surfing, rather than the battle against Hala. Apparently, he'd already become number one on the scoreboard for both Big Wave Beach and Heahea Beach.

Some girl even ended up talking with him for about five minutes, on the basis that he'd apparently helped her with it before.

Beyond that, not much else happened, although Sun was a little excited about C.C. becoming a bit larger and more restless in the past few days, seeming especially keen on gathering pollen but showing an uncharacteristic preoccupation with hoarding it for himself. Pokemon were able to take inanimate objects with them into Pokeballs if they wanted, and that was where nearly the entirety of C.C.’s pollen hauls had been disappearing to as of late. Sun was understanding. He still had plenty of honey stockpiled, and he wasn't hurting for money in the least.

After Route 4, the group made it to an area known as Paniola Town in time for bed. It was a small, rural, rustic sort of area that was a far cry from all the tourism and general hustle and bustle of Heahea City.

Coming off of a fancy hotel, one might expect that it would be something of a disappointment to have to stop in a place like Paniola Town... but really, something about the simple, homey vibe was a relief. There was something oddly pleasant to Sun about the concept of simply being able to cast off classy living at a moment's notice, being able to go wherever he wanted without regret.

Paniola Town was apparently vaguely styled after a far off country called Orre, a close ally of Unova and Alola. It was probably just about one of the driest places in Alola... Although much of the plain, barren dirt was the result of an intentional aesthetic, as there was still plenty of greenery wherever the aesthetic wasn't actively maintained, and Paniola Town was actually surrounded with
wide sprawls of fertile fields and meadows.

Further north lead into the bulk of those fields, aptly named Paniola Ranch.

Much of the tall grass in the area was a tougher, more fibrous species than usual, adapted to areas with a bit less water… But other than that, the general principle was the same. Groups of Tauros and Miltank idly grazed and wandered about, along with flocks of Mareep and groups of Mudbray.

Lillie gave a shriek when something suddenly emerged from a patch of it just as she was walking by… But as Hau and Sun quickly noticed, it seemed to be a sound of adoration, rather than one of fear.

“Oh my goodness… you're so cute…” Lillie said, to a small Pokemon that the others immediately recognized as a Mareep, seeming to have temporarily broken off from the rest of their flock..

The Mareep gave an adorable whining sort of noise, and Lillie was immediately retrieving a patterned bean for the little sheep, bending down to gently feed it from her hand.

The Mareep ate graciously, then impatiently butted their head against Lillie, obviously wanting more. Although Lillie had been wanting to save her patterned beans, she relented, pulling out four more and letting Mareep chow down.

Seeming satisfied with that, the Mareep then flopped down on their side in contentment, making what was perhaps one of the softest, cutest sounds that Lillie had ever heard.

Lillie slowly pulled out a Luxury Ball for the Mareep, silently and gently asking permission as she hoped to capitalize on their good mood. The Mareep didn’t bother to move.

As if she were afraid it was all a dream, Lillie slowly and gently touched the ball to Mareep’s body. The Pokemon disappeared inside, putting up only the briefest struggle before the ball went still.

“...Wow, that was so easy!” Lillie said with glee. Sun was beaming, as Rotomdex began rattling off information about Mareep.

“That was a great job, honestly, and I’m happy for you, but…” Hau started. “I still feel like I have to tell you. I’ve heard that if wild Pokemon accept capture that fast, they might wind up being freeloaders,” Hau explained.

“Well… What’s wrong with that?” Lillie asked. “She doesn’t have to fight…”

“Yeah, but… Even though I don’t wanna make any assumptions about that Mareep, a lot of the ‘freeloader’ types also end up becoming spoiled and disobedient,” Hau explained. “They can start taking advantage of you before you know it.”

Lillie frowned a little at that. “I’m sure that if I just do my best, that won’t happen…”

“Well, if there’s any problems, I’m always here!” Hau said. Sun nodded along, adding on his support as well.

“Thanks,” Lillie said, smiling softly as she fondly looked at both of them, then down at her newest capture.

“Excuse me!” came a new voice, just a touch deeper and stronger than Lillie’s. “You must be trial goers, right?” said a young woman, jogging over to them. She immediately looked rather familiar.
Her hair was tied back in long twin-tails, and colored green a couple of shades lighter than Hau’s, while also being decorated with a bright pink flower. She wore short overalls… and Lillie noted that she was… really pretty… Her eyes were such a fascinating shade of green… “I figured because the girl in the cute hat just caught that Mareep super easy,” the girl said with a grin, causing Lillie’s heart to leap into her throat as her face quickly reddened.

“I- uh, thanks, it… I thought it was pretty gi-! I mean, I thought it was pretty good! Pretty good, I meant to say!” Lillie cried, talking faster than usual, and with rather inconsistent volume. Hau fought the urge to laugh. Sun just smiled innocently.

“Oh, and you’re the ones who had such interesting battles against Hala, aren’t you? They were all over the internet, and they’ve only started dying down pretty recently. I’m Mallow, by the way!” Mallow said, eyes keen with interest.

“Yeah, that’s right! I’m Hau, I knew you were familiar! What’re you doing here the same time we happened to pass through?” Hau asked.

“I stop by here to get fresh milk for my recipes, and just to enjoy the wide open space and fresh air in general! Besides that, I think it’s important to check up on the rest of Akala Island every now and then, just to see how things are. I’m actually glad I ran into you all. I’ve been told some things about you, after all,” Mallow said.

“You have?” Lillie asked, rather curiously.

“For safety and security reasons. Ilima, Hala, and Professor Kukui have all been in touch with me. One of you has a very rare Pokemon… Well, technically, two of you, but you know what I mean specifically… and one of you is… not from around here,” Mallow said rather quietly, although the area was mostly devoid of other people. “So, I have been told that you’d be here, and I’d meet you at some point, but I wasn’t really going out of my way to track you down,” Mallow continued.

“So, when it comes to the order we go about the Trials here…” Hau started.

“Oh, you can handle that whatever way you feel like! You can split up, or take turns, whatever you like. The main thing is that each of you does all three… although we might have to try to spice things up when you challenge us, given how talented you three seem to be… And it’s been over a month since you fought Hala. You’re probably all stronger than ever now!” Mallow said.

“Is there any order you suggest in particular?” Hau asked.

“I’d just suggest following what your team is best suited for. From there, you’ll have to be flexible. But, to help you out with things a bit, I do have a couple of things to give you all,” Mallow said. “First, Hala should’ve given you all Ride Pagers, so can I see those for a minute?” Mallow asked.

The group obliged, holding out their Ride Pagers for Mallow. One by one, she quickly fiddled with them for a moment, then gave a satisfied grin.

“Good! Now you’ve all been registered with Stoutland! I shouldn’t have to give you any further lessons, if you can ride a Tauros you can definitely ride a Stoutland. They’re calmer, and usually a little slower too. And don’t worry about how they’ll carry you, Ride Stoutland are bred and raised to be a much larger strain,” Mallow explained.

Hau gave a sigh of relief at that, pretty certain that Lillie was the only one even remotely light enough for a normal Stoutland to be comfortable with carrying for long, although they were
definitely much stronger than they appeared.

“So, even though they’re a little slower, Stoutland have tons of stamina, and they have the added benefit of being able to locate and dig up lost items for you. They’re also good for rescue, if for whatever reason your other Pokemon aren’t able to help,” Mallow explained. “Wouldn’t want you getting in trouble, after all,” Mallow said with a grin.

“Thanks, Mallow!” Hau said. Lillie just quietly mirrored his words, too flustered to speak at full volume.

“And next… I have something for Sun..” Mallow said, before she carefully opened a Pokeball so that whatever was inside would materialize in her free hand, cradled against her. The group was a bit surprised when it turned out to be an egg, dark brown colored with a rough and slightly ‘hairy’ texture to it. It was somehow like an egg and a seed at the same time.

Sun studied it closer as Mallow handed it to him, but the rather drab nature made it a bit hard to predict what it was supposed to be, besides being a Grass-type. Sun peered through the thick shell, but whatever was inside was still only partly developed.

“So, that’s a Pokemon egg! I’d like Sun to take care of it… because reasons,” Mallow said.


“It’s an experiment, pretty much. Pokemon egg and child development is accelerated and influenced by Fields acting upon them. Both Pokemon and human Fields help, but each impacts the egg differently. Professor Kukui tells me that Sun can’t really be considered a Pokemon at all. So, if we have the influence of someone who isn’t a Pokemon or a human…. I dunno, I think it’d be neat to see what happens. Maybe nothing in particular. But even then, it’d still be interesting to see how someone like Sun would go about raising a baby Pokemon,” Mallow said. “I’ve been told that all of his Pokemon become obedient pretty much right away, and hardly ever give him trouble. I think that’s really something,”

“So, what’ll the egg be?” Lillie plucked up the courage to ask, as she studied the egg closely. “It’s rather hard to tell, beyond it being a Grass-type of some kind,”

“Oh, that’s gonna be a Bounsweet!” Mallow said with a giggle. “Figure I may as well tell you now, so you won’t be scrambling to figure out how to take care of one once the egg hatches. If the development speed stays around the same as usual, I’d say you have about another month,”

“Well, we do have a way to make eggs hatch faster,” Hau said. “Professor Kukui added new features to the Rotomdex. I think the time reduction is like-”

“50%, bzzt!” Rotomdex said, suddenly coming out of Sun’s bag.

“...Um, how often are you eavesdropping on us?” Lillie asked, turning towards Rotomdex with a raised brow.

“Approximately 76.7% percent of the time,” Rotomdex said, matter-of-factly.

“Wow, that’s not unsettling at all!” Hau said with sarcastic cheer.

“I’m a ghost. I regard that as a compliment,” Rotomdex replied with a grin, before vanishing back into Sun’s bag. Mallow just blinked a couple of times. Lillie seemed relatively used to it.
“So, anyway, Mallow… should we treat this more like a seed, or more like an egg? It kind of looks like both,” Hau said.

“More like an egg, but there are some seed-like quirks. Pokemon breeding is an odd thing. Pokemon have a wide variety of reproductive methods in the wild, or in captive settings designed to closely emulate it… But under certain conditions, and with frequent human contact, AWE causes the Pokemon reproductive system to change… Leading to large eggs that always contain large, well-developed young. Almost always one at a time, since the eggs use a lot of resources. Researchers think that this might exist specifically to make it easier for humans to help Pokemon care for young, and take full advantage of benefits available under human care.”

“So you're saying… normally, something like a Miltank would get pregnant or something… but with humans raising it in a certain way, it'll suddenly lay eggs?” Hau asked. Pokemon breeding really wasn't his strong suit in terms of knowledge about the creatures.

“Yup!” Mallow said with a quick nod.

“That's so weird!” Hau cried. “It hardly makes sense!”

“I've heard about it before, but it's still just as odd to think about,” Lillie added.

“Well, in the most literal sense, no Pokemon are animals, no matter how much they look like them. We just call them by animal names sometimes because it's easy for us. True animals don't have any Field capacity, so they're held to stricter rules. Many species of actual animal are rare, and many are known mainly known through fossil records. A lot were hunted and outcompeted to extinction, mostly leaving the common ones as small, fast-breeding species, and the generalists. And very few animals approach the intelligence of even the simplest Pokemon. As you know, many Pokemon are limited more by Reluctance Syndrome, rather than genuinely lacking the brainpower. Did you know that, genetically speaking, a Caterpie is more similar to a human than it is to any species of real caterpillar?”

“Wait, what?” Hau said. Sun felt just as confused by that last tidbit, but Lillie seemed to have known already, just nodding along in rapt attention.

“Well, humans derive from Pokemon, not animals. And convergent evolution is an amazing thing. Creatures can develop very similar adaptations in response to similar conditions. Not to mention, the theories that Pokemon somehow use AWE to acquire new traits far faster than they would otherwise be able to. Pokemon seem to be an entire kingdom of their own, fully distinct from animals, plants, or fungi.”

“...So, are humans Pokemon?” Hau asked.

“I'd say… Yes and no. It depends on how you define ‘Pokemon’. At this point, our DNA and behavior are different enough that most people would say no. But at the same time… some of us do have power beyond Tier 0. And some Pokemon don’t have Reluctance Syndrome. Not to mention, even though our DNA is different, it’s really not as different as you’d think. So, if you want my opinion… we are what we are. It’s fine to be curious, but I try not to think too hard about it,” Mallow said. “Either way… I'm sorry, but I still have other things to do today. I'll just get the egg properly released, and then I'll be seeing you all later! Good luck!” Mallow said. She took just a few more seconds to point her Pokeball at the Bounsweet egg and have it give off a bright blue light, severing all of its affiliations with the egg. With that, as soon as everyone said their goodbyes, she was gone.

“Lillie... you should totally go to her first,” Hau said as soon as Mallow was out of earshot. His grin
was brimming with mischief. “You and Mallow, all alone while you do your Trial…” he continued, getting close to Lillie and whispering in an exaggerated, conspiratorial sort of way.

“Okay, first, I think she's about 19 or 20, so still too old! And second, she's too good for me anyway!” Lillie whined.

“That first thing may be, but that second thing is just ridiculous! You could get any girl you want! Well, unless they're more into the butch side of things… but besides that!” Hau said. Lillie just went rather red at Hau's words. Even more so because Sun was enthusiastically agreeing with Hau. “You guys…” Lillie whined.

“Okay, fine, I’ll stop… for now.” Hau said with a smirk. “But really, how are we going to do these Trials? Do we go to each one together and just take turns, or do we just split up? The second one seems faster, but…”

Sun quickly voted for all of them staying together. It was safer that way.

“…I agree with Sun, I'd prefer we stick together. I've heard Team Skull has a larger presence on this island. Not to mention… this is Tapu Lele's island. What if they hate Sun just like Tapu Koko?” Lillie asked.

Nebby gave an indignant sound from within the bag at the mention of Tapu Koko.

Both Hau and Sun froze briefly at Lillie's words. They'd probably been fine for the time being because they'd mostly been near a city, where Tapu Lele would prefer to avoid attention and avoid making a scene… But, if Sun were to be caught alone in the wilderness… Tapu Lele could have him up and vanish, and no one would be any the wiser.

“Yeaahhh, we're definitely sticking together then,” Hau said, as he gravitated closer to Sun, holding his hand without even entirely thinking about it. “But that still means we have to pick an order.”

“I think, maybe, we just go by what's closest? Brooklet Hill, then Wela Volcano Park, then Lush Jungle,” Lillie suggested.

“Yeah, that sounds simple. And usually, simple is good.” Hau said. Sun agreed. “But if that's the case, it probably would be best to make sure that Mareep is willing to fight and listen. And if they are, then you should have her become a Flaaffy too. Or if they don't want to fight, I'd say you should try to catch something else,” Hau said.

“So, you're saying we should wait a little longer?” Lillie asked. “I don’t want to slow you two down…”

“No, it’s fine! I have to train too! On paper, my team looks the most prepared for a Water trial… But my team looked strong against granddad too, and I easily could’ve lost that. I still don’t want to be taken off guard, and I'd bet a dozen malasadas that the Totem or their backup knows an Ice-type move,” Hau said. Sun figured he could also use that time to evolve C.C., and make more progress to getting a Zoroark too… But getting Bounsweet to hatch and become strong enough for the trial would probably require an impractical amount of time. He didn't need to immediately rely on them so heavily anyway.

“So, I'd say we give it two more weeks,” Hau said. “We have Rotom's powers, so that should probably be enough time.”

No one objected to that, and so it was decided.
With that, they went about the rest of their day exploring the ranch, battling, testing out the Stoutland, and generally trying not to worry too much about what may or may not happen if Tapu Lele were to decide to come after them.

Lillie tentatively tried out battling with Mareep… Fortunately, she was willing to battle… But unfortunately, it proved unreliable, with Mareep being lazy and non-confrontational to the point of only showing any willingness to face the easiest-looking opponents possible. She only managed to complete one genuine battle over the course of the whole day… and the opponent was only an exceptionally small Lillipup. In comparison, Salsa was overpowering young Tauros and Miltank with little effort at all.

The group investigated the Pokemon Nursery as well, although they knew they didn't really need to use it. But there was a kindly, if not somewhat mysterious woman inside, who gave them a TM for Hidden Power. The group immediately distributed the move amongst their team members… Ultimately, to Sha, Zorua, Eu, Mareep, and all of Hau's Pokemon. The others either prioritized physical attacks, or simply had enough decent move options already.

With some experimenting and close observation on Sun's part, they were able to work out the Hidden Power typings for all eight Pokemon who learned it. Sha had Flying, Zorua was Bug, Eu was Ice, Mareep was Poison, Dartrix was lucky enough to have Rock, Pikachu had Dragon, Blissey had Steel, and Noibat had Grass.

“And now I'm gonna have to come up with some way to not confuse the Hidden Power types of four Pokemon at once… hoo boy…,” Hau said, once they had all the types recorded in their Pokedexes.

“Try a mnemonic device,” Lillie suggested. “Like acronyms, or a rhyme, or something.”

“Crap, that sounds like it involves thinking,” Hau said with a fake whine, eliciting a brief laugh from Lillie.

“It won't be that bad! We all know you're smart!” Lillie said encouragingly.

“Eh. I was one of the kids that had to study a ton to get good grades. Totally different from everything I've been told about my dad, who mostly just coasted and somehow did fine… “ Hau said.

“I understand. My tutoring was very strict… Sometimes I think Mother wanted my brother and I to have too much homework on purpose, to limit the time we had for anything she wouldn’t like,” Lillie said. “Tapus forbid you try to complain about it where she can hear you…”

Sun remembered something involving a difficult test administered by an electronic helmet designed to give horrendous migraines and pulses of nausea-inducing light patterns if you made mistakes, but immediately refused to think any further about it.

The group moved on soon afterwards, practicing the new attack on various wild Pokemon and a couple of Trainers. The rest of the day passed uneventfully enough.

The next day, soon after the group entered Route 5, they came upon a pale, lanky young man with platinum blonde hair, dressed entirely in black and red clothing, which was ripped in several locations… It honestly looked a touch too warm for the climate, even if it was currently “winter”. He was initially turned away, slowly walking in the same direction they were, but Lillie was rooted
to the spot, recognizing him immediately. Her eyes widened.

“Lillie?” Hau asked. “Lillie, what’s wrong?” he continued, just loudly enough that the young man stopped… and slowly turned around.

Immediately, Sun and Hau were struck by the startling similarity… Especially for Sun, who could take in the features of his face much more easily…

Could he be…

“Gladion,” Lillie started. “It’s alright. These are my friends, the ones I told you about,”

Lillie’s words did nothing to stop Gladion from stalking over with surprising speed.

“So, you must be Sun…” Gladion started, giving Sun a once-over with an intense expression. “Gods, what’s with the star marking and the shiny hair? Everyone around would notice that!” Gladion immediately complained. “And that video! Now scores of people will wonder what you have to do with Lillie! Do you even try to keep a low profile?!” Gladion continued, getting more in Sun’s face as his voice steadily raised. Sun wasn’t exactly sure what to make of it. Lillie hadn’t told him Gladion would be so… opinionated.

“Hey, hey, we can be cool about this! Uh, so, I’m Hau! Lillie’s friend, Sun’s boyfriend. I’d really appreciate it if you gave him some space,” Hau said.

“Whatever,” Gladion said, although he did back away. “I saw you in those videos too. And the pictures of you two kissing and all that shit. Not only was your battling underwhelming, but you’re just as tactlessly noticeable as Sun.”

“Underwhelming? But he won! Don’t be rude!” Lillie responded, as Hau just paused for a moment.

“Wait… there are pictures of us kissing?” Hau asked.

Gladion just rolled his eyes at Hau before answering Lillie. “Yes, underwhelming. He got two Flying-types demolished and had to cover his ass with his Blissey, while his Pikachu couldn’t even handle a Z-Move properly,” Gladion replied to Lillie, still unimpressed.

Sun forced back a low growl at Gladion’s tone towards Hau. How many trials had he beaten then, if he had so much room to judge?

“None. But that’s besides the point. I have a good reason to be avoiding them. There are other ways for my team and I to become stronger,” Gladion said.

“So, you wanna test that?” Hau asked, his tone remaining civil and even, although the spark of challenge could be seen in his eyes.

“Fine. I just hope you know what you’ve gotten you and your Pokemon into,” Gladion said quietly, as he held up a Pokeball.

Hau nodded, and both of them cleared distance as Sun and Lillie watched quietly.
“D,” Gladion said simply, tossing a Luxury Ball in a casual, aloof fashion. A Crobat materialized, all sleekness and fangs, a touch smaller and lighter than average but clearly built for speed. They gave a chilling cry, extending a Field that was easily Tier 3 as they fixed Hau with a challenging glare.

Hau responded with Pikachu, Both Hau and Pikachu did their best to look relaxed, but really Hau’s gears were turning as fast as possible. Pikachu had the type advantage, but Crobat was just inherently stronger and faster, as well as being able to fly.

“Cross Poison,” Gladion said. D swooped down in a silent blur, edges of their wings becoming alarmingly sharp and dribbling a deeply painful toxin. Pikachu moved at the last moment, taking only a grazing hit to the side from the incredibly swift move, but even that caused a flash of white-hot pain, drawing a thin line of blood in the process.

Something in Crobat’s eyes shifted, keen nose picking up on the blood. Hau could actually see the creature salivate, predatory instincts flaring up in earnest. Hau did his best to mentally calm Pikachu, who was more than smart enough to realize he was starting to look an awful lot like prey to his opponent.

“Thunder Wave!” Hau called. Pikachu fired off a quick jolt, but Crobat was gone in a flash, swooping in with another Cross Poison before Hau knew it.

Pikachu used Iron Tail, just barely blocking the attack as his feet dug in against the ground, and managing to get off the Thunder Wave then, while Crobat attempted to overpower him.

Gladion grit his teeth as Crobat nearly dropped to the ground then and there, giving a low croon of discomfort. In response, Gladion clutched one of his wrists tightly, as his hand briefly trembled. Hau furrowed his brow, a bit confused as to why. But with that strange movement, Crobat’s paralysis suddenly vanished as quickly as it came, the creature putting on an incredible burst of speed before soundly landing a brutal Cross Poison, hitting dead on and releasing even more blood as Pikachu gave a screech of pain.

Lillie and Sun actually cringed at the display, as Crobat leered hungrily at Pikachu, and Hau clutched at his chest, feeling a phantom burn there as he did his best to will Pikachu to continue.

He had Pikachu fire off a Shock Wave, using the opening created by the crackling flash and burst of pain throughout Crobat’s body to follow with Double Team… But Crobat was unconcerned.

With little effort, Crobat found their mark, Gladion not even having to say anything out loud. He just gave a satisfied grin as Crobat took Pikachu into his jaws and used Leech Life, painfully draining what little energy he had to spare, trilling in delight before unceremoniously tossing Pikachu aside, bloodied and battered.

Hau twitched a bit as he returned Pikachu, looking like he wanted to speak but couldn’t.

“Echolocation. It’s a bat. You have a bat too, don’t you? You should’ve known,” Gladion said coolly. Hau just twitched once more at those words.

“Blissey!” Hau called, voice cracking a bit as he released her onto the battleground. He knew having her go against physical attacks was a huge risk, but both Noibat and Dartrix were just asking for trouble if he tried to use them against a Crobat.
“It’s alright, Hau! You still have a chance!” Lillie called. Hau could feel Sun in the back of his mind as well, gently encouraging him and advising him to steady his breathing. Gladion just tsked.

“Leech Life,” Gladion ordered.

“Psychic,” Hau countered, knowing it was coming. Pikachu hardly had anything left to give after a head-on Cross Poison, but Blissey was absolutely *replete* with vitality. Of course he’d want to use Leech Life again.

The psychic field didn’t build up strength fast enough to stop D from coming in and sinking their fangs in deep, continuing to trill in delight as they gorged themself on Blissey’s bevy of blood and energy, but it did build fast enough to blast them away with utterly punishing force, as Blissey gave a cry of pain and effort.

Gladion swapped D out then, just as their flight stabilized. “Good girl,” Gladion said quietly to the Luxury Ball, before switching it for a Dusk Ball. “Now, Abbadon,” Gladion said, as an Absol materialized, a bit larger than normal, with glossy white fur and a scythe so wickedly sharp and polished that its edge actually glinted in the Alolan sun. “Tear them apart.”

Hau couldn’t help but frown at the fact that the Absol seemed so… well-cared for… But he couldn’t stop yet.

“Blissey, you return too!” Hau called… But in the space between him holding up Blissey’s ball and firing the return beam, Absol had already landed an incredibly strong Pursuit, ramming their head scythe into Blissey’s plush, yielding form just as she was about to dematerialize, painfully interrupting the process with their Field.

Blissey gave a cry of agony as Abbadon then cocked their head a bit and cut even further across Blissey’s front, drawing more blood and creating such screaming pain that Hau couldn’t take it, couldn’t handle feeling the tearing phantom blade in his own body even as he tried to will Blissey to continue. Blissey collapsed, bleeding steadily on the ground, as Lillie just looked away with a grimace, and Sun was practically rooted to the spot, still desperately hoping that Hau could turn things around. But he was pretty sure that Super Luck, combined with Gladion’s deep Field sync, had allowed Abbadon to score some truly grievous damage.

Hau felt a lump in his throat as he looked at what was probably his most durable team member, lying face down in the dirt with such a savage gash. He quickly returned her before it could get any worse.

Hau paused for a moment before sending out Dartrix, steeling his resolve and doing his best to forget the phantom pains, remember that they weren’t real for him, only for the Pokemon he’d so carelessly guided to their defeat. The next time, he’d take it. He’d bear it, no matter the pain. He and Dartrix together.

“Stone Edge,” Gladion commanded, looking quite self-satisfied. Hau’s blood ran cold as he mentally screamed for Dartrix to dodge. Luckily, as sharp-edged stalagmites burst from the ground in a near-instant, each rising taller than Hau in only a split second, Dartrix just barely managed to get out of the way.

But Gladion and Abbadon were persistent, the ground trembling as Abbadon focused their will tightly. Yet another jagged line of stalagmites came jutting out of the earth, thinner and faster, more...
precise and bladelike, angled towards Dartrix with intent to slash and tear. That time, Dartrix couldn’t dodge fully, one of them abruptly angling left and firing itself from the earth just as Dartrix tried to swoop up high. It sliced deep into one of his shoulders as Hau, Lillie, and Sun all cringed as one, and Hau clutched at his own shoulder, hissing at the pain.

Dartrix came clumsily crashing down, while Gladion took the chance to command a Swords Dance, much to Hau’s horror.

“Roost!” Hau called, while the Absol gave a long, low cry and began to jump about while thrusting their scythe and swiping their tail to an odd rhythm, an aura of power rapidly building around them. Dartrix began to glow, rapidly mending his injury throughout the process.

“Night Slash,” Gladion ordered next. Abbadon rushed forward, already bloodied scythe savaging Dartrix with a wicked black aura, but Hau resisted still, another lump rising in his throat as phantom pain assaulted him… But that time, he refused to give in, breathing deeply as he focused pointedly on his next move. It wasn’t real for him. Only for Dartrix. And Dartrix needed him, if they wanted to win.

Hau began to pose, summoning forth an utterly brilliant light that suffused itself deep into Dartrix, filling him with such power that he briefly forgot his tiredness. Absol backed away and warily hunkered down as yet more power surged out of Hau, yet more emotion surged out of him, into his Field, then to the ever-hungry stone on his wrist. Hau seemed momentarily lost in the light, nothing but a continuous mass of burning white-gold, streaming relentlessly into Dartrix, who cried out with the sheer might he was accumulating.

It was going on the longest Sun or Lillie had ever seen, before Breakneck Blitz was finally unleashed. Dartrix was essentially just a brief, blinding flash that smashed against Absol with such speed and power he could hardly be seen at all, forcing Gladion to cover his eyes.

When everything settled, there was a long, straight rut in the earth, nearly a foot deep, stretching back well past Gladion and all the way to a tree about twenty meters back, which Dartrix had smashed his opponent into with utterly unreal force. Abbadon and Dartrix both were utterly unresponsive.

Gladion was once again clutching his trembling wrist, taking deep breaths through tightly clenched teeth. Once it subsided, he returned Abbadon without a word. Hau had to actually jog forward a bit to do the same for Dartrix.

As Hau resumed his position, still panting a bit, Gladion just stared incredulously. “What the fuck was that?! She was undamaged! You- How did you create that much aura?! How did you create that much and you’re still standing?! The bulk of the strain should’ve been on you, because you’re only human, but Dartrix fainted instead!” Gladion cried.

“I don’t know,” Hau said quietly.

“What?” Gladion answered, before leaning forward, his stance becoming more aggressive. “Don’t give me that. Tell me. Have you been holding back? Is that it? Are you just not taking any of this fucking seriously?!” Sun’s eyes briefly burned with golden light. Lillie quickly put a hand on his shoulder.

Hau clenched his teeth “That’s not it, I just… I just thought about how much I don’t want to lose, and-” Hau started.

“Fine. I’ll just have to go all out too. Whatever your last Pokemon is going to do, I hope you’re
“ready,” Gladion said, before throwing out a plain Pokeball.

What came out was anything but.

Everyone immediately cringed upon seeing it, and Sun actually involuntarily teared up for a moment as the creature extended its Field with a distorted, haunting roar from within what seemed to be… some kind of helmet? Either way, its Field was…

Its Field was nasty.

High Tier 3, apparently, but so strange. It pulsed in some erratic, ugly way, range and intensity ebbing and flowing like a mad heartbeat. Power flowed through it in fits and starts, bursts and lunges, blotchy and unfocused, dimmed and blinding all at once. It was like… something was subdued, but desperately trying to break free.

Around the edges of the heavy brown helmet, the very edges, there was an unknowable power there. Conglomerated together, pulsing and thrumming within the very structure of the helmet… It looked like… Sun barely knew how to describe it. As his gaze pierced the surface of the helmet, hoping for a look at the creature’s true face, his eyes burned unbearably, a few tears streaming down his face as he tried to come to terms faced with what madness he could see.

It was as if every kind of Field there ever was was trapped there, trapped just beneath the surface, waiting to explode out of that monstrous creature’s mind. There was no one type, no one signature. It was... it was like everything, only stripped down and stuffed into a tiny little space, locked up until it teetered on the brink of madness. Like looking into some kaleidoscope and seeing a pattern woven purely from nonsensical atrocities.

The rest of the creature’s appearance was something to behold by itself. For one, it was huge, bigger than most Arcanine, even. Even taller than the Ride Stoutland, although it didn’t have their bulk. It was a solid hunk of lean muscle, its front legs terminating in huge, wicked talons, and their lower parts being made of something that had Sun unsure if it was metal, reinforced chitin, or sort of both. It had a shaggy grey mane, and short black fur, but also some sort of purple, scaly padding on sections of its back legs, and some sort of large, fish-like tail.

Sun was silently horrified to see Hau send out Noibat.

As much as he wanted Hau to win… No. No, that wasn’t going to work, that wasn’t going to work, he needed to forfeit, he needed to hurry up and-

The creature lunged, its movements stiff and unnatural. Noibat tried her best to dodge, and to counter with blades of wind...

Despite that, it all but ignored her counter attack, then rammed Noibat with a sudden incredible leap. It caught her on its strange bladed crest and then tore into her with its ferocious front talons, which glowed harshly with a pinkish-magenta Fairy aura. Was that... Play Rough? A guttural, echoing rumble sounded from its helmet all the while. Its movements were jerky, strange, almost robotic.

Noibat was reduced to a bloodied heap within moments, wing membranes torn and a few strips of fur missing. Hau took a long, deep breath before returning her.

“You win,” Hau said lowly.
“So that’s it? You’re just going to go out like that? That’s your whole gimmick? One wild Z-Move, and then you slip into comfortable mediocrity? Tch,” Gladion responded with a scowl, as Hau just looked down at the ground, clenching his fists. Gladion’s strange Pokemon came up beside him, and he idly stroked the creature’s back. Sun growled lowly, but he was at least a bit surprised to see how the creature’s Field calmed and retracted so swiftly in response… although the absolute madness within the helmet hardly abated in the slightest.

“Gladion, please, he already lost…” Lillie said.

“No, Lillie. For someone to have all this talent and privilege, and those Pokemon, and squander it to the point where that Z-Move is the only reason he knocked out even one of my own-”

“I… I have been trying,” Hau said, voice strained. Gladion paused. “I have been trying, really hard! You-you really think I want to just… stand around, constantly goofing off while at any moment, something bad could happen to Sun, or Lillie, or Nebby? You think I’m really happy just staying how I am while I know damn well there are aliens, and evil laboratories, and in general, just about an uku billion things that could probably kill us in our sleep if we aren’t careful? You really think you can stand there and preach to me about what I do or don’t do, like you know me, like you know my life, while you fuck off with some weird Pokemon and wear stupid emo clothes instead of sticking with your own sister?” Hau shouted, expression growing angrier by the moment.

Gladion flinched, opening his mouth to respond, but Hau was faster.

“I’m not fucking done! You really think I’m so stupid that I don’t already know to feel ashamed when some pasty bastard comes out of nowhere, acting all high-and-mighty, and hands my ass to me while preaching about privilege and talent and low profiles, as if I’m just some fucking idiot? Well, loser or not, who’s still been right there by Lillie’s side for what, I don’t know, the last four months?! Was it you?! No! It was me! And who do you think was there for nearly a gods-damned year?! Was that you? No! It was Sun! Someone who was a total stranger looks out for her better than you do, so how the fuck does that make you feel, you pretentious-ass beanpole?!”

“Hau!” Lillie cried with a strained expression, fretfully looking back and forth between him and Gladion. Sun mostly just looked impressed, if anything.

Gladion’s strange Pokemon stalked forward, issuing a rattling growl, but Hau’s eyes glowed a strange, deep green… and the Pokemon stilled, then went silent.

“Null?” Gladion said quietly, turning to the Pokemon. “And you, your eyes… how are you-”

“Don’t talk to me,” Hau responded, voice cracking. Sun rushed to his side in that moment, and Hau turned away… but Sun felt. And Sun saw.

As Sun carefully moved to get Hau to look at him, he saw not a green glow, but tears, steadily starting to flow in spite of Hau’s best efforts.

Sun paused at that, then slowly stroked Hau’s hair.

Carefully, gently, fondly. He admired the lovely texture, the deep, beautiful color...

And yet…

Lillie and Gladion could both feel goosebumps. Lillie’s stomach churned unpleasantly.
Sun hugged Hau close, gently soothing him and Hau began to cry a bit harder, the mental dam holding it back steadily failing. Sun’s hands were so gentle, so caring, holding Hau as if he were beyond priceless, as if he were a gift from heaven.

And yet…

Flocks of Pikipek, Trumbeak, and Butterfree cleared the area even from a startlingly large distance away, despite having already seen and stayed through the aberration that was Null.

Sun slowly pulled away from Hau, steam steadily rising off of him. Violet light all around him. Illusion slowly fading.

Gladion’s eyes went wide, his head beginning to pound as Null whined lowly, repeatedly nudging their crest against him to try and convince him to leave the area. Lillie clutched the sides of her head and squeezed her eyes shut, trying to simultaneously reach out and calm Sun with her mind while also blocking out the sheer malice she felt.

Sun glared at Gladion, eyes burning violet, a crystal-toothed snarl on his face as light and steam spilled from his mouth.

You.

“I… you… me?” Gladion stammered dumbly, quickly stepping backwards. Sun stepped forwards. His sandals were smouldering, Gladion realized. He held his harshly glowing hands away from his clothing, but the air around them was shimmering regardless.

This is all your fault.

“I… I know, just, please, calm down, I didn’t mean to-” Gladion started. He’d never thought anyone wearing a pastel blue skirt and sporting pink painted nails could somehow be mind-bendingly terrifying, but there it was. A smooth, lizard-like tail at least four feet long thrashed behind Sun, the last foot or so glowing a wrathful violet, whipping so quickly it actually made cracking sounds. Lillie backed away warily, internally trying her best to get Sun to calm down.

You hurt him.

“I didn’t mean to, I swear, I just, I just thought-” Gladion sputtered, bending his head down and clutching it tightly as he backed away more. Sun continued to step forward. There was something there, in his mind, something harsh and scathing. It was baying for his blood, pounding against his consciousness, making his head pound physically too. His heartbeat sped up, nausea building rapidly...

Excuses!

“I… Null, let’s go, we have to get out of here, we have to-” Gladion started, as he made to run… only to slam face first into a translucent wall that definitely wasn’t there a moment ago, falling unceremoniously to the ground as Null got between him and Sun, hunkering down and growling deeply. “Wh-what the-”

Coward!

Sun’s sandals actually caught fire, along with the nearest grass. Sun didn’t even seem to notice.
Nearby, Lillie frantically started looking through her bag for something, and Hau, still struggling to stop his tears, looked on in silent terror, as he realized just what Sun could possibly do.

"Sun!" Hau called. "Sun, it’s alright, it’s alright! Don’t! Don’t do it!" Hau said frantically, as he started to run towards him... Only for Lillie to interrupt with what looked like an outstretched fire blanket, dashing in and abruptly crashing into Sun with a tight hug, while simultaneously wrapping him in the blanket, managing to avoid the heat that way. Still, Hau joined in as well, just for good measure.

And steadily, the light faded. The flames licking at Sun’s feet subsided thanks to the blanket, although the unpleasant smell of burning sandals remained. Sun looked at Lillie, who was still hugging him tightly as if her life depended on it, while also on the verge of tears. Then at Hau, whose tears were only just subsiding.

Sun looked at the boy on the ground in front of him. Took in his fear, his vulnerability, the youth in his face. Took in how easily he could’ve been blinded, mauled, burned alive. Then thought about how Gladion’s Pokemon would’ve reacted, how Lillie would’ve felt.

The shame hit Sun all at once, his nodes trembling violently before he vanished right before Gladion’s very eyes.

"Wha-" Gladion started, as he stared at Lillie seemingly holding a fire blanket over a lump of air.

"So... I suppose I have a lot of explaining to do,” Lillie said.

"I’ll bet," Gladion said in utter exasperation, before he bent his head down and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. “That’s your friend?! Some alien with fucking superpowers? For fuck’s sake, Lillie, how did you even find him?”

"He, uh, fell out of the sky. Apparently, it was some kind of portal. Professor Kukui’s Rockruff found him,” Lillie explained.

"...You mean, like... like an Ultra Beast?” Gladion said, voice getting a bit quieter. “Is he some kind of Ultra Beast? Just a really smart one? One that decided this whole ‘Trainer' thing and ‘human’ thing would be fun?”

"Technically speaking, probably not. Or at least, Professor Kukui and I don’t think so. He can’t access Beast Boost, he has no reluctance, and neither does the rest of his species,” Lillie said, as Sun steadily reappeared.

"...So there’s... a society? A whole race?” Gladion asked.

"Yes,” Lillie said. “Not to mention, a little while after you left, a couple of strange people came to help Mother with her research... Turns out they were actually Sun’s species, and they know Sun. We’ve been calling them Luxians,” Lillie explained.

"So, wait, if they came to help her... How do you know Sun isn’t on their side?”

"Sun lost his memories, and he’s only been getting them back slowly. He hardly has anything to do with it, directly speaking. The other thing is that they don’t really seem to want to help her, and they’ve helped us multiple times. They’re generally rather nice, once you get to know them,”

"Wait…” Hau spoke up, coming closer, sticking close to Sun in the process. “If you don’t know
Dulse and Zossie… How long were you gone?”

Gladion hesitated to answer, but he knew that Lillie would likely answer for him if he refused. “…It’s been well over two and a half years now…”

“…So… even counting how long it’s been since Lillie left home, you left Lillie alone with your abusive, unstable mom for almost two years?” Hau asked, his gaze hardening as he spoke. “Even knowing that if you left it’d probably give her an excuse to act even worse?” Gladion scooted backwards slightly, cringing at Hau’s words.

“Hau, it’s, it’s fine, he had his reasons,” Lillie started quietly.

“How is it fine ?!” Hau responded sharply, causing Lillie to flinch. “He just… he just bailed on you! So, seriously, how is it fine?! Why’d he do that?!”

Gladion spoke carefully, feeling a lump briefly rise in his own throat. “It’s why I have to get stronger. To protect her.”

“Oh, yeah, because staying miles and miles away from someone at almost all times is just soooo protective of you…” Hau said, rolling his eyes.

Lillie covered her mouth with one hand. Gladion flinched at those words, balling up a bit smaller. “You don’t… you don’t understand,”

“Neither did you, but that didn’t stop you from talking down to me, now did it?” Hau asked. Gladion hesitated yet again, not exactly sure what to say, but then spoke again.

“It… It’s about Null, too. I couldn’t leave them there. Our mother had them frozen alive. And… if I had Null, I figured it was safer for me to go alone. Null isn’t always… easy to control…” Gladion said. “Null is my friend, but they were designed as a living weapon. There’s no sugarcoating that. They weren’t just designed to fight, they were designed to kill. It took me a while just to be able to trust them.”

Hau softened slightly at that, but not entirely. “…So, why not come for her later?” Hau asked simply. Gladion just opened and closed his mouth, not seeming to have a good answer. “…And if Null’s a living weapon, is it even a good idea to encourage that?”

“…Null gets… testy when they go too long without a fight. Compromise is the only real solution I found. But either way, Null needs to be able to win against Ultra Beasts. And if anyone comes after us, Null and I need to be strong enough to resist. Or else we’re all f*cked, basically,” Gladion explained.

“…Alright.” Hau said, after a long pause. “I still think you went about all this in a really ass-backwards kind of way, but it seems like your heart is in the right place,” Hau said. “I’m really sorry. I shouldn’t have been so harsh. I just… it was so frustrating to lose to you. And… scary . To know that at any time, no matter how well I think I’m doing, someone can still just come along and make everything I work for feel like it was all for nothing. And then, they could just do whatever they want, and I couldn’t stop them…”

“…I see. I can understand that,” Gladion said quietly. There was a brief pause, before Lillie cleared her throat.

“What?” Gladion asked.
“You know, Hau said sorry…” Lillie said rather dryly.

Gladion stared for a moment longer before it suddenly clicked. “Oh. Oh! Yes! I…” Gladion cleared his throat. “I’m sorry too. I said rude things to you without considering your feelings. And there was no reason to go so hard on your Pokemon. I’d hoped to force you to battle at full intensity, but I went overboard,” Gladion said.

“Well, they’ll all be alright before long, and that’s the important thing,” Hau said. “And honestly, I just have to accept that I have to try harder from now on,”

After another lengthy pause, Sun finally apologized as well. It wasn’t appropriate to scare Gladion so badly. And if he’d ended up physically hurting him, that would’ve been inexcusable.

“…I wasn’t that afraid,” Gladion poorly lied. Everyone just shot him very tired, unimpressed looks. “…Alright, alright, fine. It was terrifying. Are you happy now?”

“It’ll do,” Lillie said, but Sun just looked deep into Gladion’s eyes, his gaze intense, his nodes pulsing white. Gladion felt a question there. A challenge.

“...You want to battle me next?” Gladion asked.

Right.

Trying to harm Gladion was wrong. But there was nothing saying he couldn’t receive a more honorable punishment.

“...You’re still mad,” Gladion said quietly, briefly swallowing.

Observant, this one.

Sun once again disguised himself, putting on an air of outward calm rather than the roiling sea of violets part of him still wanted to be displaying.

Gladion rose to his feet, and went about the process of healing his Crobat and Absol. Hau tended to his own team as well, but that was a process that would take significantly longer. Sun just waited patiently.

Once Gladion was ready, he returned Null, and the two took their appropriate positions.

“Calypso!” Gladion called, as he sent out a Sylveon… although everyone immediately noticed how odd the color was. The Sylveon was silver where they should’ve been cream, and a deep blood red where they should’ve been pink, leaving only the eyes and the ends of the ribbons unaltered in their coloration. Still, given that they didn’t have that tell-tale sparkle to their body, it was easy to see the likely explanation for the colors.

“Holy shit,” Hau said with a huge grin, as he stifled a laugh. “You dye your Sylveon just to make the colors more edgy? Seriously?”

Gladion pointedly turned away from Hau a bit, although Sun could make out a faint blush on his face.
In turn, Sun sent out Sha, immediately giving the order to use the Toxic Venoshock combo. There was no time to lose. Gladion could dispel status quickly, Sylveon seemed like the kind of Pokemon that could possibly know Heal Bell, and he was pretty sure Sylveon were resilient against special attacks.

Sha sent out a steaming torrent of sticky, bubbling goo that Calypso just barely avoided with a graceful leap to the side, only to be overwhelmed by strong fumes and poisoned regardless.

Gladion's response was Shadow Ball, which Sun was somewhat grateful for. He'd been anticipating that there could be a Psychic-type move.

Sha dove out of the way with little trouble, immediately following with a ferocious Venoshock as Gladion told Calypso to dodge, just barely managing it as some gentle pink aura began to swirl around Calypso's body, along with a subtle wind that boosted their speed.

Sun thought about another Venoshock, but Gladion seemed to think better of keeping Calypso in any longer, and instead sent out Abbadon.

Immediately, Gladion went for Psycho Cut, and Sun responded with Signal Beam. The attacks clashed, Signal Beam's steady output and Bug-typing proceeding to overcome Psycho Cut and crash into Abbadon's side with full force. The Absol gave a pained whine before responding with a volley of smaller, quicker Psycho Cuts, meant to keep Sha preoccupied with dodging.

But still, Sha managed to fire off another Signal Beam, blasting the landscape with its bright light as Abbadon dashed to the right and then leapt to the left, doing their best to evade.

Sun countered by having Sha fire off blasts of toxic glue to coat the ground, but Gladion had a response to that.

“Stone Edge!,” Gladion called, and Abbadon summoned a line of pillars up wide and blunt, ponderous enough to easily miss Sha… but that didn't seem to be the point. Abbadon leapt up onto them, using the tops of them as platforms to maneuver above the rest of the field.

Sun quickly changed tactics, having Sha fire off a powerful spray of toxic aerosol and fumes, managing to poison Abbadon as well, forcing them to slow down greatly as the aerosol irritated their eyes and throat.

That was all the opening needed.

One more Signal Beam knocked Abbadon down off the stone pillars with impunity, and Gladion struggled to help hold Abbadon's will together, allowing Abbadon to just barely hold on, lifting herself from the dirt and toxic goo she'd landed in… but she was still much too slow after taking such a hit, and landing in a spot of thick goo.

Sha fired a final Signal Beam, faster but weaker than the others to give her as little time as possible. Regardless, it was more than enough.

Absol went right back down as Sha lit up with a cyan aura, cackling at their victory.

Gladion gave a low grumbler of dismay at the sight of Beast Boost, but quietly praised Abbadon before sending out D.

Sun did his best to assess the situation. Because of Leech Life, typing, and phenomenal speed, the Crobat honestly made a very good counter to his team, in theory. But Sha was still raring to go. Now was as good a time as any to be able to defeat her.
Sun focused intently, on the movements of the Crobat, the tiniest fluctuations of D's Field, the smallest twitches of her muscles.

Sun had Sha use Acid Spray, firing off small bursts of the acid rapid-fire. D did her best to weave between the shots, her speed serving her well, but she was still a relatively large target. A few peppered her, although they didn't cause much outright pain as she simply powered through and attempted Acrobatics.

Sha responded with Iron Tail, just barely preparing the attack in time to block, although they were still sent hurtling to the ground, squealing at the force of impact.

Sun had Sha use Hidden Power immediately, as D swept in with nasty blades of wind swirling around her, ready to use Acrobatics again.

Sha's Hidden Power, Flying-typed and empowered by Beast Boost, rammed into D hard and sent her flying backwards in a great burst of wind, doing much more than it normally ever would.

Sha followed with a much thicker, goopier Acid Spray, building enough offensive momentum to take flight again. D gave a screech of actual discomfort as the thick blast of acid coated her skin and her wings, not only eating away at her hide but making it harder to fly as well as before.

“Not yet! Confuse Ray!” Gladion called.

Sha dodged with little effort, Sun silently revealing to them the exact angle and trajectory of the attack. How the Field moved, how the AWE accumulated, the subtle actions of so many muscles and tissues working together…

Sun had Sha use the thickest, stringiest glue they could muster, blasting it out of their nozzles in dense, rapid fire pellets.

D, already somewhat slowed, was at the glue's mercy, slowing even further… but Sha followed the barrage up with another Hidden Power, blasting D backwards and causing her to crash to the ground, accumulating various dirt and filth in the process.

Still, she had just a bit of fight left, so Gladion quickly returned her, wanting to deprive Sha of any further power.

Gladion sent out Calypso yet again. Sun wasn't entirely certain why he was still avoiding Null. But a working theory was forming.

Sha instantly went for Acid Spray, confusing Gladion a bit as he saw the substance, visibly distinct from the poison of Venoshock. Calypso was still under Toxic effects. Why not Venoshock? Still, his confusion was enough that he wasn't able to have Calypso dodge, so she took a fair amount of damage as the acid pelted her fur.

Sun returned Sha then, confusing Gladion further. What exactly was he playing at? It didn't help that Gladion never heard any of his orders.

Sun sent out C.C. next. Gladion just glared for a moment. Fairy resisted Bug, and Cutiefly didn't have Poison or Steel moves, so what exactly was the-

C.C. already had a cloud of Stun Spore cast over Calypso before he could think further on it, instantly followed by a ludicrously bright Dazzling Gleam.

Gladion urged Calypso to act, but the Stun Spore combined with the sheer brightness of Dazzling
Gleam had Calypso too numbed and dazed to do much of anything, no matter how desperately Gladion's will reached out. Not to mention, Fairy didn't actually resist itself, and on top of Acid Spray, that made Dazzling Gleam all the more brutal.

With that lapse in Calypso's actions, one last critical Draining Kiss to a key artery in the neck that Sun's eyes picked out for C.C. soundly took care of her, helping to heal C.C. significantly as well. Gladion grimaced at how his neck briefly stung, and how he hadn't been able to get her to hang on. Was that the plan, then? Shake his resolve, confuse him with strange tactics and interfere with his ability to sync?

He hated to admit that it seemed to be working.

Gladion returned Calypso, quietly praising her before letting D back out, although she was on her last legs. She was free of the dirt and glue, but still exhausted.

It was exactly what Sun had been hoping for.

Gladion gave a command, not sure why Sun wasn't swapping, but figuring one last Cross Poison would be enough.

Immediately after, the air around C.C. distorted. Psychic surged out as a cyan haze of kinetic force in the air, just as D mustered the strength to swoop forward with all she had.

She hit it like a brick wall, and crumpled to the ground, unmoving. Gladion just stared, feeling only a brief ghost of the pain himself, having not even thought he'd needed to try and bear any more damage with her just yet.

Sun just smiled rather coyly at Gladion, as C.C. energetically flitted around Sun's head, glad for the quick victories.

Finally, with a small frown, Gladion sent out Null.

“Wait. I have to be honest with you. The… purple one you have with you, Poipole? That's an Ultra Beast. Null was designed to hunt Ultra Beasts. If you… if you use Sha to battle them, I can't guarantee that nothing bad will happen, even though I'll try my best to Field-sync deeply enough to control them. This is unprecedented, after all, even if Sha is small and peaceful,” Sun was a bit surprised he said anything. He'd half expected that Gladion just wanted to tire Sha out to try and reduce the overall advantage of Beast Boost, and then have Null come in and go nuts, potentially sweeping Sun's team in the process. So, that was more thoughtful than he'd anticipated.

“I'm not that underhanded,” Gladion gruffly replied. “At least I don't give every order silently,”

Sun just curtly replied that Gladion had brought that on himself, after his earlier statements to Hau implied he didn't want an opponent to hold back. Besides, at least Sun didn't bring living weapons to fights.

“...Fair enough,” Gladion said, feeling highly disinclined to try and make a fuss about it. He could still feel the vague notion that everything he said and did, Sun was silently judging.

“Null, Aerial Ace,” Gladion called next.

Null came forward in jerky but surprisingly swift movements, powerful winds briefly accelerating their heavy body. Sun wouldn't admit it to Gladion, but the unusual nature of Null's Field really fouled his visual advantage. It still hurt his eyes to look too closely, and the flow was sort of... all
over the place, strangely erratic and inefficient for something so strong, as if Null was constantly fighting for proper control of it.

C.C. responded with Psychic, as Sun hoped the force of the attack would at least slow Null down. They looked both stronger and heavier than Crobat, and they had the ground for traction.

Sure enough, Null took a bit of damage but mostly crashed right on through, slashing C.C. harshly. Sun felt a dulled sting of pain cutting across him as well, and decided that was enough on C.C.'s part. C.C. went back to his ball, and Sun sent out Zorua next, immediately commanding Agility.

Even if Null tried Aerial Ace again, at least then Zorua could respond a lot more easily. Zorua began darting around so fast they were practically invisible, at least to human eyes. Null stood perfectly still, waiting patiently. Gladion once again ordered Aerial Ace, followed by X-Scissor.

In response, Zorua used Bounce before Aerial Ace could even be fully executed, suddenly springing incredibly high into the air.

Null gave a rattling groan of frustration, looking up and waiting patiently for Zorua.

Zorua's response was a Dark Pulse, aimed straight downwards.

Null gave a pained groan as the Dark Pulse connected, followed by Zorua still being able to connect Bounce, landing on Null's back with an impossibly large amount of speed and force before grace fully backflipping off.

"Recover!" Gladion called, much to Sun's frustration. Null hardly looked that hurt as it was… But if you wanted a living weapon, it made sense that you'd want the creature to self-heal. Null's aches and bruises rapidly vanished as it gave an echoing croon of relief, but Zorua went for Fake Tears, followed by Taunt.

Sun could see the scowl immediately forming on Gladion's face as Zorua began bawling, only to then turn around, wave her rear at Null, and begin a string of yips and growls that seemed to be roughly about how she'd been crying because Null was so hideous that she couldn't bear to look at them. Combined with subtle Field manipulation, that was apparently so grievously insulting that Null immediately charged forward with a chilling, guttural roar.

Zorua effortlessly leapt out of the way and just as soon went for another Fake Tears, further frustrating and goading Null, as Gladion once again gripped his trembling wrist tightly. From what Sun could see, the movement seemed to be directly linked with large surges in the efficiency of Gladion's Field-syncing. Whether it was purely psychological or a response to the strain of doing that, Sun still wasn't sure.

Either way, with the movement, Null suddenly calmed significantly, as Zorua used Agility once again.

Sun knew the main advantage they had was that Null's movements were restrained, jerky, and off-kilter, so he need to get Zorua as fast as possible, but he couldn't stall on attacking for much longer. Null would overcome the Taunt soon.

Sun ordered another Dark Pulse, which did far more damage than last time, Null's Field offering far less protection. Null went for Aerial Ace in response, which Sun had Zorua tank in exchange for getting off another Dark Pulse.

Gladion cocked an eyebrow at that. What was the damn alien planning now? Why not Bounce again? He supposed there wasn't too much point in wondering as he went for Recover, feeling that
Taunt's effects on Null were fading…

Only for Null to suddenly lock up, whining uncomfortably as Zorua rapidly healed instead.

Gladion went bug-eyed, as Hau just loudly went “Ooohhhh!!!”

Snatch. Of course the wily little shit knew Snatch. And of course the alien was gonna use his psychic alien brain or whatever the fuck to plan exactly when Taunt was gonna end.

A great chunk of stamina restored, Zorua went for Dark Pulse yet again. Null gave a strange, hollow hissing sound as they were struck, and their head hung low as they breathed heavily, body shuddering. But still, they didn't give in.

Gladion ordered X-Scissor, trying to have Null move more erratically to confuse Zorua. But, playing the fox's own games wouldn't be the way to victory. Zorua dodged once more and went for Taunt one more time before Sun returned her, figuring they'd done well enough that there was no need to get greedy.

Next came Rhovera, who immediately opened with Will-O-Wisp. Gladion scowled once again as Null was forced to take a burn from the flying bluish-violet fireballs. He'd have to exhaust even more effort on trying to help Null overcome it.

“Rock Slide!” Gladion called, but Rhovera rushed out of the way of the sudden rain of boulders with a Flame Charge, slamming into Null's underside in the process. With the pain and distraction of a burn, the boulders just didn't have the speed and power they should've.

Null's breathing became yet more ragged, but they still didn't give in.

Sun looked on, noting how the beast's erratic Field made it hard to even accurately gauge how much fight they truly had left. They were tired, clearly, head sagging, but still utterly refusing to go down, and it didn't look to be particularly because of Gladion. Gladion wasn't cringing heavily with each strike, only wincing a little at most.

Rhovera fired off a String Shot next, as Gladion yelled out a command for Aerial Ace… it landed, but the damage was greatly reduced, especially because Null had to avoid a spurt of silk straight to the face.

Gladion desperately willed Null to use Recover again, as he felt the burning pain in his stomach of Rhovera using Flame Charge yet again.

Null managed, much to Sun’s frustration. Just what was Null made of, anyway? With his whole body trembling, and feeling some short-lived relief thanks to Recover, Gladion also finally managed to help Null dispel their burns in the process.

Gladion went for Rock Slide again from Null, but it was different from before. With Gladion's body still trembling, and Null having more strength and focus, Rock Slide's full potential was restored. Even as Rhovera diligently weaved between boulders, one in particular still delivered a powerful blow, blindsiding Sun with the sheer pain.

Just like that, Rhovera was out, bleeding a steaming yellowish-green from her side. Sun silently returned her, holding back a spurt of anger towards Gladion and Null.

Still, Gladion could hardly relax. Null was going to be about as speedy as a Slugma after all the silk and hits taken, their normally incredible defenses were heavily compromised by Fake Tears, and there was still that annoying ass Zorua to worry about.
Sun sent out C.C., who immediately used Draining Kiss on Null’s neck, immediately robbing much of vitality Recover had just given Null as he and Null glowed a bright pink, and Null’s whole body slackened. Null was still so silk-ridden there were basically nothing they could do, angrily hissing and flailing their head at C.C. only for him to already be long gone.

Recharged with Null's strange energy, C.C. began flitting around rapidly and aggressively, much more bold than usual.

Gladion could hardly even keep up as he tried Rock Slide again, not wanting to relying on Null having to physically connect with the target… But C.C. was a far smaller target than Rhovera, slipping around every stone with ease before firing off an alarmingly strong Dazzling Gleam.

Finally, as the attack seared Null's hide, both Null and Gladion finally hit the end of their rope. Null collapsed, briefly struggled to rise again, and found they couldn't even as Gladion clutched his trembling arm tighter than ever, sweating profusely.

Gladion just stared down at Null, then up at Sun.

They… lost? Already?

Hau almost immediately gathered Sun up in a crushing hug, talking about a mile a minute about how well he’d done, praising C.C. and the rest of Sun’s team as well. Lillie came over too. Gladion couldn't help but feel a brief twinge of something unpleasant as she praised Sun and only glanced apologetically at him, but he had no one to blame but himself, honestly.

Gladion returned Null, sighing deeply. So in the end, Sun didn’t even really need his warning about Null… That was… frustrating. He supposed he understood better than ever what Hau had been talking about.

C.C. became wreathed in glowing light, letting out a surprisingly loud cry as his body began to shift and change… His Field drastically increased in intensity, energy sealed within rapidly bursting to the forefront, rapidly transforming C.C’s body and infusing him with new levels of power. In a matter of moments, C.C. had become a sparkling pink Ribombee, with a dark red ‘scarf’ that actually served mostly as a sensory organ, as well as a receptacle for more pollen.

“He’s so cute!” Lillie cooed, as C.C. carefully adjusted the new ‘scarf’.

Sun beckoned C.C. over to him and nuzzled the little creature close to his face, although he was still small enough to sit in the palm of Sun’s hand as he did so. Gladion had mixed feelings about the whole display. He was familiar with the feeling, the joy of seeing a Pokemon evolve… But there was a deep sting to the fact that unless Poipole had a previous stage he didn’t know about, his whole team got trounced by someone who didn’t have any evolved Pokemon until after the fight. He was basically just a springboard for someone strong to get even stronger.

But Gladion didn’t have much more time to dwell on it, as he suddenly heard a somewhat familiar voice.

A young man with a deep tan and tufts of dark red hair poking out from beneath a tell-tale team Skull bandana, along with a young woman who had neon purple hair, lighter skin, and a similar outfit. The woman was actually a couple of inches taller than the man, Sun noticed.

Sun fought the urge to growl at them.
“Aaand, here we go,” Hau said quietly, in a rather tired tone. Sun just nodded in agreement, while Lillie just eyed the two grunts warily.

“Judging from the looks of this place, and that fancy-ass Ribombee over there—” the man started. Sun immediately had C.C. get behind him, peering out over his shoulder. “You just lost a battle, didn’t you, French Fry?”

“... French Fry?” Hau said to himself, as he desperately suppressed the urge to laugh.


The red-haired man shot a filthy look at Hau before turning back to Gladion. “I told you, don’t call me that anymore! I’m Crimson now!” Crimson replied, but Gladion was unmoved.

“Whatever, Tiny T,” Gladion repeated, only emphasizing the name.

“Listen here, French Fry, I know you don’t got any Pokemon healthy right now, so you got no room to be disrespectin’ me!” Crimson replied, getting in close to Gladion’s face.

“First off, your breath is worse than a flaming orgy of Garbodor, so back the fuck off,” Gladion said.

Lillie audibly gasped. Sun blinked a few times in surprise. Hau only laughed even louder, completely unbothered by the dirty look he’d been given. Crimson just fumed, cheeks burning.

“Nightshade, a little help here?!” Crimson snapped at the young woman next to him. “I need a comeback!”

“I would, but your breath already killed all my damn brain cells. I ain’t got nothin’ clever to say, besides maybe take your ass to a dentist somewhere. Cavities so big you got fuckin’ Zubat livin’ up inside of ’em,” Nightshade responded, crossing her arms and sneering.

Hau was practically howling with laughter at that point, although Gladion was just smugly straight-faced and Sun and Lillie were just taken aback.

“Th-this is so mean!” Lillie said, mortified.

“Yeah, well, fuck you too, you fuckin’ eggplant lookin’-ass bitch! We all know you got a jacked up haircut and now you got that fuckin’ dumbass wig on, lookin’ like some fake party store bitch! Just my luck, I gotta be stuck with the fuckin’ Purple Pussy Eater while I’m tryin’ to sort out this fuckin’ powdered lemonade stick over here!” Crimson said. Nightshade looked like she was halfway to strangling him.

“Powdered lemonade stick...” Hau wheezed, laughing so much he had to lean against Sun for balance. Lillie practically wanted to faint.

It was Gladion’s turn to blush.

“What the fuck do you guys want, anyway?” Gladion responded.

“We came all this way because some little twink-ass bitch couldn’t follow simple orders and help us out at Brooklet Hill! We coulda stolen the Totem Pokemon, if you weren’t such a fucking buzzkill!”
Nightshade replied.

“You know how I feel about stealing Pokemon. It’s stupid. Especially Totems. There’s no way in hell they’re gonna obey you. And don’t even think about trying to convince me with force. You know you can’t beat me,” Gladion said.

Lillie, Hau and Sun fell silent, as they took in the full implications of the conversation.

“Whatever. Let’s just go. The Murkrow are crying, and it’s time we get flying,” Nightshade said.

“Yeah, I’m done here too. Listen, French Fry. The boss does like you, no homo, but you’ll never be a real part of Team Skull.” Crimson said. “And you never will be? Get it?”

Gladion was silent, just scowling as Crimson and Nightshade stormed off. But as he took another look at Lillie, his expression softened slightly. “Listen, Lillie. I can explain. This is… the other reason it’s been just my team and I, all this time,” Gladion said. “…These people would be too much of a bad influence on you, but I needed to work with Team Skull. There just weren't many practical options. Taking care of Null was much more expensive than I’d planned, and I still needed other Pokemon too…”

“Gladion… I’m… surprised, but I understand. I can’t imagine the desperation you must’ve felt…” Lillie said quietly.

“…That’s it? You’re really not more upset?” Gladion asked quietly, carefully searching Lillie’s expression for any indication she was hiding something.

“What's done is done. I will say I would’ve preferred you not to… but… you have to look out for yourself and your Pokemon somehow, don't you?” Lillie said.

“But… those things Hau said, about how I left you… He had a point,” Gladion said, much to Hau's shock.

“Well, for the most part, I was just mad,” Hau said a bit sheepishly.

“Regardless. Just because you weren't nice about it doesn't mean it was a lie. I can dress it up however I want, but… it was rather selfish of me.”

Sun and Hau both just stared quietly. He was being a lot more… humble than they'd expected.

“Well, like Lillie said. The past is the past. But if you need money, you could always do Mantine surfing. It's free, and you can rack up money way faster than I thought that way!” Hau said.

“...I'll… try,” Gladion said quietly, although Sun got the sense that he was a little uncomfortable with the idea, much like Lillie was.

It was… actually a little bit endearing.

Gladion continued to speak in a surprisingly mannered way, to Hau and Sun. “…At this point, Lillie seems happy the way things are, travelling with you two. I never thought she'd be a Trainer too, but… she's talented. Last time we met, she even told me she started playing the ocarina again. So, I am still going to carry on with just Null and the rest of my team… but I will make an effort to come around more often…. If that's alright.” Gladion said. “I don't want to get in the way of whatever weird things a human and an alien get up to together…”
Hau blushed at that. Sun gave an odd, tiny whine. “It's not weird!” Hau defended. “But yeah, if you want to do that… go ahead, I guess?” Hau asked, looking to Sun and Lillie for their opinions… but neither seemed particularly opposed. Lillie even seemed a bit excited.

“Right. That’s that, then,” Gladion said flatly, before suddenly turning and walking off.

“He's really just gonna leave like that?” Hau asked, to no one in particular. “Some guy,”

“He has a bit of a bashful side, even if he won't admit it. So he pretends it's him being aloof,” Lillie said with a short laugh.

“So I guess we’ll be dealing with him more often… That means it's really important for me to train more,” Hau said.

Sun seemed enthusiastic about the opportunity to help him with that. He needed to train more too, after all.

It was time to hunker down, then...

At least once they cleaned up the smouldering sandal remains still left on the ground.

Chapter End Notes

For Hidden Power, I just decided types with RNG, because I didn't want to be tempted to make every type end up as just what was most useful for the given Pokemon.


Overall, I'd say they still came out pretty well. I'll be keeping track of this.

We also Fine-O'-Lee get to see The Boy. I gave his team some huge alterations, keeping in mind that he’s been away from home longer than any of the main characters. And given that Lillie is actually there, and the other things that this universe changes, the reactions to him are different by quite a bit.

Also, since Sun and Hau had a relatively easy time getting together, I wanted to make Sun/Hau/Gladion a bit more complicated in contrast. Hence why there’s almost no romantic tension at first. And to be honest, Gladion has always struck me as the kind of person who takes a bit of getting used to.

And I Fine-O'-Lee get to dump my Thoughts (Complaints) about Null on all of you!

So, for starters: I think Null/Silvally has an issue with being way too underwhelming in comparison to its lore. Even the sets with competitive use are usually support/pivoting sets, when Silvally clearly comes off like it’s supposed to be the primary means of combat against UBs.

And overall, Silvally just makes me feel like... Why not just pull together some Megas and regular strong Pokemon? Why waste probable billions of pyen on something both worse and far riskier than Pokemon that are already accessible to you?
So, to this end, I've made a number of changes to Null and Silvally.

Although base stats do not mean as much in this universe, this is about what my version of Null would be like in the game, if it had to be translated:

Stats:
HP: 120
Attack: 90
Defense: 120
Sp. Atk: 90
Sp. Def: 120
Spd: 45
BST: 585

Speed and power is actually slightly lower than canon, but defenses are buffed. Battle Armor is almost useless, so I just went for the helmet assisting Null's bulk. I also gave them some more moves. As for Silvally…

Stats:
[REDACTED]
Chapter 14: Monsters

Chapter Summary

In Which Lillie Meets A New Friend. Mostly a training/character chapter though.

Warning for a gory nightmare that Sun has.

Chapter Notes

This update was slightly slower than usual, but I was a little busier than usual. Luckily, the thing that was making me so busy is now over with, so I now have significantly more time to devote to this long ass yarn I've been spinning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After Gladion left, the group made their way to the nearest Pokemon Center, where they waited until they had their rooms to discuss the events of that meeting in private. After all, a few people actually recognized the group to some extent. Sun was beginning to think Gladion had a point about how much he stood out.

“So… you know that thing Gladion said about my eyes glowing? And how I used an overpowered Z-Move again? What exactly is up with all that? Because I don’t actually have any idea. I don’t even realize when I’m doing it,” Hau said.

“I’m not sure…. It could be genetic, but if there were ever any special powers in your family lineage, wouldn’t you know that already?” Lillie asked.

“Yeah, as far as I know, I don’t have relatives or ancestors who can do… whatever it is I do,” Hau said. “Really not entirely sure yet.”

“Strange…” Lillie said. Sun silently agreed.

“Is it Sun?” Hau asked. “His Field isn’t a human’s or a Pokemon’s… There could be things it does that no other Field can… But then, in that case, why don’t you have powers? You’ve spent way more time with Sun than I have.” Hau pointed out.

Sun’s eyes widened as he interjected that although Lillie didn't do anything unusual, he had noticed her Field slowly growing over time. But since it was still so gradual, and Lillie seemed otherwise normal, he hadn't bothered to point it out as anything odd. He wasn't really sure how fast a human's Field was supposed to grow in the first place, but his own research had already revealed that some Field growth during puberty was normal. The problem was that the process varied so much that he couldn't find a definitive answer on how fast was enough to be abnormal, so he didn't want to jump to conclusions.

“So, basically… Lillie still might get some kind of power like me? Even though I'm not even sure what mine actually does, besides how sometimes my Pokemon's Z-Moves are super strong... Which
would be a lot cooler if it didn't make them instantly pass out afterwards,” Hau said.

Lillie went silent for a moment as she pondered that idea. “...Interesting, but I'm not even sure I want one… what if it's dangerous?” Lillie asked. “What if it turns out I can't control it?”

“That's a decent point... I'm sure that if it did happen, you'd turn out alright, but still. What do we even do about this? Who do we tell?” Hau said.

“I think... for at least a little while, we should wait. Try to see if there's anything more we can learn for ourselves first. This could end up being so much more than just your Z-Moves...”

“Yeah, but at the same time, isn't this kind of thing important enough that at least one other person should know? Maybe Granddad or Professor Kukui could help?”

“That makes sense, but Hau, if this is really true, then it means Sun might be able to theoretically give anyone powers. I mean, think about it, what's so special about us? Why not anyone? People have been wanting a way to do this since... essentially always. It means Sun might, without exaggeration, be one of the most valuable people in the entire world. If the wrong people ever realized that...” Lillie trailed off, but Hau already understood.

“You're right,” Hau responded, looking down at the ground as he fully realized just what a big deal it would actually be. “And if there is something special about us... Then that just opens up a whole different can of Wurmple,” Hau said. “Especially the whole question of what the heck the special thing is in the first place, or if it even has anything to do with Sun at all.”

“It won't be forever,” Lillie said. “I don’t seriously think we can handle this ourselves forever, with so little to go on. I just want time to try and think this over, get more familiar with it, see if we can find any hints on our own,” Lillie said. “It'll probably just be a few weeks,”

“I guess we can do that,” Hau replied. Sun didn’t have any better ideas, so he merely agreed with them.

“...And Lillie, one more thing...” Hau started.

“Yes?”

“You were so... calm about Gladion leaving you... and I still don’t understand how or why. Family is... family is supposed to be there for each other... Not just go off being all self-important, thinking they can do everything alone...” Hau said.

“If anything, I was surprised it bothered you so much,” Lillie responded, with a slight frown.

“It’s... it reminds me of my dad. That’s what it is. My dad just... up and left to go live in Kanto, and he’s always been really distant and terrible at staying in touch, even though he has no real excuse because he has plenty of money and being a Trainer is pretty much all freelance stuff...” Hau said. “But compared to you, I have no real room to complain. So that’s why I just... don’t entirely get how you stay so calm,” Hau said.

“...He deserved to be free more than I did,” Lillie said quietly, causing both Sun and Hau to give her odd looks.

“What... what does that even mean?” Hau asked, voice growing quieter as he frowned slightly, not exactly liking where Lillie might be going with things.
“...Well, it’s just… I was probably a burden to him anyway. I mean… looking at it from his perspective… who wants to be old enough to leave home, but still have to stay just for the sake of their pathetic little sister?”

At once, there was a brief flash of rage across the faces of both Sun and Hau.

“Did he tell you that?!” Hau blurted, suddenly leaning in closer to Lillie before steadily calming again.

“No… At least, not out loud, but I just... sometimes I wonder… There were all these things Mother would tell me, and it just…” Lillie started, trailing off as her voice cracked slightly.

Hau and Sun silently, worriedly stared for a moment, gears turning in their heads before Hau voiced the theory he’d arrived at. “...She made it your fault that Gladion left,” Hau said quietly. Lillie just slowly nodded in response, fighting back tears. Sun resisted the fleeting impulse to hunt Lillie’s mother down and present her head as a trophy.

“She… she told me he always secretly hated me. That every time he was kind to me was only because she asked him to. That he must’ve acted out and ran away because I made him too jealous, and so it was all my fault that he didn’t get along with Mother… She said he must’ve wanted her to get upset and take it out on me, and that along with his theft of Null was how he was getting revenge against us… A-and she always said, ‘you’re either… you’re either with me, o-or… against me’...” Lillie said, voice trembling. “Even though… even though being ‘against’ her could mean practically anything… A-any tiny little thing, and she’d just... just... she’d just...”

Lillie fully lapsed into a bout of tears, unable to handle the memories any longer. Sun teared up slightly as well, in sympathy, as he felt part of all the pain and turmoil clenching at her heart and mind like a vice. He silently embraced her as Hau patted her slowly on the back, offering hushed words of sympathy and comfort in the process.

Eventually, Lillie quieted, but neither Hau or Sun were comfortable with leaving her alone afterwards. They did at least ask, and they would’ve listened if she’d said she wanted to be, but the relief on their faces when she didn’t say it was plainly obvious.

For the rest of the day, the group took things easy, Hau and Sun coming up with anything they could think of that would take Lillie’s mind off of her mother. They stopped by the Pokemon Nursery, getting things for the Bounsweet egg and looking at all the baby Pokemon, which helped considerably. By the end of the day, Lillie ended up turning in for bed early, but she did at least seem much calmer. Her Pokemon all quietly kept her company as she drifted off to sleep.

Meanwhile, once Sun went to sleep, body lazily wrapped around Hau’s... something happened.

Sun found himself... somewhere. He was kneeling in something warm, wet, and sticky, and it was dark. Unbelievably so, to the point it was hard to see even for him. For some reason, providing his own light was hardly helping. It just got swallowed up by the darkness almost immediately.

He was cradling something in his arms. A body. He didn’t want to look too closely, but he did anyway, unable to resist, using what little light that managed to persist in the pervasive darkness.

Hau’s body.
Glassy-eyed, all the clothing tattered and singed, the neck mangled and bent at an unnatural angle, terrible burn marks and grievous wounds readily apparent…

Sun’s eyes widened, and he wasn’t sure whether he wanted to recoil or hold the body closer. A low whine sounded from the back of his throat as he shook Hau’s body gently, stroked the hair even though part of the scalp had been burnt and torn away…

He would wake up, right?

He had to wake up.

It couldn’t really be happening.

It couldn’t.

Sun slowly rocked the body, desperately willing Hau to wake up.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Hau began to speak.

Despite what he'd thought before, Sun immediately wished he wouldn’t. He immediately saw how wrong it was.

“Get away from me,” Hau whispered up at Sun, his voice quiet and distorted, gravelly and echoing. His whole body was twitching and shivering in unnatural fashion as he attempted to summon the strength to twist his way out of Sun’s grip… But the entire time, his heart was completely still.

Sun tensed. Why? Why would he do that?

“Monster,” Hau said, as Sun’s vision further adjusted to wherever he was, and he only got a stronger sense of just how horribly mangled and disfigured Hau actually was. How-... Why was he alive? He shouldn’t… he shouldn’t have still been alive. Not like that. Not like that.

“It’s because you won’t let me die, you defective little mongrel,” Hau said, with a disquieting chuckle. Sun realized he wasn’t even speaking his own language anymore. “You like prey that struggles to the very end, you sick bastard!”

Sun teared up, unsure of what exactly Hau was talking about, until he could suddenly taste blood. Until his face was suddenly wet with it, bits of meat suddenly between his teeth, blood steadily dribbling down his chin.

No.

No!

No no no no no no no no no no-

“If you want me dead so fucking bad…” Hau started, grunting with pain as Sun gave choked, wretched sobs.

“You might as well finish the fucking job… you hideous disgrace…” Hau continued.
Sun was sobbing harder then, steaming tears and blood mixing together, as Hau began constantly insisting that he “finish the job”, over and over, louder and louder, going from gravelly whispers to unnatural, blood-curdling screams. Sun desperately tried to cover Hau’s mouth, tried to quiet him peacefully, but Hau had more vigor than physically possible, screaming at the top of his thoroughly savaged lungs with a horrendous voice, from a mangled throat that shouldn’t have been able to speak at all...

And, so, finally...

Sun’s teeth clamped down around his throat, and sank as deep as he could muster. Nausea welled in his stomach, tears streaming down his face more than ever as he let out another wretched sob.

Sun woke up with a start then, steaming tears trickling from his eyes as Hau laid next to him, looking at him with deep concern, softly repeating his name. Sha was there as well, hovering just overhead and casting a dim cyan glow, apparently having come out of their ball upon sensing Sun’s distress.

“Sun? A-are you awake now?” Hau said. Sun shakily confirmed it. Hau gave a deep sigh, planning to pull Sun into an embrace before suddenly being able to feel that for whatever reason, Sun didn’t want him to, scooting back instead. Hau just frowned, along with Sha. “Sun?”

Sun responded with only quiet sobs, so Hau just kept talking gently. “It’s gonna be alright. It’s gonna be alright. You were just having a nightmare. I was… I was trying to wake you up, because you were thrashing around and looking really scared, but… you weren’t responding, until now,” Hau said. “I’m just glad you finally woke up.”

Sun did nothing but continue to cry for a little while longer, unable to even get his thoughts straight… until he finally managed to slowly convey the idea, slowly convey the pain...

Was he a monster?

“Sun… you’re not a monster,” Hau said.

Then what was he? He certainly wasn't a good person. Good people were better than him. Good people didn't have to be restrained from brutally assaulting others just because they said rude things.

“You don’t have to be perfect all the time to be a good person. Nobody's perfect. You just have to keep trying,” Hau said.

Sun was silent, just focusing on trying to take deep breaths. What if he tried and just got worse? He was not only remembering more, but he was getting stronger, as their journey continued… at the same time, it felt like he was becoming more dangerous, too.

“Yeah, you are getting more powerful… But you're still in control. I trust you,” Hau said. “And I believe in you,” Hau continued. “You went through all kinds of messed up crap and you came out so thoughtful, and caring, and sweet, and just… amazing . You're a good friend and a good boyfriend, and you're kind to Pokemon.” Hau said. “It's a miracle that you are how you are,” Hau finished, smiling gently.

A wave of soft pink light flowed across Sun's skin, interrupting the dark blues. Sun embraced Hau gently, as if afraid to hurt him.
“You won't hurt me,” Hau said gently, pressing a soft kiss to Sun's cheek. More pink light radiated out from there. “Even if you ever did, somehow… I know you would never mean to. I would forgive you,” Hau said quietly.

Flecks of green and teal light showed up through the dark blue, as Sun kissed Hau back. The fear of the dream began to actually feel like a dream as his breathing steadied, and his mind steadily cleared. Gratitude welled up inside of him as he kissed Hau again, on the lips, then embraced him more tightly, even winding his tail around Hau's body, snaking it up beneath the back of his shirt.

Hau shivered for a moment, then giggled. “You know that tickles, come on!” Hau said quietly, but Sun just gently dragged the tip of the tail along the back of Hau’s neck, causing him to poorly stifle even more laughter.

“Sun, c’mon, it’s late and there’s probably people in the rooms next to us!” Hau managed to get out, whenever he wasn’t too busy laughing, although he wasn’t truly irritated about it. Sun complied, deciding it’d be more enjoyable to invite Hau to make out with him anyway… which Hau readily accepted. Hau couldn’t really blame him for not wanting to go back to sleep… and with the way Sun’s tossing and turning and odd sounds had scared him, he wasn’t ready to sleep again either.

The intimacy caused the depth of their mental bond to spike, and Hau felt the way their minds practically spilled into each other, the pleasure and the lingering pain, fear, and anxiety. He could see it then, the erratic memories of what exactly Sun had dreamt… He briefly stopped kissing just to slowly stroke Sun’s back, frowning slightly, eyes brimming with tender concern.

He wished nothing could hurt him ever again.

Neither of them went back to bed that night, although Sun would periodically fret that Hau could go back to bed if he liked. Hau did quite literally have to admit he was tired, given that the way their bond worked prevented him from hiding it… but Sun was more important.

By about seven in the morning, after largely passing the time with talking about whatever came to mind and looking up videos of cute Pokemon on Hau’s Pokedex, the two decided they may as well just start the day.

Before bed, Sun had set Bounsweet’s egg in a flower pot by the windowsill, burying it down to about 2/3rds of its height in damp mulch and topsoil, to allow it to absorb water and nutrients. Fortunately, the Pokemon nursery did have a secondary store to provide the pots and soil, along with other supplies for young Pokemon of various types, so that wasn't much of an issue. Being much like a seed, the egg’s outer hull and moderately “hairy” texture aided in the absorption process, given that it wouldn't sprout any permanent root structure.

As Sun removed the egg and returned it to its Pokeball again, he half-jokingly suggested that the Bounsweet should be named Hau Jr., much to Hau's embarrassment.

“I- I'm not the dad!” Hau responded, blushing deeply. He was actually still lying in bed, having been on the cusp of briefly drifting off before Sun’s joke snapped him back to full alertness. Sun just giggled at that.

“If anything, we're like…” Hau paused, trying to think up an adequate way of dodging the “parent” description before he realized that no matter how he put it, it was rather parent-like. He just gave a sigh of defeat. “…Okay, yeah, I'm basically like this Bounsweet's dad now. Guess I better get ready to build treehouses, play catch, and make like a billion terrible dad jokes,” Hau said, with exaggerated exasperation. “At least once they're old enough to actually have arms.”
Sun couldn’t help but laugh at such oddly specific stereotypes of what a human father did… he honestly didn’t remember what things a Luxian father would stereotypically do. From what he could vaguely remember, Zossie had three mothers… and Dulse was just passed around between various tutors, never truly having “parents” in any real sense.

The two got themselves cleaned up and dressed, and Sun studied himself in the bathroom mirror afterwards. He supposed he could at least try an appearance that stood out a little less. Hau reassured him that he didn’t have to, but he was still rather curious about what Sun was going to change regardless.

With that, Sun briefly concentrated, Hau quietly watching. The omnipresent star marking on his cheek dispersed into a smattering of ‘freckles’ instead. Then, with careful precision, scrunching his face slightly, he moved those ‘freckles’ about until they evenly dusted his cheeks and the bridge of his nose. His hair was also getting rather long, so he opted to tie it into a ponytail and covered up the iridescent sheen it’d developed, while shifting it to more of a dark blue in color.

He silently asked Hau’s opinion, the freckles glowing dimly pink as he did.

“Beautiful as always,” Hau said, beaming at Sun before quickly kissing him on the cheek. Sun practically wanted to melt on the spot just from that simple phrase. “And you tied your hair back! Now we match!”

Some of Sun’s ‘freckles’ went a somewhat brighter pink as he admitted that that was the idea, although his was somewhat longer than Hau’s, and the texture of his hair in general wasn’t quite the same.

Hau wore the same sorts of clothes as usual, following his general pattern of contrasting a dark color with a bright, warm one, typically orange. But he also wore the bracelet Sun had gotten him for his birthday, the glossy green and blue stones glinting when light struck them.

Sun was delighted to notice it, cheering up a bit more after the dreadful nightmare he’d endured. It was tough, but he felt he could face the day, as long as Hau was there with him.

Over the course of that day, despite his tiredness, Hau thought almost constantly about the fight with Gladion, the fight with Hala, any fight that’d been a general struggle over the last month or so…

What was he doing wrong?

He trained on a regular basis, his Pokemon all liked him, and he felt like he understood them well… But there was still something missing.

Was it a matter of tactics? Was the training frequent enough? Efficient enough?

It wasn’t enough to just count on Rotom. It wasn’t enough to just desperately sink all of his time into it willy-nilly. He had to hone his efforts, truly think outside of the box, make every training decision count.

Confidence a bit shaken, Hau ended up having the training time before Lana’s trial increased to three weeks. There needed to be time to get everything just right. Lillie and Sun didn’t complain. Lillie knew she honestly needed more time with Mareep anyway.
The group made a trip by Tauros back to Heahea Beach, where Hau had Blissey learn Gravity, followed by having her learn Calm Mind on his own, with Sun's help.

Still, while Calm Mind had wider battle application, there was something more specific that Hau was planning with Gravity.

Like Aromatherapy, the in-battle effect of Gravity was typically less than the full potential of the move. If a Pokemon actually had sufficient time to calmly focus instead of having to rush or worry about an opponent, the effects could be much longer and greater.

Under such conditions, Gravity actually made for a potential training aid, when used carefully.

Hau freely admitted he'd originally gotten such an idea because he was inspired by anime, and originally assumed it wouldn't be practical… Only to look it up online and find out that it did have actual merit, but the real life version was a lot less extreme and significantly more nuanced, with several extra things to keep in mind.

The long, quiet stretches required on Blissey's part to maintain a prolonged Gravity effect also naturally made an excellent time for her to practice Calm Mind at the same time, a move which could further feed into the efficacy of Gravity.

Overall, the process involved getting Blissey to create a localized gravitational field that made it harder to move, but wasn't as extreme as it was in battle. Along with the fact that this needed to last a sufficiently long time, it was trickier than expected… but once Hau told his move tutor about his intentions, they were willing to help in that regard as well.

Within a week, Blissey had the concept down well, along with Calm Mind.

As it turned out, unlike exaggerated concepts of gravity at 10x or 100x, even shifting the strength of gravity by less than 50% was enough to have a sizable impact. Many writings on the subject advised to be very careful to take it steady and frequently check on all Pokemon involved, especially the Pokemon in charge of the gravitational effect. Furthermore, it was strongly advised for the gravity effects to not go on for longer than an hour a day, which Hau didn't plan on anyway. He didn't want to push Blissey that far.

During the first week of building up to being able to properly execute the idea, Hau still made sure to train diligently in other ways, getting started on having Pikachu learn Discharge. Once he was done, he'd move on to Brick Break, which would also provide Hau with a move to use for practicing with Fightinium Z. Meanwhile, Noibat learned Water Pulse and the beginnings of Psychic. Dartrix learned how to use Leaf Blade, and continued to train in defensive and evasive maneuvers, to compensate for his numerous weaknesses. As Leaf Blade immediately proved to have far more cutting power than Steel Wing, Hau also made plans to train in trying to mix the properties of Leaf Blade and Steel Wing… Leaf Blade’s power, and Steel Wing’s durability. The whole group went over tactics and potential ways to vary their moves, while also continuing to practice with Z-Moves.

Hau also knew he especially needed to resolve the issue with there being times when his Z-Moves were apparently too strong for his Pokemon to endure… Hopefully, the new training would help with that. He tried to experiment more with whatever his power was, attempting to meditate and hone his focus, but... there wasn't much headway. He felt... something. Something, some kind of power, or change, deep down... But it was as if he was grasping around in the dark for it, only pulling it to the surface little by little, still hardly sure of what it was... Only that it was there.

But beyond that, the group also took full advantage of their close proximity to Paniola Ranch, to further the effectiveness of training.
In conjunction with Blissey's eggs, and C.C.'s greatly increased honey and pollen yields post-evolution, the group also had easy access to Moomoo Milk, further expanding the repertoire of nutritious options they had for training and medicinal purposes.

Unlike most milk, a Miltank’s milk had the unusual distinction of being safely drinkable or otherwise absorbable for just about all Pokemon of all ages, at least in limited amounts. Even Nebby seemed to enjoy a small saucer of it every now and then… although they did not 'drink' it so much as just sort of slowly vaporize and absorb it.

And so, the training of the Pokemon was well underway… although Hau couldn’t help but doubt himself still.

Around the end of the first week, the group had noticed as much and gone back to spend time in the Pokemon Nursery, hoping that being able to interact with baby Pokemon would cheer Hau up.

There were plenty of young Pokemon that Trainers didn't want, usually being taken care of temporarily until they were either adopted directly from the Nursery or taken to various adoption agencies across Alola.

While Sun was distracted by a couple of baby Jangmo-o, who were in the middle of clumsily headbutting one another to establish dominance, Hau and Lillie were with a small playpen full of Growlithe pups. As cute as they were, Lillie could still notice the somewhat unfocused, distracted expression on Hau's face.

"Are you still thinking about how you don't think you're a strong enough Trainer?" Lillie asked quietly. Hau slowly nodded.

"You shouldn’t be so hard on yourself…” Lillie started, while idly petting a Growlithe who playfully nibbled her fingers. "I mean, you’re comparing yourself to people that aren’t really that comparable to you. Gladion is almost two years older than you… meaning he had about that much extra time to train his team. Hala has decades of experience, and even though you think you should know him so well that you shouldn’t have much trouble, it’s the other way around too. Hala probably already had a decent idea of what tactics you’d be likely to use. Meanwhile, I was lucky enough to catch him off guard somewhat… and well, Sun isn’t even human,” Lillie said.

“Like, the rational part of me knows you’re totally right… But my emotions make it feel like that’s just making excuses for myself. The stronger my Pokemon and I are, the less they get hurt… the easier they win… and the better we can protect everyone we love. So it’s like part of me is saying, ‘if you really loved your friends, you wouldn’t be so weak’… and it’s really annoying, because part of me knows that I do try, it’s just so hard to satisfy. Like I try to follow guidelines and stuff on training, and how hard to train, and how long to train… But in my heart, I never really know when enough is enough.”

“...It’s funny. You kind of remind me of Gladion, when you say things like that…” Lillie said. “But at the same time, you two are so different,”

“I really shouldn’t have been so mean to him…” Hau said quietly.

“I think, perhaps it was that you felt so strongly about him because you could partially relate… But there were parts of him that didn’t line up with that, and that bothered you even more than it would if he were just difficult to understand all around,” Lillie said. “Because to you, that means he has
potential. Essentially, it makes you expect more out of him.”

“That makes sense, in a weird kind of way. I remember seeing his Pokemon, and being shocked by like… how it looks like he takes care of them so well, and how they obviously like him, but he was still so rude at the same time… and I remember how frustrating that was. But I still wouldn’t have thought of it like that! Seriously, Lillie, you’re like, really smart.” Hau said, which caused Lillie to look away, slightly flustered.

“I- I guess,” Lillie said, trying her best not to deflect entirely… She didn’t really know what else to say, but fortunately, she didn’t really have to think of anything further, as a young male nursery employee came out of the back room looking rather haggard.

“We got a Growlithe pup on the loose again! One from that fancy batch of ’em!” he cried, sending the rest of the staff into high alert. The group decided they’d see what all the commotion was as well, which ended up with them all outside, searching the ranch areas for the missing pup.

Relatively quickly, the Growlithe was found, but unfortunately, not in a good situation. In a well-meaning effort to play with a young Tauros calf, the Growlithe seemed to have wound up accidentally burning him out of excessive excitement, drawing the ire of a fully grown Tauros. The Growlithe pup trembled and whined before the towering beast, tail between his legs as the Tauros looked as if they were getting ready to stomp him pancake-flat at a moment’s notice.

“I got this!” Hau said, rushing forward even in spite of the words of warning from the daycare owner. He sent out Dartrix quickly, silently communicating a plan.

The first course of action was to secure Growlithe. In comparison to Dartrix, the young Growlithe was already about half his body weight, and not nearly done growing… But after months of hard work, Dartrix was more than strong enough to quickly swoop in and whisk the young pup away with no appreciable drop in speed, using quick gusts of leaves and wind against Tauros… The only intent was to distract, rather than harm. The Growlithe gave a startled yip, but otherwise didn’t resist.

Dartrix deposited the Growlithe behind himself and Hau, before landing gracefully beside his Trainer, ready for what would come next. As Hau expected, next came the truly sticky part. With a roar of challenge, the adult Tauros scraped a deep furrow into the ground with their front hoof, making to charge towards him as well… Sun and Lillie watched in silent horror, mouths agape, but Sun could feel Hau telling him to trust him and Dartrix… and so, he fought the urge to sprint forward and summon a barrier of light.

Dartrix stood before Hau, ready to divert the Tauros if worse came to worse… but Hau, fully trusting in Dartrix, outstretched a hand towards Tauros, took a deep breath, and simply focused.

Tauros charged like a freight train, and even as Hau heard his powerful hooves trampling the ground beneath him, Hau stood his ground and clenched his eyes shut, focusing his feelings with all he had.

There was a feeling of power then, of intent twisting into action, spilling out of his mind alone and into reality, springing to life on nothing but sheer willpower… Time seemed to slow. Everything seemed to become less real, fading to a half-dreamlike quality, as if he were in a trance.

Hau’s eyes snapped open, an intense green light pouring from them. He could feel the Tauros in front of him as if he were part of his own body, felt the creature run as if it were him personally… Breathed in perfect time with it, fast as first, then steadily slower. Felt a great anger, which he immediately understood and moved to pacify.
He could feel the Growlithe too, the young Tauros, and Dartrix as well, all of them in perfect clarity. As if they were all one, all part of a greater whole. All inexorably intertwined. Everything around them seemed soft and fuzzy, out of focus, irrelevant. Meanwhile, they seemed ultra-crisp, ultra-real, as if Hau could nearly know everything there was to know about them from a single glance at each. The exact pace of their hearts, every tiny twitch in their muscles, their current feelings, their next actions.

Tauros calm to a halt in a nigh instant, stopping just before Hau’s still-outstretched hand… and then lightly nuzzling it with his nose. Hau responded by gently petting the Tauros, causing it to give a delighted little moo, as if nothing bad had happened at all.

The effect ended abruptly, with Hau suddenly gasping for air as his awareness crashed back to typical levels, his head briefly swimming as he tried to catch back up with usual reality. The rest of Paniola Ranch lurched back into focus in an almost nauseating fashion, colors and details seeming obnoxiously bright and sharp before he got used to it all again.

Everyone else watching was at a loss for words. Sun had the closest idea of what Hau had just gone through, been able to feel that something about his mind and perception had changed in that moment, reached out and touched, no, intertwined with all the Pokemon around him in a way deeper than any Field sync he’d displayed before… But even he wasn’t entirely sure what precisely had just happened.

Hau quickly applied a Full Heal to the young Tauros, the others still watching in quiet amazement at the way the calf was perfectly, utterly calm about it, making no effort to whine or shy away. The burn they’d sustained was gone in only a minute or so, and the calf nuzzled affectionately against Hau along with the Growlithe. All ill will and tension seemed to have been abandoned completely.

With that, Hau casually carried the Growlithe pup back into the nursery, Dartrix following close behind him. The employees seemed reluctant for Hau to leave after such a display, suddenly doing their very best to politely sprinkle in several mentions of work positions as ranch hand or Nursery assistant being open. Hau respectfully declined, although he did hold the Growlithe pup so that they were face-to-face… an action which was immediately met with the pup excitedly licking him.

“I’m a trial-goer, so I can only stay so much longer… But… can I take this Growlithe with me?” Hau asked. “I... felt something back there. Something... special, even though I don't really know how to explain it. I just feel like we'd really get along well.”

"Oh, go right on ahead!" came the voice of the Nursery's manager, somewhat gruff but ultimately kind-hearted. "That little lady there is from a special batch of eggs. A high class competitive breeder came through here... You know how they are. They only end up pickin' the very best one they get, leavin' all the others behind. We do limit the number of eggs we let them churn out at once now, but they haven't changed all that much. Still, this strain of Growlithe has some real potential, and we didn't want just anybody comin' by to scoop them up... But after that display back there, I think you proved you're not just anyone. She's yours now, if that's what she wants. Alright! So, how about it?” Hau asked the Growlithe, who yipped excitedly in response, tail wagging rapidly. Hau smiled ear to ear. “Alright, that’s great! We’re going to have a lot of fun together, and you’re going to get so big and strong, just you wait!” Hau said, as he shifted Growlithe’s position so he was being cradled in one arm, while Hau retrieved an empty Pokeball from his pocket with the other. He lightly tapped it against Growlithe’s head… and with little further fanfare, Growlithe was captured.
Sun hugged Hau tight in congratulations, while Lillie just smiled in turn, happy for her good friend. After a bit of paperwork, that was that.

The next two weeks went by quite smoothly, once the core setup of the new training plan was complete. With Blissey’s Gravity move fully stable, she could easily provide training under increased gravity for a total of about 45 minutes per day, compounding with the benefits of Rotom Powers. However, Hau always stopped her there. It was for both her sake and the sake of everyone involved, given the risks of using Gravity to train. In addition to that, he would set aside two days a week for everyone to forgo gravity training entirely.

Unlike using the move in battle, Gravity during training was so much less intense that it still let Pokemon fly. It was simply a good deal more difficult, as with nearly all other actions. It was harder to even pump blood, which was part of what made it such an important training method to be careful with. The intensity had to be consistently around just 1.25x to 1.5x, and no higher. There was also the issue of needing to be careful to avoid accidents, given that everything fell with more force than usual, which was another reason to keep the effect relatively subdued.

But, besides the costs of Blissey’s upkeep, the training was free and relatively flexible, which was a huge upside. Blissey was also capable of a limited amount of other actions and her own training in other areas while still maintaining the effect, as long as she conserved her energy and periodically diverted some of her focus to keeping it going.

Combined with the benefits of a high-nutrition diet that greatly boosted regeneration and stamina recovery, and the benefits of Rotom Powers, the moderate risk of adding the new strategy paid off. Everyone was improving faster than ever, although the new regimen was undoubtedly exhausting, and the group noticeably required more food and water. So, it was probably less suitable for times when resources needed to be rationed more, but they hadn’t encountered anything like that for the time being.

On Hau’s part, Blissey learned Shock Wave, while Pikachu learned Discharge quickly enough that Hau had more than enough time for him to finish learning Brick Break too. Noibat learned Psychic, and Dartix learned Swords Dance, while also improving the rest of his moves. Although Nasty Plot would’ve probably been easier, since Pikachu would be able to help, Hau decided that a dedicated physical attacker was needed to balance out three Pokemon who focused on special attack. The whole team also improved excellently in strength, stamina, and speed, due to the effects of training under Blissey’s Gravity.

Growlithe in particular worked so hard and was so benefitted by the increased improvement speed of the training system that she was already rapidly catching up to the rest of the team, although she wasn’t quite there yet. Still, all weaker Pokemon naturally had an easier time becoming strong when around other strong Pokemon, as they could share their excess Field energy and also allow a weaker Pokemon to have part of the energy relinquished by the Fields of defeated foes.

There was also the fact that Growlithe seemed very well bred, having the potential to learn rather unusual moves, such as Flare Blitz, Close Combat, Morning Sun, and even Dragon Dance... Hau wondered who exactly was responsible for breeding her in the first place. They must’ve been very talented.

Hau still made sure to have Growlithe train under higher gravity the least out of his team, due to Growlithe's young age, but she was such a bundle of energy that she still managed pretty well whenever she did. Her Close Combat had become usable in battle as well, although weaker and
clumsier than usual. Hau wasn’t quite ready to try Fightinium Z on it yet, either. But with a lot of help from Salsa, Growlithe had already gotten Dragon Dance down too.

Growlithe knew Fire Fang, Bite, and Ember with no issues at all, but Morning Sun and Flare Blitz were still somewhat useless. Morning Sun was at least enough for Growlithe to slowly heal by herself, but it was no good for battles. Flare Blitz was still just too much. At best, it was still no better than a riskier and more unstable version of Flame Wheel.

Sun’s team was affected in a largely similar way. For the time being, C.C. was his typical strongest team member, becoming blazing fast and alarmingly hard-hitting for a Pokemon so small. In preparation for Lana’s trial, Sun taught him Energy Ball, and he figured out Pollen Puff in only about a day, thanks to how naturally it came to all Ribombee.

But Sha was perhaps the most versatile, and under the correct conditions, became the most powerful as well. Sun had them learn Nasty Plot with Pikachu’s help, and practice with more poison configurations, faster output, greater output pressure, and higher volume. As it turned out, gravity training was also useful for that, as even firing off poison took more effort under the effect. The training culminated in Sha learning Sludge Wave, which would be generally useful for pretty much any Totem battle going forward, and offered more immediate power and battleground manipulation for Sha.

Zorua learned Foul Play and Nasty Plot, and also went through an interesting growth spurt, her legs getting longer and her body somewhat evening out the proportions between it and her large head. As a result, she also became much faster, especially after continuously practicing Agility in the midst of Gravity. Sun could see that it would likely be only a matter of a few more weeks before her inner stockpile of AWE broke its final threshold, and she became a Zoroark.

Rhovera got Sunny Day, since Sun had no team members that would be hindered by it, only the risk of enemy Fire-types being able to use it against him… But in an emergency, he could possibly make an opening for Rhovera to get in and use Sunny Day to weaken the Totem’s Water-type moves. He also had her learn Wild Charge, with Pikachu’s help to understand Electric-type Field energy, as another move for tight situations. It did have some nasty recoil to deal with, but she could somewhat make up for it with Leech Life or Giga Drain.

Hau, Sun, and Lillie continued to train their own bodies as well, which was paying off nicely. Hau didn’t seem to have gotten any taller since Sun met him, but he did look noticeably stronger. He still hadn’t lost weight either, if anything he’d probably gained a bit due to muscle. However, his arms and legs were thicker and sturdier, his chest and shoulders bit more broad… and Sun would be lying if he said he didn’t stare, because he got caught staring a lot. He’d given up on even bothering to stop right away when caught, deciding it was more fun to just wink at Hau instead…. and even more fun to see Hau’s reactions.

Sun’s tail had pretty much fully developed, but fortunately, Kukui had found a tailor who wouldn’t ask too many questions about why exactly anything requested needed to accommodate a large tail, much to Sun’s happiness. He’d already taken it upon himself to perform some makeshift modifications by using the internet for help, but Kukui’s solution was a lot more convenient. It was still a slight inconvenience to have to sit a little bit differently in any seat with a solid back, and a little awkward to lay on his back, but that wasn’t much to worry about.

Sun had also officially begun to reverse the height difference, becoming just a touch taller than Hau… which Hau jokingly complained about sometimes, and Sun jokingly teased about… but Hau couldn’t help but still periodically think about the fantasy of being pinned against the wall by a towering, smoking hot alien.
As Sun practiced his powers, Hau tried to practice his own, trying to copy the thoughts and feelings he experienced whenever they activated before... But unlike Sun's powers, Hau's seemed to be far more finicky. At best, he could access a weaker version of the strange altered awareness he'd used to calm the Tauros... And he could summon up more Z-Power on command, if he concentrated deeply and focused on something he felt passionately about... But that didn't help him figure out how to actually make his Pokemon handle such power any better.

As for Lillie, she didn’t really get as much out of the exercise as Sun or Hau, both physically and emotionally speaking. Her main goal was just to be decently fit if she had to do anything especially strenuous or dangerous. So, she generally preferred to focus on her Pokemon, although she did at least improve her own stamina while she was at it. She also continued her ocarina practice, whenever she had the time. As always, her Pokemon seemed to love it too.

But Lillie’s Pokemon were a different story. Eu, as hard-working as ever, was becoming larger and more powerful along with Salsa, who worked just as hard. They seemed to have a sort of friendly rivalry going, with their shared interest in dance and flashy, impressive maneuvers. Eu learned Ice Beam, Hyper Voice, and Work Up, while Salsa learned Rock Slide, and cooperated with Pikachu and Rhovera to learn Wild Charge. In the month before the group had met Gladion, he’d also learned Dragon Claw and Iron Head, rather than taking advantage of the move tutors at the beach.

Lillie was surprised with the young Bagon’s skill and dedication, especially since TMs and Move Tutors didn’t seem to be able to teach Bagon Iron Head or Wild Charge otherwise… But with Sun around, and Salsa’s own willingness to learn, it was possible to stretch what was previously possible. Meanwhile, Eu could use her Ice Beam to rapidly create walls of ice, or make the terrain difficult for the opponent, increasing her defensive options as well. By sliding on ice, she also became faster than usual in turn, although they still needed practice on that front. Still, it made Eu’s Hidden Power basically worthless, since hers was an Ice-type move.

It seemed like evolution wouldn’t be too much further away for either one of them, much to Lillie’s surprise. The two were naturally driven and also seemed to strongly motivate one another, allowing them to make great strides.

Nebby, of course, didn’t really benefit from gravity training, per se, but they did apparently think the feeling of the gravity was interesting and fun to play with.

So much so that they actually learned Gravity too.

And the strangest part was, it was actually strong. Just as good as any other Pokemon’s, easily. And yet, Nebby didn’t even seem to have a particularly hard time with it. It was as if they were naturally attuned to such a move, grasping and accepting it with ease.

Without Lillie actually making any effort to teach them such things.

Of course, the moment Lillie’s interest was piqued, and the group had excitedly called Professor Kukui and received his excited encouragement to try and see if Nebby would do anything else…

Nebby proved resistant to learning any other move the group could think of. Of course.

That just left Mareep.
Mareep was slow and peaceful, but lazy and stubborn… so, despite everything the group went through to devise a better training method, carefully balancing out the exact time and intensities needed to use Gravity to its fullest potential… Mareep hardly tried anyway, making almost all of that a moot point for her.

Lillie made a concerted effort to get Mareep to be more cooperative with training, or at least find out why she was being difficult. Hau and Sun made repeated efforts to help her, but the only thing that ever consistently worked was continuous bribery with food, which wasn’t really sustainable, so Lillie tried to avoid it. Talking it out was also hard, merely because Mareep often tended to just sort of ignore Lillie whenever she tried to communicate on any deeper level, refusing to really open up in any way beyond accepting petting and compliments… But buttering her up until she complied didn’t work that well either, unless it was some very easy, low-stakes command.

Lillie mostly just got by on allowing Mareep to absorb some of the stray AWE of battles and training that Salsa and Eu took part in… which was sufficient to get her to evolve, but it felt like a bit of a hollow achievement, because it was easy to tell that she was still just piggybacking on others.

If actually coaxed into fighting on her own, Flaaffy was slow, clumsy, unfocused, and her attacks had increased in power with no real increase in skill or control to show for it. The only new thing she’d even somewhat learned was Signal Beam, and battles caused her to tire rapidly. She even still seemed to be somewhat unused to her new bipedal gait, which only made her less willing to train with the others. As a result, she was hardly much better at battling than she started, despite being significantly more powerful… and even then, her raw power wasn’t nearly as impressive as one would expect.

Hau’s Growlithe was already a far better fighter than Flaaffy in both skill and power, despite being unevolved and much younger. Lillie couldn’t help but feel slightly jealous. He’d caught Growlithe under such similar circumstances, simply winning her favor with kindness rather than battle… But then again, in the process of saving her, he’d also displayed his heroism and competence. Lillie hadn’t proven much beyond the fact that she was just some soft little pushover.

Growlithe grew and improved in leaps and bounds, while the greatest talent Flaaffy ever revealed was just the ability to look so cutely pathetic that Lillie would almost immediately give into her, forgiving or excusing whatever she wanted.

Finally, towards the end of the training period, with just days to spare until Lana’s trial, it came to a head when Eu attempted to help by trying to politely convince Flaaffy to be more cooperative from a Pokemon perspective…

Lillie was standing with them a ways away from the Pokemon Center. It was getting dark, but she really wanted to try and get more training in, and make her final efforts at getting through to Flaaffy. As it stood, Lillie knew she had the lowest chance of beating the trial… She only had two Pokemon of any real use, and no Grass moves. Salsa had Wild Charge, but wasn’t actually an Electric-type, so Lillie was still a bit nervous about how the lack of that extra power might impact her. And she was so stuck on trying to sort Flaaffy out that she hadn’t really had the time to just do the obvious thing and get a more cooperative Pokemon… Well, she technically would, if she just gave up on Flaaffy, but she just couldn’t bring herself to do that. There had to be something that would get through to Flaaffy… even if Lillie knew it still wouldn’t really guarantee her Lana’s trial in the short term, because Flaaffy was so far behind that even after she evolved, she was literally only half as strong as Lillie’s other Pokemon. Maybe the gap was even bigger, in Eu’s case.

It was just a stroke of further bad luck that Flaaffy was still obnoxiously stubborn even with Eu trying to help, believing that she was satisfied with what she was getting for minimal effort. Why try
harder?

Eu, willful and full of ambition, was automatically opposed to Flaaffy’s outlook, but managed to keep herself together for a little while longer, still trying to gently change Flaaffy's mind. But when Flaaffy kept rejecting her point of view, Eu couldn't help but get frustrated with such a complacent line of thinking. She came closer to Flaaffy, leaning up into her personal space, barks getting louder and body motions getting more animated. Lillie could only have so many Pokemon with her at once, and everyone required her care and attention. Some lazy sheep wasn't doing anything to further the team, so what was the point of her wasting Lillie's time?!

Flaaffy casually responded with something along the lines of Nebby not contributing anything either.

As Eu's Field suddenly flared out so violently that Flaaffy's skin prickled at the power, there was a flash of regret on her face for the first time.

Eu, in no uncertain terms, strongly told Flaaffy to leave Nebby out of it, before proceeding to tell her off for making excuses and bad comparisons.

Between Eu's steadily increasing volume and the strong presence of her Field, Flaaffy eventually felt threatened enough that she felt a surge of indignant confidence, figuring she would just have to prove she was already strong enough that she didn't need to try any harder.

Flaaffy fired off a Thundershock, more of a warning than anything... but Eu barely felt it at all. Instead of backing down, she just began ranting at Flaaffy more harshly than ever. Flaaffy just stood there for a moment, stunned and rather ashamed by how unexpectedly useless her attempt at dominance was. But as it fully sunk in, Flaaffy then responded by theatrically beginning to cry and scurrying over to Lillie, clearly expecting Eu to be punished. If she hadn’t been so mean, she wouldn’t have been attacked.

“You attacked first. I saw you,” Lillie said, frowning. Flaaffy gave a pathetic little baa, hugging against Lillie's right leg with big, watery eyes... but Lillie just gave a frustrated sigh.

“Listen. I really want you to be happy being on my team, so I’ve always tried to be nice to you, and go easy on you! But I draw the line at you attacking team members like that! I'm not helping you get stronger just so you can hurt someone who was trying to help you!” Lillie said sternly, finally putting her foot down.

At those words, Flaaffy looked up at Lillie in hurt and disbelief before suddenly running off.

After fruitlessly calling for her to come back a few times, Lillie just took a deep breath and tried to think. She couldn't help but feel frustrated, knowing that for once, she didn't have Hau or Sun for immediate backup... She could feel that she was close enough to Sun to mentally tell him that she needed help, and she could still just call them on her Pokedex... but it was far enough that by time they came to help, who knew where Flaaffy would be? Lillie looked off in the direction she ran. It was well off the proper path of the route, and there were a lot of trees and shrubs around. Not to mention, it’d rained quite hard recently, so there was bound to be mud and uneven ground slowing her down when she gave chase. Great.

Lillie got her Ride Pager and Flaaffy’s brush out of her bag, planning to summon a Stoutland to track Flaaffy down by scent... Which was all well and good, except it ended up taking twelve minutes for Lillie to actually get a hold of one... They would suddenly be busy after the wait times gave her no real issues any other time she used a Ride Pokemon. And over the process of the wait, Lillie realized she really could’ve just called Sun and Hau, if it was going to take that long, which only made her more upset with herself. Her Pokemon was out in the wild alone, and she was fumbling over Ride
Pokemon, too useless and underprepared to go after her without one… or better yet, stop her from running away in the first place.

Nebby gave a soft, questioning squeak from within Lillie’s bag.

As tempting as it was, they were definitely not going to try and teleport to Flaaffy. That was just begging for trouble.

Nebby quieted, a bit dejected, but Lillie still briefly praised them for at least trying to be thoughtful.

Finally, Stoutland came, whining apologetically as they almost immediately sensed Lillie’s minor irritation and not-so-minor worry, but she wasted no time in climbing aboard and having Stoutland sniff the brush. With that, they were off.

Unfortunately, although Flaaffy was a rather clumsy and slow Flaaffy, she was still a Pokemon, and still at least fast and enduring enough to clear quite some distance, especially when Flaaffy switched back to using all fours. It wasn’t quite as easy as it had been when she was a Mareep, but it was at least still faster than the bipedalism she wasn’t quite used to.

So, Lillie’s search was an uncomfortably long one, going on for a full fifteen minutes with no sign that she was any closer. Stoutland was doing their best, and did seem to be getting closer, but all signs pointed to the fact that it’d be a while yet before they actually found what they were looking for. It didn’t help that in her impatience, the urgency conveyed in Lillie’s Field was pressuring and rushing Stoutland, reducing the efficiency of their tracking even as Lillie tried to act calm. Regardless, Lillie pressed on.

Rather than Flaaffy, she soon found a girl instead, who seemed rather curious about what Lillie was up to, and why she seemed so tense. Part of Lillie wanted to ignore her… but maybe she could help. She seemed about Lillie’s age, but a bit taller, with light brown skin and a more athletic build. She wore a straw hat, orange tank top, and white shorts, with honey-brown hair in two braids.… Besides the fact that Lillie couldn’t help but notice she was awfully pretty, she also seemed to have a bow and a quiver of arrows on her back, which immediately stood out to Lillie. What exactly was she even doing with that? Hunting Pokemon with a bow and arrow was both illegal and impractical, as most Pokemon were too strong to be killed by regular arrows.

“Hi, um, my name is Lillie… could you please help me?” Lillie asked, from atop Stoutland. The girl just nodded.

“Moon,” the girl said, pointing at herself. It was a slightly odd name, and also instantly reminded Lillie of Sun, but Lillie had more important things to do than dwell on that.

“My Pokemon, Flaaffy… She ran away from me, and now she’s lost, and I’m scared she’ll get in trouble… so I’m trying to find her, but… maybe, if you help, it’ll be faster?” Lillie asked. “Y-you don’t have to if you don’t want to. This is really all my fault, so-” Moon held up a palm, motioning for Lillie to stop there. From there, Moon just nodded, before sending out a Pokemon of her own, stretching high up to the tree tops with a strange cry. The creature was nearly 40 feet of durable bark, with a ridiculously long neck and three heads… really, four, counting the strange one on its tail.

“Wow… how’d you get an Alolan Exeggutor?” Lillie asked. “Shouldn’t you be way ahead on the island challenge, if you already got to Exeggutor Island?”
“Trade,” Moon explained simply.

“Oh,” Lillie replied, coming to a better understanding. With that, they continued on, Exeggutor’s three upper heads, towering height, and psychic abilities all providing a massive benefit in searching for Flaaffy. "Also... why do you have a bow with you?" Lillie asked. Moon casually reached for her quiver and pulled out an arrow, revealing it was actually tipped with a Pokeball. Still a bit odd, honestly, but the girl was helping, so Lillie didn't want to judge. "Interesting!" she said simply, as Moon put the arrow back in the quiver.

As they steadily drew closer to Flaaffy, Lillie called out for her… But she wouldn’t be truly found quite so soon.

Flaaffy’s ears were keen enough to pick up on Lillie’s voice, but it only pushed her to run harder, faster, as much as her short legs could carry her. Flaaffy always looked back towards where she heard it last, always hoping Lillie wasn’t too close. She couldn’t bear to face her so soon. She’d never thought Lillie would get so genuinely upset...

Unfortunately, due to Flaaffy’s clumsiness, she didn’t avoid Lillie for too much longer before she had the misfortune of tripping face-first into a deep mire of mud and disturbing four Mudbray she hadn’t even known were there, given that they were all resting in the deep mud… which angered the creatures into a group Bulldoze against the already tired Flaaffy. The powerful vibrations travelled through the ground and painfully shot through her body as well, wreaking havoc on various bodily tissues and bones and causing her to faint nearly instantly.

A few moments later, Flaaffy slowly and painfully got back up, shaking and trembling all over, coated heavily in mud and feeling a sense of deep shame as she looked down at herself and realized how embarrassingly easy it was for the wild Pokemon to defeat her. She tried to charge a Signal Beam, hoping that that would be better than her electric moves, but it wasn’t mastered and she was already technically defeated, so it was far too difficult to muster up the power.

In response, the Mudbray just mockingly spat mud at her, while simultaneously insulting her for disturbing their rest and intruding on their territory.

Already exhausted, in great pain, and in no shape to move properly through such thick mud, Flaaffy could do nothing but begin loudly crying… Tired and irritable, three Mudbray pitilessly went up and began kicking and stomping at her to get her to stop… although one hung back, giving a conflicted braying sound. Hadn’t she already fainted? There was no need to keep going, they could just take her and dump her somewhere else.

Two Mudbray briefly considered that, but the last, the largest of the four, loudly protested it. Flaaffy and Mareep were always eating up all the best grass and all the best berries anyway. If they didn’t have the common sense to leave groups of Mudbray alone, then there was no reason to bother respecting them.

The one who hung back meekly replied that upon reflection, the Flaaffy probably just fell in the mud by accident, given that he honestly couldn’t think of any other good reason why a Flaaffy would even want to suddenly jump into a mire. The largest didn’t listen, pausing their assault on Flaaffy for only a moment before resuming, along with the other two at their side flinching and then following along when the first angrily threatened them into compliance. The last just watched, unsure of what to do...

Although they didn’t have to wonder much longer, because that was precisely when Lillie showed
up, somewhat tired, but led by Exeggutor’s keen lookout, and Stoutland following Flaaffy’s scent and weak cries... which had finally began to fall silent, as Flaaffy could no longer hold up against the beating of the three Mudbray.

The third looked up at the human girl just in time to see her stare at the scene with wide eyes, eyes that immediately filled with tears...

And then began to emit a piercing, silvery glow, the likes of which the young Mudbray had never seen before.

“You leave her alone!” Lillie cried, causing the three attacking Mudbray to turn towards her... and all immediately freeze in fear, as Lillie sent out Eu.

Lillie raised and outstretched her hand by some unknown instinct, a soft, silvery glow emanating from it in the moonlight as she reached out towards the Mudbray...

Tears dribbled down her face, full of the same silvery, mercurial light... She was luminous and haunting then, ethereal and almost unreal against a backdrop of encroaching nightfall... Her hair floated upwards of its own volition, subtly shining with the same eerie light...

Moon stared blankly at Lillie, staying absolutely silent. She honestly had no idea what to make of the spectacle before her...

Although she had to admit, it was strangely beautiful.

In that moment, although Lillie hadn’t even really said or done all that much, although she was still the same petite teenager in light-colored clothing... the Mudbray all knew true terror.

Terror enough that they were completely unprepared for Eu striking them all down in moments with a deluge of carefully directed bubbles, all deftly controlled so that they wouldn’t hit Flaaffy. She felt Lillie’s Field flaring so strongly and immediately, urging her to attack with such desperation that it’d blocked out all else... and so, she only caught the barest glimpse of her Trainer’s odd state.

Upon seeing the aggressors incapacitated, Lillie just blinked a couple of times, expression going blank for a moment, as the light all steadily faded and she proceeded to lower her hand in moderate confusion.

“Wait... what was I...” Lillie started, staring blankly at her previously glowing hand while clutching her head with her other hand. There was a moment of clarity, suddenly, as she looked up at the scene before her. “Flaaffy!” Lillie called, quickly going to retrieve the deeply unconscious, heavily bruised and battered sheep. She was so filthy that it was hard to tell how injured she even was.

“You’re psychic?” Moon asked, as she walked up next to Lillie, although Lillie didn’t even hear her. She was too busy returning her, then using her Pokedex to run a medical diagnostic, based on the readings it was getting from Flaaffy’s ball.

Already, it wasn’t looking good. Heavy bruising, fractured bones, muscle tears, some internal bleeding, and{apparent damage taken well past the point of fainting.}

Tears built at the corners of Lillie’s eyes as she quietly apologized to Flaaffy. Moon silently put a hand on her shoulder, but it didn’t entirely stop Lillie from taking a few moments to cry.
Soon after, once Lillie calmed down some, with a bit of quiet comforting from Moon, the two girls hurried back to the Pokemon Center. On the way, Moon began to speak a bit more.

“You glowed,” Moon said flatly, getting straight to the point. “How?”

“I know this'll sound strange, but… I don’t know what I did… My mind just went weird and foggy, and then there was this feeling like… pins and needles, rushing through my whole body. Once it was over, I barely even knew what was going on. You say there was some kind of glow, but I don’t even remember that…” Lillie said.

“Late powers?” Moon suggested.

“...But, there’s nothing like this in my family… I don’t know, does this mean I’m some kind of aberration, or-” Lillie abruptly stopped talking, her eyes widening. “Sun.”

Lillie knew she still didn’t exactly have absolute proof that it wasn't all a crazy coincidence or something else completely, but it was the main thing that made any sense to her. If she and Hau were the same...

Moon just cocked her head slightly, given that Lillie had never mentioned Sun to her before then.

“Sun?..” Moon responded quietly, confusedly looking up at the steadily darkening sky through the canopies of trees overhead, unsure of what Lillie was getting at.

“No, not the Sun. That wasn’t what I meant. I meant… Nevermind. Sorry,” Lillie said. “Either way, now it’s even more important that I hurry back to the Pokemon Center,” Lillie continued, as she picked up her pace to the point she was at a brisk jog.

Moon was simply quiet at that, easily matching pace, although still deeply intrigued by whatever it was that was going on.

Eventually, the two made it back.

Lillie breathlessly handed Flaaffy’s Luxury Ball to Nurse Joy, who cringed when the diagnostic scans of the healing machines listed off all the damage.

“How did this happen?” Nurse Joy asked.


“Well… Luckily, your Flaaffy was young and healthy beforehand, so they should make a full recovery. We’ll have to keep her overnight though. And just from what I’m seeing so far, I’d suggest no training or battle for a solid week.

Lillie nodded glumly at that. On the bright side, at least Flaaffy was going to be alright.

Regardless, once Lillie caught her breath a bit more, she started to pour her heart out, hoping she could get any kind of release or at least perspective, anything to relieve the vice-like grip of shame and regret on her heart. “I… never meant for this to happen. I just, she’s a sweet Pokemon, but I’ve been having a lot of problems with getting her to do anything unless it’s really easy. I mean, I even tried breaking her training down into really simple tasks, but as soon as she realizes what I’m doing
she starts to resist again. So today, it started to really upset my starter, because she thought Flaaffy was wasting my time and being ungrateful… So, they argued, and then Flaaffy attacked her, and I got upset and scolded her… and that’s when she ran away! And-and I tried really hard, but finding her took so much longer than I thought, and there were all these trees, and so much mud, and I know I’m really irresponsible and stupid and I probably should’ve called my friends too, but—” Lillie rambled, voice cracking as a lump formed in her throat.

“Oh, no, no, honey, it’s alright! It’s going to be okay!” Nurse Joy interject. “I wasn’t accusing you of anything. Accidents happen. There’s no need to be so hard on yourself. You tried your best, and because of you, Flaaffy is here in time to make a full recovery.”

“But… in the first place, she ran away because I couldn’t understand her, and said such mean things to her, and I was selfishly expecting her to do something she didn’t want to… It’s… It’s just like when—” Lillie stopped herself, although she couldn’t really go on anyway, as the comparison she immediately thought of brought her to her breaking point.

That meant… It could only mean…

No. No! No!

All that time, everything she went through, everything she put up with, all the effort she put in…

And she was still just like her?!

Neither Nurse Joy or Moon understood the full reason for why Lillie broke down then, leaning on the front desk of the Pokemon Center as she lapsed into incoherent sobs, drawing the attention of the rest of the room, but Moon did at least silently lead Lillie to the bathroom, followed by Nurse Joy, who left a Blissey and Comfey to handle Flaaffy. Eu and Salsa came out of their Pokeballs in a flash, sensing their Trainer’s distress.

In the bathroom, Lillie still cried her eyes out, hardly calming down at all until Moon held up a Pokeball and released a Comfey of her own. The creature quickly looped its flowery vine around Lillie’s neck and began to emanate a soft, calming light and pleasant odor, gradually slowing Lillie’s crying to a halt, in conjunction with Moon steadily patting her on the back and gently quieting her.

Moon wondered why exactly Lillie’s bag wriggled in that moment, unaware of the Pokemon inside who was doing everything in their power to refrain from escaping in order to comfort her.

By time Lillie stopped, she was immediately mortified and going bright red at the fact that she had just been bawling in front of people who were almost strangers, and they’d had to go out of their way to calm her down…

“I’m sorry!” Lillie said immediately, almost feeling like she wanted to start the crying up again.

“It’s alright,” Moon said softly, putting a comforting hand on Lillie’s shoulder. There was a tenderness in her eyes that made it all the more convincing, despite her quiet nature and rather brusque manner of speech

“Honey, you’re not a bad Trainer. We can’t control everything Pokemon do, and there are bound to be times when you get frustrated. There are bound to be accidents, and mistakes. What matters is that we keep moving forward,” Nurse Joy said.
“Th-thank you,” Lillie said quietly, sniffling as she did.

Nurse Joy left after expressing hope that Lillie would feel better soon, and Moon quietly conveyed that she would take it from there.

“You travel alone?” Moon asked softly.

“No… I have two friends, but… I didn’t want to bother them. And by time Flaaffy ran, I thought it would take too long to get their help... I’m the only one who has a Pokemon giving me issues, and they’ve already helped me so many times…”

“We can go find them,” Moon suggested. Lillie noted she had a bit of an accent, when she listened… and looking at her features more closely… Not only was she pretty, Lillie was beginning to suspect she had some Kantonian or Johtonian heritage… Maybe she was from Malie City?

“...Thank you,” Lillie replied, largely because there was a sort of finality in Moon’s tone that suggested she’d actually already made her mind up about it.

With that, Moon patiently escorted Lillie to Sun and Hau’s room… although Sun actually met them halfway, having already sensed Lillie’s emotional distress but electing to simply wait until they came out of the bathroom. Lillie’s Pokemon along with Moon’s Comfey followed.

As soon as they were all up in the room with some level of privacy, Lillie began to explain what happened. Moon seemed wary, silently judging each action from her two friends, looking for any sign that it was their fault that Lillie had been so reluctant to ask for their help… But honestly, they seemed… kinder than she thought? Both of them immediately hugged Lillie close, seeming mortified that she’d gone through all of that… and one of the very first things they asked was why Lillie hadn’t asked them to help.

Moon was even more shocked when the one with freckles hugged her soon after the first gauntlet of questions to Lillie was over, silently thanking her for helping Lillie. She didn’t hug back, just standing there rather stiffly and awkwardly, before the one who hugged her seemed to realize he’d been too sudden and abruptly let go, apologizing.

Moon waved it off, not particularly minding much beyond the initial surprise.

“Yeah, Sun’s a hugger!” Hau said with a laugh. “He’s just grateful, though. We both are,” Hau said, before getting an idea. As he flashed Lillie the briefest smirk, all too knowing, Lillie gulped. “If you’re not too busy, why not hang out with us tomorrow? That way, we can repay you for your help,” Hau said, beaming. Lillie couldn’t help but go slightly red at soon as she heard that… and even redder when Moon agreed with a surprisingly enthusiastic nod.

“Okay! So, since that’s out of the way, we should all exchange contact information too, so we can sort out when and where to meet up!” Hau continued. Lillie’s eyes widened as Moon nodded yet again, and Lillie realized what exactly had just happened.

Did he just… get her a girl’s number? And make it seem totally natural, to boot?

As terrible as the circumstances were, Lillie had to admit, that was rather sweet of him.

It was just too bad that Lillie was terrified to actually do anything further in regards to Moon… She was kind, and pretty, and surely a good Trainer if she could successfully obtain and raise an Alolan Exeggutor… Plus, she must’ve been to Lush Jungle already to get that Comfey… But… still. She
Lillie did her best to quiet those thoughts as they all exchanged contact information and spoke a little longer, although Moon often conveyed things in the fewest words possible.

Before long, Moon left, going back to her own room.

Lillie could practically feel Hau about to burst with his urge to say something that apparently couldn’t be within Moon’s earshot.

He waited all of ten seconds before letting loose.

“So, Moon, huh?” Hau said, wagging his eyebrows.

“Hau!” Lillie cried.

“Did you see how fast she agreed to hang out and trade numbers? I bet she’s totally into you too,” Hau said with a wide grin.

“T-this isn’t about that! She was helping me, that’s all!” Lillie said, unconvincingly.

Sun mentally played her the tune of wedding bells.

“Suuumnn!” Lillie whined, as both Hau and Sun laughed.

“But really… I bet she is a little lonely. She’s really quiet, and probably doesn’t open up that often. I saw her when she first came in here, and it looked like she didn’t really trust us at first…” Hau said. Sun nodded in agreement, having noticed something similar. She probably wanted to make sure he and Hau were actually good friends to Lillie. Hau continued speaking. “So, even if nothing happens, I still think you two should at least stay in touch as friends. Otherwise, who knows when you’ll run into each other again?”

“Yes… I suppose you have a point,” Lillie said quietly, before looking down at the new contact name on her Pokedex.

Mizuki Mahina, “Moon”.

There was a simultaneous feeling of trepidation and excitement... but there was still one more thing, too.

Lillie looked back up, and quietly began to explain the discovery of her powers to Sun and Hau... Hau had to stop himself from loudly blurting out his astonishment... although part of him had sort of been anticipating it, based on his continuing suspicion that it had something to do with Sun.

With that, and the fact that it was so incredibly unlikely that two people who naturally had late-awakening powers would meet through totally unrelated circumstances, the theory of Sun having something to do with it was looking significantly more stable. So, they had a new plan, regarding the subject of powers. After Lana's trial, Lillie would try and experiment with them for about a week or so, just to see if she could reliably demonstrate that there was something unusual about her if she needed to prove it... and then, they'd tell Professor Kukui. Hopefully, he'd be able to point them in the right direction.
By the next morning, Lillie thanked her lucky stars that Nurse Joy had been right about Flaaffy. She was well enough that Lillie could have her back, but like Nurse Joy had said before, no training or battle for a week.

Lillie got her back at the front desk, with Hau and Sun behind her. Lillie’s first order of business upon letting Flaaffy out of her ball was to apologize immediately… Only to be met by an apology in turn, much to her surprise.

“But… why are you apologizing?” Lillie said quietly. Flaaffy bleated, and Lillie quickly got the sense that she was asking the same exact question.

“If I had just been a bit more patient, you wouldn’t have run away… and if I hadn’t been so pushy about training…”

Flaaffy interrupted with louder bleating and grunting. Lillie was hardly pushy at all! She was actually always polite about it, while Flaaffy had been the one taking advantage of her for weeks on end… and it was true, what Eu had been saying. She really was a waste of Lillie’s time. Not only that, but she was pathetically weak. She’d gotten such a big head, thinking she was special just for having a Trainer and living the easy life… only for it to turn out she was really practically worthless. So worthless that a bunch of stupid donkeys could’ve killed her if they wanted to.

Lillie scooped Flaaffy up and held her close, careful not to hug too tightly due to the fact that Flaaffy was still sore… but regardless, she silently assured Flaaffy that she wasn’t worthless. She was part of the team, no matter how she did in a fight.

Quietly, Flaaffy began to cry into Lillie’s chest. And still, Lillie held her close.

Hau and Sun had to admit, it was a touching sight.

Later that day, the group called Moon, inviting her to hang out as Hau had said. They didn’t really have much of anything planned, but Moon quickly accepted regardless.

They met up at the Pokemon Center cafe, treating Moon to lemonade and sandwiches… Moon was mostly just as quiet as before, until she saw Sun get two club sandwiches and dunk one into his Tapu Cocoa… which simply prompted her to suddenly giggle at the fact that someone would do something so odd, although she did her best to hold it back as quickly as it came.

Lillie felt her heart suddenly speed up. Oh no, her laugh was cute too…

Once the meal was over, and no one really had any proper plans on what exactly they’d do next, Moon quietly gave a suggestion to Lillie… although it was really more of an invitation.

“Battle?” Moon asked quietly. Lillie accepted, although she knew she couldn’t use Flaaffy. Moon revealed she had four Pokemon in all, and all battle-ready… Lillie frowned a bit at that, but knew she had overcome superior numbers before. Deep down… something within her was even a bit… eager.

They went off to the side of the Pokemon Center, where there was a simple dirt battlefield that was easily accessible to travellers without blocking the main paths. Hau and Sun watched in rapt attention… Along with Sha, who seemed to be out just for fun, and Flaaffy, who seemed to be watching with much more purpose… Mentally preparing herself for the day it’d be her on the battlefield again.
Sun and Hau knew Moon had come to their room with a Comfey, but what else did she have? How strong was she? She looked like she was their age, but they hadn’t even asked how many Z-Crystals she’d collected…

Moon started the battle by sending out a Torracat that gave a loud, confident yowl, wreathing his neck in an impressive burst of flame, as Lillie just looked on in mild confusion. She knew Lillie’s strongest Pokemon was a Brionne, didn’t she?

Regardless, Lillie sent Eu out, trying not to let her guard down as she quietly commanded Eu to open with a potent Water Pledge… But Torracat was much faster, rapidly firing a bright orange orb into the sky without a word from Moon.

The sky became filled with harsh light, sunlight intensifying significantly as Torracat fluidly shifted into an impressive forward dash, while wreathed in a subtle green glow, nimbly avoiding the Water Pledge as it detonated just a short distance away.

Eu hardly had time to react before Torracat closed the distance in two more blur-like lunges and slashed her deep with claws cloaked in a Bug-type Field, causing Eu to squeal in pain while Torracat immediately dashed back to Moon’s side in another series of blurry dashes, dispersing themself into a mass of reddish light before vanishing back into their Pokeball.

U-Turn… So Moon had a decent plan after all.

The next Pokemon stretched taller and taller as they materialized, giving a strange, low-pitched sort of cry as the process finalized… revealing the incredibly tall body of her Alolan Exeggutor, who happily twisted and thrashed their heads about as they took to the battlefield. As silly as an Alolan Exeggutor looked, Lillie had to admit that part of her was a bit frightened.

In one brief moment, as she saw its leaves grow bright yellow, attracting and absorbing light impossibly fast, she realized she was about to see exactly what was truly scary about such creatures.

Lillie fretfully commanded Ice Beam just as the Exeggutor fired off a brutal Solar Beam, a collision which created a thick burst of steam but unfortunately got overpowered by Solar Beam in a near instant… In the nick of time, Eu summoned up a veil of water and managed to Aqa Jet out of the way. The Solar Beam thoroughly baked the ground it crashed into, leaving nothing but a scorched crater where Eu once was.

Another Ice Beam came blasting out of Eu’s mouth, but Exeggutor countered with another Solar Beam, fired off with worrying speed. Once again, Eu dodged with Aqua Jet, but she went high into the air with the next one, quickly blowing out large bubbles to maneuver between rather than going back towards the ground.

Exeggutor continued the Solar Beam assault, firing off a third and fourth, first from up high and then from the fourth head on their tail. They seemed faster and more agile than usual, their movements swift and calculating thanks to the invigorating sun and combined efforts of four heads. But with Lillie’s careful direction, Eu continued to dodge, jumping and flipping between bubbles with a perfect mix of grace and urgency, never letting the pattern become too predictable… until Moon seemed to have a different idea.

“Psyshock,” she coolly commanded. Exeggutor's eyes glowed blue for the briefest moment before
all of their heads lead out a collective cry of effort, and fired off a powerful pulse of psychic energy that thoroughly destroyed every bubble platform Eu had up, also blasting her backwards and sending her plummeting to the ground as Moon and Exeggutor followed with an alarmingly swift Dragon Hammer. Exeggutor’s upper body came crashing down with seemingly impossible speed, heads wreathed in dragon fire, smashing into Eu before Lillie could do much of anything besides brace for impact.

Fortunately, as Lillie felt an unpleasant ghost of a blow send a rush of phantom pain through her whole body, she managed to recover quickly enough to see Eu still taking a stubborn stand as the light faded.

“Eu!” Lillie called with glee, more relieved that she was still relatively fine than upset that she was hurt.

Eu didn’t even need to be told what to do next.

As Exeggutor dealt with the challenge of righting themself, Eu fired off an utterly merciless Ice Beam, with Lillie concentrating as best she could right along with her, willing the beam to fly straight and true, so efficient it wasted only the barest minimum of AWE.

It met Alolan Exeggutor’s body just as the sun’s unnatural strength faded away, leaving the towering beast unable to respond with another snappy Solar Beam. With a collective groan from all four heads, and Moon noticeably cringing and shivering, even just that one solid, powerful hit was too much for Exeggutor to bear, on top of how hard it was to focus the will of four different heads against such an unpleasant experience. They swayed unsteadily before slowly beginning to collapse. Moon scrambled to return them just before the almighty thud that was sure to follow.

With the benefit of the sun gone, Moon sent in another Pokemon…Comfey.

Oh no.

Despite looking adorable, Comfey actually held a massive advantage…

Still, Lillie pressed on, being able to feel Sun’s encouragement and hear Hau cheering for her. Even with a disadvantage, she still remembered one of the most important things about Comfey...

It wasn’t really a Grass-type at all.

Lillie ordered Water Pledge, but Comfey was instructed to use Giga Drain… a move which it executed with utterly alarming speed, globules of vaporized bodily fluid and glowing energy already being painfully extracted through Eu’s skin and mucous membranes by time the order quietly left Moon’s mouth.

Lillie did her best to deepen her sync with Eu as soon as she noticed, willing her not to give up even as Lillie herself felt knock-kneed and suddenly somewhat sweaty and ill, having to give up part of her own comparatively scant power just to make up for a fraction of what was being relentlessly siphoned from Eu.

But as Eu slumped lower, and lower, she silently urged Lillie to continue, to hold on just a little longer with her… And Lillie obeyed, just as Eu obeyed her. Together, they survived the onslaught, and Eu responded by giving a loud cry of determination and lighting up with an ocean blue aura, droplets of waters materializing and gracefully swirling around her as her Torrent ability activated,
allowing her to gain a second wind. Lillie felt a surge of relief as she felt part of the energy of Torrent herself, transferring through their synced Fields, invigorating her and allowing her to forget some of her weariness. Then, from Eu, there was one more silent request for Lillie.

Lillie obliged, rapidly performed a familiar series of poses. A strange silver light bloomed from her, gracefully swirling about her whole body, sticking closely to her skin rather than aggressively shining outwards like usual. It seemed almost one with her, blurring her features and her outline, briefly making her something almost ethereal, almost otherworldly... But as soon as it came, it was gone, lapsing into the typical burning gold... although even then, it was more refined and controlled than what tended to come violently bursting out of Hau if he got too worked up..

Nebby peeked out of the bag the entire time, looking completely spellbound. Hau and Sun looked on in utter bewilderment.

Moon only just barely had time to hunker down and try to sync with Comfey as closely as possible, before Eu fired off an absurdly strong and blisteringly fast burst of sheer kinetic energy, sending Comfey hurtling backwards at ridiculous speeds, while Comfey let out only a brief, thin shriek of terror before the wind was completely knocked out of them.

There was only the briefest moment of tenuous celebration before Comfey steadily collected themself, hovering back into the fray as Moon commanded Synthesis. Comfey rapidly healed off a good chunk of their wounds, with Lillie’s only consolation being that it allowed her the perfect opening to use Water Pledge, especially with the harsh sunlight faded back to typical levels.

Eu obliged, as Lillie took a deep breath and put all she still had into the attack, even as her heart beat thickly and her brow beaded with copious sweat, the exertion bearing down on her... Only sheer hope and the power of Torrent was able to bring the attack out with such ferocity, as both Lillie and Eu hung on by a thread, knowing that even a hit from the piddliest possible sources could be the end of it all.

Together, Eu and Lillie put the last they had into the Water Pledge, and an orb of incredibly compressed water and vapors went tearing across the battleground, making a beeline for Comfey before detonating with unreal force, sending a mighty geyser shooting at least twenty feet into the air, just beneath them.

Comfey was blasted into the air with utterly punishing force before flopping wetly back to the ground, sopping wet and with flowers in complete disarray. Despite an honest effort to rise again, with Moon staring intensely at them the whole time, they just couldn’t find the strength to go on.

A combination of Torrent and critical damage had allowed Eu and Lillie to go beyond, to push to the limit and overcome such an unexpectedly daunting foe... But such things did not come without a price.

As Eu tired to mask her wheezing, and Lillie panted, hands on her knees, Moon had already swapped Comfey for a glowering bipedal canid, their fur an intimidating mixture of stark white and blood red.

Midnight Lycanroc.

Lillie briefly thought of how Gladion probably would’ve loved to have one for its aesthetic alone, as she tried her best to hunker down for Eu’s sake, concentrating on Lycanroc’s movements. Lillie could tell Eu didn’t want to give in just yet. If they could avoid one more hit, they still had a chance
to at least soften the foe up for Salsa, perhaps even get lucky and manage to defeat it with a single Torrent-boosted Water Pledge...

But the Lycanroc was strong, a bit bigger than usual too. That much was obvious at a glance. The eyes glowed a menacing red as the Lycanroc surged forward with startling speed and power, then shredded into Eu’s body with claws that crackled with lightning, of all things. A Thunder Punch, but adapted for clawing rather than blunt impact. Especially nasty, directing all that current into open wounds. It was all too much to respond to, too much to do anything about after such exhaustive battling.

That was more than enough, and Eu collapsed with a short whine, as Lillie tried and failed to help take on the sheer enormity of the pain and exhaustion she felt. Still wincing with phantom pain, Lillie returned Eu, praising her heartily before moving on to Salsa.

“Salsa, you can do it! We’ve been working so hard!” Lillie called, as Salsa confidently took to the battlefield, seeming undaunted by the much larger foe, who boasted more raw speed and power. “Dragon Dance!” Lillie called.

Salsa immediately started up an impassioned bout of lunging and twirling through the air as Lycanroc responded with Rock Slide, compressing chunks of earth into mighty boulders and then having them hurtle out of the ground at terrifying speeds before crashing back to earth..

Salsa nimbly weaved between each hit, impossibly light on his feet as Lillie quietly ordered Twister as well, in such a way that Salsa knew what it was really for. He boosted his nimbleness to new levels as the power of Dragon AWE drove a powerful, but steady gale around his small body, allowing him to achieve impossible aerial maneuvers and divert the paths of the crushing stones.

Finally, the Rock Slide ended, and Salsa was left unscathed, immediately charging out of the wreckage with Iron Head, bashing into Lycanroc even as Lycanroc tried to respond with Counter, defensively throwing their arms up for protection.

Unfortunately, Lycanroc underestimated the sheer speed and power of Salsa’s approach, and the added power of a super-effective Iron Head, which allowed Salsa to crash against Lycanroc’s arms in such a way that Lycanroc immediately yelped and cringed, snarling as they felt something start to crack and give way under the incredible force of the attack.

Lycanroc withdrew their right arm from their defensive posture, still snarling and slavering at the pain of what was very likely a fresh new fracture in their left arm.

Lillie felt a little bad, but immediately took the opportunity to have Salsa use Dragon Dance again, knowing she was already too tired for her syncing to help Salsa very much if he got in a tight spot… However, Moon responded with an order for Stomping Tantrum…

And given that Lycanroc had tried to use Counter before, but only got a fractured arm in response, the thing was roaring mad.

With a truly monstrous sound, Lycanroc was upon Salsa at once, body surging with adrenaline as they briefly forgot all pain and easily caught up with the slippery Bagon’s uncannily fluid motions. One final attempt to backflip away was thwarted by Lycanroc lunging forward and taking Salsa into their crushing jaws, followed by hurling him against the ground.

In desperation, Lillie gave one last order, a silent plea through the overlapping Field of her and her
partner.

Sun, ever so briefly, caught Salsa’s body flashing silver before Lycanroc’s savage assault began in earnest, kicking up a huge dust cloud and countless clumps of dirt as the very earth trembled, Lycanroc settling into a chaotic rhythm of utterly pounding their opponent into the dust.

By time it was over, Salsa was lying prone in a crater, eyes shut. Lycanroc held his small body beneath one foot, growling menacingly as they leered down at the ground, wordlessly daring Salsa to get up.

Lillie trembled in place, feeling an unpleasant soreness, raising Salsa’s Great Ball as she briefly considered the match over already…

But then, there it was.

A feeling of burning defiance that wasn’t hers, coursing through her like liquid flame.

Salsa’s eyes snapped open.

There was a bright gout of violet dragon fire, engulfing Lycanroc’s entire body as the canid howled in pain, allowing Salsa to scramble out from beneath them, heavily bruised but still conscious.

Lycanroc twitched and shook, body spasming slightly as they stood dazed… And Salsa stood at the edge of the crater, taking a deep breath.

“Hydro Pump!” Lillie called, immediately divining what it was that Salsa wanted to do, the dragon’s feelings rushing through her impossible to misinterpret. It wasn’t about what the most practical move would be. It was a matter of pride.

Even in spite of the move’s unboosted, unmastered nature, the sheer spirit of Salsa was such that the massive stream of water overwhelmed Lycanroc in an instant, the larger Pokemon flailing and struggling fruitlessly against the mighty deluge.

When it was all over, the crater was less a crater and more of a muddy pit… with Lycanroc plastered against its muddy sides by sheer water pressure, soundly defeated.

Salsa took a bow as Hau cheered loudly and Sun clapped energetically, while Sha squealed with delight, repeatedly flipping in the air. Iron Head’s hardening effect, briefly extended to encompass the entire body… Definitely clever, and speaking volumes of Salsa’s determination.

Moon just gave a tired sigh before adopting a stern expression, wordlessly and seamlessly swapping to what looked to be her first and now last Pokemon, Torracat.

Immediately, Torracat was ordered to use Sunny Day again, most likely to counteract the presumably ensuing Hydro Pump… only for Salsa to just immediately use Rock Slide, hurling a barrage of boulders towards Torracat. As fast as Torracat was, Salsa was now faster and more precise, the boulders repeatedly ramming into Torracat’s body with impunity. Under any other circumstances, such an attack should’ve soundly netted Lillie and Salsa the battle… But as Moon grimaced at the numerous aches blossoming through her body, knees wobbling as her head swam and her heart pounded, she stubbornly directed what limited AWE she could muster to keeping Torracat on his feet.
Torracat gave a long yowl, hissing, spitting, and completely going up in flame as Blaze activated…

And Moon began to pose, in such a way that no one in the group was capable of yet… Light spilled out of her in great, rolling waves, strong ribbons of scarlet aura infusing Torracat with monumental power.

As Moon held out an outstretched hand, body drenched with sweat, Torracat unleashed a fireball of terrifying proportions. All Lillie could do was have Salsa use Rock Slide to build up a barrier of as many boulders as possible… But even that only did so much.

Inferno Overdrive, boosted twice over by powerful sunlight and Blaze, essentially baked the field, blasting the rocks away and subjecting Bagon to horrendously superheated air even behind what little cover he still had. Despite the savage power against her already weakened Pokemon, Lillie didn’t fault Moon. After it’d been proven to Moon that her opponent could take a Stomping Tantrum that embodied Lycanroc’s full savage rage, still win, then go on to nearly achieve victory in just one more strike… It made sense that she’d want to be absolutely sure the next hit took care of everything.

As everyone briefly turned away and covered their eyes and faces from the intense light and heat, they were almost too scared to look up again… But when they did, the results were conclusive.

Torracat was still standing, just barely, struggling to keep their eyes open as their whole body trembled…

But Salsa was soundly passed out amongst a battlefield of scattered boulders and completely scorched earth, with a few lingering flames and embers still scattered about, burning what little was left.

Moon had won.

However, no sooner than Lillie stepped forward and returned Bagon with careful aim, mindful of the fact that the entire space in front of her was still uncomfortably hot in the aftermath of such an incredible attack, Torracat collapsed, and even Moon took a knee, panting heavily.

“A-are you guys alright?” Lillie called, as Moon just returned Torracat and gave Lillie a thumbs up… despite the fact that she briefly struggled to stand again, requiring Lillie to hurry over and help her. Hau and Sun followed close behind… Neither one missing the way Lillie tenderly grabbed Moon’s hand in the process of helping her.

Lillie seemed to realize just a moment later, when she felt a burst of amusement from Sun in the back of her mind. “I-I’m sorry,” Lillie cried, immediately letting go and looking down at the ground. “It was supposed to be a friendly battle, I shouldn’t have pushed you so hard…”

Moon gave a simple shrug and a wry grin as she wiped her forehead, then finally spoke. “I had fun,” she said simply, as if it were the easiest justification in the world.

“...So did I,” Lillie admitted, after a brief pause, although it’d definitely been tense and exhausting as well. But even though she lost, knowing her Pokemon tried so hard, knowing they enjoyed themselves… Being able to just cut loose, and trade the sting of her perceived worthlessness for the ache of a hard day’s work with those she loved… Somehow, despite the undeniable pain of defeat, and the literal phantom pain of helping her team members stand up to punishing blows… there was
something rewarding about it, too.

Afterwards, Lillie and Moon rested and healed their Pokémon, and Hau and Sun congratulated Moon, with Flaffy just continuing to watch... but as soon as Salsa had some energy again, he suddenly began behaving strangely, curling up into the tightest ball possible and making an odd groaning noise. Lillie was a bit worried at first, but Sun saw something... A surge of power, building in Salsa ever-greater, second by second, before engulfing him entirely within a dense Field of Dragon-type power, blazing at Tier 3 without a doubt.

Over the past month or so, Salsa had gone through a sizable growth spurt, along with eating and sleeping more. Ever since the gravity training had been implemented, it seemed to strongly feed into it. Under a combination of increased strain and natural growth, Salsa’s bones grew denser, and his muscles grew thicker and more compact than ever. Lillie knew what’d all been for, what’d it’d been leading up to, but it was another thing entirely to see it for herself.

Salsa gave a cry that suddenly deepened considerably as he began to steadily glow, body bulking and enlarging dramatically, thick bone plating rapidly engulfing almost every part of him, surrounding him completely before finally settling into a continuous spherical shape. His limbs thickened into four stout, sturdy legs, and nearly his entire face was engulfed in the armor before the light faded. Finally, his new form was complete.

Shelgon.

Rotom was immediately out to collect data, while Lillie was overjoyed.

“Salsa, you did it! You evolved!” Lillie gushed, as she went over to embrace the new Shelgon... although given his large, spherical form, that basically just looked like her semi-awkwardly draping herself against him while petting all his new armor. Salsa gave a low, pleasurable croon at the contact, although their shell wasn’t as sensitive to touch as their scaly skin.

“Man, that’s awesome! A Shelgon already! You’re way ahead of schedule!” Hau said. Sun enthusiastically agreed, while Moon just gave a thumbs up, glad that Lillie and her team had gotten something valuable from the battle even if they had lost.

As a rule, Shelgon who evolved through Field intensity rather than time and resources were Tier 3 or above... But, at the same time, Lillie remembered that Kukui’s research indicated that Tier 3 was supposed to take about a year of consistent effort to achieve, if a Pokémon had a Trainer. Lillie was sure that Salsa was already a few years old, but still.

Considering that Lillie had only been a Trainer for about six months, and only even had Salsa for about three... It was shocking to realize that she was apparently either good enough or insanely lucky enough that Salsa’s power was so well ahead of an average schedule. As a Trainer progressed, it also became progressively easier to strengthen new team members, but Lillie had done so as such a new Trainer herself. Although it was a bit of a shame that she hadn’t been able to have Salsa evolved beforehand, Lillie wasn’t sure if she would’ve actually won even if Salsa had...

Smaller teams were saddled with a greater inherent vulnerability to Z-Moves, as taking out any one Pokémon had a larger impact. So, even with Salsa’s much greater bulk as Shelgon, there was still a good chance that a well-placed Z-Move would allow Moon to win.

Flaaffy sparked slightly, agitatedly beating her tail against the ground as she watched the spectacle.

Lillie noticed, getting off of Shelgon and worriedly going towards Flaaffy instead. After the run-in
with the Mudbray, Flaaffy’s previous stubbornness and laziness had given way to what seemed like a new dominant attitude, one of general insecurity… In retrospect, it could’ve even been something that was present all along, just repressed when Flaaffy had been more naive and confident.

But without that naive confidence, Flaaffy had gone from cowardly, lax, and uninvested in training, to far more withdrawn and self-critical. For all of Flaaffy’s previous insistence that she simply had no need to try any harder, the change was so rapid that Lillie was beginning to suspect that Flaaffy may have never truly believed it at all… Deep down, she was really just too anxious and unconfident to try aspiring for anything more, and believed it was easier to just pretend she didn’t want to.

Lillie was starting to realize that Flaaffy might’ve been significantly more relatable than she’d first thought.

She briefly took Flaaffy into her arms, hugging her gently. Lillie knew she still wasn’t well enough to be on time for Lana’s Water trial… But Lillie felt her other team members still had a chance. And once Flaaffy completely recovered, Lillie silently vowed she would help her however she could.

They both needed all the help they could get, after all.

For somewhere, far above the whole scene, hidden from perception…

Tapu Lele looked down on them.

And to the capricious god, healer and destroyer, they were nothing more than ants.

But that was fine, all the same.

Sometimes, it was more fun to torment ants before you crushed them.

Chapter End Notes

W-why… why do I keep making these so long,,, why am I Like This,,,,

So, I did a toned down take on the concept of gravity training from DBZ and other media, like the nerd trash I am. Still not terribly realistic, but I wanted something a bit more indicative of the group’s ingenuity than just “And then they trained Super Hard”.

Also, I Put Moon In. In keeping with the summary, Moon isn’t actually from Kanto in this world. Also, the bow is a reference to the manga. I haven’t actually read it, I just think it’s kinda funny that that’s a Thing with her. The fact that she has a sun team is also for The Irony.

It’s also really funny to me that her real name here can essentially translate to “Moon Moon”.

I changed Alolan Exeggutor’s ability to Chlorophyll, like regular Exeggutor and Exeggcute, because Frisk is basically worthless here. Despite how important items are in the metagame, I’ve been sticking much closer to a battle style combining the anime and story mode. So, most held items are completely irrelevant to this story, although I might start including more of them towards the “endgame” I’ve planned.
Plus, Hau just Really Seems like the kind of person who would have a Growlithe. I actually debated this to myself months ago, because I know they’re found on Route 2. But at the time, I decided to hold off.

This does create a sizable Rock weakness in the current team, but We'll Get To That. On the plus side, it gives an advantage against Steel and Ice, where Hau's team was somewhat lacking.

And if I were to make this fic a game, I would rebalance Arcanine like so: (since Bitch Ass Gamefreak Didn’t Give It A Mega)

HP: 80 (-10)
Attack: 120 (+10)
Def: 70 (-10)
Sp. Atk: 90 (-10)
Sp. Def: 70 (-10)
Speed: 125 (+30)
Total: 555 (Unchanged)

So now, Speed is its best attribute, and it gets a little more attack, in exchange for some bulk and special power. Fire isn't a great defensive type anyway.

It's also not supposed to have Dragon Dance, but again, Bitch Ass Gamefreak Didn’t Give It A Mega, so yeah. This is my attempt to make it more of an actual badass. The lore always goes on and on about how fast and incredible Arcanine supposedly is, so I wanted to try and reflect that more.

Also, you might be a little confused about there already being Shelgon before the Water trial, but this takes into account the altering of time scale and power curve. Shelgon is also buffed a little, so in a hypothetical game it would go like:

HP: 90 (+25)
Atk: 95
Def: 100
Sp. Atk: 60
Sp. Def: 75 (+25)
Speed: 30(-20)
Total: 450 (+30)

Basically because given how it looks, you would think it’s slower and tankier than it really is. Also, this minor buff to overall BST would apply to all middle stage pseudo-legends or similar, in varying ways, because 420 honestly feels too weak for the effort you have to put in.
Chapter 15: A Thing Of Hope

Chapter Summary

Lana’s Trial. In which Sun and friends have to smack the fuck out of some fish and shit, I guess...

It's actually significantly more serious than that makes it sound.

Chapter Notes

I meant to finish a bit sooner, but this chapter was kind of difficult, not to mention I was starting to become discouraged by the slow progress on the story’s stats…. Although in the context of the AO3 Pokemon fandom’s general activity levels, and what can be typically expected for similar subject matter, it actually isn’t so bad.

Still, I'd say it's mainly my own fault, given that I don’t like to self-promote much. It makes me feel like I’m being needy and arrogant… Not to mention, I’m always wary of unfamiliar fic communities, because I get paranoid that I’ll attract rude/entitled people.

But like I've said before, I will not depend solely on stats to write. I will continue to write regardless, and I greatly enjoy the attention and engagement I have received already.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After Lillie’s battle, and Salsa’s evolution, the group split up from Moon… Apparently, she already had a Waterium Z, only facing the issue of having no one to use it with… and having no real reason to anyway. Her team already countered whatever a Water-type would rather well.

Once they were off, Lillie had Salsa walk beside her, largely to help him start to get used to moving around with his new body. After only about ten minutes, he started giving low groans of complaint, finding the new body and its weight distribution to be rather cumbersome.

“That’s why you’re walking,” Lillie said quietly. “We both knew this would probably happen… So, we’re just going to have to figure out the best way to cope with it. For now, at least walking for a while will help you start to get used to it,” Lillie said. Salsa just gave a low growl, clearly not enthused.

“Well, even if you don’t like it very much, the more you train, the sooner you can be a Salamence,” Lillie pointed out, which seemed to appease Salsa, as he gave a determined grunt and walked just a bit faster.

It wouldn’t take much longer to reach Brooklet Hill at all, so the group sorted out a general plan for how they’d go about it. They’d spend three days on it, each of them taking turns doing the trial. First Hau, then Sun, then Lillie. Although it would be possible for more than one person to do the trial in a single day, Sun and Lillie still wanted a bit more time to scope out the area and formulate further
strategy based on that. Hau himself was feeling rather confident. After all, he did have the largest type advantage, and his team had put forth a great effort over the last three weeks.

Not long after entering the trial site, Sun could already see how the land was richer with Z-Power, the subtle way it hung in the air, permeating everything around. They met the Trial Captain not long after arrival, patiently fishing not too far away from the main entrance.

She was rather short and small, even slightly smaller than Lillie, and yet something about her gave the impression she had much more composure and experience than any of the three Trainers before her.

“Ah, you three! You’ve finally showed up! I’ve heard a few things about you already, but for the sake of manners, my name is Lana. What are yours?” Lana asked.

Sun gave a silent introduction, Hau a much louder and more eager one, and Lillie a rather shy and quiet one. About what Lana had expected.

“Pleased to properly meet you all,” Lana responded. “So, who here is taking my trial on first?”

“I am!” Hau spoke up. “My team has worked really hard for this, so I’m pretty excited!”

“Excellent! Hau, I gather that you’re a straightforward sort, so for you, a straightforward trial. Ride upon a Lapras and head downstream to the Totem’s Den, where you will face a Totem well-suited for you in glorious battle. That will be all.”

“Wait… that’s it?” Hau asked, cocking his head a bit.

“Well, yes, essentially. A few Pokemon might shoot a little water at you or otherwise playfully attempt to impede you on the way there, but it’s honestly nothing to worry about…” Lana said rather coyly.

Hau’s eyes narrowed slightly as he realized what Lana was actually getting at “…So you’re saying I actually have to get through a bunch of Pokemon who will try to stop me,” Hau said.

“Well, if you must put it in so many words… Really, I’d just call it an obstacle course. Just with my special team of trained attack Gyarados involved as well.” Lana said with an over-casual shrug.

“…Trained… attack… Gyarados?” Lillie said slowly, her anxiety for Hau’s sake suddenly spiking.

“Oh, it won’t be so bad! They shouldn’t be that hungry right now…” Lana said offhandedly, stifling a laugh as Lillie’s eyes only grew wider. Even Sun was starting to think Hau should reconsider… Reflexively, he extended his Field, readying his powers for any Gyarados who needed a swift laser to the face. The anxiety and protectiveness expressed within it was such that everything within twenty feet of him became a few degrees warmer… But then, Sun heard Hau’s laughter.

“Nice joke, Captain Lana!” Hau said. Lana just laughed back in response.

Oh, so it was a joke...

Thinking that, Sun casually retracted his Field, just as the ground nearest to him began to steam profusely.
Once Lapras was registered to Hau’s ride pager, the trial began soon afterwards.

Sun, Lillie, and Lana all followed Hau downstream from shore, as the seemingly placid waters of Brooklet Hill quickly came alive with dozens of Water-type Pokemon vying to knock Hau off of Lapras with bursts of water and bubbles… None of it posed a genuine danger to Hau, but it was definitely annoying. More than anything, it seemed to be a test of endurance and patience.

But after repeatedly Mantine Surfing with Sun, Hau knew well enough what he had to do, even with a Lapras. A bit slower and less agile than a Mantine, but still surprisingly graceful and maneuverable. Besides the Water attacks, there were also obstacle areas where Hau had to take a long way around or use a Pokemon’s abilities to pass… But still, he managed, even if he got increasingly cold and soaked in the process.

After about ten minutes and four different occasions where he had to clumsily scramble back onto Lapras, Hau hit his stride, weaving through the onslaught of water and obstacles much more smoothly than before.

Before too much longer, he managed to reach his destination… the Totem’s Den. It looked rather unassuming, mainly just a large pond, but Hau could immediately feel a sort of pressure in the air, as rain began to fall in a steady drizzle. There was a small island with a few trees in the center of the pond, where a challenger could send out Pokemon to fight from land. From shore, Sun and Lillie watched, as Lana shouted out to Hau.

“The trials of Alola normally focus on Pokemon unique to Alola, I’m sure you’re well aware… But for you, who knows Alola best of all out of your group… I felt I would prefer to shine a spotlight on some of Brooklet Hill’s rarest and most exclusive Pokemon!” Lana called, with an incredibly smug grin.

“Wait, what?” Hau called back. The Lapras he rode seemed almost apologetic as it summoned up a Light Screen around them both, apparently knowing exactly what would happen next.

“Marshtomp and Marill… two exceedingly elusive Pokemon in this area, typically only found through special methodology… And when they evolve…” Lana paused, giggling rather darkly. “Well, good luck!” Lana called.

And so, the lake began to churn. Began to bubble in one area, all other Pokemon fleeing. From the depths of the lake, came a Pokemon that was not Araquanid. Was not Wishiwashi. Was a towering, slimy, amphibious terror, a creature that would stand no less than ten feet tall if it were to raise up on its powerful back legs.

From the depths of the lake came Swampert. Totem Swampert. With a great bellow, it manifested a swirling golden aura, raising its already great power even further.

Hau’s throat went dry just at the sight of it, despite the humidity and steady rain. And as the creature gave a bellowing cry, Hau’s grip on Lapras tightened. Regardless, Hau could feel Sun silently cheering him on, and he knew Lillie had faith in him as well.

“Dartrix!” Hau called, silently praying his faithful starter would be enough. Even the prideful owl flinched at the sight of the massive beast before him, but did his best to put on a brave face. They’d trained a long time for this.

The Swampert gave the two an appraising glare that seemed to cut into their very souls… Then
finally, there was another low bellow. Something significantly smaller and less frightening sprung up from the water to assist, a rodent-like Pokemon with long ears and blue and white fur.

Hau still made sure to be wary of the Azumarill, having seen the unassuming creatures even in the most hardcore of tournaments. They had access to Huge Power, an incredible ability to briefly concentrate the AWE of their physical strikes to an incredible density at the moment of impact. Ruinously powerful, with the correct training.

With a keening screech, Dartrix opened with Leaf Blade at Hau’s behest, only for the attack to be intercepted by Azumarill suddenly blasting themself clear out of the water with Aqua Jet. Hau and Sun briefly wondered why the Azumarill would do such a thing… Lillie has an inkling of an idea, but she hadn’t yet fully concluded it by time the slashing wing made contact and did absolutely nothing. All the AWE in the strike betrayed Dartrix at once, warping in such a way as to become a perfect shield against even any remaining kinetic energy in the wing. The attack died against Azumarill’s fur, completely absorbed and repurposed, power completely robbed from it. The creature dove back to the water, moderately glowing with new power, as Swampert lurched forward with an absolutely savage Ice Punch.

Dartrix dodged in the nick of time, heart pounding madly in time with Hau’s. Swampert’s frigid fist crashed into the water instead, instantly creating large chunks of ice and slush where it landed. But Hau knew what’d happened. Sap Sipper. So that was the “fun twist” of this Trial, the thing that made it uniquely challenging. Two Water-types, each covering for one of the only two weaknesses in the type. Oh, goodie.

Sun and Lillie cringed as they realized the “fun twist” for themselves. Lana just gave a massive grin. Hau had Dartrix launch off Leaf Blade as myriads of quills instead, searching for openings in Azumarill’s defensive backup… But the creature just continued to go rocketing into the path of each one, easily meeting their impressive speed with its own. Any it couldn’t reach physically, it intercepted with spurts of heavy foam that it fired off with impressive speed and pinpoint accuracy. Hau blanched, realizing too late that such a strategy would only make Azumarill even stronger, unable to overcome their speed and defensive prowess.

Swampert charged forth again, another Ice Punch at the ready. Dartrix once again dodged at the very last moment, Hau’s eyes working in tandem with his own as Hau felt a slight phantom chill from the close call. Perfectly in time with Dartrix’s movements, Hau reflexively bent down as fast as he could on Lapras, as if he were dodging right along with Dartrix.

Hau’s next order was Swords Dance, as he quickly readied Normalium Z, planning to follow up the Swords Dance as soon as possible. They needed to break Azumarill. It was the only way to even so much as get started on the rest of the task ahead of them.

Dartrix began a sharp, twisting series of tight twirls and dives, power building rapidly as Swampert answered in kind with a Rock Slide, mud and silt from the lakebed condensing into powerful boulders before shooting up from the lakebed.

Hau mentally swore at the tactic, the water and rain combined making it so much harder to follow the assault from below, as Dartrix tried their best to navigate but got pummeled, forcing Hau to switch to a heavier focus on tanking the hits rather than increasing reflexes. Not to mention, every boulder that shot up had to come plummeting back down eventually.

Dartrix recovered well after the first strike, getting knocked upwards but easily converting the momentum into a stable flight, responding to another boulder just in time to destroy it with a Steel
Wing followed by another, then another. They were larger, harder than the boulders Passimian had used back in Hala’s Grand Trial... but Dartrix had become stronger since then, and the new power invested in him by Sword Dance was no laughing matter.

Azumarill came next, leaping into the fray with a powerful Aqua Jet, leading into a brutal Play Rough. After Hau’s attacks, they’d essentially gained the Huge Power boost their kind was infamous for.

Dartrix gave a keening screech and spun in the air, one hardened wing striking hard against a boulder with incredible strength, and the other firing off glowing white quill blades infused with the same power, digging deep into Azumarill’s plush body... but doing far from enough damage to take it out, in spite of it being partially a Fairy. In that moment, Hau begrudgingly remembered that Water-types resisted Steel, for whatever reason. Something about the especially fluid nature of their Field somehow naturally opposing the penetrative force of a Steel-type Field.

The pain of the quills didn’t stop Azumarill from hitting their mark regardless, a pink glow bursting from their body as they brutally socked Dartrix clean in the face, then spun around to strike with their deceptively powerful tail, sending him plummeting straight into another perfectly-timed boulder from beneath the waves. The bird gracelessly flopped into the water, seemingly defeated.

Hau briefly doubled over at that, chest and sides aching and burning from the assault, while Swampert just gave a proud bellow... But Hau could sense that Dartrix still had just the tiniest amount of fight left, thanks to his efforts. He returned his friend, thanking him for his work despite being unable to use the Z-Move he had in mind, and sent out Noibat instead.

Hau quickly swapped Z-Crystals while Swampert came bearing down with another merciless Ice Punch, but Noibat managed to dodge cleanly as Hau quickly posed in a somewhat limited fashion, due to being atop a Lapras. Fortunately, it was still more than enough.

The sky-blue aura of a Flyinium Z surged out of his body, spiraling into a twisting pillar along with the wind around him, before that pillar curved forward and crashed down on Noibat, infusing her with its incredible power.

“Z-Tailwind!” Hau called over the rain.

The rainy winds shifted dramatically as Azumarill went in for a brutal Play Rough, only for Noibat to dodge with practiced ease, Z-Power infusing her nervous system and allowing her to act with peerless efficiency.

Swampert gave a low, almost croaking groan as they started up another Rock Slide from below, each stone smaller but the overall quantity and rate of fire increasing drastically. Noibat swooped, dove, and barrel rolled through the stone flurry, movements especially swift and clean after spending so much time struggling against heightened gravity during training.

Hau commanded Agility in the middle of it, and Noibat only grew swifter, blurring through the air as Azumarill attempted an Aqua Jet just to have a chance of landing a hit, only to crash through a few falling stones instead, taking a bit of damage..

That gave Hau an idea.

He had Noibat bait out another Rock Slide as Azumarill used Helping Hand, shooting out a beam of invigorating power towards Swampert, apparently thinking the next Rock Slide could land if they
Stones shot up faster and stronger than ever... But as with the stones, Noibat too was faster than ever.

Like the wind itself, Noibat wove around each and every one, Hau syncing so deeply he could actually begin to hear the sounds of stones whooshing through the air, seemingly just centimeters from his own ears. There was a lightness to his body, a sharpness to his mind, as Noibat flew in each and every direction, smoothly avoiding every hit.

It was time for the counterattack.

Hau could still feel the lingering phantom pain of the brutal strikes against Dartrix, a testament to the fact the Totem could hit like a freight train... so he knew firsthand the power of the stones.

“Psychic!” Hau commanded with conviction, not needing to specify anything further. Noibat already knew. Had known as soon as Hau did.

At the height of the upward flight of the countless stones, just as they started plummeting back to earth, Noibat took advantage of their naturally building momentum, redirecting and accelerating it for her own purposes at a fraction of the energy she would normally need to move so many. A storm of them rained down on her opponents instead, pummeling them mercilessly.

Swampert wasn’t all that harmed, standing stalwart, but Azumarill was given quite the beating, hardly even able to escape damage in the water thanks to the sheer speed and force, along with Noibat’s telekinetic prowess.

In response, taking what seemed like a moment of stillness, Azumarill fired off another Helping Hand, and Swampert lunged with all it was worth, billowing plumes of icy vapor and powdery snow trailing from its ominously glowing fists.

“Psychic,” Hau repeated, just before the lunge. Once again, Noibat knew her target. One weakened enough that they couldn’t resist the sudden vice grip of her mind on their body, as they were flung out of the water in a great, arcing loop to take Noibat’s place in the air.

Noibat gracefully dove out of the way of the strike, then flipped to hover briefly upside down, as her eyes glowed an ever-brighter cyan, and so too did the aura of psychic energy around Azumarill.

Squeezing Azumarill in place as firmly as possible, Noibat watched from below with a twinge of sympathy as Swampert’s obscenely strong Ice Punch mercilessly plowed the Azumarill right in the face, the partner Pokemon squealing loudly, Noibat’s psychic hold straining until it could finally take no more. The Azumarill went hurtling backwards all at once, soundly defeated. Resisted hit or not, the Swampert still hit like a freight train. And with Helping Hand backing it up, that hit had been all the more dangerous.

‘Mmmm whatcha saayyy~’ briefly played through Hau’s head, given his incredible relief at the fact that the monumentally annoying and frankly somewhat scary Azumarill was dealt with, but he quickly refocused.

Noibat quickly dropped the Azumarill into the water as the Swampert just floated idly. They seemed briefly stunned, as if in disbelief over what they’d just done.
To be fair, everyone watching felt rather similar.

In the ensuing shock, Hau quickly had Noibat use Supersonic, the attack landing with ease against such a large and bulky target.

Swampert gave an enraged roar as the rain seemed to intensify, and something answered the roar… Something much bigger than Azumarill.

From the water, twisting, writhing, and thrashing, came a Gyarados to join the Swampert, giving a bone-chilling roar that gave Hau and Noibat pause, just as Tailwind steadily abated, and Swampert pushed forward with a demented look in their eyes, readying an ungodly Ice Punch… only for the attack’s energy to suddenly detonate in their hand as they lost control, creating a great outburst of thick, frigid mist that briefly obscured Swampert’s vision, while also completely encasing that whole upper arm in a bulky, spiky, misshapen hunk of ice.

Swampert gave a great cry of pain, trying to address their suddenly frozen upper arm, as Noibat busily started up another Tailwind, grateful for the extra opening. Gyarados lunged, icy fangs bared, but Noibat smoothly dodged, opting to strike Swampert with a Hidden Power.

A missile of green energy struck Swampert’s hide and put the great beast into searing pain, causing them to immediately retaliate with another Rock Slide, giving a massive, rumbling groan of rage. Hau couldn’t help but briefly whoop with delight, glad he’d managed to properly remember that Noibat’s Hidden Power was Grass-type.

Despite his tension, Hau briefly smirked.

The Swampert was massively strong, and reasonably clever for a creature fighting without instruction, but they only ever used one of two moves, because of the typing of his team members. And that made them all the more predictable. Considering the circumstances, he had them right where he wanted them.

Noibat continued to evade and harass, smoothly coasting on Tailwind and exploiting the benefits of Agility to keep tagging the persistent Totem with Hidden Power even as she flew at top speed. Gyarados lunged and swung its tail after her, vicious ice-infused fangs bearing down on Noibat but narrowly missing each time, leaving trailing streams of powdery snow and billowy mist.

Still, the Totem was obnoxiously tough, on top of Noibat not excelling in raw power or being Grass-type herself. She also wasn’t being given much time to actually charge each Hidden Power, having to sling them one after another in between every dodge, every swoop and roll, all while remaining keen enough to avoid a hit to her frail form.

Hau could feel the battle wearing both of them down, as Noibat was forced to operate at peak capacity the whole time, having to adopt a frantic pace as each and every second became a fight to last just a little bit longer against the relentless onslaught of the opponents at hand.

In turn, Noibat she steadily whittled away at his energy as well, as he kept pushing the sync as hard as he could, giving up as much focus and determination as he could muster. And still, despite the fact that over half the hits were landing in sensitive areas and with their energy concentrated and condensed to do critical damage, the Swampert soaked multiple hits with relative ease.

Lillie watched the battle with the others, frowning slightly. “It’s so strong…” Lillie said quietly.
“Totems, even without their auras, are stronger and tougher than usual just by virtue of being Totems… An Aura may be lost, but there’s still the permanent effects that Z-Power has had on every cell, not only enlarging but empowering the Totem further. A Z-Aura is just icing on the cake, essentially. A way to escalate that power to its grandest heights.” Lana explained.

Sun simply remained silent and stock-still, laser-focused on the battle, not even so much as blinking in spite of the wind and rain. Every ounce of his being wanted Hau to win, silently cheering him on at every turn. Hau had been giving it so much effort… He’d been so upset when he lost to Gladion…

Noibat renewed her Tailwind yet again as Gyarados dove for her, and she shot straight up into the sky, delivering another horrendous Supersonic to both Gyarados and Swampert.

Hau panted heavily, able to tell that Noibat was slowing a bit even under the effects of Tailwind and Agility combined. It wouldn’t be much longer for her.

But fortunately, she didn’t need that much longer at all.

Noibat harassed the Swampert further, moving into perfect position for its Rock Slide as the disoriented yet enraged creature did just that… and the Gyarados went barreling in for a bite without a care.

There was a brief delay in Noibat’s movements, then an interruption as a comparatively colossal boulder rose up to try and bring her down, cutting off a path of flight as Gyarados crashed through the upwards barrage with Ice Fang at the ready…

They struck true, Noibat crying out in great pain as the massive jaws came clamping down, and Hau cringed immediately, feeling a sudden cold, dull stab to multiple sections of his body.

Noibat fell to the water, and Hau dug deep, lungs burning, heart pounding, body shaking… But it was too much. Noibat lapsed into unconsciousness as Gyarados was hammered with the full brunt of Rock Slide in her stead, the Swampert so disoriented and angry as to forget they had a partner at all.

Hau quickly returned Noibat, panting heavily in the pounding rain. Hau was pretty sure that not even a Totem Swampert would suddenly have Drizzle, but even so, the rain seemed to intensify further with the creature’s increasing lack of composure.

Next, Hau aimed a Pokeball towards the little island nearby, releasing Pikachu from within, quickly communicating what his role would be as their Fields intertwined.

Pikachu smoothly zipped out of the way of an oncoming Mud Bomb from Swampert, the storm of compacted mud instead striking the island with alarming speed and power for what was only supposed to be mud. Pikachu then promptly launched a Discharge, holding nothing back as Gyarados pulled off a wrathful Aqua Tail… Both attacks landed at nearly the same time, Gyarados’ body coursing with the painful electricity even as they socked Pikachu about ten meters with the force of their tail.

Hau winced and grit his teeth at that, too tired and unprepared to successfully hold on to Pikachu’s consciousness through the rush of crushing pain, a great blow followed by a deep, tingling sting afterwards.

Hau returned Pikachu, but praised him for his efforts regardless. His work was already done.
Anything extra would’ve just been the cherry on top. Gyarados collapsed into the water directly after the attack, soundly defeated.

Swampert gave a deep groan of agitation as they thrashed about aimlessly, their Totem aura taking on a haunting blue tinge and growing to twice its size, water twisting and churning about them in a localized maelstrom as Torrent activated on top of it. Hau gulped, steeled his resolve, then sent out his next Pokemon.

Dartrix materialized on the island and weakly took to the air again, as Hau gathered all of his strength to bolster their reaction time just enough to dodge one more Ice Punch. But Dartrix had gone backwards, forcing Swampert to charge up on land, where it looked even more massive than ever once it was forced to stand. The terrible cold grazed Dartrix’s wing, and in turn Hau felt a deep, stinging chill in his arm, but he carried on, yelling out one last command.

“Leaf Blade!”

Dartrix’s other wing glowed bright, and slashed deep into Swampert’s chest. The beast gave a terrible, guttural cry at the power behind the impact, and Dartrix slashed again, then again, heart beating so hard it might explode. Hau could feel it too.

The Swampert backed away, bleeding copiously, head down and wailing in submission, as Dartrix lunged forward and gave one last long, loping slash to the top of the creature’s head, which was finally too much.

Swampert collapsed in a great heap, breathing ragged and uneven as their aura sputtered and faded.

Dartrix weakly flew back to Hau’s side as Hau pumped his fist in victory, lavishing Dartrix with praise. Dartrix just puffed out his chest in response, crooning and preening happily as he used Roost to restore some of his energy.

Lapras gladly carried the two back to land, where Sun immediately brought Hau into a tight embrace, knowing no other way to express how proud he was. Lillie joined the hug shortly after, and Sun’s body began to warm dramatically as he put up a barrier of light against the rain, quickly drying Hau off… and sneaking in a quick kiss as well. He could feel how much the fight had taken from Hau, the lingering soreness, the way his heart still beat so rapidly… Still, part of that was really because of Sun’s proximity and affection.

“Beautifully done. I couldn’t have expected any better. You saw through the nature of this battle’s test almost immediately, and responded accordingly. To use such a powerful combination’s attacks against itself… That’s a stroke of true brilliance,” Lana said, smiling softly as she gave Hau a sparkling blue crystal.

“Waterium Z,” Lana said. “As I’m sure you know, using it will allow you to execute Hydro Vortex. Allow me to show you the poses,” Lana continued, before performing the graceful, fluid motions necessary for the attack.

“Thanks!” Hau replied, grinning widely as he held the new Z-Crystal up to the sky. Simultaneously, the rain ceased.

“Oh, it’s no trouble. I can only hope I’ll continue to be so impressed when your friends make their attempts as well,” Lana said.

After a bit more discussion, the group’s day was largely done. There was a small town nearby,
where Sun treated Hau to a large dinner to congratulate him, and then a copious amount of ice cream and malasadas.

Ice cream was one of the few human foods that Sun wasn’t overly fond of, finding its coldness unpleasantly intense… But of course, when they were back at the Pokemon Center and alone in bed, Sun had no problem tasting it on Hau’s lips then.

The next day, Sun went to face the Totem for himself. For him, the obstacle course was fun, if a lot easier to him that it was to Hau, but he got the feeling that it was far from the thing Lana was most interested in seeing from him. Only when he arrived at the Totem Den did Lana give a mischievous smirk. The rain fell, and the breeze built into a blustery wind… Something stirred in the water, body elongated, and absolutely teeming with power.

With a long, melodious cry, some parts deep and some parts high, a Milotic of epic proportions emerged from the water, aura flaring to life, sharpening the creature’s movements and empowering their bulk. They had to be almost twice as long as usual, undulating body thick and powerful, scales slick and shiny.

With another lilting cry, Milotic summoned their partner, and an Alomomola took its place beside the huge serpentine Pokemon.

Sun sent out Sha, wasting absolutely no time in commanding Sha’s Toxic Venoshock combo. Immediately the Milotic responded with a surprisingly swift and fluid Surf, tail swinging around and summoning up a wave at least six meters high, but as Sun intensified his sync with Sha, the little Poipole just barely managed to dart up and over the waves, only a fraction of a second before they would be crushed and engulfed by them.

Sun silently cheered as Sha released their powerful combo, the potent spray of toxins they produced not able to be sufficiently diluted or evaded even with so much water around. Following up with a harshly stinging deluge of poison and acid, the Milotic gave a loud cry…

And then promptly healed both the poison and all the damage incurred, as if none of it had ever happened.

Oh.

Refresh and Recover.

It was going to be *That* kind of fight, huh?

Sun took a deep breath, drawing forth all the resolve he could.

First things first, soften the opponent up. Sun quickly had Sha evade a sudden Scald from the Alomomola and fire off Acid Spray in turn. He considered Nasty Plot, but figured it would be best to weaken Milotic’s defenses for all team members involved.

That was a mistake.

Only seconds after the burning, sizzling concoction hit Milotic’s scales, Sun saw the creature’s already impressive Field flare up and fluctuate wildly. He saw the look of sudden *aggression* on Milotic’s face as its raw power soared, and its aura surged larger and brighter.
Sun’s mind worked as fast as possible, trying to puzzle out what exactly he’d just done, and more importantly, what Milotic had just done… It was frustrating. He’d researched so many Water-types, but hadn’t thought he’d face a Milotic, of all things...

“Hook, line, and sinker,” Lana said quietly, smirking as Milotic sent off an incredibly strong wave of water, its monstrous power only boosted further by the rain. It smashed into Sha with such impossibly high force and such crushing pressure that not even Sun’s best syncing efforts allowed them to avoid or endure it.

As the water drained away, Sha was left soaked, muddy, and completely unconscious.

“...Holy shit,” Hau said quietly, a pang of concern shooting through him.

“...Wait.. That was the effect of Competitive, wasn’t it?” Lillie asked.

“Oh, good eye! Indeed, that was just what happened. Trying to whittle Milotic down, trying to soften her up… None of that will work. All of it will be turned against you, just like when Hau turned Swampert against her own partners. This Milotic is the peacekeeper of Brooklet Hill, born and raised to both protect it and to quell the destructive impulses of other Totems. She can’t be bested so easily. The perfect surprise challenge for someone who leads with a Poison-type,” Lana said with a smirk.

Lillie’s expression became a bit downcast, sympathy for Sun welling up along with a sort of disdain for how Lana seemed to be reacting to his struggles.

On the battlefield, Sun had returned Sha and opted to send C.C. in, only to be met with another merciless barrage of powered-up waves. Lillie could see how C.C attempted to part the waves with a combination of Psychic and Silver Wind, trying to make even the smallest gap she could slip through, but the water seemed utterly implacable, and her body was small and relatively frail even after evolution.

Once again, the waves crashed down with impunity, and C.C. too was bested. Sun grunted in frustration, returning C.C. and quickly apologizing before sending out Zorua.

“I-I don’t know,” Lillie said hesitantly, realizing she was technically speaking to an authority figure, even if Lana didn’t really look intimidating at all. “Isn’t it a bit much? Sun tries so hard to research and adapt to this world… He’s always tried his best, even when things were hard… After all that, to be suddenly put against a Totem like this, one of the last Pokemon he would’ve expected…”

“Even with all the rules, and all the efforts to level playing fields… Sometimes, battles just aren’t fair. Sometimes, there will be counters to your teams that you were entirely unprepared for. I get the sense you’re pretty clever. I think you must’ve realized that this was the point of my trials to you three all along. How to overcome adversity, how to get around what seems like an implacable wall, a perfect counter,” Lana said, looking Lillie straight in the eyes. “In other words, how to proceed when the current seems to be against you,” Lana said.

And in that moment, just as her final words left her mouth, even Zorua was already bested, struck down by a mighty wave of water even as Sun gave all he had to get Zorua to dodge… But the wave merely lurched forward faster, stretched wider, commanded by Milotic’s utterly unreal strength… It swallowed Zorua completely, overpowering her with disquieting ease. Sun felt the battering pressure, the crushing weight… And when Zorua endured, just barely, wincing and holding on by a thread, she was merely picked off by a quick Scald from the partner Pokemon.
Technically, Sun had already lost twice. Once against Hau, and a forfeit against Ilima… He also
supposed that getting knocked out by a bunch of Drowzee kind of counted as a loss against Tapu
Koko, although he and Hau did defeat the Totem it sent… But facing a Totem with only one
Pokemon at a time was a completely different thing.

As Zorua fell, without ceremony, without dignity, the Totem looking the same as they ever were,
their partner doing just fine…

Sun lowered his head, stomach turning uncomfortably. He silently returned Zorua. Something from
the depths of his mind bubbled up hot and unwanted, seeming to blot out everything else.

In his mind, Sun was pushed roughly against a crystalline wall by a horrendously burning hand,
outer membrane bubbling, agonizing pain tearing through his body.

“88%,” came a low, hissing, masculine tone, only audible over the sound of his own searing flesh
because it was spoken directly into his mind. “You’re miserable, you know that? Utterly pathetic.
Sometimes I think someone must have swapped your egg with a Light-forsaken commoner’s. What
kind of defective mongrel can’t even get a perfect score on such a mind-numbingly simple task as
target practice?!”

Sun had no real reply.

“What do you know what Codi and Fucus both got?”

100%.

“That’s right. And do you know what Saccha got?”

Sun only gave gasps of pain in response, his vision growing blurry, but the burning hand’s blow
briefly intensified, and a burst of psionic strength sent a terrible jolt of pain and nausea ravaging
through him… It forced a response, as much as he didn’t want to give it.

110%.

“That’s right! 110%! Because she’s already proceeded to advanced light redirection, ahead of
schedule! And that is what we expect! True brilliance! Not the loathsome mediocrity of a defective
retard like you. All the resources it takes to maintain you, and this is how we’re repaid… You are a
disgrace!”

In the present, Sun lapsed into inelegant sobbing on Lapras’ back, disguise breaking as steaming
tears dribbled down his face.

Still the memory persisted… a staff of violet light suddenly materializing, the staff beating down on
Sun, over and over again. Each hit burning wildly, easily overcoming the natural heat resistance of
his skin.

As Sun found himself lost in the memory, still sobbing and pulsing dark blue, Lapras hurriedly
ferried him back to shore. Even the Totem seemed a touch concerned, giving a soft, melodious cry
before issuing a pulsing pink aura that raced across the water, hitting Sun and Lapras and briefly
making them glow along with it. In spite of that, Sun was only moderately calmed, still hunching
over and refusing to show his face.

Hau and Lillie were immediately embracing Sun before he could even completely get off of the
Lana just stood back, unable to look directly at them, fidgeting awkwardly.

“I—I’m sorry, I didn’t expect—” Lana was cut off by the ugly sound of renewed sobs, the effect of Milotic’s calming aura seeming to slide right off of Sun. Sun wept against Hau’s shoulder as Lillie silently placed a hand on Sun’s shoulder, grimacing as she began to see just what kind of memory Sun had managed to unearth.

Lana had only just met them… But in brief spurts, quick and terrifying rushes of intense feeling and awful sensation, she saw and felt it as well.

The faint, burning phantom pain of being beaten senseless… The quick flashes of a terrifying face, razor sharp crystalline teeth glowing an awful violet, the guttural snarling of a being more like a monster than a family member, the tail whipping around with terrifying cracks to land scalding blows to her back… And the sharp, unrelenting hatred she felt from such a monster, the rage, the disappointment…

Lana backed away, shutting her eyes and covering her ears.

“Hey, um, we gotta go… Are you going to be alright?” Hau said softly to Lana, doing his best to convey that he wasn’t upset with her. But in a flash, he focused his attention back on Sun, softly stroking his hair and humming to him, quietly reminding him to take deep breaths. Lillie took deep breaths too, attempting to provide a good example for Sun to fall in line with. Lana got the uncomfortable feeling that both of them had done it all before.

With a bit more distance, Lana was able to quickly regain most of her outward composure. “I… understand…” Lana said quietly. “Please be careful. Can I walk you back to the Pokemon Center?” Lana asked.

“Thank you, but we’ll be fine,” Lillie said, her voice a bit clipped as she as Hau began to steadily walk off with Sun between them.

Lana stared after them, feeling as if a deep, dark pit of helpless guilt was opening in her chest.

Steadily, she pulled out a Pokedex, which was fortunately fully waterproof as most were. With fingers slightly trembling, she began to type.

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**Chat:** Akala Squad

**LanaBanana:** I fucked up.

**MarshMallow:** Aw, what’s wrong hon? :(

**Opposite Fireman:** You’re in the middle of overseeing trials for Sun and his friends, right? What went wrong?

**Rock and Rollout:** It’s alright, just tell us what’s happening. Do you need backup? Is anyone in trouble?

**LanaBanana:** No, I… Sun’s trial… made him have a breakdown, essentially.
MarshMallow: Oh no.

Rock and Rollout: Is he going to be alright?! His Pokemon will heal, right?

Opposite Fireman: When you say ‘breakdown’...

LanaBanana: His Pokemon only fainted, but right after he lost, he started crying non-stop. Milotic could barely calm him down. He could hardly even get off of Lapras on his own. From what I gather, I accidentally triggered a traumatic memory.

MarshMallow: Lana, you didn’t know, I’m sure there are no hard feelings…

Opposite Fireman: Well, accidents happen… although I can’t say I have much personal experience in dealing with things like this…

Rock and Rollout: I’m sure everything will work out fine, eventually. I trust that you can still make the best of the situation, but be prepared to give it time. Do your best to be present and empathetic, but don’t pry too much. Although it’s unfortunate, this will at least give us valuable info on how to better accommodate him in future trials.

LanaBanana: I suppose you’re right. It’s just… I had this exaggerated image in my head, that he was this strong, silent type who didn’t care what anyone thought of him, and so he’d need a top-class challenge to really satisfy him and push him to new heights... I was so excited about it that I never considered he’s still just… a person.

Lana frowned and briefly changed some settings around, finding that everyone’s silly nicknames didn’t really fit a situation like this at all.

Lana: And… I kind of saw it.

Olivia: What do you mean?

Kiawe: Saw what?

Mallow: Lana?

Lana: I saw part of the memory. Flashes of it. Feelings and sensations. But… even that… even that was almost too much. It was horrible. He couldn’t have been more than a young child, the equivalent of only six or seven. His parent was… like a monster. Beating him senseless, until it burned. I admit that I’m not sure if this is within my right to share with others, but… I don’t know what else to do.

Olivia: We must do our best to be kind and supportive, then. But without the impression that we’re being patronizing. This is a unique and delicate situation. We’re dealing with the psychology of a being that is undoubtedly a person, and yet not human… Even so, we have a responsibility to make sure they feel that all of Alola is truly like a home and family to them.

Mallow: Lana, if anyone can make this better, I know it’s you!

Lana: Thank you… all of you.
With that, Lana steadily made her way back home. She had plenty of thinking to do.

So did the land spirit watching overhead, thrilled at the knowledge of new weaknesses to exploit…

And new pawns to utilize...

For the main group, bedtime that night went relatively well at first. Hau and Lillie had gotten Sun some of his favorite foods, and made sure to be extra kind to him. Sun seemed placid and affectionate in bed, laughing softly as Hau stroked his hair and kissed him gently, quietly reassuring him that things would be better tomorrow.

They slept for all of three hours before Hau saw a dream.

He was in Kukui’s lab, and Kukui amicably called him “Sun”, which immediately sent a tingle of dread down Hau’s spine as he quickly got a bad feeling about the situation… If it was predominantly Sun’s dream, then…

“I heard you lost a trial,” Kukui said evenly. He wore a small, amicable smile as he sat at a familiar, somewhat battered but homey-looking kitchen table. He steadily poured Hau a glass of pinap juice, carefully mixing in some salt as well.

“Yes,” Hau replied, sitting down at the table with Kukui. “I did my best though… that’s good, right?” Hau asked, smiling weakly, as his stomach flipped and knotted for reasons he couldn’t quite place.

“...No,” Kukui said quietly, looking down at the table with a soft hiss to his voice. He gripped the glass of juice tightly. The tingle of dread from before became pure ice running through Hau’s veins, pure terror pounding through all of his hearts in discordant frenzy. There was a terrible, terrible pause. The glass of juice began to steam, then burst into a rolling boil in Kukui’s grip, which was in turn growing tighter by the moment. “It is not!” Kukui shouted, suddenly snapping his head up and greeting Hau with eyes that had become huge and burning gold in coloration, each prominently displaying two pupils. Kukui suddenly hurled the glass of pinap juice at Hau with unreal strength, the object violently shattering against the wall as Hau just barely ducked to avoid it. Burning hot juice splashed against him in the process, although it fortunately didn’t seem to hurt like it really should’ve.

Unfortunately, Kukui was up on the table in an instant, crouching in an unnatural, almost feral fashion as he leaned his head down and glared closely at Hau. A slavering maw of sharp, crystalline teeth bared down on him, burning fangs at the ready. Hau could only cower helplessly in his seat, too petrified to move.

“What was I thinking, expecting that someone like you would be of any use to me?! You’re never useful, all you do is take up precious time and resources with your sheer, incessant inferiority!”

Kukui pounced then, knocking Hau out of the chair, his grip burning terribly, his snarls like that of a feral beast, steam and violet light alike pouring from his mouth… Hau merely sobbed, powerless to stop it.

The room suddenly started to fill with ice-cold water, rushing in from every direction possible, even crashing through the windows. Kukui seemed utterly unbothered, while Hau immediately felt the
grip of staggering cold, felt himself struggle to stay afloat as the frigid water sapped his strength away
in an instant. Kukui floated forth, a savage glee shining from the emerald-green light of his eyes.
Kukui started choking him, choking him for all he was worth, Hau spasming and flailing uselessly in
his grasp...

There was a long, thin cry then, and another, then another. Loud, yet familiar crying joined in with it,
building louder and louder as time passed.

The nightmare ended. This time, Hau found himself partially soaked upon waking, and immediately
began to fret… but fortunately, it was only his own sweat. Sun was clinging to him like his life
depended on it, nodes wildly twitching about and pulsing a deep blue in what was otherwise a totally
dark room.

Whatever had been going on, it was enough to wake their entire teams, all nine Pokemon crowded
onto or hovering above the bed… Ten, actually, considering that Nebby was also there.

Once Sha darted over and opened the door, Lillie was there as well, dressed in nightclothes and
teary-eyed as she made a beeline for Sun, the Pokemon immediately clearing room for her.

Although part of Sun was touched, for the most part he just huddled up even closer to Hau and
vanished, feeling ashamed that he’d woken everyone up in the middle of the night just because of a
stupid nightmare.

“Sun…” Lillie said quietly, kneeling on the bed next to him. She managed to find his hair, in spite of
his invisibility, and so she slowly stroked it. “It’s alright. We’re here to help,” Sha gave a soft,
agreeing trill.

“Yeah. Like I’ve said before, that was pretty much the entire reason I was told to travel with you,”
Hau said softly.

Sun slowly reappeared, the dark blue of his nodes a bit less intense than before. Still, many of them
trembled violently on his skin, jittering about restlessly. He was supposed to be better. He was
supposed to be way better.

“It’s okay that things are hard for you sometimes. We don’t only love you when you do everything
right, Sun.” Lillie said quietly. “We always love you. You know that, don’t you?”

Sun nodded slowly. He could feel it. He could feel it, and it felt so good, but that was exactly what
made it so worrisome. There was always that tiny, lingering worry… that one day, just the slightest
little extra nudge would set everything over the edge… and then the love would just… stop… And
from there, he’d have no idea what to do.

“That’s not going to happen. I’m not going to let it,” Hau said. “Whatever crazy stuff happens,
whatever we have to go through… I’m not gonna stop loving you,” Hau said. “I knew going into
this that it could never be a ‘normal’ relationship. I knew going in that it would be hard sometimes,
and that it was going to involve a lot of risks, and that I might end up having to go outside of my
comfort zone on certain things. But I did it anyway, and I don’t regret it! Because you make it worth
it.” Hau said.

Sun was almost on the verge of tears again, but for a markedly different reason from before.

“Still… saying all this is one thing… But I think we should try and find a way to treat the nightmares
now,” Lillie said.
“I think we should try getting him a Munna. Drowzee would be a lot easier, because Munna don’t naturally live in Alola, but Drowzee don’t really like nightmares,” Hau said. “...Plus a horde of Drowzee knocked us out that one time, so I’m honestly still not thrilled about the idea of one rooting around in Sun’s head…”

“Professor Kukui gets Pokemon imported all the time, so I think that idea should work just fine,” Lillie said.

Sun silently posed a question that made both Lillie and Hau flinch.

Would Professor Kukui hate him?

“No! Professor Kukui loves you too!” Lillie empathically replied.

Even though he was the one who told Sun to go on an Island Challenge, and now Sun was failing a direct order from him?

“Sun, first of all, you can’t really ‘fail’ an Island Challenge until you stop trying. Every trial area is obligated to let you have as many do-overs as you want. Second… he would never hate you just for failing at something,” Hau softly explained. “I may not know him as well as you, but I do know he’s not that kinda guy.”

“Not to mention… Professor Kukui told Sun that because he thought this is what was best for Sun. This was never really supposed to be something that’s only for the professor’s sake.” Lillie said.

Hau considered Sun’s prior motivations… What exactly even drove him to do so well in perhaps his two most stand-out battles, against Hala and then Gladion…

In one, it was to prove himself. To prove that he could succeed, and so could his friends. To prove that he wasn’t a burden… In one, it was… anger. Searing, pulsing, roaring anger.

In both, in at least some way, it was for Hau. Or moreover, for the sake of people Sun loved.

But that just raised another worrying thought.

On some level, in spite of all the psychic and empathic power at his disposal… Sun believed love was conditional. Judging by his explosive temper if loved ones were harmed, and it wasn’t because of a consensual Pokemon battle… Hau would even go so far as to say that Sun believed all forms of good will, down to the basest tenants of respect and mercy, were purely conditional. And yet, Sun simultaneously believed otherwise. He simultaneously believed in gratitude, honor, courtesy, manners, second chances… He kept trying to do better, be better, even in spite of his past.

Having to struggle with such a juxtaposition, day in and day out… It must’ve tormented him greatly.

And the more Hau thought… what were Sun’s personal motivations to battle, anyway? Were there any that weren’t, in some way, centered on the excessive desire to prove worth, or to guard and maintain the love and approval he’d managed to find? Was there anything just for himself?

He didn’t really express any desire to be a Kahuna, or a Champion, or anything like that… Kukui told him to go on the Island Challenge, but from what Hau heard, Sun even viewed that as largely just a way of receiving Kukui’s approval. And he and Sun had talked about Sun getting stronger because it might help him save his people… but what kind of ass-backwards quest was that, setting
out to rescue your own personal hell? Who would want to fight their hardest for that? Who wouldn’t feel conflicted? Hau felt he had to wonder, and had to ask.

“Sun…” Hau asked quietly. “Why do you want to do the Island Challenge? If it weren’t about Kukui, or facing your homeworld, or even Lillie and I… If it weren’t about whether any of us like you or not… What would it be for?”

Sun was truly silent for a while, withholding most thought as he glowed white with focus, dimly at first, then brighter. There was a pause for such a length of time that Hau and Lillie briefly worried that Sun didn’t have an answer… Then finally, the thoughts came.

Looking back, Sun realized… The world was so much more than just the battles. So much more than just a test.

The wonder of meeting new people, seeing new Pokemon… the thrill of meeting each new team member, raising them, bringing their power and versatility to new heights… The joy of seeing new places, basking in their glory, taking in the experience with all senses and coming away feeling like something new had been gained.

It was a world that made itself so easy to love. Bright, warm, lively, supporting so much life that it developed a life of its own, a spirit of its own… A place that offered so much to learn because it was alive. Alive, changing, warm and pulsing. What was true one day could change the very next. For one day’s tragedy, the next could provide a miracle. A place of endless promise… Never before had something offered up so many things to be loved, to be cherished, to be valued… Before, an Incanze could love only what was worthy. There were so many things beneath an Incanze’s love, an Incanze’s affection, an Incanze’s time… And so many things to oppress, to dismiss, to burn away like a loathsome thorn the moment it proved inconvenient.

But in Alola, Sun could love whatever he wanted. Treasure whatever he liked. Make time for whatever he liked. Alola was not a thing of hatred, a thing of stifling. Alola was a thing of freedom.

And oh, the freedom.

The freedom of riding Mantine, tearing across the open ocean with nothing to stop him. Surrendering all of his worries and tension to sync into Mantine, become as one creature, think only of the spray of the surf, the smell of saltwater, the beautiful glisten of sunlight on water, the unthinkable splendor of an ocean replete with life…

The freedom of exploring the lands, crossing hills and mountains and meadows, lying upon warm sand and soft grass… Listening to wind blow through trees, taking in the colors of ripe berries and the sway of branches and leaves… It seemed so vast, and yet so simple, all at once. Such small things, and yet they signified so much more. Meant so much more, when there was no punishment for enjoying them. He could do whatever he wanted, feel without apology, love without apology, exist without apology…

The freedom to become more powerful alongside his team, exploring the options that seemed to stretch before him without end. Bringing out power that never ceased to surprise and delight him, studying the limitless potential the world’s creatures had to offer… The way that even the fiercest battles all came back to love, encouragement, passion, understanding… It was a challenge wholly unlike those he was used to. He could cultivate a power that could be used to aid, protect, and further discover, rather than merely being used for cold dominance and conquest.

But at the root of it all…
Driving love, driving freedom, driving joy, wonder, excitement, curiosity…

The world, the adventure, Alola…

It was hope.

It was all a thing of hope.

It had to be, really. Because in being warm, in being alive… In changing, shifting, growing… Alola too had its curse.

That sometimes, the growth was painful. That sometimes, it was abrupt, or erratic, or frightening. That sometimes, it couldn’t grow. Sometimes there was weakness. Sometimes there was sickness.

But what mattered most was that Alola could heal. Alola could press on. The myriad misfortunes of day to day living, the struggle baked into the very act of adapting… It seemed as if none of it could overwhelm the region for good.

The other place… was a dying, brittle thing… Each hardship, each tragedy, it was only chipping away at a ruined husk that’d bled out long ago. And those in charge were only scavengers. Picking over cold, brittle bones and telling themselves it was a feast.

But even in dry, crumbling remains, there was something there. A chance to be absorbed into new life, and new hope. To rise from lowly soil and take its place among the highest canopies.

And in the end…

Perhaps sometimes, it was better to persist at 88%, rather than become engulfed in the self-destructive blaze of 110%. Perhaps even still worth it to persist at 70%, 30%, even 1%. After all, one still offered the chance to improve the score. The other did not.

Sun was rather taken aback when he finally finished conveying the bulk of his thought, the full weight of the concepts he wanted to get across… only to realize that both were misty-eyed.

Even the Pokemon around them had various unexpected reactions. Nebby was stock-still, quietly weeping globules of golden dust. Zorua seemed to be looking away, trembling slightly in an effort to control herself. Sha made to comfort Nebby only to start weeping right along with them. Rhovera was exceptionally quiet, seeming completely lost in thought as she stared unflinchingly at Sun. C.C. mirrored her, perhaps even quieter still.

Hau’s Pokemon were acting no less strangely, Blissey softly weeping while Pikachu nuzzled deep into her plush fur, equally as emotional. Dartrix did his best to look staunchly unaffected, but even he trembled slightly. Growlithe seemed slightly confused, but unusually placid nonetheless. Noibat seemed quietly awestruck, closing her eyes in deep contemplation.

As with many things, Sun had not conveyed his concept of Alola with words. To even begin to do such a thing was beyond him. The feel of its boundless hope, the beauty even in its perils, the freedom, the joy, the exhilaration, the endless possibility… none of that was something he knew how to put into actual words. It’d been a whole array of feelings, memories, senses, beliefs… It was analogies, metaphors, and symbols, all melding together, all weaving into one cohesive explanation.

“…That was… that was beautiful,” Lillie said quietly, wiping her eyes. Hau agreed with a simple,
slightly shaky nod, briefly finding himself too choked up to speak.

The words gave Sun pause. To him, the answer felt at least partly obvious, although it’d steadily evolved as he’d given it more thought in the moment. He hadn’t known it would have that kind of impact. From his perspective, he just felt rather silly for not properly keeping it all in mind during his earlier battle.

“With reasons like that, I think you’ll be just fine. That’s what you’ve gotta focus on, when you fight. You need something solid, and strong, like an anchor for all your emotions, all your willpower. That’s what my granddad always told me. If it’s something too conditional, or too temporary, it won’t hold. Technique is important, but Pokemon are partners, not weapons… Because of that, you can’t fight without heart,” Hau explained.

Sun gave a soft thrum of agreement. He understood.

That night, Lillie got her sleeping bag and slept on the floor beside the bed, and even the Pokemon refused to retreat back to their balls, sleeping wherever there was room.

That night, everyone managed to fall back asleep…

And there were no more nightmares.

The following day, Lillie prepared for her turn at the trial, walking back to the same location with Hau and Sun, although it looked a bit different without constant rains… only for Lana to tell her that the trial was cancelled.

When pressed about it, Lana’s only response was “I need time to think of something better.” Her tone was rather quiet and clipped as she said it. Lillie noticed the way Lana stood stiff as she said it, mostly looking out over the water and not towards the group.

Silently, gently, Sun tried to explain to her that it wasn’t her fault that he had such a bad reaction to his trial, but Lana didn’t seem particularly moved.

“You don’t need to be so accepting. It was a poorly designed trial. The only thing I took into consideration was your nature as a battler. I hardly spared a thought when it came to your nature as a person. I told myself it was still a good idea, under the concept of teaching you how to move against an opposing current… But in retrospect, I was selfish. I was too caught up in the idea of it, rather than being more practical. And for that, I apologize.”

Sun frowned at that. He’d be back. He’d do the Trial as Lana originally planned. He just had to train further, think further, come to a better understanding with his team, and then everything would be fine. He knew it would be.

“You can all train and capture Pokemon here in the meantime. Normally, I wouldn’t allow it… But, I believe my trial to Sun was unfair, so this is my way of compensating.”

Sun nodded, glad at least that Lana hadn’t rejected his desire outright.

With that, the group somewhat hesitantly accepted Lana’s decision.

The next day, Sun’s ‘birthday’ arrived. The technical details were a bit odd, given that it was actually just commemorating the day Sun fell out of Ultra Space, and Sun’s real birthday was
essentially lost knowledge to him. Most likely, Zossie and Dulse could still recall it with relative ease, but then that would entail the task of trying to pinpoint what day on Earth it corresponded with.

Hau woke Sun up with breakfast in bed, having done a remarkably good job of remembering what exact combinations of food and seasoning appealed most to Sun’s odd tongue.

Sun flashed bright green as he happily ate everything provided to him, rewarding Hau afterwards with a tight hug and a litany of tender kisses.

“Happy sixteenth birthday! Even though you’re technically older than me, apparently, from the way Lillie explained it,” Hau said, beaming at Sun in a way that never failed to make him feel all warm and gooey inside.

Sun smiled back before pulling away, turning to the nearest windowsill by the bed, where the Bounsweet egg was partly buried in a flower pot as usual.

Sun carefully unburied the egg, wiped it relatively clean, and held it close. As Sun held the egg, Hau came closer yet again, pulling him into a half-embrace while being mindful of the egg.

Sun’s hearts sped up, briefly losing rhythm. His nodes were already beginning to turn pink as Hau drew close, and they were an even brighter pink as Hau tenderly closed the distance, mindful of the egg as he softly kissed Sun. Sun felt Hau’s love course through him too, and his love pulsed back, flooding into Hau and creating a sort of feedback loop that ignited a single soft kiss into something a bit deeper. Sun’s tail and his free arm both wrapped gently around Hau, as the other arm cradled the egg carefully… The egg twitched a bit, shaking slightly in Sun’s grasp, but he hardly noticed. Sun returned Hau’s kiss with a longer, deeper one, although neither could stop from giggling slightly at the giddy feeling building between them, deep affection and fondness cycling back and forth like pulsing waves…

The kisses continued on, the egg gently squeezed between the two, and Sun’s nodes still pulsing a vivid pink, mixed with alternating pulses of soft greens and yellows…

Hau could feel three other heartbeats within himself, seeming to form a perfect rhythm with his own…

And along with that, came the pulsing AWE of the new life between them…

The egg shuddered violently, cracking and emitting a soft white light. Both Sun and Hau immediately stopped kissing to look down at it, giving it a bit of space.

“Nau!” Sun verbally cooed, mentally coaxing the new life along as he reached out to achieve their first true Field sync together, the first involving the child being a full-fledged member of the world.

“Naupaka,” Hau said, immediately understanding as images steadily rose to the forefront of his mind. A type of Alolan flower with an ancient legend behind it. There were many different versions, but at the core, it was always relating to two people whose love was forbidden, lovers who had to remain apart. Due to each blossom’s nature of appearing to be only half of a typical flower, it was said to symbolize that separation…

But, Hau could feel Sun’s sentiment. That was the flower, but Naupaka the Bounsweet was whole. And in a literal sense, even the flowers were still actually just how they were supposed to be. Still whole, despite human perception. Hau could feel how Sun didn’t care that their love shouldn’t have been allowed. Didn’t care that they could be completely separated one day, each doomed to carry on
without the other. It couldn’t stop them. It couldn’t stop Sun from loving Hau to his very core, wouldn’t stop him from doing everything in his power to stay with Hau.

And Hau felt precisely the same.

In that moment, Hau synced deep with both Sun and Nau, the egg trembling and glowing as the cracks spread… followed by the entire egg glowing a bright white, dissolving away into a very warm, formless mass… and from there, shaping into a fresh young Bounsweet. She softly cooed, then gave a small, high pitched chirping sort of noise. A pleasant scent began wafting from her almost immediately, prompting Sun to affectionately nuzzle against her.

“Nau,” Sun repeated softly, fondly, as Nau squealed softly back.

Going by what he’d read and videos he’d watched in the weeks leading up to Nau’s hatching, Sun went about carefully placing Nau on the windowsill to sunbathe, while also preparing an Oran and Pecha Berry to grind into soft mush for her first meal, along with an eyedropper full of fresh spring water, and various other supplies.

The process of Pokemon hatching was a swift, efficient, but rather tiring process, considered that it was a rather skewed take on ‘hatching’ in the first place. What was really happening was a process more similar to Pokemon evolution. The baby Pokemon finalized its egg development by undergoing a dramatic spike in developmental speed, triggering a complete breakdown of the shell and any remaining yolk. The resulting baby was always quite well-developed and already possessing all of their senses, even having the ability to begin wielding weak attacks.

Sun sat by the windowsill with Hau as he gave Nau her first meal, which she devoured with fervor, if a bit clumsily. Sun giggled as he used a napkin to gently wiped her face clean of any lingering juice and flecks of mush, and she readily took to the little eyedropper afterwards, using it much like a bottle.

“She’s so cute I can barely handle it,” Hau said. “I guess she gets that from you,” Hau said, turning to Sun with a broad smile.

Sun’s vivid pink glow had been diminishing in favor of green and a softer, whitish-pink, but the deep rosy hue returned in an instant. The only thing forcing him to keep some semblance of composure was that Nau had begun to walk on the windowsill with a rather unsteady waddling motion, so he had to pay close attention to make sure she wouldn’t fall.

Mentally, Sun called Lillie to come see the newborn Bounsweet, while also steadily sending out team members, slowly and one at a time so as not to startle her.

Sha immediately reacted by picking Nau up and twirling her around in the air, eliciting a tiny, squeaky laugh. Sun briefly worried it would scare or overwhelm her, perhaps too closely mimicking the sensation of being carried off by a flying predator… However, once Sha carefully put her down on the floor, she seemed completely unbothered by it.

Zorua and Rhovera were immediately drawn in by her distinctive smell, gently nuzzling her and rubbing against her. C.C. was much the same, immediately offering the young Bounsweet a small pollen puff. Nau gleefully consumed it with surprising speed, squealing and chirping all the while, seeming to love it even more than the mashed berries.

Hau’s Pokemon were much the same, even Dartrix unable to resist the urge to fawn over the new baby, especially since she was a fellow Grass-type… although Noibat just licked Nau over and over, giving off the impression she mainly just liked Nau for the sugary secretions she naturally produced.
Although Hau’s Growlithe had at least learned more about not accidentally hurting others, she was the most rambunctious and hyperactive, her introduction caused her to knock Nau over multiple times in the process of trying to initiate a play fight… But just when Hau was about to tell her to calm down, Growlithe made one last attempt to pounce on Nau… only to smack face-first into a sudden, miniature wall of translucent pink light, giving a pathetic whine as Nau just gave a rather pleased squeak.

Sun’s small gasp and surprised giggle told Hau that he hadn’t done that.

“So she already knows Reflect?” Hau asked aloud. Sun had Rotomdex do a quick scan.

“Bzzt! Attacks in alphabetical order! Dazzling Gleam, Light Screen, Play Rough, Reflect, Solar Beam, Splash, Sunny Day, Synthesis! Quite unusual, zzt! While they most likely aren’t very powerful, the potential is undeniably there.” Rotom said.

“A lot of them have to do with light…” Hau pointed out. “Do you think, maybe…”

“Exposure to Sun’s Field during development created an increased affinity to photokinesis? It’zzz possible, I’d say. Sun’s current Field is high in the Tier 2 range, zzt.” Rotom said. “This is a quality finding! What effects would be seen in other species? What effects on Nau are still unknown? What effects as Sun’zzz Field grows in power?”

The three could only wonder.

Soon after, Lillie came into the room, gushing over Nau just like everyone else.

Professor Kukui also made a video call in short order, much to Sun’s joy.

“Happy birthday, cousin! I’ll be flying out to Akala in a couple of hours! The wife also managed to get some time away from work, so she’ll be coming by too! Just stay put for a little while, alright?” Professor Kukui said. “Once we show up, we’ll go wherever you want from there. We already have some good ideas,” Professor Kukui continued.

Sun nodded eagerly at that, excitement welling up within him as he pulsed with vibrant greens and yellows, nightmares and doubts forgotten for the time being.

What a fun day they were going to have together!

Somewhere else, Tapu Lele slowly floated down next to Lana, who reacted with only the barest moment of shock before it seemed to drain away completely. From there, Lana merely stood quietly as Tapu Lele whispered steadily in her ear, using a soft, lilting language that Lana had never heard and yet always known. Every word was like song, smooth as silk, gentle as a cool spring breeze…

And yet, the actual purpose of her words was anything but.

Lana smiled a soft smile, expression otherwise going blank and vacant as her eyes took on a slight tinge of pinks and purples.

She had her new trial idea, now.

It’d be the perfect trial and the perfect present, all at the same time!

Why, she’d even go so far to say it was a trial to die for!
What a fun day they were going to have together!

Chapter End Notes

Sun’s “birthday” is March 23rd, and is actually the date of his arrival, not when he hatched. The Aryzma incident and his subsequent lengthy stay in the experimental healing machine pretty much paused any aging or mental development for the duration… So he is chronologically closer to 19 or 20, and biologically about 16½.

I’ve reworked Totems a bit here to make them a bigger challenge, not to mention they tend to shift, depending on the challenger. One reason is because I have a really funny way of showing these characters that I love them. The other is that I wanted to set Trials apart a bit more by leaning into making them less standardized and more personal, typically with the goal of imparting a lesson and fostering creativity, rather than just letting you brute force your way past.

So basically, Totems are uniformly stronger than usual, even with no aura. In theory, any Pokemon can eventually become a Totem. In game terms, this would be like a 1.2x-1.5x increase in everything, depending on Totem. It also applies to Totems that travel with Trainers. Species with less inherent power tend to be more strongly affected, evening things out a bit.

The stat boosts from an aura also factor this in. So, $1.3 \times 1.5 = 1.95x$, not $1 + .3 + .5 = 1.8$

Like the games, Totems with Trainers don’t have a natural Totem aura... Usually...

(Tune In Next Time For What That Means)

Also, although anything can become a Totem, the level of time and resources required along with most official rule formats cause people to typically only use one per battle, much like Megas.

“Ohr, But Beetles,” you moan. “Doesn’t this make Megas obsolete?”

Oh, imaginary reader, I’m so glad you asked! Mega Evolving is kinda different here too! But I’ll get more into that when it’s more relevant.
Chapter 16: The Earth And Stars

Chapter Summary

Happy Birthday, Sun....
I'm sorry.
I also admit that it's 100% coincidence that the chapter about Sun's 16th birthday is technically the 16th chapter too, due to there being a Chapter 2.5 and 2.75.
I'm not actually that clever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By about 10:30 AM, both Professor Kukui and Burnet showed up in front of the Pokemon Center, riding in on a huge Braviary. At the sight of the great bird, the group was somewhat reminded of Kahili’s… but the one before them seemed even larger. Upon landing, Professor Kukui briefly stroked the great bird’s head, and it crooned softly before he and Burnet dismounted. Then, Kukui got out a Ride Pager and simply pressed a button, causing the oversized bird to vanish in mere moments.

Sun wasted no time in being able to sense their arrival, immediately rushing outside to hug them both tight… and nearly bowling them over in the process, which he just barely managed to avoid by quickly creating a barrier behind them.

“I’m glad to see you too,” Kukui said with a brief laugh, once he was over the initial shock.

“Sun! Happy birthday! How are you doing? Goodness, you really grew, didn’t you?” Professor Burnet said with a laugh, ruffling Sun’s hair. They’d called or texted each other, every now and then, but that couldn’t fully prepare Burnet for seeing Sun suddenly at 5’11, when he’d been 5’6 and an inch shorter than her when he left… Not to mention the even more enormous difference compared to when he’d first emerged from the portal. Nine inches taller and a bit over twice the weight he started, yet still looking outwardly rather soft and nonthreatening in spite of his ever-increasing height and strength. He wore pastel greens and pinks, with a pink flower in his hair, pink shorts, and a green, floral-patterned shirt… although Burnet could still see the familiar clip-on star earrings.

Really, even Hau and Lillie looked a bit different from how she remembered. Lillie wasn’t quite as pale as before, and she’d gotten a couple of inches taller. Her fashion seemed to have steadily changed a little too, as she wore a dress incorporating both soft blues and white. Still, the white sunhat and the clip-on moon earrings that Sun had gotten her remained.

Burnet wasn’t quite sure if Hau had grown any taller, but he’d definitely become somewhat broader and stronger, and he wore the green and blue bracelet Sun had gotten him for his birthday… But beyond that, his appearance and fashion was much like always, typically preferring to mix dark colors with bright, warm ones.

Everyone went back up to Sun and Hau’s room in the Pokemon Center after Burnet and Kukui
arrived, no one particularly minding that it was a bit of a snug fit. With that, everyone began getting out everything they’d brought.

Professor Kukui brought a small Munna to protect against nightmares… immediately making it quite obvious that Lillie must’ve brought it up with him. It turned out to be surprisingly easy for him to get, considering that Professor Burnet had a close colleague in Unova who had Munna and Musharna as an essential part of her work. In order to circumvent the Munna taking up a spot on Sun’s team, it was instead registered to his Ride Pager, and would return to the lab when not summoned... Apparently, despite obviously not providing rides, the fact that it provided an important temporary service was good enough.

Burnet brought two birthday cakes, a regular vanilla one with cyan-colored icing, and a smaller one with a dark green color and an odd enough odor to tell you that most humans wouldn’t dare attempt to eat it. She also brought a bottle of fancy basalmic vinegar, something that would likely strike anyone else as an odd gift, but Sun immediately loved.

Hau and Lillie went next. Sun wasn’t exactly sure when precisely they found non-suspicious windows of time to have gotten him gifts without him even really noticing anything odd, but he wasn’t complaining.

Lillie had gotten him a large book on astronomy, another focusing more on constellations, and a portable telescope, figuring it could be an interesting hobby based on Sun’s fascination with stars and other celestial bodies… Besides that, much like before with Hau’s gifts, her gifts tended more towards things she felt would simply be useful for Sun on their journey.

“I wasn’t sure how much you would really need the telescope, because you can already see super well and with your powers you probably already can magnify images anyway, but—” Lillie started, before Sun brought her into a snug embrace, trilling happily as he lifted her clear off the ground.

Hau had gotten him a large plush of a shiny Staryu, along with a thin golden-colored chain necklace with several small stars in the chain. Sun practically fell over himself in his excitement to put it on, before he opened the last box, containing tickets to a famed water park near Route 7, apparently named Sharpedo Point.

“You know, since you liked Mantine Surfing so much, and that involved water… and you’ve never been to any kind of theme park before…” Hau said. “I figured we could all go together! As a plus, there aren’t actually any Sharpedo in the area besides a few tamed ones, so that’s even better,”

Sun hugged Hau the tightest he’d hugged anyone yet, but Hau just returned the hug with equal enthusiasm, having grown used to Sun’s affections.

As Sharpedo Point would have better places to continue the celebrations, Sun packed up the gifts and the group proceeded to leave the Pokemon Center, planning to leave by both Braviary and a Ride Charizard that Kukui had brought.

But just before the group finished up their final preparations, they were interrupted by the sudden sight of Lana, who seemed oddly cheerful as she ran up to them.

“Oh, Sun, hello! Glad I caught you! Happy birthday! I came as soon as I could, because I had a burst of inspiration and came up with an absolutely perfect revised trial for you! I promise, it’s going to be so much better than the old one! I tried really hard to take more things into consideration this time!” Lana said.
“That’s great! But we were actually getting ready to do something else, so maybe-” Hau started.

“It won’t take very long at all! Sun already passed the first section, so there’s no need to worry about that. This is… very important to me, and I would relish a chance to make up for my mistakes, so it would mean a lot if you at least came by to check it out…” Lana said, frowning slightly and glancing down at the ground in such a way that Sun couldn’t resist. He ended up agreeing, much to Hau’s surprise.

“Well, if you think it’s alright,” Hau said with a shrug, as Sun just nodded.

As everyone made their way to Brooklet Hill, Lillie couldn’t help but wonder how Lana knew about Sun’s birthday… She and Hau must’ve told her at some point. Yeah, that had to be it. Or Kukui had, at some point in the process of giving her information on Sun.

As they all got closer, Nebby was growing strangely restless for some reason, whimpering and fussing over something Lillie didn’t quite understand… further attempts to figure out what exactly the issue was only told Lillie that Nebby “didn’t like” what they were doing, for reasons Nebby didn’t seem to be able to properly express.

Part of Lillie wanted to take more stock in Nebby’s concerns, given that they were usually a rather carefree sort, and it was odd to see them so worried about something… But another part of her told her that Nebby was probably just being fussy because they were so young, and simply bored or restless.

So, the group continued on.

At Brooklet Hill, Lana didn’t even bother getting everyone to the Totem’s Den before smiling an odd smile

Hau couldn’t help but feel there was some sort of odd pressure in the air, as he silently asked Sun if he really wanted to do the trial again on such short notice… and pointed out how it was rather odd that Lana wanted him to just rush back into it on such short notice too.

But Sun, apparently still feeling it was more his fault that Lana’s previous trial had been such a bust, simply assured Hau that everything would be fine, as he readied Sha’s Beast Ball.

From the water, there was an ominous clicking and bubbling… and the approach of a dense Field, high Tier 3, spanning over twenty feet in radius.

Sun took a deep breath, waiting patiently as the owner of the Field emerged from the water with a haunting cry of rasping clicks and odd screeches, and stood at full height upon the muddy shore, massive claws at the ready… A behemoth of a creature, one he’d recognize anywhere as a Totem Golisopod. They were perhaps even larger and bulkier than the Swampert, and outfitted with incredibly strong natural armor, grey and purple in color. A visible aura flared up around them, its ominous golden color and strong brightness alerting Sun to the fact that Golisopod would be wielding a massive amount of extra power.

“Let the Trial begin!” Lana called, with only a light, somewhat absent-minded smirk. Slowly, it began to rain.
Along with the Golisopod came an Araquanid, still rather distressingly large even at a relatively normal size. It gave an odd chittering sound as it immediately began to engage with Golisopod in a strange, lurching, skittering series of rhythmic movements, back and forth… The odd ‘dance’ caused its Field to briefly entangle with Golisopod, syncing very closely for a moment as Golisopod’s claws became shrouded in thick globules of water…

Sun realized what’d just happened with a sinking feeling, his hearts briefly losing rhythm.

That was Entrainment. Golisopod had received Water Bubble, and in the process, its powerful natural instinct to retreat from fights at a certain point had been overwritten.

Shit.

Golisopod surged forward with unbelievable speed, its monstrous field rapidly compacting inwards to just a couple of feet in radius, and bolstering its body to give it a rush of unbelievable strength and stockpiled energy. It then all but vanished in the next instant, accelerating with an explosive bang as it used First Impression. Sun tried his best to keep up with its blistering movement, but there was still no way to realistically counter. Sun briefly expected the worst… Only for the creature to merely smack Sha out of the way like a bothersome insect, and go straight for Sun instead.

From somewhere high above, masked and filtered from even Luxian perception, Tapu Lele smiled an awful little smile. The rain only intensified.

At the last moment, Sun reflexively held his arms up to block and attempted to create a shield in front of them… But on such short notice, the shield was barely formed at all, immediately dispersing into translucent glowing shards as Golisopod’s claws cut deep into Sun’s arms. The other arm then shot up from below and slashed deep into his soft, vulnerable lower side. Sun gave a shuddering hiss of pain, dark blue blood oozing out everywhere, while Golisopod’s four smaller, more nimble front arms were tasked with further slicing and cutting into him.

The rest of Sun’s Pokeballs exploded open, along with Hau’s and Lillie’s, the Pokemon inside responding almost immediately to the massive levels of pain and distress from Sun… Rotom burst out of Sun’s bag, separating from the Pokedex he inhabited, the sky crackling with thunder as he did so.

Everyone else looked on in sheer terror, rooted to the spot and entirely unable to comprehend what was going on. Lillie clung worriedly to Professor Kukui, feeling a wave of nausea building. But then, there was Lana. Lana merely watched with a small, blank smile, completely unblinking. Her eyes were wide, glassy, and unfocused, the tints of pink and violet still there.

Even in the midst of such a rapid response from the Pokemon, Golisopod was already done with its true primary task. Sun dropped unceremoniously to the muddy ground, still bleeding profusely as C.C. and Blissey rushed to tend to him. Other Pokemon converged on Golisopod, their Fields surging brighter with rage and anguish.

The sky flashed especially bright as a burst of lightning dropped straight down on Golisopod, Rotom letting loose with a strange, haunting mix between screaming and buzzing in the process. Golisopod shrugged it off with unreal ease, staggering for all of a moment before their aura flared brighter than ever, and they seemed to get a fresh influx of strength from some deep and unknowable well of power. More Pokemon rushed towards it with a savage fury, but Golisopod fended them off with truly devastating power, Razor Shell and Leech Life landing with terrifying strength and not a scrap of mercy.
Hau, Lillie, Kukui and Burnet all looked like someone may as well have suddenly stabbed each of them in the gut, all still too wide eyed and too stunned to react right away as they clumsily tried to come up with some sort of viable idea without completely panicking.

Nebby’s eyes burned gold, a myriad of tiny lights twinkling within their body. They burst out of Lillie’s bag and let out an otherworldly, shrieking sob then, a shockwave of invisible power blasting outwards at great speed, distorting light and space as it surged outwards.

Golisopod briefly fell to a knee in the wake of such massive power, and Tapu Lele cringed as the wave of unexpected power struck them… and in that moment, the mental hold required to deceive everyone faltered.

Tapu Lele appeared, eyes wide, a vital part of their plan gone awry.

Lana faltered, stumbling briefly, blinking a few times.

What was going on? What was she- where was she-?

Lana looked up.

Up at the frantic pack of Pokemon, battered and bloodied by Golisopod’s furious attacks but still fighting with everything they had.

At Sun’s pale, heavily bleeding body, lying prone on the muddy ground.

At the dark blue blood pooling there, and on Golisopod’s claws.

At the four people standing behind Sun, all looking like they were going to be sick.

No.

No no no no no no no-

Lana turned around, towards Tapu Lele, sensing her lingering connection with her mind. Tears welled up in her eyes as she glared directly up at the callous creature, balling her fists as she called out as loud as she could.

“You used me!” Lana called up at the creature, who just cocked their head more like they’d been inconvenienced, rather than actually feeling sorry for anything.

Of course they did. Why was she so shocked? This was a very important matter, after all.

Lana stared back with a truly haunted expression, realizing with dawning horror that there was not a single scrap of shame or regret in the creature’s body.

Tapu Lele just stared back blankly for a few moments longer, as if silently asking if that was all she wanted. Getting their answer, Tapu Lele then casually broke eye contact, staring intently at the battle before them instead.

The battle raged on, attacks being traded relentlessly swift. Noibat seemed to have set up a Tailwind, bolstering the movements of the entire mob of attacking Pokemon… Rhovera had used Sunny Day, dampening the horrific power of Golisopod and Araquanid’s Water-type attacks. But the Golisopod’s impossibly tough armor still made them seem utterly implacable as they rampaged.
about, having already felled a few Pokemon with horrifically strong attacks and the assistance of the Araquanid that’d been summoned with them, which wisely remained distant to pick off enemies that could even briefly stand up to or evade Golisopod’s fury. To make matters worse, it could get the rain back as well… Requiring Rhovera to struggle immensely with keeping sunlight in play, and making it far harder to focus on the rest of the battle.

It being a panicked effort, the synergy between the united teams was relatively poor. Nau had stayed in her ball, but Growlithe had leapt out, and multiple Pokemon had the sense to try and protect the youngest member, who also bore an unfortunate type disadvantage… But that often just led them right into the path of attack.

With nine out of thirteen Pokemon actively participating, five were soundly defeated with truly frightening speed, suffering grievous and life-threatening wounds almost as soon as the Golisopod was upon them.

It left only Eu, Salsa, Sha, and Pikachu, but all of them were showing signs of heavy injury and obvious exhaustion. Salsa’s shell had actually developed a massive, branching crack, just a bit above his face, but he remained standing out of sheer iron will and the stimulant effective of intermittent Helping Hand boosts from Sha. Eu had Torrent active, relying on adrenaline alone to ignore the myriad gashes and bruises across her body, along with a thoroughly broken front flipper. Sha had applied thick, rubbery goo to their body that’d solidified into an elastic armor, but there were gashes in it regardless, and one of his secondary nozzles had been cleanly sliced away. Pikachu relied solely on speed, and had tried multiple times to paralyze and confuse the foes… but somehow, they kept overcoming it with ease. Pikachu was clearly already growing exhausted, and filthy with mud, which only made it more difficult to generate electrical power.

Perhaps the only reason they lasted so long at all floated a short ways ahead of them. Rotom, sparking wildly and firing off intense electrical blasts and bursts of ghastly light as Golisopod gave bone-chilling cries, counteracting easily with waves of mud and walls of stone. Rotom zipped about with incredible speed, uncharacteristically quiet besides giving off unearthly cries and rasping, faded-sounded buzzes that spread through the whole area, but Araquanid was right there to help Golisopod counter, seeming far more swift and alert than usual as well. Not to mention, the sudden arrival of a massive Gyarados as well.

Launching itself out of the water with impossible accuracy, the Gyarados attacked directly after Rotom fired off a Thunder, responding with a massive Crunch that landed dead on the mark… almost as if someone or something told it exactly where to aim. Rotom crackled madly, a massive surge of blindingly strong electricity forcing the Gyarados to let go, leaving it a writhing mess on the muddy ground… But the pain and exhaustion was too great to evade Golisopod, who barreled straight on through Salsa’s paltry attempts to tiredly cover for Rotom with Protect.

Delivering a brutal Sucker Punch, claws wreathed in pitch black, Golisopod soundly defeated Rotom in one strike, Rotom’s body promptly dissipating into a cloud of sparks and plasma wisps as he gave a strange, distorted cry of pain..

Lillie and Hau stared helplessly, bodies aching terribly with the effects of syncing as best they could with so many of their Pokemon at once, trying to overcome an insurmountable foe…

Gears turned desperately in Lillie’s head as she watched the woefully one-sided battle. Golisopod, Araquanid, and now Gyarados… all seemed unnaturally powerful, as if bolstered far beyond usual limits…
And Tapu Lele… Tapu Lele was the key to that, just like Tapu Koko was before…

If there were a way to weaken them, to drain their power without any more dangerous, protracted battle…

Out of sheer desperation, Lillie’s eyes began to glow silver.

Her heart began to pound harder than it ever had in her life, her hair floating up by itself as power flooded her body.

The others stared at her, and Tapu Lele as well.

The god’s eyes widened as they outstretched an arm towards her, directing all of their will towards the girl, the horrible tainted girl.

But as she focused her will, so too did she find it seeming to simply disappear into the girl, as if falling into an endless pit and being spat out as unrelenting streams of white and silver. Enormous sums of kinetic energy being devoured like they were absolutely nothing…

In fact, AWE and Z-Power alike came rushing to the girl with incredible speed, causing Tapu Lele to back away with a mix of confusion and revulsion. It came from near and far, from the Starchild, from the alien scum, from the girl’s Pokemon, from the god’s pawns, from the god themself…

Power, countless little specks and motes of it, coalescing into a single area, uniting under a singular will, a singular purpose…

And what would happen, when so many little specks and motes were put under so much pressure…

What would happen, when what seemed like worthless dust and unimportant little specks became the very force that could burn you alive?

Tapu Lele backed away slightly, a dull sense of fear worming its way into their ancient mind…

It was just like back then, wasn’t it?

Lillie’s Field exploded outwards then, simultaneously generating an incredibly potent whitish-silver light that surged upwards and outwards along with it, as she began to hover off of the ground, her entire body floating nearly three feet above it. She radiated such power that the muddy earth beneath her feet became dry soil. Such power that the air shimmered with heat and a strange rainbow aura. And yet, far more power built within her, her body burning hotter and brighter by the moment, drawing in more AWE without rest.

And yet, whether it was recklessness, sheer concern, some unheard psychic urge, or some mix of all three, Hau and Burnet both reached up from either side of her and grabbed her hands.

From Hau came a surge of brilliant forest green light… and from Burnet, a pulse of electric blue… and then, both colors brightened, then fused into the pulsing white light between them, power circulating and magnifying as the three became one great, continuous pulse of intense white-teal.

Tapu Lele’s eyes went wide as Burnet held up a hand and a Pokeball flew into it from Hau’s pocket, the little sphere immediately becoming cloaked in what looked like strange blue electricity, making clicking and whirring sounds all the while.
The deity made to escape, not wanting to suffer the consequences of a taint that could affect technology… but the light shifted closer to green, and Lele found themself spellbound. Their gaze seemed rooted there, unable to shift in the slightest.

There was a great clashing of wills then, a strange rainbow haze forming in the air as intense AWE crashed together, waging what was largely a silent, invisible war.

And then, clashing became intermingling…

Intermingling became intertwining.

And then, in a moment that surpassed all logic, intertwining became fusion.

Hau, Lillie, and Burnet all screamed out as ancient knowledge came pulsing through their minds, timeless memories that weren’t theirs, myriads of foreign experiences, as uncountable as the grains of sand on a vast beach.

There were things that stood out more though. Memories that rushed by in exceptional clarity. But even those were incomparably vast and deep, too great and difficult to understand in full… Until finally, the group became “snagged” on one, in a desperate bid to slow the great deluge of information down. To try and find some meaning among the madness.

It was nothing but darkness and snatches of blurred imagery and color… but still, voices could be made out quite clearly.

Gracila, why?! Why didn’t you tell us?!

“I said there would be a great deal of refugees coming.” came a feminine voice, in overly-calm Luxian.

You never said why, Gracila!

There was a horrible, earth-shattering, eldritch roar.

“I never expected this to happen. I never thought It would follow them. There was a plan, I swear it, a plan that was supposed to prevent It from…” Gracila said, her voice steadily growing more impassioned.

Clearly, it didn’t work! So the question remains, why didn’t you tell us this was a possibility?!

“We can still salvage this. Tapu Lāpa is fully operational, as is the Landsguard. If you all cooperate…”

It’s going to take far more help than a rabbit of gears and an army of green blobs to fix this. Far, far more!

“Lele, please, have a little more faith-”

No! You… I knew I should’ve never trusted you! You kept a secret that could very well cost us everything we have! How could you?!

“Lele-” Gracila tried.

Silence, Incanze.
With that, endless darkness burst into a sickeningly bright deluge of light.

Meanwhile, Tapu Lele also fell through streams upon streams of memory. But Lele was stronger, and far more experienced. They parsed the chaos far more readily, easily understood the endless chatter of four minds at once.

Of course, that still didn’t mean they enjoyed what they saw, or more importantly, what they felt.

There was a roaring, twisting, unending anguish, a misery without end. Guilt without pause, rage without limits. Ceaseless pain as power and knowledge pulsed through the four in amounts greater than they could possibly handle for much longer… But that was only the surface.

Beneath the surface, there was more. Tapu Lele saw it unspool like thread. The entire lives of those four. The exact moments they met the child from beyond dimensions… But worst of all, was their love of him. The slow, steady feeling of coming to love him, four different times, in four different ways. Coming to sync deeper and deeper with him, coming to understand him, wanting to help him.

The driving force behind the very existence of their power, of the deep taint in their very souls.

That child… so much like Gracila it hurt, so much unlike them that it was sheer agony.

From an outside perspective, Kukui and Lana merely watched helplessly together, huddled near Sun’s helpless, unresponsive body with C.C. and Blissey. Sun was still breathing, fortunately… but they were all completely uncertain about what it was they should do. The four battling Pokemon remaining, besides Nebby, had all collapsed… But even so, they stared up at the event with blank, exhausted eyes, too drained to do anything else. Golisopod and Araquanid, free of Lele’s hold, stood exhausted and trembling as well, seemingly transfixed by the sight.

There was horrendous noise, but Kukui wasn’t even sure if it was screaming or Field effects or what. The light around everyone involved in the…”anomaly” was so bright that it completely obscured all of their features… and extremely strong AWE had been known to produce strange and horrible sounds, its sheer excess energy causing the surrounding molecules to vibrate powerfully. What sounded like screaming or crying one moment became nothing but a clear, deafening ringing sound the next.

There was a blindingly bright stream of colors connecting the two opposing sides, pulsing with such searing might it was hard to believe. A rushing surge of whitish-teal to meet a great torrent of light pink… And in the center, the line bulged, swirling and pulsing with rainbow colors. To chance even the briefest look at it was to invite a wave of horrendous nausea and vertigo.

The physical representation of five Fields becoming one, not just syncing but fusing, all coming together in discordant harmony.

But gods couldn’t be human, and humans couldn’t be gods.

There came the feeling of the entire earth shaking violently, and then the sight of a sudden rainbow-colored flash over the whole area, combined with a noise like thunder from hell.

And with that, nigh-instantaneously, the “anomaly” vanished.

Everyone involved abruptly collapsed to the ground, while Kukui and Lana just hunched down with their teeth grit, eyes shut, and ears covered.
When they dared to look up again, there was a sight nearly just as unthinkable as the anomaly itself.

Hau, Lillie, and Burnet laid there hardly breathing, and unmoving.

Tapu Lele had started moving, but hadn’t left the ground… They merely held themself up on trembling arms, shuddering and sniffling… before breaking into a long, plaintive cry, then beginning to sob.

What an eerie thing it was, to witness a weeping god.

It was said that such things happened less than once in a century… and yet, there it was.

And then, with eyes still full of tears, Tapu Lele looked up at Kukui… and silently pleaded.

_You know what has to happen next._

Kukui shook his head, frowning heavily, not comprehending. Until Tapu Lele cocked its head just slightly, and glanced back towards the others. And suddenly, he did.

“No… they’re… they’re gonna be alright, aren’t they? They will, yeah? You can fix them, can’t you?!” Kukui asked.

Tapu Lele’s expression shifted almost imperceptibly as they simply laid down and went back to their weeping.

“What?! What’s wrong, why can’t Tapu Lele heal everyone?! Why are they just laying there and crying?!” Lana asked.

“Field breakdown. Too much emotional strain,” Kukui explained blankly, briefly looking over at Lana. “Right now… Tapu Lele is hardly any stronger than a human,” he added on. Despite it being a relatively simple explanation, it still sent chills down Lana’s spine, as she struggled to comprehend it. Under any other circumstances, it’d be an absolutely ridiculous thing to say.

A Tapu? No stronger than a human? It had to be a joke…

But… if it was what all signs pointed to, then...

_Go on, child._

Kukui’s head snapped back towards Tapu Lele.

_You’re tainted, aren’t you?! Go on!_

He didn’t… he couldn’t… he didn’t know what to-

Keanu Kukui. You’ve already disappointed me once. You _and_ that deranged friend of yours. Don’t you dare do it again.

He didn’t know what he was supposed to- what he could possibly-

_Use a damned power already, you useless freak!_

In that moment, Kukui’s eyes lit up icy blue… A wave of it pulsed out over the entire area, engulfing Sun, Lillie, Burnet, Hau, and Nebby in films of icy blue energy, perfectly and utterly unmoving. Tapu Lele’s sobs slowed, and they looked out over the scene with an utterly impassive face.
Stasis? Such a half-baked power. The tenacity to hold on, but not the hope to move on. You can do better than that, you worthless fool.

Kukui’s entire body felt like it was full of pins and needles, and his head pounded. What did they even mean, do better?! He barely knew what he was doing as it was!

A girl who so loved the sun that she became a star. A boy who fuses the very Fields with his desire to accept and understand. A woman who so wanted to save a child that even a machine would heed her pleas… and you, so fearful that you only freeze in panic.

Kukui cringed at those words, and Lana only stared at him worriedly, unable to perceive the harsh sentiment directed only at the Professor… But Kukui understood, nonetheless.

Now, child of earth… think of that child, child of light. Think of hope. Think of desperation. Think of inspiration. Think of what you really want. Huddle close to the light that guides you, child of earth, and you shall thaw. And when you thaw, only then will you bear fruit. Then and only then.

Kukui’s eyes once again glowed a piercing, icy blue… but this time, the glow extended to his entire body. Lana looked on in utter bewilderment, as a towering pillar of light rose and then exploded outwards, washing over the area with far more aplomb than the previous effect. She blinked her eyes rapidly as the wave touched her too, foreign emotions and a strange sensation flooding her body, calming her somewhat, like a balm for the very soul.

Tapu Lele slowly began to hover. They wore a tiny, almost imperceptible smile… but a smile nonetheless.

When light kisses earth, a garden arises.

When light guides the way, the soul yields surprises.

They say a comet brought life, in ice and fire.

How good to know it could spring from desire.

Well done, Keanu, little comet.

I’m sorry, Lana.

With that, in a great burst of pink light and glittering scales, Tapu Lele vanished.

As the scales scattered, imparting their divine power, an assortment of dainty flowers sprung from the earth… Among them, wounds steadily knit closed, and bones steadily mended.

With pained grunts and shuddering gasps, everyone slowly awoke.

Before too much longer, everyone was back in Heahea City, at the Pokemon Center.

For the most part, anyone who wasn’t a Pokemon was “healthy” enough to just need rest and fluids, largely dealing with moderate dehydration, migraines, soreness, and exhaustion.

Many of the Pokemon weren’t quite as well off, pretty much anyone who left their ball needing intensive care… Blissey and C.C. had gotten off the easiest, merely being exhausted from the effort
of stabilizing Sun’s condition before Kukui and Tapu Lele had stepped in.

Dartrix, Noibat, and Zorua made up a “moderate” section, being quite heavily battered and beaten but not exactly at serious risk.

Eu, Growlithe, Pikachu, Rhovera, Salsa, and Sha made up the unfortunate cluster of Pokemon in in the worst condition, even after the power of both Kukui and Tapu Lele... A combination of stubborness, misfortune, unfortunate type matchups, and just being horribly outmatched in general being the culprits. While the most grievous wounds had vanished, there was still the extreme exhaustion and overexertion, and even the strain of recovering so much and so rapidly.

Nebby, notably, seemed to be absolutely fine, just strangely quiet.

Kukui, Burnet, Sun, Hau, Lillie, and Lana were all quietly sitting on couches in the Pokemon Center’s lobby, trying to process everything that had happened. No one really spoke to them after Lana had brusquely told Nurse Joy there’d been a freak Golisopod attack and left it at that.

The trial-goers had one couch, and Hau and Lillie flanked Sun in an undeniably somewhat paranoid and protective fashion. Hau tenderly held Sun close, feeling simultaneously exhausted and impossibly jittery and high-strung, like some kind of caffeine crash from hell. Much of what’d been gleaned from the look into Tapu Lele’s mind was trickling away like water, no matter how much he tried to hang on to it. What stood out most was what hadn’t been part of that.

Sun getting brutally mauled by a Golisopod, while Hau was utterly helpless to stop it.

Part of him wanted to believe it was a dream. That it hadn’t really happened at all. But the thick, pale blue, jagged scars on Sun’s arms had told a different story. As did the thin ones across his left cheek and lower jaw, and the diagonal one between his eyes, cutting across the bridge of his nose and all the way down to his right cheek. It was honestly a miracle he hadn’t been slashed right through the eyes. He hid them all beneath his disguise, but Hau knew they were still there.

The memory sat in Hau’s mind like a brick, each recalled stroke of the Golisopod’s monstrous claws seeming to tear into his spirit just as they’d torn into Sun’s body.

The Pokemon too, enduring such grievous blows one after another, fighting more savagely and desperately than any of the violent spectacles Hau was already used to…

Growlithe’s battered little body, barely breathing even after the healing, fur matted with mud… The way Golisopod’s wicked claws had punctured right through to her stomach, and Hau knew because he’d felt it too.

Hau held Sun tighter, burying his face in the crook of Sun’s neck, and wept as quietly as he could. Sun held him close as well, and Lillie quietly rubbed his back. Kukui did his best to offer quiet verbal comfort.

Meanwhile, Burnet had a notepad she’d requested from Nurse Joy, scrawling feverishly and barely responding to anything around her, almost as if she were in a trance. What’d started as a series of hastily written words had devolved into odd pictures and symbols with little notes written next to them.

Strange beasts with intricate hexagonal patterns, some bipedal rabbit creature with a gear motif… Burnet briefly stared at the rabbit, and for that moment, Lillie swore it almost looked like she was going to cry.
Lillie briefly looked over at the drawings, wondering what had Burnet so transfixed, and felt the strangest sense of deja vu… There was something that came before the Tapu Lele incident, something that made them so strangely familiar even besides the chaotic influx of a god’s memories… but she couldn’t quite place it.

There was another thing too. Something somewhat catlike, bipedal, with whiskers and a trailing ‘scarf’ of fur that were both vaguely reminiscent of lightning bolts. It looked lithe and nimble, and sparks crackled around its fists.

“interloper” was written underneath it, in heavy-handed chicken-scratch, with a triple underline to top it off.

At one point, Burnet scribbled intently until a whole page was jet-black with ink… and yet, when Lillie briefly looked over again, she could swear she could just barely make out some kind of sinister shape in it, some jagged, angular thing.

On the next page, an assortment of what looked like Z-Crystals were drawn, black and white but rendered in stunning detail. Below them, an equally detailed Z-Power Ring, connected to them all by what looked like wavy tendrils of energy. Then, Burnet began to write again, the words still rushed and scratchy, but just barely legible.

*The Will of Light, its splendor long buried.*

To wishes and dreams, its power married.

*All will kneel before the great power shown*

*When Light’s will is seated on zenith’s throne*

*But along with the king will come a queen.*

*And that traitorous heir, so long unseen.*

*The cosmos unite, to make night into day.*

*A god they will save, a god they will slay.*

*And oh, what an awf---*

Burnet’s pen abruptly trailed off into a jagged scribble, her hand jerking a few times before she abruptly snapped the notepad shut, clutching her head and grunting lowly, a couple of tears coming to her eyes before she blinked them away.

“That’s all I’ve got,” Burnet said, taking a deep, shaky breath. Her tone was low and morose as Kukui carefully draped an arm around her shoulders.

“Are you alright?” Kukui said quietly.

“I was trying to write down whatever I could remember, whatever seemed important out of everything I saw when… you know,’ Burnet said, before taking note of Hau. “Oh, honey, what’s wrong?” she said softly.

“He’s been crying for a while now,” Lillie said quietly.
“...Really?” Burnet said, before briefly clutching her head again, and staring down at the floor. Vague transparent images and symbols seemed to swim across its surface, little ghosting flecks of knowledge she so desperately wanted a better look at. “Sorry, I… I must’ve been out of it.”

Things were quiet for just a bit longer.

“... Do you think… maybe Sun, Lillie, and I should just… leave Alola?” Hau asked, to no one in particular, as he pulled away from Sun slightly and sat up straight.

Everyone was quiet once again.

Hau’s voice was subdued, but passionate. “Listen. I don’t care if Tapu Lele helped us in the end… I don’t care if it was ‘sorry’, or whatever… It tricked us. It tried to kill Sun, and it was probably gonna kill our Pokemon next!”

“Hau…” Kukui said quietly.

“So why should we have to keep putting up with crap like this?! Why shouldn’t we just go somewhere else, win some badges, and try not to think about all this mess?” Hau asked.

“Hau, I do understand why you would say something like that… But... no,” Lillie replied, although it seemed to pain her to say it. “Unfortunately, if we leave Alola, I don’t think we’ll be able get Nebby home, or figure out their mysteries in general. Not to mention, I think Alola is the key to figuring out more about Sun too…”

“What if we just left for a while and then came back?” Hau asked. “Like, just a way to get stronger and regroup for a while without worrying so much about all this stuff…”

“I don’t know. There’s…” Lillie felt something in the back of her mind, an idea haphazardly snatched from divinity, fluttering about like a trapped butterfly... If she could just catch it, if she could just properly express it... “There’s reasons we should stay. Important reasons. And if we leave...” Lillie’s left eye twitched briefly, as she tried desperately to catch the damnable butterfly. Snatches of information scurried by in the corners of her mind, specific details seeming to dart just past her head... But even so... “...I just, I don’t know, I just get a bad feeling about it, Hau. I don’t know what it is exactly, but I do. I’m sorry, but I can’t explain more. Please believe me,” Lillie said, feeling incredibly dissatisfied with herself. As she finally closed in on the butterfly, finally clasped it between her hands...

All she was left with was the powder of its scales.

“Okay…” Hau said quietly, as he gave a long, searching look into Lillie’s eyes. “I just, is it so wrong to not want to watch someone I love get fucking shredded by a giant-ass mind-controlled bug?” Hau asked. “And then the bug tries to kill the rest of my friends too? Especially considering that him getting healed was basically dumb luck, because we can’t even take him to an actual hospital when he gets hurt!”

“No, that’s not wrong. Not at all. Just- just please trust me. Please.” Lillie said, a strange desperation worming into her tone.

“Alright. I trust you,” Hau said, taking a few deep breaths to calm himself.

“Thank you,” Lillie said. “I know it doesn’t make sense right now, but I promise it will. Somehow.”
Fortunately, within three days, all Pokemon involved were back to stable condition. Even Rotom had coalesced back into a physical form, once again inhabiting the Pokedex as if little had happened. Apparently, it took more than that to truly destroy a Ghost-type, especially a powerful one… Even if the level of power displayed really hadn’t been expected.

Ultimately, the group decided to stay in the area and try to get back to their previous routine, as a way of keeping their minds off of things. Really, Sun and Lillie were rather weary after the whole debacle… but Hau seemed oddly insistent. Any talk of Sharpedo Point had been all but forgotten, instead replaced with talk of everything that had happened during the accident, and Professor Kukui recounting what happened between him and Tapu Lele.

Kukui and Burnet found it a little odd that the group elected not to take a break, as did Lana, but they all decided the group was able to make their own decisions. With that, they were left to their own devices… while the two professors wondered how best to approach everything that’d occurred.

And Lana quietly contacted Olivia, having no idea who else to turn to.

Even training near Brooklet Hill, the group’s overall progress would likely be hampered by a month or so… Less than half of that time would be needed for full physical recovery of their teams, but the rest would be just as important. Sun and Lillie knew that even in peak condition, their teams wouldn’t be physically or mentally ready to face the Water trial again.

So, the group still trained who they could, as best they could. Lana offered her help as much as possible… but her weariness was apparent too, even when she tried her hardest to conceal it. Regardless, having Lana’s help and advice for such a prolonged period was a significant blessing, and the area being mostly Water-types made it a pretty convenient location for Nau and Flaaffy.

With some independent training and then some help from C.C, Nau became skilled enough to learn Razor Leaf, allowing her to defeat Magikarp and Wishiwashi by herself. With Reflect, Light Screen, and Synthesis to improve her longevity, she even became able to chance a few battles against Poliwag, Psyduck, and Goldeen.

Once Flaaffy took a couple more days to recover from her own previous incident, she surprised the entire group by working so much harder that it was rather astounding that she was the same Pokemon at all… although it did little to solve the friction between her and the rest of Lillie’s team.

Any time all of Lillie’s Pokemon were out together, the resentment that Eu and Salsa felt was always palpable… Not that Lillie could entirely blame them. They genuinely risked their lives to ward off a threat, while Flaaffy hadn’t done a single thing, evading all harm and getting off scot-free. She couldn’t really say it was silly of them to be angry.

Lillie repeatedly tried to show them that Flaaffy was trying her hardest, but that did little to assuage the whole sentiment of how she could’ve been trying a lot harder before too… Which lead to the much trickier task of trying to get them to at least stop focusing so much on the past, if they couldn’t forgive Flaaffy outright.

So began an exhaustive effort to keep them apart from Flaaffy whenever possible, lest they steal her food, tell her rude things, and play mean-spirited jokes on her… At one point, Salsa had even somehow managed to covertly set her wool on fire when she took a nap outside of her ball. Luckily, she hadn’t been truly hurt, but Lillie still had to spent quite a bit of time trimming all the burnt wool away… and facing the discomfort posed by the fact that her trusted Pokemon would do such a thing.

To make things even trickier, Flaaffy tended to be quite submissive towards all the poor treatment, leaving it up to Lillie and the others to intervene. Lillie was only further disturbed by how it looked
like it was because Flaaffy believed she deserved it... and in general, Flaaffy training methods seemed self-punishing too. It was as if her prior behavior had essentially inverted. Where before Lillie struggled to get her to do anything, Lillie began struggling to get her to stop. Any drill or practice she was asked to do, she’d keep doing it to the point of collapse.

Then there was Hau, training perhaps the most frequently and diligently of all... But he seemed... off. He’d always been rather high-energy, but to Lillie, it seemed he’d become more high-strung instead. He was less patient than before, always getting up at the crack of dawn to train on his own, and more prone to frustration when his Pokemon weren’t progressing quickly enough.

There was still the good humor of before, but it often seemed somewhat forced. Laughing too hard at things that weren’t that funny, smiling a little too wide, talking a bit too loudly or too quickly... Erratically changing topics, often seeming to make an excessive effort to focus only on the positive ones.

No matter what progress was made, no matter how “normal” things could feel sometimes...

Something just constantly felt... off.

Both Sun and Lillie silently discussed it sometimes, but neither really knew how to properly approach it. They couldn’t really force Hau to do something he didn’t want to, but still...

About two weeks in, figuring a quiet bedtime was a good chance to get the idea across without interruption, Sun decided to step up his efforts to intervene.

They needed to go home for a while.

“We’re fine here, Sun,” Hau said, lying on the bed at the Pokemon Center nearest Brooklet Hill. The room was dark and quiet, but Sun’s chest felt like it was full of noise and activity.

No they weren’t.

“Yeah we are! We’ll have a much easier time getting stronger here, I know it!”

It was... true. But also not.

“What... what is that even supposed to mean?” Hau asked, frowning.

Sun just sighed.

There were things... they couldn’t just overpower. Things they couldn’t just outright win. Tapu Lele made that much readily apparent. If they wanted progress, it was about more than power. It was a mental thing, too... and sometimes, the mind needed rest.

“I’m fine! I’m totally fine! What, are you saying I’m too weak for this? Is that it?!” Hau asked, voice suddenly rising significantly. “I can do it! I can keep you safe! I can!”

It wasn’t about that. It was just... Hau wasn’t himself, lately.

“I said I’m fine!” Hau insisted. Golden, double pupiled eyes stared back at him. Stared into his very soul. Hau felt Sun in his mind then, felt him slowly settle there, felt him gently probe at something... but Hau recoiled.
Sun gave a low huff, rolling himself to his other side.

Liar.

“I… that’s not… it’s nothing, really. I’ll be fine! I just need to like, get my head in the game, you know? So, don’t worry! I’m fine, I swear.”

Sun wasn’t.

“...What?”

Sun sighed again. Hau wasn’t seeing the whole picture.

“What, what am I not seeing?”

Claiming to be fine doesn’t magically erase the impact on everyone else, that’s what.

Hau was silent.

They’d barely actually had a real discussion about Tapu Lele together ever since that day. And Sun knew he was personally guilty as well, deciding to bury his feelings and pretend everything would be fine right along with Hau, hoping that maybe he really was doing the helpful thing. But… it wasn’t working. And it was honestly more pain than it was worth, constantly just pretending.

The only reason Sun had held out even as long as he had was because the Pokemon could use the time in Brooklet Hill, so that prolonged Z-Power exposure could benefit their recovery… But still, as the physical wounds faded, the mental ones still hurt.

The tension, the anger, the anxiety, the guilt, the inadequacy, the sheer pressure of it all… It hurt! It hurt a lot! And everyone knew it! Everyone knew it, and everyone felt it, and everyone knew everyone felt it! So it didn’t benefit anyone, all that happened was that everyone got even more hurt because they all knew everyone else was hurt too, and they all knew it wasn’t really getting better!

Sun was technically silent, but he’d lit up with such a bright deluge of various blues and violets that he was steaming profusely… and when he turned back over, glaring directly into Hau’s eyes, Hau couldn’t help but flinch… tears welling up in the process.

He confessed the truth then. Not only the truth of not being fine, but the truth he’d suppressed all along.

“...I wanna go home,” Hau said quietly, voice cracking in a tell-tale way. “I just, I just thought, it was, it was too wimpy and selfish of me to admit that, because… you and Lillie don’t even have your real homes to go back to...”

Sun just frowned. Calling the other place ‘home’... That was nothing but a technicality. Home was… with people you loved. And… he loved Hau, so, so much. He loved Alola. It’d been among the last things he thought about, when he’d been attacked. Hau’s smile. Lillie’s voice. Kukui’s embrace. Burnet’s hand ruffling his hair. The little glint in Zorua’s eyes when you praised her, the way C.C. would nuzzle your face when you felt down… The softness of Rhovera’s tufty mane… How he would never get to see Nau grow up.

It was probably the most awful part of thinking you’d die.
Realizing you couldn’t be with the ones you loved anymore.

Nearly dying in Alola was so much worse than nearly dying before.

Before, there’d been… a grim acceptance.

Even a sense of relief.

Hau’s eyes immediately widened at that. So did Sun’s, pricking with hot tears as he found himself stunned he’d even thought such a thing… But as he remembered the scattered details of his previous near-demise in greater detail, he knew it was true.

“…You… When you shielded Dulse in that accident with Aryzma… You wanted to die?” Hau asked, doing his best to wrap his head around it. From what he knew about Sun’s upbringing, it made sense… it was just the sort of thing where he desperately wished it wasn’t the case.

Sun was silent in a markedly different way from how he typically was. Dulse had called the act ‘kind’, back when they’d discussed it on Melemele Meadow. He’d vaguely wondered why he hadn’t felt particularly proud of himself, or particularly much of anything beyond faint surprise when he heard that.

Sun supposed he’d finally remembered why.

Hau didn’t say anything further. He simply held Sun close… and both of them began to cry. Their Pokemon came out to comfort them, but even then, it took quite some time to get it all out.

But afterwards, they supposed they could say that it hurt just a little bit less.

The next morning, they briefly talked things over with Lillie… who immediately seemed relieved at the whole idea, to Hau’s moderate surprise. He hadn’t even realized that she already wanted the same thing too.

Although they’d originally planned to take the long way, a combination of Tauros and boat rides, Kukui ended up insisting on coming to pick them up once they called and told him they’d be coming. Sure enough, soon after they said their goodbyes to Lana, Kukui showed up with both the massive Braviary and a large Ride Charizard. Before long, Hau was being dropped off at his house, while the others made their way back to the lab.

Sun could tell it was best to let him be alone with his mother for the day.

After waving goodbye, Hau went inside.

Konani, of course, was thrilled to see her son, immediately pulling him into a tight embrace… But although Hau seemed happy to see her at first, the more tense and worried vibes started coming through before long. Konani could tell something was definitely wrong with her son when two dozen homemade malasadas did pretty much nothing to improve his mood, even though he plowed through them like he desperately hoped they would.

“Honey, are you alright?” Konani asked, as Hau laid face down on the living room sofa and she sat in a loveseat adjacent to him.

‘…Not really. That’s kinda why I’m here,” Hau said.

“Is everything alright with Sun?” Konani asked, noting that Hau wasn’t with him… which was a bit
odd, considering they’d been almost inseparable for months.

“That’s not it. It’s just… something really bad happened, and it’s kinda hard to explain, and at certain points it’s gonna sound like I’m making it up, so… yeah. Are you ready?” Hau asked, as he slowly sat up.

“Honey, you’re dating an alien. And the alien likes his tea with barbecue sauce and a dash of vinegar. Go right ahead,” Konani said, as she sat next to Hau on the couch.

“Alright, so, uh… the first thing that’s gonna sound weird, but is pretty much vital to the rest of this making any sense… I have like, psychic powers now, and I’m pretty much 99% sure it’s because of Sun,” Hau said.


“It’s like… Field sync, or that AWE-SOM thing Kukui talks about, the Synchronized Oscillatory Meld… except deeper. Professor Kukui says that when I do it, I don’t just sync Fields, I somehow fuse them. Also, there’s this weird green glow and stuff… So, the next important thing… Lillie, Professor Kukui, and Professor Burnet all have powers too, except each of them does something different. Lillie is like… she concentrates and absorbs all the AWE around her, and then releases it as way more energy than she started with… Like Bide on steroids, or something. Professor Burnet, she somehow controls technology. Professor Kukui has a healing power.”

“So, what’s the bad part of all this, then?” Konani asked.

“Basically… Tapu Lele mind controlled Captain Lana and a Totem Golisopod and straight up tried to have them kill Sun, ‘cause he’s an alien and apparently the Tapu all hate him because his race invaded Alola a super long time ago… And there was like… I don’t know, something where the aliens kept a secret from the Tapu, and they really didn’t like that? I don’t remember very well. I only know that at all because I basically used my… power… thing, to like, fuse with Tapu Lele’s mind. Plus, Lillie and Burnet were doing their things too, and Nebby was with us… So like, all of our energy combined into this huge light… and it burned really bad, and it felt like I was literally going to explode, but it gave me the power I needed to keep us all connected while we saw and heard all this crazy nonsense in Tapu Lele’s head… And then we all passed out, because five different bodies suddenly like metaphysically hooked up together while sharing metric craptons of power is really not a stable situation.”

“Tapu Lele what?!” Konani asked, in mortification.

“Tried to kill Sun,” Hau said, rather hollowly, as he stared down at the floor, the memory rushing back to him. “Almost did it, too. There was… there was a lot of blood. Too much… way too much.” Hau took a deep, weary breath. “Then the Golisopod probably would’ve killed our Pokemon too, if we didn’t do the weird… mindfuse… thing or… whatever…” Hau continued, voice getting quieter and more distant by the word. Konani noticed how tired he looked then. “So… yeah, that’s the story, in a nutshell…”

“Hold on. I’m calling Hala, right now. He has to hear about this.” Konani said, quickly getting up to find her cell phone. Hau didn’t bother protesting.

Although Hala was technically somewhat busy at the time, he dropped everything the moment Konani mentioned “Tapu Lele” over the phone. In surprisingly little time, he’d arrived.

Once again, Hau sat on the couch and recounted the story, and once again, the odd weariness
clinging to his voice, posture, and very spirit became increasingly apparent with every word he
spoke.

Hala sat down on the other side of Hau, taking a deep and heavy breath.

“I should’ve been more wary… After what happened with Tapu Koko, I really should’ve… But in
the aftermath, Tapu Koko seemed truly remorseful of what they did… and they gave me no
indication that this would come to be an issue with all Tapu. I’m… I’m terribly sorry, Hau.”

“And when did this all happen, anyway?”

“Like, two weeks ago,” Hau said rather blankly.

Konani and Hala both stared at Hau in an especially odd way, but not so odd that he didn’t recognize
it. The fact that he did made a feeling of mild dread pool in the pit of his stomach.

“Did you not think it wise to say anything sooner?” Hala asked gently, doing his best to keep his
voice as level as possible.

“I…” Hau started, his heartbeat accelerating suddenly even as he tried to get the words out.

“You went through something like that and didn’t tell us right away? Why?! What were you
thinking? Why didn’t Professor Kukui or Professor Burnet tell us anything either?! Why-” Konani
started, before Hau interrupted.

“I was scared, alright?!” Hau snapped, voice cracking, tears springing to his eyes. “And just…
ashamed! Sun and Lillie… put up with all of this, with no actual family to support them, no real
home to go back to… Both have these dark pasts and high-stakes secrets to handle and all this other
stuff… And here I am, basically living the dream compared to them, but I have the nerve to be a
baby about it!” Hau cried, an outburst which was followed by a lengthy silence.

“…Hau, honey, you’re not a baby,” Konani said. “And I’m sorry for getting so worked up. I just…
it worries me when you don’t tell me things like that.”

“I just… feel like maybe I’m not actually good enough. Like I’m not as good as Sun or Lillie, and
especially not as good as you, Granddad,” Hau said quietly.

Hau frowned a bit before speaking, steadily a deliberately. “...And what made you decide such a
thing?” Hala asked.

“You know, just… just feeling like pretty much everyone else is so much braver and smarter than
me, handling everything that comes at them while I have like a fraction of the problems and can’t
really handle it any better, and half the time I probably don’t make them feel that much better either,”
Hau said.

“Those are feelings. And while it is alright to feel them, their intensity alone doesn’t make them true.
What proof do you have that those feelings are based in reality?” Hala asked.

“...I don’t really have any, but that doesn’t actually stop my brain from doing it anyway,” Hau
admitted.

“I’m afraid there’s no immediate fix for that one. You just… ride the waves. Let the feelings come.
Examine them closely and calmly, and eventually, let them go. When you fight the thought with
frustration, with anger, when you scream at it to go away, it will only get more persistent. When you
guilt yourself for even having the thought, it becomes emboldened by that. Focus on what you can do, focus on your accomplishments, your strengths. And be forgiving towards yourself, just as you’re so forgiving towards your friends,” Hala said, before adding on one last thing. “And just ask yourself, Hau... Who in their right mind should be fine, so soon after watching someone close to them have such a terrible accident, only to immediately have to go through a second traumatic experience immediately afterwards?”

“I know it doesn’t make sense, when you look at it that way, it’s just that... I’m so used to it being expected that I can handle everything, even if before it was just like, normal life stuff. It was just always normal that everyone expects me to do all this amazing stuff one day, and be smart, well-behaved, cheerful, and talented all the time. I’m not saying I don’t want people to believe in me, it’s just... a lot. And after I’ve felt like that basically my entire life, it’s just hard to handle falling short,” Hau said.

Hala let out a long sigh as he gently put a hand on Hau’s shoulder, while Konani just looked at him in silent worry.

“...I will take some of the responsibility for that. You’re… a lot like Milo. But much different, in many ways. And I admit... I try my best, but I know my position as Kahuna not only inherently creates pressure for you, but makes it harder for us to have talks like this as often as I’d like.” Hala said, his voice surprisingly soft and wistful.

“Granddad…” Hau said quietly. Konani merely continued to listen.

“...With Milo, I thought I had to be firm. Had to keep him humble, keep him grounded… So, it’s no small wonder he flew away the first chance he got. With you, I thought I had to give you space, try to encourage you to be your best without tying you down. And in the second case, I don’t believe that was the wrong approach, so much as its execution was... lacking. And I’ve always been racking my head to figure out just what is lacking, trying to figure it all out on my own... But I’ve come to realize... If I would just take more time to listen, then you could tell me,” Hala said. “So, Hau... what is it that’s lacking?”

“I don’t know…” Hau said, feeling suddenly meek... Not out of direct fear, but because Hala was being so kind that he was afraid to give him a difficult or unpleasant answer. But, as Hau looked Hala in the eye... In that moment, he felt the answer was owed, regardless of its content.

“Sometimes... You make me feel like Dad Part 2, or by extension... You Part 3, or something. But, at the same time... I feel like I can’t not be that, because not doing that is worse. And it’s not really your fault, because even when you try not to make me feel like that, everyone else basically does it for you. That might be like, half of why I even wanted to do this Island Challenge thing in the first place. So that people see that I’m me, and that that’s not any worse than being you, or an extension of you.”

Hala’s lips were pressed tight for a moment, and Hau cringed slightly, knowing it wasn’t exactly an easy thing to hear.

“I understand, and I apologize. Thank you for being honest,” Hala said, in a somewhat strained tone.

“Honey... I’m sorry I didn’t realize sooner,” Konani said quietly. “I never meant to pressure you to that extent... But with that being said... Don’t feel like you have to be constantly achieving to be worth anything. Don’t feel like ‘being Hau’ is only worth it if it’s somehow more impressive than ‘being Hala’s grandson’. That was... that was always Milo’s problem...” Konani said. Hau was dead silent, especially at that last part. She didn’t talk about his father much, especially not
“What it comes down to is this: Milo stays in Kanto because he thinks he can’t be Milo in Alola. And that’s a trap you need to avoid, Hau. Of course, not Kanto specifically, but whatever form the trap may come in. You should feel comfortable being Hau no matter what. Not only when Hau is the best Trainer. Not only when Hau is the smartest or most interesting one in the room. Not only when Hau is alone, or only when Hau is with certain people or in a certain place. Because none of those things are guarantees. Of course, it’s not wrong to draw strength from them, or feel motivated and comforted by them… I’m only saying that there’s a limit. That if you have absolutely nothing left to lean on, you should be able to stand on your own until you find new support.”

Hau just blinked a couple of times, processing the words… It made a rather painful amount of sense, really.

“Thank you,” Hau said simply, even in the midst of beginning to tear up. “I love you.”

“We love you too, Hau,” Konani and Hala said almost as one, both scooting in closer on the couch to hug him tight.

The rest of the day’s mood lightened up somewhat from there, although it still wasn’t exactly wonderful. Hau still had to go over what he saw and felt during his time entangled with Tapu Lele’s Field and very soul… and release the anger, frustration, and displeasure that had pent up over that, too.

No matter how ‘sorry’ Tapu Lele was, Hau was quite sure he could never bring himself to like the creature again.

Everyone took a break from heavy conversation for a couple of hours, Konani put on tea and a movie, and they all made an effort to simply relax and process their emotions quietly for a while… Of course, as soon as it was time to talk deeply again, to strike once more into the well of emotions, they all came bubbling up once more.

“It wasn’t sorry or regretful until after things started becoming inconvenient for it. And I just… it was just so clear, how much it wanted to kill Sun. It wasn’t like, just wanting to scare us, or just wanting to punish us or something, it was just completely out for blood! And Lana! It knew exactly what it was doing there! Sun lost her trial, so not only did Lele see using Lana as a good way to come after him, but it was just pissy that Lana felt sympathy for him when he lost! It mind controlled her just to be petty, just to ‘show us who’s boss’!”

“I’ll speak about this with Olivia… But it just goes to show an unfortunate truth… No matter how much we think we understand the Tapu, no matter how much a Kahuna bonds with one, or the level of Field sync… We do not, and most likely can not, ever truly understand them entirely.” Hala said.

“You wouldn’t want to,” Hau responded, in a quiet, bitter tone. “It’s like… for a minute, and forever, I was everything and nothing, nowhere and everywhere. Tapu Lele knows… I wouldn’t say everything, but it knows so much, it knows more than you could ever believe. But, the thing is… it just doesn’t care. It just… all it cares about is this idea of a ‘perfect’ Akala Island. And that’s it. That’s literally it. If you aren’t part of its ‘perfect Akala’, if you aren’t benefiting it in some way, if it decides you have no good ‘purpose’, then you can just die,“ Hau said. “It’s like… sure, yeah, it thinks, it has feelings, but it basically feels like it’s just a sentient, overcomplicated immune system for Akala Island, really. Everything it does, in the long run, is only for Akala’s sake.”

Konani and Hala pursed their lips at that, not really sure how to respond to a boy who’d always
loved Alola suddenly speaking of one of its guardians as more of a thing than a being.... But with the way Hau spoke, the utter conviction in his tone, they knew there was no talking him down.

Hala felt a twinge of anxiety stir within, wondering where it would all lead. Would Hau end up losing faith in Alola too, like Milo had? And then there was the matter of that power he had… and how Hala could possibly guide him through such a thing…

Ah, what a dicey situation...

Chapter End Notes

In which Tapu Lele is what the kids call... A Bastard And A Half. And then sorta okay but still kind of a bastard. But I did kind of need them in order to have a good chance to semi-explain the mechanisms behind the human powers, and be a handy-dandy Lore Dispenser.

Gracila: Gracilaria, a genus of red algae.

Keanu: Kukui’s first name. I decided on it months ago, but I decided I’d put it in now. It's like 50% because I enjoy alliteration tho. Plus it means “breeze”/”cool breeze”, apparently, and he wants to make a League on top of a cold, windy mountain, so… yeah.

Milo: Hau’s father. Like Hau and Hala, this name is also based on a Hawaiian plant, Thespesia populnea/Portia tree.

This chapter was kinda hard because it’s important, but at the same time, writing it was really emotionally taxing. (Although I also sorta use it as therapy, especially when I project #relatable issues onto the characters for them to face)

I don’t particularly want the kind of story where the characters are never allowed to be happy after a certain point, but this part was inevitable to a certain degree. (It actually went better for them than I originally planned, in all honesty)

Fancy god scales ain’t gonna do shit about those mental wounds, kiddos.
Chapter 17: As The Sky Clears

Chapter Summary

Training, plus Sun and Lillie finally going up against Lana again, as truly intended.

Chapter Notes

There was a moderate delay here because my attention was split into a different writing project, but We’re Back, Babey!

It's apparently only been two and a half weeks, but it felt longer than that, since I was so used to relatively quick updates.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

While Hau stayed back home, Sun and Lillie had to get used to the sight of Kukui’s house and lab after they looked like they’d been hit by a veritable academic hurricane.

Books, documents, and multiple electronic devices were scattered everywhere in varying degrees of haphazard disarray. Kukui, although he’d been prompt in making sure they arrived safely, looked like he’d hardly slept.

“Professor, have you been… alright?” Lillie asked, not long after she and Sun went inside.

“Oh, yeah, I’m fine, yeah! Just, you know… I’ve been trying to understand what in the world happened to us all, only I think I understand less than when I started, and also my brain might be melting. But yeah, it’s cool, it’s fine, it’s all good! No worries here, yeah!” Kukui said, with a nervous laugh.

Sun didn’t seem convinced.

“Professor, not to be rude, but your specialty is Pokemon moves…” Lillie pointed out.

“Yes, but this is an entire paradigm shift! Humans developing powers from outside sources, and without any apparent side effects? And we already know it worked on four different people, all without any blood relation, meaning it could potentially work on anyone who meets the criteria… It’s amazing and terrifying all at once,” Kukui said. “Not to mention, I was… well, I needed something to keep me occupied from worrying about you guys when you decided not to come home right away… And to keep me from coming out there and forcing you to… figured I gotta let you make your own decisions, yeah?”

There was a brief pause then, Lillie looking at Kukui in vague surprise. “...Home…” Lillie quietly repeated, smiling slightly.

Kukui seemed a bit flustered, turning to the side a little, but he responded regardless. “Well, someone has to give you two somewhere to go after all the trouble you get yourselves into,” Kukui
said with a laugh. “And I couldn’t possibly trouble Lana and her family with anything like that,” Kukui continued. “She’s already going through enough, yeah?”

Sun and Lillie could only imagine… A being you worshipped and admired, deciding to make you into a meat puppet… not only a meat puppet, but an accessory to murder, at that.

They did their best not to dwell on it.

The rest of the day passed with surprising normalcy, but constantly blended with an undercurrent of mild tension. By time night came around, neither Sun or Lillie were really in the mood to go to sleep right away… If they absolutely couldn’t, the Munna that Professor Kukui got to combat nightmares also knew Hypnosis… But they elected to stay up for a while, sitting in the loft and using Rotom to watch a movie in the quiet darkness.

It wasn’t a scary movie, actually just an informational documentary about Ghost-types… But Sun jumped anyway when the house made an odd noise. Lillie, who’d been leaning against his shoulder, easily felt it.

“Sun?” Lillie asked, putting a hand on his shoulder, as Sun looked expectantly towards the corner where he heard the sound, his pointed ears twitching slightly… but there was nothing, not even to his eyes.

The house was just really beat up, of course it made weird random noises. It wasn’t even a new or unfamiliar thing to him… it was mainly just the aftermath of being mauled by a giant Golisopod. And not having Hau around.

Despite knowing it hadn’t even been a whole 24 hours, and knowing they were separated by nothing but a 30 minute walk up the road, Sun couldn’t help but miss Hau.

Probably even more because it made him wonder what he’d do if a time came when they were separated by more than just a short dirt road…

Like say… the divide between dimensions…

Lillie hugged Sun close and gentle then, feeling his distress.

“It’s alright. We’ll figure something out,” Lillie said softly. “I’m not going to let you go back there if you don’t want to.”

Sun could kind of tell she was just trying to sound determined for his sake, but he appreciated it nonetheless.

“By the way… if a random noise was a ghost, you can see them, can’t you?” Lillie asked. “As in the regular ones, not just Ghost-types.”

Sun nodded. Technically speaking, actual ghosts were made of AWE. Ghost-type Pokemon had material forms, although only a few of them were alive in a ‘conventional’ sense. Many of them would nigh-instantaneously die without AWE. But he added on an important caveat with that confirmation.

No one wanted to see them. He could still remember, almost instinctively, that it was considered a grave sin to look upon a true ghost. Fortunately, it was easily possible to avoid seeing them through a method similar to an unfocused camera lens. A ghost’s AWE was usually so diffuse that if you
weren’t trying to see them, they were “blurry” enough to just blend in with background AWE, especially because ghosts tended to get even “blurrier” as they got weaker. It took a lot for them to become so sharp and well-defined that they could be spotted with ease… and even more for them to act on surrounding molecules enough to create light and sound.

“Oh… I guess that was a weird question, wasn’t it?” Lillie asked, as she thought about the uncomfortable implications of what ghost activity would be like on a planet where more than 99% of the population died before their time.

Sun just shrugged. It was mainly bad outside of the city’s barriers, from what he remembered. There were countermeasures for anything within the city limits.

Lillie wracked her brain trying to imagine what that could possibly be like… Alien ghost hunters? Did they have some kind of task force for it, or something?

Sun gave a brief laugh. It wasn’t really like that. Most ghosts weren’t very powerful, so the methods were usually more passive. It was more like using dreamcatchers, or something along those lines. At most, they’d be hunted down with creatures capable of absorbing them.

Sun did his best not to remember trying to look for Codi and Fucus. Did his best not to remember the punishment he received for his efforts.

He must not have entirely succeeded, since he could feel the way Lillie briefly tensed, then held him a bit tighter.

“I know it’s hard, thinking about death, coming so close to it… But once we beat the trial, we never have to go back there again. And from there, we can go back to just doing fun things together instead. So… hopefully, that makes you feel at least a little better,” Lillie said.

Sun nodded, gently hugging Lillie back.

He tried not to think about how what would really, really make him feel better would be seeing Tapu Lele’s neck get reduced to a freshly cauterized stump by a searing blade of light.

In the morning, Sun and Lillie went over to Hau’s house… although it took them nearly five minutes to properly enter once they got there, because Hau and Sun practically tackled one another as soon as they saw each other. From there, entering the house was slowed down considerably by an incredibly sappy ritual of them both repeatedly kissing while gushing about missing each other and being so happy to see one another.

Not that Lillie didn’t see it coming, given that it’d taken Sun all of his self-control to not outright run to Hau’s house when he started to feel their psychic bond strengthening as he got increasingly close.

With Lillie being too polite to interrupt, it was only stopped when Konani came and simply said “Oh my,.” just loudly and teasingly enough that Hau immediately flinched away from Sun, chuckling nervously and suddenly clearing his throat for no reason.

“W-well, I really missed him! And Lillie too, it’s just, you know-” Hau weakly defended, as his mom just giggled before welcoming Sun and Lillie.
That day was significantly more laid back, with everyone feeling significantly better after being back together and in a safer, more familiar environment. The group continued training much like before, although it felt significantly less tense and more rewarding ever since they’d stopped using it to repress their emotions. The Pokemon seemed to respond noticeably to the emotional shift as well, progressing faster despite the general mood being more laid back… Part of it was simply practical, as the Pokemon were just better listened to and accommodated when their Trainers weren’t so tense and moody… But part of it went beyond that, touching on the nature of Pokemon as beings who could be strongly affected by emotion and psychological state.

Rhovera learned Psychic with Blissey’s help, with Sun emphasizing a focus on speed and control rather than sheer strength or force. Despite the move’s potential power when the right mind was backing it up, Rhovera wouldn’t typically be using it directly for damage. At least, not until well into the future.

Sun’s actual plan was to use it for synergy, combining it with other attacks. In particular, Rhovera could use it to control fireballs, as well as silk. In addition, it allowed her to make the silk a lot stronger and more versatile, producing a highly flexible utility option that was greater than the sum of its parts.

From there, it also allowed Rhovera to use the silk as an armor, similarly to Sha’s ability to coat themself in protective sludge. With Psychic, manipulating the silk deftly enough to make it a viable tactic was much more feasible.

Taking the synergy even further, such a tactic had multiple benefits.

By igniting the silk, Flame Charge and any other physical strike would do extra fire damage, and contact moves would be strongly discouraged in turn. Larvesta silk was actually fireproof in itself, instead burning because of oils infused into its fibers. Therefore, such a tactic also didn’t have to come at the cost of the armor.

The armor also mostly eliminated the recoil of Wild Charge, while simultaneously allowing some extra resistance against incoming electricity.

Rhovera, generally rather calm and focused as it was, managed to progress with Psychic easily enough that Sun still had plenty of time to sink into improving her Flame Charge as well. Like Psychic, optimizing the attack towards speed. While the speed boost upon completion was good, it could stand to involve more immediate, explosive acceleration as well.

So, Sun repeatedly drilled Rhovera on the attack, focusing on building up the power as quickly as possible, and releasing it in tighter, more focused and higher pressure streams. It was also another area where telekinesis was useful without having to be incredibly strong, since it could still make Rhovera temporarily ‘lighter’, as well as being able to increase the speed and pressure of flame emissions.

To similar ends, Sun also trained C.C. further in his psychic abilities, geared more towards outright power and potency in order to oppose Poison-types, but still with a large emphasis on speed and technique. By C.C.’s own request, they also focused heavily on Aromatherapy and Pollen Puff together, and the two moves were also found to synergize quite well. Modified healing pollen could be dispersed into an Aromatherapy to strongly boost the potency. In the other direction, a thick haze of pollen and harmful compounds could be detonated for damage and disorientation over a wide area, and used to decrease visibility.

Sun hoped Zorua would evolve soon enough for the rematch against Lana, because it was much too
soon to rely on Nau, but he’d understand if it didn’t happen. Until then, they worked towards learning Grass Knot… as well as another technique, a sort of combination between components of Agility, Bounce, and Dark Pulse. Sun would call it... Dark Rush.

By gathering the energy and gases of Dark Pulse at her legs and feet instead of her mouth, then further compounding the effect with the aerokinesis and increased leg strength of Bounce, along with the improved reflexes of Agility, Zorua could release shockwaves of energy from to move extremely quickly and abruptly, while still being able to properly control her speed. She also gained much greater mid-air maneuverability, being able to do things like jump or dash in midair, briefly hover, or simply skip and glide over unfavourable terrain..

As it happened, a vitally useful component of Dark Rush was the ability to temporarily maneuver over water as well.

Meanwhile, Sha learned perhaps one of the single most useful moves for the Trial, going forward… Gastro Acid. With that, Sun could simply say goodbye to that troublesome Ability Milotic had. It also went without saying that he often considered how things would’ve been if Sha had already had it against Golisopod too. They could’ve handily done away with Water Bubble that way. Even then, they’d probably still lose, but at least it might’ve been a less brutal loss.

But beyond that, Sun also managed to find a practical use for Sha’s Hidden Power, which was normally rather situational… Since Sha expressed it as a relatively underpowered Flying-type move, its main use seemed to be just blasting opponents back to get breathing room or knock them off balance.

*But, since it was* a Flying-type move, Sun soon realized it still had good utility options. Unlike Sha’s Poison-type moves, Hidden Power wasn’t tied to emitting any physical substances. Nor was it tied to any specific motions. It was purely about Field manipulation, so it could be released from any body part, in myriads of different ways.

The end revelation was that thinking of Hidden Power Flying as simply a “ball of compressed wind” was thinking much too small. When applied more extensively, especially if Sha used Nasty Plot, it was really more like general, moderate aerokinesis.

From there, it could be used to increase Sha’s speed, propel attacks with more force, put more power behind physical strikes, provide a buffer against the knockback and recoil of attacks, and be shaped in varying ways. That allowed for blades of wind, sustained streams, explosive bursts, even temporary shields and small twisters.

Nau grew considerably larger, more vibrantly colored, and more strongly scented as she continued to train diligently… Sun made sure to try and be a bit gentler with her, but also wanted to impart good work ethic, which seemed to be going well. Staying with Kukui and having easy access to Ten Carat Hill also made the training pretty simple, as she could easily take on most of the Pokemon there.

Sun could also easily have her fight Water-type Pokemon, given that they were by the ocean… and although water did make him slightly uneasy after what’d happened with Golisopod, at least the salty scent of ocean water reminded him more of Mantine Surfing.

The rest of the Pokemon remained kind and helpful towards Nau as well, only improving her progress further. Sun was quite sure she’d evolve before too much longer.

What Sun hadn’t been counting on was that Nau would develop a somewhat unexpected skill,
thanks to Dartrix…

Bored with having to focus on recovery for the first couple of weeks after the accident, Dartrix had taken to treating Nau as a younger sister of sorts, most likely because she was the only other Grass-type. Which was all well and good, up until Dartrix got it in his head that he could somehow teach Nau to fly… apparently, believing that the secret was in getting her to rotate her sepals fast enough.

Hau repeatedly tried to talk him down, but Dartrix was a proud and stubborn Pokemon in relatively equal measure. Unlike Flaaffy, getting beaten down so badly hadn’t hampered his spirit, only gotten him even more driven.

But of course, the group had forgotten to consider that one of the principal abilities of a Field was to alter the energy costs and outputs of the user’s actions… Which translated to Nau’s spinning sepals being able to generate an otherwise impossibly large amount of lift.

Which translated to Dartrix actually being right all along, at least to a certain degree.

While Nau’s capacity for genuine powered flight was slow, and limited to only seconds at a time, it did at least allow her to float, hover, glide, and make extremely large leaps. The process also began to familiarize her with Flying-type AWE, allowing her to learn Bounce with relative ease.

Hau begrudgingly rewarded Dartrix’s contributions to Pokemon science with extra treats. It would’ve been a lot less begrudging, but of course, Dartrix made sure to act incredibly smug about it whenever it came up.

Meanwhile, Dartrix himself continued to improve as well. Even before his full recovery, Hau had at least had him do gentle exercises and think of new ways to utilize his power once he was feeling better.

While Sha’s Hidden Power was initially a blessing in disguise, Dartrix’s Rock-typed Hidden Power had been an obvious blessing all along. A move that countered three type weaknesses, just like that. But still, Dartrix took it even further.

Hidden Power Rock, much like Hidden Power Flying, was actually quite flexible beneath the surface. In its base state, Hidden Power Rock was a deep brown missile of condensed AWE, carrying heavy kinetic force. However, it could also be infused into the ground or surrounding rocks and rubble, allowing for limited terrakinesis. Furthermore, in doing so, or infusing it into blade quills, Hidden Power could be made to operate like a physical attack, because of how it became bound to solid objects. From there, it could even partly receive the benefits of Dartrix’s Swords Dance.

Such applications provided a deep enough well of opportunities that it was the bulk of what Dartrix focused on, besides general conditioning and making sure his other attacks didn’t get rusty.

Meanwhile, for Pikachu, Hidden Power Dragon wasn’t quite as flexible. It could still be shaped in varying ways, though. Since Pikachu had less offensive or evasive use for it, Hau focused on its defensive applications, using it to help block and intercept attacks. It also seemed to follow the type chart quite reliably, noticeably having a much easier time opposing the types that Dragon resisted. But other than that, Pikachu largely just improved on what he could already do, continuing to focus mostly on speed and power.

Blissey was as indispensable as ever. Being one of the least physically affected by the Tapu Lele incident, having stayed back to tend to Sun, she was free to devote most of her time to Hau’s lengthy
training sessions. Although she’d been upset about her Trainer’s state of mind and attitude, she had
at least always done her best to keep up and remain positive, not wanting to do anything that would
upset him further.

It showed in Blissey’s progress, as she’d become better than ever in both battling and support. She
was a key part of making recovery times as short as they were, and allowing all humans involved in
the incident to get off without requiring hospital visits themselves.

A Steel-typed Hidden Power was only a moderate offensive boon to Blissey, but incredible for her
defenses, increasing the hardness of whatever it was infused into. It could even be integrated into a
Light Screen to increase its strength… although it did take a lot of experimenting to get down, and
any Light Screen altered in such a way took significantly more time to prepare.

Besides that, Blissey also learned Toxic with Sha’s help… after all, despite appearances, Blissey was
one of the most infamous users of the attack.

Noibat carried on much like before, learning Steel Wing but mostly focusing on simply improving in
overall ability. She didn’t have Dartrix’s bulk or physical strength, but it helped improve her
defense, and her strong focus on speed still made Steel Wing a good hit-and-run tactic for slicing into
opponents.

Growlithe’s training, like Noibat’s, also focused more on just increasing overall ability. Still, Ember
ended up progressing to Flame Burst, and she also learned Double Team from Pikachu. Hau had
interest in utilizing something like a Fire-type version of the “Dark Rush” technique that Sun had
come up with, but it would likely have to wait. Zorua had a head-start of several months when it
came to training in the prerequisite stamina, reflexes, and control necessary to execute it.

As for Lillie’s team, they remained troubled by the tense divide formed between Flaaffy and the
others. Overcoming it was a frustrating and gradual process for Lillie, but some degree of progress
had at least been made, enough to at least establish that physically hurting Flaaffy was unacceptable.
Lillie also forbade them from sparring against Flaaffy, just to make the line especially clear. The
mockery, harassment, and general exclusion was still a work in progress, unfortunately.

Still, Flaaffy displayed perhaps the largest increase of all in overall strength, compared to when they
faced Tapu Lele. Over the course of the entire month, she’d learned Power Gem, Heal Bell,
Confuse Ray, and Discharge… Although of course, much of that was because Heal Bell was the
only move she needed to get from a Move Tutor, while the rest were inherently part of her
capabilities as her power developed.

Despite that, her progress wasn’t entirely a good thing… largely because it seemed to make Eu and
Salsa jealous. Which, on one hand, did motivate them to train hard as well… But on the other hand,
it meant that no matter how well Flaaffy behaved, or how polite she was, they’d keep resenting her
just for getting stronger and receiving so much of Lillie’s attention.

Nebby seemed to be the only one on the team with no such hangups, their opinion on Flaaffy still
perfectly amicable, although their attempts to help create peace were always short-lived.

It wasn’t helped by the fact that Eu’s evolution seemed to be approaching as well. She was getting
larger, and noticeably eating more, but also dealing with mood swings… which made her rather
passive-aggressive at times, when combined with her natural inclination to hide her true feelings.

Still, she didn’t really learn any new moves, simply working on improving general abilities… while
Lillie also tried to adjust her attitude towards Flaaffy.
It was a similar story with Salsa. Getting him to let go of his grudge towards Flaaffy was slow going, but Lillie did at least manage to help him get used to being a Shelgon, and find workarounds for the decrease in his speed. Using the “Dragon Gale” strategy of combining principles from Twister, Aerial Ace, and Dragon Dance, Salsa could maneuver much more nimbly by rapidly rolling and spinning about, generating powerful winds in order to steer and accelerate. He could also form a thin layer of air beneath him, which could help him overcome rough obstacles and terrain while rolling.

Wild Charge could further boost Salsa’s speed for a brief moment, especially useful because having Rock Head essentially erased the consequences of using it.

By continuously practicing on the shores near Kukui’s lab, Salsa even became able to briefly skim the surface of water, once enough speed and wind was built up. Lillie knew it would be an important tool in finally getting past Lana’s trial.

Meanwhile, Eu practiced improving what she could already do, especially when it came to utilizing ice and bubbles in her arsenal to broaden her evasive and defensive options.

With so much work, time seemed to fly by.

And soon, it was once again time to face Lana’s trial.

Sun insisted on the same Totem as before, to Lana’s mild apprehension. Regardless, she agreed. Once more, Sun found himself staring down the massive Totem Milotic, and their faithful partner Alomomola.

Once again, Sun opened the battle with Sha, who deftly soared above the opening Surf but elected to respond with a rather different attack from last time.

With a mischievous cackle, Sha fired off Gastro Acid, which didn’t seem to outwardly do much to the Milotic, but she did rear back with a cry of alarm as the repulsive yellowish-brown slurry thoroughly soaked her face.

Sha smoothly evaded a Scald from Alomomola with a burst of speed, followed by the tips of Sha’s horns lighting up with the silvery, gaseous aura of Hidden Power Flying as they used it build additional air pressure, helping to fire off an Acid Spray with truly incredible speed and accuracy.

The globs of highly adhesive and somewhat water-resistant acid impacted Milotic dead on… and Lana, Hau, and Lillie were treated to the sight of Milotic looking rather upset and perplexed when she easily weathered the acidic effects on her tough scales, along with her Field becoming less capable of absorbing blows… But then didn’t receive any boost to her power in turn. On top of that, the poison glue was fouling her vision and making it hard to retaliate.

Quickly taking advantage of the disturbance, Sun smoothly switched to Nau, who materialized upon the small island in the middle of the lake and set up a Sunny Day almost right away, thanks to the uncanny skill with photokinesis that’d been imparted upon her. Alomomola made an attempt at Scald, but Nau was a relatively small target, and Alomomola’s attacks weren’t actually very strong, so she was merely grazed.

Milotic finally managed to wash the stinging glue away as a ray of sunlight punched a gaping hole through the thick clouds in the sky, but as she attacked with another Surf, she had to face the fact that it was vastly weaker than before… and Nau merely endured the hit with Light Screen, which brought the damage down to utterly pathetic levels. The already greatly diminished wave essentially
just sloshed uselessly against the shield of light, only a weak splash of it actually reaching Nau.

Alomomola, seeing the trouble Milotic was having, fired off a multicolored Helping Hand beam at their partner, but Nau was already being called back as Sun thoroughly praised her. Her job was done, and Milotic probably still had Ice Beam.

Next came Zorua... But by that point, both Milotic and Alomomola had been thoroughly thrown off their game, realizing that nothing they tried last time was working anymore.

In a brief blur of wind and shadowy aura, Zorua smoothly dodged a rather telegraphed Ice Beam as it became significantly dimmer and weaker upon passing through Light Screen, leaving only a moderately-sized slick patch on the ground where it landed.

In retaliation, Zorua used Taunt… and Milotic let out a wail of rage as she fired off multiple Ice Beams and small waves, only for Zorua to smoothly and rather smugly go darting and weaving through it all, laughing all the while as she repeated the move on Alomomola, quickly preventing them from helping Milotic any further. In the process of dodging their sloppy assault, she perhaps got more damage in than they did, using her sharp reflexes and their focus on pure offense to pepper them with cheap shots of Dark Pulse, or use Dark Rush to zip out over the water and clash against them a couple of times.

But once again, in the midst of Milotic’s inefficient, directionless fury, Sun switched Pokemon... This time, to Rhovera.

With Sunny Day and Light Screen both in play, the Water-type moves being used were basically a complete non-issue for her… Only moreso when Sun gave the silent command, and she rapidly began cloaking herself in thick, water-repellent silk with a faint blue aura around it.

Silk Armor had been successfully set up.

Sun’s expression remained hard and impassive as he continued a steady stream of focused, silent commands… and meanwhile, Milotic and Alomomola started to lose even more composure, confused by the arrival of what by all means seemed like a Fire-type Pokemon… Only, their attacks were basically worthless against the odd assailant.

Using the Flame Charge she’d so heavily practiced with, Rhovera shot herself up into a tree and used a combination of Psychic and String Shot against Alomomola, the mentally controlled string entangling the creature far more swiftly and deftly than it would otherwise. The water was of little consequence to it, the string easily being pulled through and protected from moisture by psychic energies.

With that, Rhovera then pulled upwards with all her might, physical and mental strength both working in perfect sync. With that, Alomomola was yanked clear out of the water and thrown high into the air, much to the fish’s alarm. Alomomola struggled like mad against the psionically-reinforced silk, but as Alomomola were uniformly rather passive creatures, it was no good.

Rhovera shot out of the tree, flames streaking behind her, and met the hapless fish in midair with a brutal Wild Charge. The hit had such power that the crackling of electricity and the pained cry of the fish were both clearly audible, even back on shore…. But as Alomomola was still thoroughly snagged and wrapped in her silk, Rhovera then completed the motion by quickly twisting in midair and throwing Alomomola onto land, where it proved quite useless, flopping weakly against its restraints.
In desperation, Milotic tried another Surf, just before the strong ray of sun steadily began to fill back in with clouds… But not quite quickly enough for Milotic’s liking. Rhovera easily took the hit and merely restored what paltry damage she received with a quick Giga Drain against Alomomola, robbing it of even more strength… The fish’s famed vitality only worked against them in such a situation, as they were left still conscious and available to provide another dose of convenient vitality… But unable to do anything in return, besides struggling weakly a few meters away from Rhovera, who would barely be harmed even if they did attack.

When Sunny Day disappeared, all Rhovera had to do was renew it, easily taking another desperate Surf from Milotic in the process. Apparently, in spite of her great length and intimidating appearance, the golden aura wrapped around her only making her more impressive, there was little else she could actually do.

One more Giga Drain on Alomomola robbed the fish of the very last reserves of their truly impressive vitality, leaving Rhovera in peak form while the fish was left dehydrated and motionless. Rhovera at least had the decency to quickly knock them back into the water when she was done using them.

Milotic gave a long, melodious cry upon Alomomola’s defeat, calling her next ally. The Light Screen that Nau left steadily faded as well.

A Pelipper swooped in with their own noisy cry, a pulse of AWE coming off of them and re-establishing the oppressive, drizzling rain in mere moments.

Milotic confidently set off great waves, the full potential of her Water-type moves restored, but unfortunately…

Rhovera gave a determined cry, her five nozzles briefly glowing with psychic energy, focusing and accelerating the fuel within. Doing so, she fired off a Flame Charge so superbly swift that it rocketed her up above the entire wave in mere seconds.

Not even waiting for her to land, Sun commanded a Sunny Day, and she obeyed, firing off a missile of orange light into the sky and immediately banishing a good chunk of clouds once more. Pelipper’s Water Pulse came just a moment too late, the sphere of water noticeably shrinking and losing much of its force as it sailed through the air and successfully landed, but did only negligible damage against Rhovera.

With a brief Psychic to stabilize herself, Rhovera managed to land back on the island quite gracefully, and easily shook it off. In response, Milotic gave a cry of irritation and attempted an Ice Beam, only for Rhovera to smoothly evade once more, thinking little of the impressive cluster of large, icy spikes the attack created just to her right.

Pelipper set up a Tailwind with a few powerful flaps of their wings, but Rhovera had already moved on to her next plan of attack.

Dozens of thick strands of silk went racing out over the water, chasing Pelipper down like ethereal little serpents even in the midst of Pelipper’s Tailwind.

The bird became light and graceful among its winds, swooping and diving and using compressed air to cut through the seeking strands as Milotic backed it up with Water and Ice-type moves as a distraction... But Rhovera was ever persistent, still dodging and weathering attacks while easily sending the extremely lightweight silk in every direction, to trap and confuse Pelipper, limiting where they could safely go…
And when Sun’s keen eyes saw the chance, Rhovera struck.

Flame Charge rocketed her off of the island, and then lapsed to the brilliant yellow of a Wild Charge, as the silk snaking through the sky forced Pelipper just a bit too low and a bit too close.

Rhovera smashed into the bird with oppressive force, electricity surging with such power that it caused the Pelipper to give a terrible squawk of pain and defeat as they dropped to the water like a fly.

Milotic had greatly increased speed, and it was true that Rhovera was getting deeply tired… Sun could feel the steady ache throughout his body, the blossoming phantom soreness, the general weariness... But in dodging and launching herself for attacks, continually using the principles of Flame Charge, Rhovera had been steadily building speed as well.

As such, Milotic had no recourse when Rhovera set off a Giga Drain with alarming speed, and the Acid Spray from Sha finally came back to bite the massive Totem.

Despite Rhovera not specializing in such attacks, and despite the fact that special defenses were supposed to be a Milotic’s strong suit, Rhovera was still able to deal a distressingly large hunk of damage. That damage was then only further exacerbated when Rhovera began firing off streams of silk burning eerie blues and whites from Will-O-Wisp, creating nasty burns that Milotic would have to expend even more focus and energy to dispel in the midst of trying to regenerate from all the damage being inflicted.

Lana, Hau, and Lillie all just looked on in wonder, as the battle ground down to a matter of attrition. A great and majestic serpent, reared by a great Trainer, now forced to struggle in earnest against a mere insect hailing from a dingy cave.

Blows were traded, both parties easily healing from everything the other could do… but steadily, the scales tipped in the favor of Sun and Rhovera.

Milotic faced many things weighing her down. The exhaustion of having to fight through the continuous sunlight, constantly wasting energy on trying to power up heavily weakened attacks... The chip damage from Zorua, earlier on… Then there was the mounting dehydration from continuous Giga Drains, the annoyance of being encumbered by such incredibly durable silk, and the searing pain of continued burns, in spite of being surrounded by water.

Will-O-Wisp’s flames were quite particular in their composition, not doing much immediate damage but proving exceptionally hard to douse… and by time you did, the burns they left were not for the faint of heart. The water was only a mild relief.

Realizing that Milotic had been so worn down that she essentially couldn’t attack without losing, Sun took the time to double down on his syncing efforts, taking deep breaths and focusing purely on giving Rhovera everything he could…. and with the sync, with the ebb and flow of Sun’s Field and Rhovera’s Field together, her Giga Drains became more vicious and focused… they focused on more vulnerable areas, the mouth, the eyes, the gills, and Rhovera’s AWE penetrated deeper into Milotic’s scales, drawing away power with more purpose than ever before.

The critical damage rapidly began to supercede any regeneration even a Totem was capable of…

And with that, the battle drew to a close.
Milotic was left floating listlessly, soundly defeated.

Sun and Rhovera were both breathing heavily, but as Sun took the result in, he finally gave a contented smile, and returned Rhovera, lavishing her with silent praise.

The deed was done.

With that, Lapras returned Sun to shore, where Hau and Lillie wasted little time in gushing about the battle. Hau was hugging Sun tightly, although Sun didn’t mind at all, relishing the soft warmth after all the rain and water.

As soon as Hau let go, he was already rattling off about the battle. “Sun! You were so cool! Rhovera beat three Water-types! And it was so smart, how you used the silk, and the Sunny Day, and the Gastro Acid… and then it was so funny, how the Milotic looked like it didn’t know what the heck to do and Rhovera was taking like a million hits from it, and—” Hau continued to rattle on as Sun felt a warm and gooey feeling well up within him, completely separate from the actual warmth of a hug. Lillie just smiled, not wanting to talk over Hau’s excited rambling but silently letting Sun know that she agreed with him.

Sun brought out Nau, Sha, and Zorua as well, to congratulate them all on their role in finally bringing the Totem down, after so much physical and emotional toil… and that was when both Zorua and Nau began to glow in a tell-tale fashion, much to Sun’s joy.

Growing and shifting dramatically, both of their body structures changing massively, cells reconfiguring at a seemingly impossible rate as stockpiled AWE exploded out from deep within, causing their Fields to surge with power far greater than before.

And so, instead of a Zorua and Bounsweet, everyone found themselves looking at a Zoroark and Steenee instead.

Both were a bit awkward on their feet, neither entirely used to the new body plans… But regardless, Sun met them halfway and took a knee in order to embrace them both, literally glowing with pride in the process.

“Well… I suppose that’s one way to handle a Trial. Simply erase and suppress every factor that made it a challenge. Excellent work, Sun,” Lana said, as she handed him a sparkling blue crystal. He steadily rose back to his feet to accept it. “Waterium Z. You’ve more than earned it. Honestly… after what happened with Tapu Lele, I had half a mind to just give it to you after that, and let you skip this trial, figuring that the fact you were willing to continue the Island Challenge after something so terrible was impressive enough… But I always had the nagging feeling you wouldn’t have wanted it that way,” Lana said.

Sun nodded as he silently thanked her. He understood the logic of a decision like that, but regardless… It just wouldn’t have felt right to him.

The next day, it was Lillie’s turn.

Her Totem came in great, rolling waves and strong winds, dark rain clouds swirling overhead as the massive thing rose above the water and gave a great, collective cry as a powerful aura flared up around it, thick and strong.
An old, traditional classic. Totem Wishiwashi.

And with a great collective cry from the huge school of Wishiwashi, came a Gyarados.

If Hau’s fight was about circumventing a defensive advantage, and Sun’s was about circumventing a technique advantage... Lillie’s battle was about circumventing a sheer power advantage. Especially as rain began to fall, just as it always had before.

Lillie couldn’t deny that her heart was in her stomach. It was honestly a terrifying prospect. Still, she opened immediately with Flaaffy, fearing an opening with Shelgon in spite of the latter’s greater durability. If that Totem didn’t have Ice Beam or at least Icy Wind, she’d eat her hat.

Lillie and Flaaffy opened immediately with Thunder Wave after Flaaffy just barely dodged a vicious Aqua Tail from Gyarados. Lillie knew full well that they needed to take advantage of Wishiwashi’s ponderous nature if they ever wanted to succeed.

Fortunately, Wishiwashi’s reliance on a massive degree of focus and coordination made even their huge form plenty susceptible to Thunder Wave, and the great conglomerate seized and faltered as Gyarados fought in its stead, scoring a punishing bite against Flaaffy’s rubbery hide... only to become paralyzed as well, in the process.

“Discharge!” Lillie commanded, and Flaaffy obeyed, wracking Gyarados and Wishiwashi with great jolts of pain... but not nearly enough to do them in.

Wishiwashi’s Totem Aura briefly surged a bit brighter as the behemoth found the will to make a move... and make a move it did, immediately giving a strange collective roar and sending off incredibly powerful vibrations that ripped through the water and lakebed. Pounding waves crashed against the island, and powerful vibrations rocked the land that Flaaffy was confined to, dispatching her in short order and leaving Lillie feeling sore, rattled, and tingly after the failed effort to get her to endure it.

Lillie groaned to herself and returned Flaaffy, doing her best to maintain composure. Deep breaths. In and out. She would really like to just put the whole place behind her, once and for all, rather than losing and having to go through another battle that reminded her of one of the worst experiences of her life. On the other hand, Lana did say that she would probably give her the Z-Crystal anyway, if she wanted... But some part of Lillie felt like she couldn't let it end like that.

More importantly, she felt like her team didn't want it to end like that.

Her journey had been strange like that, so far... sometimes, terrible things happened.

But other times... A lot of times, even... There were things she wouldn’t trade for the world.

Lillie sent out Salsa next, feeling relatively confident about all the speed and mobility he’d gained back since evolving, although it relied on more indirect tactics, given his heavy body and stubby legs.

Salsa rapidly formed a Protect barrier against an incoming Ice Fang from Gyarados, an attack that normally would’ve done great damage even with Salsa’s impressive armor. Unfortunately for the Gyarados, getting in so close proved to be their undoing. With Wishiwashi too sluggish to do anything to help, Gyarados was immediately slammed with a brutal Wild Charge, which did absolutely nothing to Salsa in turn.
With a massive roar, Gyarados collapsed into the water, soundly defeated.

“Good job, Salsa!” Lillie happily called, even as Wishiwashi gave another bone-chilling collective ‘roar’ and found the strength to attempt an Ice Beam… but as Salsa trilled happily at Lillie’s praise, while also smoothly blocking the attack with a protective coating of light green power, Wishiwashi began to sluggishly thrash their great collective body, myriads of eyes across their form shining with intense light in order to summon up another partner Pokemon.

Lillie silently prayed not to see an Azumarill, but she was only moderately relieved to see a Masquerain show up instead.

A great target for Rock Slide, Wild Charge, or an Ice Beam from Eu… but there was one problem.

As the Masquerain spread their wings, the resulting Intimidate took hold of Salsa’s mind, further reducing the power of his attacks.

Lillie frowned before returning Salsa, sending out Eu instead.

Still, she felt like the Masquerain was… kind of a non-sequitur? They weren’t exactly the weakest Pokemon, but they were nothing like the oppressive power of Gyarados or a Wishiwashi school.

Lillie tried not to overthink it as she ordered Ice Beam against the fluttering moth… only for Masquerain to dodge with strange, elegant, but swift movements, glowing a pale blue and spreading lightly twinkling scales as it did…

Movements that Lillie soon recognized as Quiver Dance, especially with the tell-tale glow. She could remember that Sun wanted to try and teach C.C. within the next couple of months.

Lillie had to admit she was getting a bit more scared, but the Wishiwashi was luckily incapacitated for a brief moment, so Eu had time to set up bubble platforms and try leaping between them to match Masquerain’s agile wings. She set off multiple Water Pledge geysers, since the rain made them an equally effective option to Eu’s Ice Beam, but Masquerain smoothly weaved between most of them, and Quiver Dance’s effects blunted the impact whenever they did manage to land a graze or glancing blow.

So, as soon as the moth got the chance, they continued the bewitching dance, much to Lillie’s concern.

Hoping for the best, Lillie took a deep breath and commanded Eu to create several water geysers around Masquerain at once, each one significantly weaker, but angled slightly inwards so that the water would cage Masquerain.

Eu obeyed, but letting the Masquerain use Quiver Dance twice had been a definite misplay. They rapidly fluttered their wings, and fired off an Air Cutter that’d been powered up to the point it easily sliced right on through, creating a gap easily big enough for Masquerain to slip through and immediately send out several more, which made a beeline straight for Eu.

Eu valiantly attempted to evade, backflipping off of her bubble platform with an Aqua Jet and simultaneously smacking the bubble towards Masquerain with her tail, hoping to intercept and weaken the Air Cutter, but she was still struck hard, leaving an unpleasant gash on Eu’s chest as she cried out. She plummeted gracelessly into the water, and Lillie gritted her teeth, but she could fortunately sense that she still had fight left.
“Work Up!” Lillie called, hoping to pull through if she could just get more power behind Eu’s strikes.

In the brief lull, Masquerain suddenly paused in midair for a moment and emitted a white glowing orb, their movements slowing down as the orb left them and infused itself into Wishiwashi, which had remained too sluggish and ponderous to contribute much.

Lillie’s breath caught as the influx of power infused the whole school of Wishiwashi, the creature’s myriad eyes glowing brightly as its aura flared brighter, instilling Lillie with a deep sense of dread.

Was that… Baton Pass, modified to not involve switching out?

Lillie immediately returned Eu and sent out Salsa again, commanding a Protect right away.

Sure enough, with their new influx of power, the Wishiwashi school overcame the paralysis long enough to let loose a barrage of obscenely fast and powerful waves, mercilessly crashing down against Salsa one after another. The Shelgon dug his feet in deep and gave strained grunts with each hit, his Protect flaring with light green as he put in all the strength he could muster…

But fortunately, it was enough.

The attack abated, and Salsa escaped unharmed, as Lillie quickly went to the next part of her plan, now that Salsa could fight at full strength.

“Dragon Gale!” Lillie called. Masquerain fired off another Air Cutter, but Salsa was quicker, generating a powerful shroud of draconic wind as he lunged forward and began to roll, the quick movements and adrenaline simultaneously stoking his body with the power of a Dragon Dance.

With incredibly careful control and manipulation, Salsa could create a “cushion” of air beneath him as he propelled himself along, avoiding the worst of unfavorable terrain…

Even enough to briefly skim along water.

Lana just looked on in genuine astonishment as Salsa did a couple of broad loops to build speed and then hurtled himself out over the lake, while Hau and Sun cheered at the sort of flashy display that Salsa excelled at. Masquerain had trouble parsing the odd strategy as well, not sure what to do as Salsa crossed the gap between them with impressive speed. Meanwhile, Lillie took a deep breath and focused intently on their sync, and Masquerain’s positioning…

Her focus marked out exactly where the troublesome moth was.

At first, Salsa shot straight past, like a mix of a torpedo and a cannonball, his movement sending up strong sprays of water at his sides… but then he hooked around, and before Masquerain could react, leapt up and slammed into his target from behind with a brilliant Wild Charge, the sound of crackling electricity and Masquerain’s distress filling the whole battlefield.

The creature dropped like wet tissue paper while Salsa managed to land without sinking, although he did create a massive splash.

In just another second, Salsa was back on the island, shaking himself off as Wishiwashi watched in a mix of irritation and fascination, apparently just as taken aback as Masquerain was.
Regardless, they launched off a somewhat sluggish but absolutely devastating Ice Beam, as Lillie ordered another Protect.

The unbelievably powerful attack slammed against the barrier and spread out wildly, making a discordant noise as it tried and failed to pierce the wall of pure AWE in front of it. Salsa was once again left unharmed, but the environment around him changed dramatically. That entire area of the island became a frozen stretch of land; creating slick, hard ground; icy pillars; and grass that’d become stiff little needles. Even the rainfall briefly became a burst of snow and foggy ice vapor, before new raindrops overrode the effect.

Salsa shivered, already tired from the effort of blocking such immensely powerful attacks, and supporting his heavy body over the lake’s surface…

Lillie sympathetically shivered as well, before attempting to have Salsa use another Wild Charge before Wishiwashi could retaliate.

Salsa gave a low battle cry before launching himself off of the island again, towards the massive fish that was his target… But even with his sheer strength, bolstered by Dragon Dance, the Wishiwashi’s bulk was utterly absurd. The aura wrapped around it was utterly oppressive, seeming to thicken the air and steal energy away from the raw force of Wild Charge as Shelgon went tearing across the surface of the water, slamming Wishiwashi with everything he had…

Electricity went rushing through the whole school, and it slowly began to fall apart, tiny fish dropping listlessly into the water, one by one… But still, the school pressed on. With a mighty wave, the collective gathered up the last of its strength to send Salsa hurtling back to land… and then released another absolutely ungodly Ice Beam.

Lillie desperately tried to command another Protect, but the attack was just so engulfing, so encompassing, the icy blue light briefly overtaking Salsa entirely before it vanished… and he was left not only soundly defeated, but solidly encased in ice.

Lillie quickly returned him with a grimace, fortunate that the beam of the Pokeball could penetrate the ice.

The Wishiwashi school continued to steadily fall apart as Lillie sent out Eu, hoping the rest would be quick and painless.

Unfortunately, the answer to that hope was… no.

No, not quite.

As Eu dove back into the water, the scant remainder of the school flashed their eyes and concentrated their power… and with that, more Wishiwashi came rushing in to replace what was lost.

With that, the school was restored back to fighting shape.

Lillie and Eu recoiled in unison. Recover? Sure, it made a decent amount of sense that if fish got hurt, they could just call more fish, and in turn those fish could share their energy to revitalize the remainder of the school… But that didn’t mean it wasn’t beyond annoying.

Lillie decided to focus on the speed advantage she held, and use it to buy time to build power as
well. Eu was hurt, but smaller and much more agile. Even with Quiver Dance passed on to it, the ponderous school was only as fast as it started.

“Work Up, don’t let it hit you!” Lillie called. Eu complied, swiftly swimming about and stimulating her body to build more power.

The Wishiwashi responded with an enormous wave, its power increased so dramatically that even Eu would likely be unable to handle being hit…

Eu rocketed herself out of the way with an Aqua Jet and a series of rapidly-formed bubble platforms, benefitted by the fact that Work Up allowed her to put more force and urgency behind the Aqua Jet, thus indirectly boosting its speed further.

As Eu ascended into the rainy sky, then perched on a large bubble, Lillie rapidly began to pose, immediately realizing what she and Eu needed to do… Just as Wishiwashi began to prepare its own incredibly powerful rebuttal.

Whitish-gold light poured from Lillie and snaked into Eu as she gave a surprisingly mighty battle cry. The sheer concussive force of a Hyper Voice transformed into the immense power of a Breakneck Blitz, and crashed down just as Wishiwashi responded with a massive diagonal pillar of water to counter it. The two forces collided with a loud and terrifying crash, water spraying everywhere in a great deluge as the sheer power of Eu’s attack sent her flying backwards… Not being based on a physical strike, the Breakneck Blitz had been expressed as a shockwave of obscene speed and force.

The attacks largely cancelled out, but the energy of the Breakneck Blitz had spread as it crashed upon the deluge of water, harming Wishiwashi somewhat in the process… and there was the matter of its sheer, deafening sound.

Paralysis still unresolved, Wishiwashi’s movements locked up again as it struggled to overcome the shock… Eu and Lillie seized the chance, Eu using Work Up once more before firing off another bellowing Hyper Voice… and in their shared, burning desire, it pushed through Wishiwashi’s incredible defenses to land a critical strike against some of the most vital fish in its school.

Once again heavily weakened and exhausted, the school began to fall apart… and this time, there was no escaping Eu’s wrath. No fast enough reaction for what was to come.

“Water Pledge!” Lillie called, heart pounding, time seeming to slow down somewhat. This was it. It was now or never.

With the rain, Lillie’s determination, and the power of Work Up coursing through her, Eu sent off a roaring geyser of such size and force that it engulfed the remainder of the school in its entirety with the pummeling force of massive amounts of water…

When the attack ended, the school had been completely blown apart, defeated in its entirety. The few remaining fish swam away in a daze, while a few that’d been blown all the way onto the islands weakly flopped their way back into the lake.

Lillie gave a deep sigh, only then realizing the extent of her tiredness as relief and satisfaction welled up within her. If she were being honest, the single best part of the situation for her was that she’d never have to do it again. A proper close to the wet, muddy, dreary hell that’d almost killed her dearest friends.

But for Eu…
Lillie could feel the pride and excitement, the towering high of victory, the crescendo of power building as she excitedly swam towards Lillie, while drawing in the errant AWE released by her defeated foe…

And then, when she was almost there, she began to glow.

Brighter and brighter, body shifting and changing, cells shifting and changing with great speed... Lillie watched, holding her breath all the while, not daring to look away for even a moment.

Until finally, the light faded, leaving a Primarina where a Brionne once was.

There was a long, melodic cry as Eu’s new form completed development, the light fading and leaving her with greater strength than ever before. The cry seemed to call out to the lake itself, globules of water rising and slowly twirling around Eu, seeming to dance along to her song.

Lillie was on the verge of tears as she watched, pride and captivation written all over her face.

“Eu! You did so well! And you’re so beautiful!” Lillie cried, as Eu came up next to her and Lapras to receive Lillie’s affection. “Salsa and Flaaffy did well too!”

Eu balked at the mention of Flaaffy, but Lillie’s expression hardened when she did. “You’re going to have to accept her at some point, you know. She made mistakes, but so does everyone. She’s trying her best to change now. And even though you did well, and I’m proud of you, we wouldn’t have won this without her. The paralysis she inflicted bought us a lot more time and openings.” Lillie said.

Eu merely snorted at that, but Lillie could tell she had no rebuttal to the logic used.

“And from there… if you hadn’t been able to defeat Wishiwashi, you probably wouldn’t have been able to evolve just now either. So at least think about it, alright?” Lillie said.

Eu grunted lowly, frustrated that she once again didn’t have a sensible counter-argument.

With all of that said and done, Lillie and Eu went back to land, where Lillie healed Eu's lingering weariness and received excited congratulations from Sun, Hau, and Lana.

“Excellent work! I especially liked the strategy you employed with your Shelgon! Such a novel approach to patching up the issue with his mobility limitations! Clearly, you’ve worked hard… and I’m relieved that you’ve finally overcome this,” Lana said. “I only regret that I wasn’t able to make this a better experience for you…” she finished, her voice quieting as she looked away, towards the lake.

“That’s not your fault. You had no control over what Tapu Lele would decide to do. As for everything that wasn’t related to that, I think it was a valuable experience,” Lillie said, smiling in a way she hoped would put Lana at ease. “And I still sort of had fun with this battle… even if I have to admit it wasn’t great, but that’s not because of you.”

“Well… if you really mean that, I suppose I’ll accept it,’ Lana said, as she gave Lillie her Waterium Z as well. "It’s just too bad you all missed the Shiny Poliwag that passed by while you were busy watching the battle,” Lana continued, adding the last part on all too casually. The group’s eyes collectively widened.
“Seriously?! I was thinking about catching one!” Hau cried. “My team could use some more defense against Rock-types…”

Lana just badly restrained her giggling as Hau realized that he’d been had… although he just laughed along with her, at least glad that she was feeling happy enough to make jokes.

“In all seriousness, I do have a spare Poliwag, if you’re interested,” Lana said. “She was one of my potential Totem candidates. I’d been thinking I’d switch things up in a couple of years and put in a Totem Poliwrath. To be clear, she isn’t actually a Totem already, but she’s well bred and already used to being trained. All you’d have to do is battle her. I doubt she would want to go with you before you’ve done that, because, well…” Lana said. “She’s… somewhat rambunctious.”

Hau could somewhat tell the offer was probably to help assuage Lana’s lingering guilt, but he still pondered it for a moment.

“And quite frankly… Olivia has suggested that I lower my workload for a little while,” Lana admitted, her voice getting a bit quieter. Hau frowned a little at that, seeing what she was getting at. “...So what I’m saying is, she’d probably just get released into the wild if I don’t find anyone to take her. And I think that’d be a waste.”

“Alright, I’ll take her, then,” Hau said. “Thanks!”

Lana smiled a bit at that before getting out a Pokedex and altering some settings, causing one of her Pokeballs on hand to dematerialize in exchange for another. Immediately afterwards, she used the release function with the new ball, simultaneously sending a Poliwag out and severing its connection with that ball.

Lana briefly explained the situation to Poliwag, who turned to look at Hau and then puffed up and hopped in place a couple of times, apparently trying to look tough. It mostly just looked adorable instead.

“You ready?” Hau asked the Poliwag, who just hopped excitedly a few more times, not even bothering to let go of the breath she was holding. Hau just giggled before clearing a bit of distance and sending out Pikachu.

“Thunder Wave!” Hau called. Pikachu sent off the attack just fine, but Poliwag was quicker than Hau expected, countering the electricity with a sudden spurt of mud and easily hitting Pikachu instead.

Hau furrowed his brow a little, already able to tell that he hadn’t been taking his opponent seriously enough.

The Poliwag immediately followed up with Aqua Jet, much to Hau’s surprise. He hadn’t known they could do that, and Pikachu hadn’t recovered from the mud in time to avoid the strike, which sent him flying backwards several feet.

Still, Hau took that moment to focus, silently willing Pikachu to use Quick Attack, followed by a close-range Thunder Wave.

Pikachu immediately blurred forth in turn, only for Poliwag to actually react quickly enough to briefly avoid it with another Aqua Jet, before Pikachu adjusted his angle and dashed in again, squarely hitting his mark that time. He unloaded a healthy amount of electricity before Poliwag
could react, leaving her stunned and dazed.

With that, Hau threw a Great Ball… and, being a rather simple species to catch, the Poliwag was unable to resist. After a couple of shakes, the ball went still.

Hau picked up the Pokeball with glee. “Good work, Pikachu! Sorry you’re all muddy now though,” Hau said, as Pikachu just nodded in understanding and did his best groom himself.

“I have to admit, she actually resisted a lot better than I thought she would,” Hau said. “Especially when it comes to reaction time,”

“Poliwag have quite a few predators, so as a countermeasure, they actually have much better reflexes than you’d think. They can also be trained to use hydrokinesis to float, which lets them move much faster on land than their legs alone. That’s also part of why Swift Swim is their Hidden Ability,” Lana explained. “As is the case with the one you just caught.”

“Oh, cool! That should be really helpful!” Hau said, mentally adding ‘Rain Dance’ to his list of moves for his team to know. With that, he let Poliwag back out. She immediately looked around frantically, obviously weakened but still on full alert, apparently not fully realizing that she’d already lost.

“Welcome to the team, Poliwag!” Hau said, as he readied some medicine to heal Poliwag back to proper condition.

Poliwag initially remained on high alert, but finally calmed slightly once the potion began to take effect. Lana smiled in approval, impressed by how easily Poliwag seemed to be taking the adjustment.

With all of that out of the way, the group was finally just about ready to leave.

They said their goodbyes, while Hau let Poliwag walk alongside him, since it was pretty much always humid near Brooklet Hill, and letting her get more practice with her legs could never hurt.

Finally, they could all move on.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve always felt that Wishiwashi should by all means have access to Recover. I don’t think it’d actually be very broken that way, considering that its speed and HP are still Succ.

I also have a couple more stat rebalances that’ll be relevant to the future. But still, keep in mind that stats are applied a bit more loosely in this universe. These are largely for fun, and to make each Pokemon match my internal logic a bit more.

Poliwrath’s gears it more towards offense… With its build, it looks like it should hit harder. Meanwhile, while it’s got durable muscle and flexible skin, it doesn’t have any kind of fur/scales/armor. Also, I’m not entirely sure why Poliwag has freaking base 90 speed, but I at least sort of tried to explain that.

HP: 80 (-10)
Second is Tsareena, which becomes a bit more about speed than defense: It has powerful legs, and I can't really see it somehow being that much more of a special tank than Shelgon (which is part of why Shelgon’s bulk was buffed too).

HP: 75 (+3)
Attack: 120
Defense: 85 (-13)
Sp.Atk: 50
Sp.Def: 85 (-13)
Speed: 105 (+33)
BST: 520 (+10)

Third, Decidueye: It also becomes way more about speed. Since, besides from movement speed, this stat also seems related to reflexes and speed of attack execution. (Vikavolt makes for an infamous example) And, Decidueye is canonically supposed to have amazing reflexes as part of being an archer. Plus, I don't really get how Blastoise, Venusaur, and Meganium are faster than it anyway. I’m also lowkey one of Those People who always wanted at least one fast Alolan starter. It’s not even about competitive, I just think one of them should’ve been fast to make them more distinct from each other.

HP: 80 (+2)
Attack: 105 (-2)
Defense: 75
Sp: Atk : 90 (-10)
Sp. Def: 70 (-30)
Speed: 110 (+40)
BST: 530

Yes, I did round everything to just 5’s and 0’s purely for aesthetic. And really, how would you even reliably determine a meaningful difference between, like, 107 and 108? Realistically, wouldn’t an individual Pokemon’s stats always be fluctuating slightly?

I actually do use a damage calculator to help me write the fights, but more as a rough guideline to keep things consistent and have a better idea of how each side is faring. So stats are still informing battle outcomes, capabilities, and descriptions… But they are not completely dictating them like the games would.
Chapter 18: Binary Star

Chapter Summary

In Which Beetles Finally Stops Being A Lazy Fucking Hack And Updates For Once.
Also, Battle Royale, Lillie's birthday, and both Sun and Lillie getting new team members...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With Lana’s trial finally out of the way for everyone, the group had a week before Lillie’s birthday, which was coming up on April 27th. Not wanting to be too cocky, the group agreed to put aside about four more weeks before attempting Kiawe’s trial. Even if Hau had already won Lana’s trial a full month ago, his only solid advantage over Fire-types was a fresh catch, and his training had been heavily limited by his team’s injuries. To make things trickier, Noibat barely even counted as fire resistant. She was still frail against pretty much everything, and heavily reliant on speed.

Sun knew his own team was being put in a tight situation as well. Two Fire weaknesses and absolutely nothing super-effective… It really wasn’t looking good. But he had some ideas going, regardless.

Lillie was looking the best suited for the task, but even she had doubts. A lot of Fire-types learned Solar Beam, and there were a lot of other potential coverage moves depending on the Pokemon. A Salazzle in particular would be bad news for Eu.

After Lana’s trial, the group went back to Professor Kukui’s lab for a short while, noting that it was still just as much of a mess as it’d been ever since Kukui discovered the existence of their powers.

“Uh, Professor, is everything like… alright?” Hau asked soon after walking in, noticing that books were strewn everywhere, there were two different laptops and a tablet open to various pages, and even one of the walls had a large board with a bunch of notes and diagrams tacked up on it. Kukui himself was disheveled, and looked like he hadn’t slept in at least two days, which was probably worryingly close to the truth.

“I’ve been at least attempting to pull together research that’ll help us figure out the best way to handle this whole situation with the powers, yeah,” Kukui began with a sigh, tiredly putting a hand to his head. “But all I’ve got so far is information on the normal kinds of powers people have, which is only partly useful because those are already rare enough, and tend to fall into limited categories.

With a lot of practice and good enough Field-sync, pretty much anyone can achieve empathy… But then there’s enhanced physical abilities, clairvoyance, telepathy, mediumship, telekinesis, and Aura. Then the rare subsets that have to do with special geography or phenomena, most famously the Viridian Children… But we don’t even exactly fit any of those,” Kukui continued, with a clear undercurrent of frustration.

“From most common to most rare, they occur roughly in that order, but people with enhanced abilities often have more than one. I have no idea if all the principles of those powers actually apply here. Even between Aura and psychics, there are some key differences in how you should develop
and apply those abilities. They’re all AWE-based, but that doesn’t make them exactly the same.” Kukui finished.

“I see…” Lillie said, slightly rocking on her feet and gently biting her lip. None of what she’d just heard sounded promising to her.

“I get what you’re saying, Professor… but if it’s not too much trouble, don’t you have any better way we can experiment with them or something? I still only just barely know how to use mine on purpose… and without seeing stuff I didn’t want to see,” Hau said, begrudgingly thinking back to the incident with Tapu Lele. “But at the same time… I feel like these are way too important to just… ignore,”

“Well, I have been trying to look into finding a safer setup for experimenting with them, yeah. But as much as I usually play it a little fast and loose, I hesitate to take too many risks here. Unlike Pokemon, none of us were naturally meant to have these powers. Therefore, our bodies weren’t designed for them, and I don’t know how they’d affect us in the long run. And what I saw with Tapu Lele is already proof enough that being careless would be too dangerous. For now, you should all just continue your adventures,” Kukui said. “If I figure something out, I’ll tell you as soon as possible. So don’t go doing anything too crazy before then, yeah?”

The group agreed, collectively a bit displeased but at least understanding of the fact that Kukui was trying to approach the matter carefully.

The next week passed by much like always, a steady stream of training and experimenting with ideas and new tactics… but Sun was still aware that he needed a Water-type Pokemon.

The night after they’d all spoken with Kukui (and later, prodded him into going to bed) Sun nuzzled the plush of the Shiny Staryu he’d gotten from Hau… and as he looked at it, he knew instantly what he had to do.

Sun’s first order of business was to go to the nearest Pokemon Center to buy plenty of Adrenaline Orbs. The second was to get to Paniola Town, where Net Balls were sold. He had an idea in mind. And he’d stop at nothing to see it come to fruition.

A method of wild Pokemon battle called SOS chaining. As a wild Pokemon called allies, a Trainer would continually faint them, applying just the right amount of pressure and tactical knowledge to cajole them into summoning up more and more help.

Unlike normal wild Pokemon battles, SOS chains were known to be an effective method of both steady training and getting more rare or skilled Pokemon, if tiring and tricky to master. As an SOS battle wore on, the wild Pokemon involved became increasingly aware of the skill and threat level of their opponents, and it attracted the attention of Pokemon who were otherwise too haughty or too wary for most Trainers. Meanwhile, on the other end of it, weaker and less confident Pokemon became discouraged from approaching.

Once Sun made his way to Hano Beach for the first time, he immediately set to business. He’d done the research, amassed his items, and prepared his team for what they needed to help him with. He made them all well aware that it’d most likely be rather different from the kind of battling they were used to.
He tracked down his first Staryu. It all went from there, a dizzying stream of triumph and frustration, stamina and focus put to the test.

In a typical day, Sun and his team had the time, resources, and energy to try a Staryu chain about three times. Theoretically, it should’ve been more, with smart division of labor between all five team members… But Sun was part of the equation too. Syncing was a strenuous enough action that doing it long enough to get through so many Staryu in a row was surprisingly difficult.

Each time, they’d plow through about 50 Staryu and a couple of Starmie on average. Each try lasted a bit over a half hour on average, but they could go on significantly longer. To combat that, Sun made sure to optimize things as carefully as he could. Prioritize one-hit defeats. Keep Sunny Day and Light Screen going, when possible. Find the sweet spot of encouraging more aggression and more response from the Staryu, but without going overboard or being cruel.

The pauses between attempts were about an hour each, so overall, the whole process took up about four or five hours a day. Sun knew he could theoretically stretch it to four or five attempts, but he still wanted time to do things besides Staryu-hunting. There was still Mantine Surfing, spending time with Hau and Lillie, or planning Lillie’s upcoming birthday… Which also involved preparing the surprise he had for her.

The worst part of trying to get a Staryu wasn’t that it was surprisingly draining. Nor was the fact that it was so lengthy. Sun had known those things from the start. The real trouble stemmed from the fact that the battling process wasn’t as consistent or exciting as Sun expected… and a lot of the time, could even get outright tedious. The Staryu often kept freezing up and delaying for no discernible reason, or suddenly deciding to stop calling for help, or suddenly becoming significantly slower to arrive for no real reason. His Pokemon had to waste a bunch of unnecessary energy just trying to cajole them into cooperation. The Staryu would often randomly decide to stop trying, try to escape, or they’d suddenly become irritatingly defiant and just waste everyone’s time.

It was frustrating largely because the Staryu needed to be pressured to make the process work well, but their general unreliability and poor cooperativeness made the whole thing surprisingly inconvenient to do within acceptably respectful bounds, requiring Sun to find workarounds.

The best low-guilt option he found was to psionically mimic the distress calls himself, but more powerfully. Fortunately for him, it was mainly a trick of telepathic ability. Staryu didn’t actually have very good hearing or vision in the conventional sense, instead relying on the reflection and absorption of AWE and electromagnetic radiation to detect objects, emotions, predators, and prey. It helped even more to wait until nightfall and send up patterns of light into the air that were attractive to the Staryu line in particular.

Sun would also make sure to closely monitor the emotional state of each Staryu in battle, making sure to keep pressing them to call out without actually doing too much harm. Each attack on his team’s end had to be efficient and decisive. Quickly going in for finishing blows, then leaving the weakened to call for further backup.

Beyond that, Sun would also have C.C. go around and set off Adrenaline Orbs over a wider area, focusing on increasing range since increasing their potency wasn’t an option. That way, they got far more Staryu in the area to become emotionally invested in the fights.

Chains also tended to build momentum, fortunately. Eventually, more and more Staryu and Starmie would perk up at all the commotion. Previously defeated Staryu would wake up and begin adding their distress signals as well, and they’d come to realize the seriousness of the matter. News of
previous chaining attempts spread through their local populations, making them more responsive to Sun on subsequent tries. It helped to prevent the frustrating lulls in action and make the process more convenient and predictable.

With all of that, Sun could even have periods of fighting three or four Staryu at a time. A bit of a bigger challenge, but definitely speeding things up considerably. With that being an option for them, he felt it was only fair to start using C.C. as backup, employing Aromatherapy and Pollen Puff to give his team the energy to carry on. Luckily, the Staryu seemed to agree. Their enthusiasm wasn’t dampened in the least.

Sun continued, day in and day out, through the steady slog of fighting through dozens upon dozens of Staryu, on the order of literally over 150 a day… It was still a process of tedium, a battle of inches. Sun could notice how the Staryu and occasional Starmie were generally a cut above the ones he originally fought, the way they resisted hits better and moved more swiftly…

Regardless, he had the general strategy down well. Preserve at least one tired Staryu. Hit hard, hit fast. Switch to a new Staryu before one completely exhausts themself. Nau even learned Giga Drain with help from the Move Tutors, keeping her healthier longer in conjunction with Synthesis.

People would even come to watch, sometimes Hau and Lillie too, but Sun generally did it without his friends. He didn’t want to cut into time they could use to train, and Wild Pokemon seemed to refuse to SOS battle against two or more Trainers at once. If anything, it was more of a test than a defense mechanism. It was nowhere near fully representative of just how fierce their groups could truly get.

Finally, on the sixth day, things came to a head.

Over forty Staryu into Sun’s latest chain, just as the sky had grown almost completely dark, Sun finally saw what he was looking for. A new arrival, shimmering in the night as they leapt from the water, letting out a cry of challenge as they sailed through the air.

Their core repeatedly flashed a strong, brilliant sapphire, and their body was a sleek and beautiful silver. The challenge they issued to Sun, and the young but ever-faithful Nau, was clear.

Sun tensed, realizing he finally had just what he wanted, right where he wanted it.

A Shiny Staryu.

Their shine only seemed greater under the effects of Nau’s nighttime ‘Sunny Day’, a floating ball of glowing yellow that cast strong light over the immediate area.

Without preamble, Nau launched a Razor Leaf, some of it immediately finishing off the heavily weakened partner Staryu while the rest assaulted the Shiny.

A couple small chunks of Staryu’s body were immediately sliced away by the assault, but true to species form, they immediately recovered, backing up a bit.

Nau hopped and rolled forward, firing off more leaves as Sun’s intent and focus sharpened… Staryu was again struck with many of them, but weaved between many more, fending them off with bursts of telekinetic force before their core lit up especially bright, and Sun caught the immediate shift in the nature of their Field, the spike in intensity and the shift in alignment…
With a strange, high pitched noise that pierced the night, there was a streaking Ice Beam that hit with alarming speed and force even in spite of Nau’s attempt to leap to the side. Sun’s sync strained as he only just barely managing to preserve Nau’s consciousness, over half her body becoming encased in ice after the strike.

As Sun shivered slightly in sympathy, quickly switching Nau out, he quickly considered the situation.

Not only did the Staryu appear to have Analytic, judging by the sudden power spike just before they struck… but there was the obvious question of why they already knew Ice Beam at all.

Sun decided to try not to overthink it as he switched to Sha.

The Staryu watched silently, spinning and bobbing through the air with a quiet whir.

Sun commanded Toxic, and Sha was quick. They immediately sent out a steaming, bubbling mass of purple gunk, only for the Staryu to once again retaliate with great power and prejudice, a burst of telekinetic force lancing the toxic globule and hitting Sha dead on.

Sun winced as Sha gave a thin whine of pain, surprised at how much that stung, but they were still in the fight. Meanwhile, the Staryu suddenly put on a burst of speed and activity, spinning to and fro before their light began to steadily flash blue, violet, then purple…. Correspondingly, Sun saw their Field intertwine with Sha’s, saw it change to match more closely…

Water-type became Poison, in only a matter of seconds.

Sun grunted in irritation, knowing that meant Toxic was off the table.

Another switch. C.C.

Sun and C.C. opened with a Psychic, but the Staryu responded with the same move, the two telekinetic bursts clashing in midair and largely cancelling out, before Staryu then spun quickly and took on a harsh glow, focusing the scattered energy into a lancing blow of telekinetic force.

C.C. just barely dodged as the focused kinetic force sliced through the air with an audible whistling sound, and Sun ordered a Silver Wind, feeling a bit frustrated that he couldn’t go all out if he wanted to actually capture the creature.

The Staryu took the hit surprisingly well, buzzing and writhing in agitation as they responded with an amazingly fast, thin blue beam that Sun recognized as Power Gem. A stream of countless miniscule mineral fragments, charged with AWE and accelerated into a powerful directed strike.

C.C. took the hit hard, and the Staryu aimed perfectly. C.C gave a high squeak of pain as his flight momentarily slowed.

Sun grimaced at the shared pain, feeling like that hit had been significantly nastier than expected, even factoring in Analytic and the type advantage. After so much time, he’d gained a pretty good sense for how Staryu in the area hit, and their general strength, speed, and durability.

Overall, the Staryu’s Field wasn’t really too much more intense than most of the others that showed up so late into a chain… But its efficiency, conditioning, and reaction time was something else
entirely. It was almost like that Staryu had been training more... *expertly* than the others...

Staryu used Recover again, while Sun had C.C. quickly use Stun Spore. Undoubtedly, that would give the Staryu even more chances to exploit Analytic... but on the other hand, he needed it.

Immediately, as Staryu writhed in discomfort, steadily healing their wounds, Sun returned C.C.. He then switched to Zoroark, having her copy Sha’s appearance. From there, he opened with Taunt, wanting to at least prevent another Recover before capture. He readied a Net Ball, knowing the time was coming soon...

Staryu’s answer, delivered with screeching defiance, was Dazzling Gleam, so ferociously executed that Zoroark cried out in legitimate anguish as the attack burned at her eyes and her hide, and the pain was so sudden and surprising that Sun could hardly cope, briefly stumbling as he struggled to keep Zoroark from being nearly bested in one strike.

Sun’s eyes narrowed. How in the world did they *know*, let alone already have Dazzling Gleam in their arsenal? The Staryu’s mildly agitated rotation as it hovered through the air revealed no grand, sinister plan on their end. No masterful knowledge of Sun’s every move.

But Sun looked again.

Sun remember that the actual eyesight and hearing of Staryu and Starmie was universally poor. They didn’t really even have proper eyes or ears, only simplistic analogues that were difficult to even notice.

Their main method of perception could instead be roughly likened to AWE-based radar, operating on waves of electromagnetic radiation and psychic power.

Quickly, Sun looked *even closer*. Sure enough, all around, extremely subtle waves of psychic AWE were steadily washing over everything in the area. Constantly striking and bouncing back, but to a more refined degree and quicker pulse than they typically did for Staryu. What had to be the mark of an exceptionally perceptive individual.

Not to mention...

Sun quickly looked at Zoroark as she staggered in place, and noted how the waves just sort of... disappeared into her. Fizzled out and didn’t return at all. Not like with other solid objects, where they would slow, penetrate slightly, and then return. Just an inexplicable dead zone, a void, the unmistakable mark of a Dark-type.

They’d been foiled not by a master plan, but by the simple fact that the Staryu’s simple eyespots were apparently so poor that they never even briefly considered that Zoroark looked exactly like Sha before firing off an attack.

Sun returned Zoroark in a flash, the realization having taken just enough time that Staryu could soon strike again.

Once more, he sent Nau, feeling rather irritated but undeniably impressed that the Staryu had now heavily weakened all but one of his Pokemon…. But Rhovera wouldn’t be too much better of a choice.

Taking to the beach with panting effort, Nau nonetheless managed a Giga Drain before Staryu could respond, recovering a good chunk of energy and weakening the creature in turn. Still, having
become a Poison-type, the Staryu took the hit far, far better than usual.

Sun threw a Net Ball, feeling confident… only for the Staryu to suddenly perk up and give a great blue pulse of effort, making a discordant screech as they caught the ball in a psychic vice and abruptly crushed it to tiny pieces.

From there, the Staryu revealed one further trick, and abruptly shrank themself down to nearly a fifth their original size. Minimize. Sun grumbled in irritation. Truly a tricky little thing, through and through.

But Nau was still in the fight.

Another Giga Drain, a bit more energy restored. Another ferocious Ice Beam in response, but Sun and Nau both were ready that time, and she evaded with sprightly steps, using Giga Drain yet another time, then smoothly jumping back and drifting to the side to evade the next Ice Beam, even faster and more aggressive than the first.

Ice began building up on the wet, sandy ground as Nau darted and hovered about, setting up a powerful Light Screen and narrowly dodging yet another Ice Beam, which had split into three to make it more difficult on her.

Staryu gave a buzzing whir of agitation, a sound caught between the natural and artificial.

Nau sent up a new Sunny Day, the hot yellow-orange orb brightening the area dramatically as she shifted immediately into a Rapid Spin, scattering great amounts of sand to help disorient Staryu.

Another Ice Beam. Nau leapt from the Rapid Spin, using the rotational energy to rapidly launch herself to the side and away from the beam. Immediately, she followed with Synthesis, regaining a massive amount of her former strength. Sun sympathetically sighed in relief as he too felt the surge in energy, feeding back into him through the sync.

Staryu considered that carefully, using Recover and then just waiting as Nau rushed towards them for a running start and then launched into Bounce.

The blow just barely landed, Nau crashing down on Staryu feet-first but only getting a glancing blow, just briefly knocking them into the sand instead of mercilessly driving them into it as intended. Staryu merely braced for impact, summoning up all their willpower to use Recover again instead of succumbing to paralysis and exhaustion.

Nau seemed displeased with that, easily sensing Sun’s irritation and concern.

She gave a sudden high-pitched battle cry and charged Staryu before they could take to the air again, fearlessly grabbing them and slamming them to the ground before unleashing a long string of punishing kicks and stomps, which seemed to do surprisingly huge amounts of damage, driving Staryu deep into the sand as they repeatedly screeched and clicked in pain and shock.

Staryu was left prone and exposed, with Nau watching carefully. Sun knew it was as good a time as any.

He threw a second Net Ball, and it found its mark, unresisted by psychic energy or anything of the sort.

Even then, the Staryu didn’t go gentle, putting up such a fight that the ball shook furiously… and
then, at the last moment, exploded open. With a screech that could only be described as unflinchingly indignant, the Staryu blasted out a Psychic in all directions, knocking Nau back several meters.

Sun cringed, hunching over and stepping back, but Nau rose to her feet again. And again, Sun threw a Net Ball.

Again, the Staryu broke out, but Sun could notice the slight dim of their power as they did so, the effort they used as they fired off a wide Ice Beam, more a rush of frigid mist and frozen chunks of sand than a directed beam, once again smacking into Nau with impunity as she failed to dodge in time.

But still, Nau rolled to her feet and slowly got up, stubbornly staring the opponent down as Sun’s will blazed through her, carrying her forward.

Staryu’s core begin to flash slowly, dimming by the moment as Sun threw his fourth Net Ball, covertly coating it in a layer of hard light.

Staryu once again caught it, seeming to struggle to do so as it came to a slow and gradual midair stop rather than an abrupt one…

But this time, the attempt to crush it failed.

Even without a face, the abrupt high-pitched trill and sudden tenseness in the Staryu’s body made them the picture of shock.

*Gotcha.*

Nau ran forward, and kicked out just once. She landed a firm but restrained strike to Staryu’s core, stunning them long enough that they couldn’t react. At Sun’s direction, she easily snatched the ball from Staryu’s slackened grip and finally brought it to its target in earnest.

The ball shook with such a burning fury that one might wonder whether or not a *real* star was trapped within… Sun could see the AWE leaking, could feel the creature’s stubbornness to the very end.

But finally, finally, it halted. Well and truly spent, Staryu couldn’t resist any longer.

The Net Ball gave a dull ‘ping’, signifying Staryu’s capture.

Sun gave a cry of joy and relief, so emotional that his disguise threatened to disperse, before he quickly went to pick the ball up. From there, he lavished her with praise and gave her a bottle of fresh water from his bag. Nau took it and began drinking it like it was nectar from the gods, understandably exhausted after enduring such a stubborn foe.

Regardless, Sun knew that much of the Staryu’s advantage had been that he couldn’t truly go all-out against them if he wanted to capture them, allowing them to flex full offensive might against his team in turn. Besides that, his team hadn’t been at their absolute freshest, having to mow through about forty or so other Staryu before finally reaching the last one, who proved to be an even greater oddity than Sun anticipated.

Soon after finishing the drink, Nau actually began to take on a bright glow, but Sun quickly stopped
her. Fortunately, it wasn’t actually very hard. Just a single loud clap caught her attention and pulled her out of it.

Steenée’s evolution was frequently said to be tied to them learning Stomp, but that was a little oversimplified. More specifically, besides just an AWE stockpile, it was triggered by a certain threshold of confidence, balance, and lower body strength. It was simply that it was easier to say it was Stomp because being able to properly use Stomp was an obvious indicator that those requirements were met.

It made sense to Sun that Nau already met the base requirements to evolve again. She fought a good chunk of all the Staryu they went up against, and she was literally at least twice as fast and agile as she was when she first started battling them. Not only was she absorbing their excess AWE, but her speed in particular had improved so much thanks to the targeted effects of absorbing the AWE of Staryu specifically. It was an effect that’d previously been called the “EV Yield”. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that she went against well over a hundred.

But Nau was still incredibly young, and had evolved so recently. If she were to undergo another evolution so soon, she’d only be ready in terms of sheer might. Her skill and technique would still be heavily lacking. Just pulling in a bunch of AWE and getting a lot stronger didn’t automatically mean she knew everything or matured a lot. Sun also considered that Tsareena naturally tended towards being haughty and commanding. Megalomania, arrogance, and sadistic tendencies were commonly reported issues with poorly trained individuals. Nau probably wasn’t fully equipped to handle the psychological shift, or the demands of adapting to yet another new body. As much as Sun did trust Nau, he didn’t want to try and rush her to such an extent.

Sun considered an Everstone, but Nau would only have to hold out for perhaps another several weeks. Still impressively quick, but not so staggeringly quick as six days. Immediate power on her part wasn’t really a concern, since Sun was pretty sure he wouldn’t require her for the next Trial... especially not with a powerhouse like his newest team member.

Staryu was an incredibly welcome addition, given that it not only meant that Sun had an effective answer to fire, but a future extra response to Olivia’s Rock-types. Sun’s team also had a definite weakness to Flying, when he thought about it. Rhovera had mainly pulled through against Pelipper because the bird hadn’t been conscious long enough to realize that high cutting or piercing force was one of Silk Armor’s weaker points, especially if done repeatedly. Strikes with such low surface area were harder to fully absorb. Air Slash, Aerial Ace, or anything similar would make for a good potential counter.

Luckily, with the newest arrival’s confirmed access to Ice Beam and Power Gem, and the potential for Thunderbolt, that wouldn’t be such an issue anymore. Regardless, an actual Rock or Electric-type would be nice at some point... beyond the issue of Sun already having a full team...

Sun was immediately gripped with dread over the mere concept of having to replace anyone, even temporarily.

Technically, they could go to Lillie’s team... but that wouldn’t be fair to her, taking up her slots for future captures...

Sun wracked his brain, trying to find a satisfactory answer for who would be ‘most swappable’... but from his perspective, such an answer just didn’t truly exist. Even when he tried to be as rational as possible, there were just so many good reasons for everyone to stay.

From a perspective of typing, it was probably best to choose Nau or C.C... But from other
perspectives, it fell apart. C.C.’s speed and supportive capabilities were immense, and the Fairy typing was of great potential use... and eventually, once Rhovera evolved, Nau would be left as the primary physical attacker. It was a distinction too important to ignore. Zoroark could do so as well, but the option was better suited as a supplement to Zoroark’s ranged attacks.

Then, emotionally speaking, the very thought of replacement nearly moved Sun to tears. Especially the thought of doing it based on results and outcomes, as if everyone were only a tool.

He wasn’t going to be like those people. Have favorites. Portion out love based on test scores. Cry over poor little Saccha and not anyone else! Make everyone fight for their love! Make everyone grovel and beg and bleed for it! Give stupid fucking Saccha the nicest room! The white and gold Shiny Poipole! The little headscratches and warm, warm caresses! The professional songs and artwork commissioned just for her! The fancy memorials! All that affection for some repugnant, self-righteous, psychotic demon spawn whose birth was a curse and whose death Sun didn’t know the saddest part of! Was it because they wouldn’t ever just shut the fuck up about her, or was it that he couldn’t rip her perfect little throat out himself?!

Sun paused then, blinking away a few hot, glowing tears, clutching his head as a fresh rush of memories came to him and his hearts pounded like mad.


Don’t think like that.

Don’t be a monster.

Sun decided that maybe he would ask Professor Kukui about the team situation at some point.

Nau squeaked up at him in worry, but Sun calmed her quickly. Sun looked at the newest team member then, pausing in thought and focus as he briefly reached out to the creature’s mind, briefly conferring with them on the topic of a potential new name.

“Zmázie,” Sun decided, nodding with satisfaction. The Staryu seemed satisfied enough with their new designation.

A slight play on “starlight”, “zmázé”.

Sun briefly let the rest of the team out to interact with Zmázie, while also giving everyone medical attention.

From a cursory look at things, Sun noted Zmázie seemed like a stoic and taciturn sort, accepting the others but not showing any particularly strong feelings over it either way. Kind of like they were just meeting up with new business partners, or something. They seemed to take themself quite seriously.

The others seemed a bit wary, but at least appreciative that the new team member would be a strong one. Sha was the friendliest, while Zoroark and Rhovera mostly seemed to be happy for the new capture because it meant that they could finally stop fighting the same Pokemon over and over again. Sun had to agree with that too. As much as he liked Staryu in general, the whole process had honestly been a huge chore compared to something actually fun, like Mantine Surfing.

Soon after, he tiredly recalled the whole team and went back to the Pokemon Center where the group was staying. He could sense that Hau was still awake, even though it was probably nearing
midnight. It didn’t really surprise him. Lately, Hau didn’t like to sleep until he knew Sun was back safely. Lillie tended to be quite reluctant about it too, but at least she managed.

Hau was already sitting up in bed, having known Sun was coming a good bit before he even opened the door. “You’re back! Did you get ‘em this time? I bet you did, I can tell you’re feeling super satisfied,” Hau said with a smirk, although he made a passing effort to not be too loud. Sure enough, Sun dropped his disguise and tiredly but triumphantly held up the Net Ball with an exuberant grin and a greenish-yellow glow, eliciting quiet clapping from Hau.

“Now, we gotta sleep! It’s a big day tomorrow! We’re going to Royal Avenue for Lillie’s birthday! And not just that, but I convinced Lillie to invite Moon!

Sun’s nodes grew a bit more yellow with his surprise, as he quickly sat down on the bed to hear more. That couldn’t have been easy!

“It really wasn’t,” Hau said with a laugh, sharing a memory of Lillie curled up on a bed while clutching her Pokedex in anguish.

“\text{You know you wanna ask heeerrr~}” Hau had said, in a sing-song voice.

“I do, but I can’t!” Lillie had helplessly replied, staring at the Pokedex as if typing even one letter would be some kind of massive scandal.

“You’re literally not even trying to ask her out! This is just a friend thing! ...For now, anyway...” Hau had told her, while trying not to laugh.

“Wh-what do you mean by ‘for now’?!” Lillie had cried, looking up at him with huge, mortified eyes.

“\text{Exactly what you think I mean,}” Hau had teased, which earned him a pout from Lillie.

Sun just laughed as the memory faded out around there, and Hau joined in too.

“It’s so obvious that Moon wants friends, \text{and} that Lillie probably has a shot with her, but Lillie still takes so much convincing! Like, really! If Lillie ends up marrying her or something, I hope she always remembers that I did practically half the work,” Hau said in a joking tone.

As Sun latched onto a very particular part of those words, some of his nodes notably shifted deep pink, as he suddenly looked down at the floor with a shy, goofy little smile.

It didn’t take any profound psychic connections for Hau to understand what Sun must’ve been thinking about.

For a moment, Hau was equally quiet and flustered, before he finally found his voice again.

“...You’re thinking about being married,” Hau said quietly. It was essentially stating the obvious, but he wasn’t sure what else to say.

Sun nodded slowly, nodes growing pinker as he briefly squirmed in place.

Hau squirmed slightly too, fear and trepidation building rapidly within him... Part of him knew how risky an idea like that was. Knew that their relationship didn’t really come with any guarantees.
But at the same time, he knew Sun was just as aware. There was no use saying as much out loud and spoiling the moment… they were both thinking it anyway. Sun’s emotions in that moment were almost perfectly mirroring his own. His nodes were trembling slightly.

“...Hopefully, it’ll happen someday,” Hau said quietly, uncharacteristically so. But Sun snapped up and looked at Hau as if he’d shouted it. The emotion and intent behind those words, that much was loud and clear.

Hau felt blood rushing to his face, and he knew he definitely had to be sweating a bit, but he pressed on.

“...I know it’s... kind of a lot to say. Because you’re not human… because I’m just a human. We haven’t even known each other for a year, even though it feels longer... You gave me powers, but I don’t even have a surefire way to get better at using them. My practice can’t make much progress when pretty much every part of it is trial and error,” Hau said ruefully. “And we both know that even though what we have isn’t wrong, it is really different, and it’s a lot to handle... But what I am sure of is that I love you. And… I want to be with you for as long as possible. Whatever that leads to. Because you know… I’d...” Hau paused briefly, voice cracking slightly, but he looked deep into Sun’s eyes as he said the next part, in no uncertain terms. “I’d die for you,” Hau said. Sun could tell that it wasn’t hyperbole. Hau meant it. He meant it with every fiber in his being, and it was equal parts wonderfully charming and terribly disconcerting.

“When you… when Golisopod attacked, I really thought that might be it. I really thought you’d just die, and there wouldn’t be shit I could do about it, and then we’d all probably die! It was one of the scariest things that ever happened to me.... But at the same time, it made me realize more than ever just how special you are to me,” Hau said quietly. “So even though it’s really scary sometimes, and half the time I feel like I’m on a rollercoaster where the track is just being built as we go, and is also on fire, and has parts where it just soars off a fucking ramp and somehow does a fucking pirouette before it actually lands again... If I can be with you, if I can help you… it’s worth it.”

Sun lapsed between a variety of different colors at once, each one rushing through his nodes in pulsing waves.

The words were so touching, but... if Hau was scared, if Hau was uncomfortable... he didn’t have to stay, not by any means. Sun didn’t want to cause him any pain, even indirectly.

“Like I said, I want to. Me being scared is way different from me being unhappy with this in general... and I could never bring myself to just let you and Lillie deal with all this crazy shit alone,” Hau said. “And like I said... I love you a lot,”

Sun scooted closer to Hau in what initially seemed like an attempt to be coy and subtle, judging by his initially gradual movement… But considering the way he was bathing most of the room in soft, steady pink light, and the way he gave up on being gradual halfway through to just flinging himself at Hau instead, it was really about as subtle as a crashing meteor.

Judging by the deep trilling noise and the litany of kisses Hau received all over his face and neck, Sun reciprocated wholeheartedly. Not to mention, Hau could feel Sun’s intense relief. Sure, he’d definitely been serious about offering Hau the chance to leave if it was too much… but anyone could see that Sun clearly wanted Hau by his side more than anything. Hau could tell he would actually be glowing even brighter, but he’d gotten used to restraining himself for the sake of Hau’s eyes.

“Am I gonna have to wear sunglasses every time I do something you like?” Hau joked.
Sun gave a small whine. He was holding back! It was Hau’s fault for being too good!

Hau just giggled, not really minding at all as he happily returned Sun’s affection. He held him close and basked in his warmth, finding it easier to return Sun’s kisses as they became slower, longer, more languid… Aside from the rare bursts of anger, Sun was always highly careful about his temperature when in close contact with Hau, using their bond to make sure Hau wasn’t too uncomfortable.

“Imose lak yavay Ahz, Hau…” Sun contentedly murmured, feeling the warm reply without words as Hau kissed him in response. For all his initial excitement, Sun nuzzled more calmly and contentedly against Hau with a soft yawn, the steady pulse of Hau’s love and warmth relaxing him and making him remember just how long his day had been.

Still, with a grunt of frustration, Sun scraped together enough motivation to at least get up and go shower before he succumbed completely. Outside of his pheromones, he didn’t sweat or have body odor… But, that did nothing to change the fact that a bunch of annoying sand had snuck its way into his clothes.

Sun sometimes wondered why exactly his pheromones could work on a human if there were so many differences in their origins and biology, but he wasn’t completely sure. His best guess was that it was more of a psionic thing, like the substance made Hau more receptive to his emotions and influence or something.

Before long, Sun finished showering and switched into a simple white t-shirt and black basketball shorts, after which he practically threw himself on the bed, delighted to nuzzle back up against Hau. Before Sun went to sleep, he just barely remembered to get out his Ride Pager and summon Munna. Dutifully, the small Pokemon sat at the foot of the bed, their natural instinct being to wait patiently for dreams to arise.

Hau was humming something too, soft and warm to match the comfort of being nuzzled against his soft, warm body. Sun vaguely recognized it as an Alolan lullaby, and it quickly did its job. Sun ended up practically passed out on top of Hau before long, which was obvious from how the vivid pink he emitted steadily faded down to almost nothing.

Hau just gently stroked his hair in a practiced motion, just the way he knew Sun liked it. In that moment, Sun looked like the epitome of peace… No horrific nightmares, no deep-seated pain, no rage or sadness… Just slow, steady breathing and the dim pulse of soft, twinkling light.

Before long, just watching was enough to lull Hau to sleep as well.

By morning, Munna had done their job well once again. Sun and Hau easily slept through the night, and he was practically buzzing with energy, shining bright yellowish-green as he bustled about getting ready for the day. The energy seemed to have an infectious nature, so Hau got ready almost equally fast.

As Sun got dressed, he decided to go for something feminine. A white halter top with pastel blue trim, and a floral-printed skirt, white on pastel blue. His sandals were also blue, and since he was going to see Gladion again, he hoped he wouldn't end up burning them again. His 'nails' were bright goldenrod, and he wore his metallic necklace with little golden stars. His hair was a glossy dark blue,
tied back into a ponytail that'd been steadily growing in length. In the front, he wore a gold-painted hairclip decorated with little molded flowers.

Hau’s fashion was similar to how it always was, as he didn’t really put as much stock in it, although he still wore the bracelet Sun had gotten him.

It took a touch longer for Lillie to wake up and get ready, so she was practically ambushed by the two the moment she left her room, although it wasn’t necessarily frightening… just a bit disorienting, considering they both shouted ‘Happy Birthday’ and then pulled her into a group hug that was almost more like her being sandwiched between them… while also dangling a couple of inches off the ground.

“Y-you guys!” Lillie squeaked, as they let down. “It’s only my birthday…” Lillie said more quietly, although she was notably blushing a bit.

“What do you mean, ‘only’? I figured you’d be used to fancier stuff than this, considering you were like… a gazillionaire,” Hau responded.

“Well, for the last few years… my mother usually decided what my birthdays would be like, and what presents she would get me. I was only allowed so much input…” Lillie said. “And there would be all these relatives and family friends, and so much fuss, and just… I suppose what I’m trying to say is, I think it’s nice to have something more… down to earth. With people I actually care about.”

“...Don’t you have any relatives you get along with?” Hau asked worriedly.

“Beyond the sense of ‘basic civility’... no, not really. It’s all very… Performative? Scripted? ‘Fake’, I suppose, if you want to put it simply. Interacting with family always involves Mother putting all her energy into trying to seem as perfect as possible, and ordering us to do the same. And that’s just when it comes to people she still actually bothers to talk to… Things got rather… troubled … after Father…”

“Ah,” Hau said, getting the feeling it was best not to ask for more information. Sun softly frowned as well. The feeling of trying to deal with family matters getting more strained and complicated in the wake of death… It was relatable, but out of what he could remember, he knew every moment of it was hell.

“Anyway, that’s enough of that. We still need to get to Royal Avenue, don’t we? I’ve never even been before, so I’m quite excited about it,” Lillie said, doing her best to smile.

“I’ve only seen Battle Royals on TV… It’d be fun to try one!” Hau said. “And beat Gladion, if he tries one…” Hau continued, with a hint of irritation.

“I thought you’d forgiven him?” Lillie asked.

“I said I was sorry for how I acted and that I got where he was coming from. That’s different,” Hau said.

“That’s fair,” Lillie said simply. As much as she cared for Gladion, she couldn’t say he was anywhere near perfect, after all.

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So, with that, they were on their way. Rotom had the directions, so by using Tauros and leaving the
city from Route 6, it took less than an hour in total to reach the entrance to Royal Avenue. It helped that Route 6 was perhaps one of the simplest in the entire region, being nothing but a straight line.

However, despite reaching their destination, the group was delayed from entering by the sight of a few Team Skull grunts. They were accosting a young girl, a towering Mudsdale, and a small Drifloon, which trembled in the girl’s careful grasp. It was hard to get a fix on her general age, since she was significantly shorter than even Lillie, but she didn’t quite seem like a little kid. Her face was too wise and calm for that. She had dark skin, and her clothing was a mix of khaki and purple. The fabric, along with her boots, looked like they were clearly designed for rugged outdoor conditions.

Sun growled at the presence of Team Skull. Any other time would be annoying enough…but for them to be there on Lillie’s special day...

“Ah, you three over there! I’d appreciate your aid, if it doesn’t trouble you too much,” the girl called, upon noticing the group. Her voice was steady, but stronger and a bit deeper than her stature suggested.

The group obliged, quickly dismounting their Tauros and hurrying over to the girl’s side.

“Oh, whatsa matter little girl, not tough enough to handle us without havin’ some strangers do it for you?” one grunt out of four asked with a sneer. Sun looked, noticing they were vaguely familiar.

“Wait a minute…” a grunt started, looking at Hau and Lillie. “Ain’t you those kids from all that time ago, back on Melemele? Where’s the freak with the sharp teeth?”

Sun responded with a disconcerting snarl. He supposed he wasn’t originally recognizable, having grown significantly, grown his hair out a bit and changed it to dark blue, and discarded the star marking on his cheek. Not only that, but he’d decided to adopt a more feminine look for the time being.

But with that inhuman snarl, two of the grunts, the two who looked near-identical, immediately took notice.

“Fuck, that’s… uh… him? Her? Them! It’s them, the one we were tellin’ you two about!” one of them shouted.

“Shit, I thought you made that up! You are the Blunder Twins, after all…” said a somewhat pale looking girl with dark circles under her eyes and reddish-pink hair.

“Damnit, Razzmatazz! Stop callin’ us that in front of these kids! We’re Cloak and Dagger, you got it?!” Cloak cried… or at least, Sun was pretty sure he was Cloak. He also hoped that he was correctly interpreting what the grunt said as an introduction, and not just an odd way of saying that their names were a mystery. Interpreting human languages through telepathy wasn’t always a flawless process, even if he had gotten far better at it after over a year of it.

“That’s never catching on, you know. ‘Cause it’s fucking stupid, just like you two!” said a third male grunt, taller and broader than Cloak and Dagger both, with dark red hair and thick sideburns.

“Shut it, you damn numbskull! Better than being named Warhammer!” Dagger retorted.

“Warhammer is a cool name, you shut your damn mouth!” Warhammer, the largest, bellowed.

“All of you, calm down! We’re not here to fight each other!” Razzmatazz cried, putting herself
“I was kind of hoping they would,” Hau whispered from beside Sun. Although it did briefly make him giggle, Sun’s irritation didn’t fully disappear.

“She’s right! Fork over the Drifloon!” Warhammer said to the short girl, in a booming voice.

“My, you’re a loud bunch, aren’t you? Lahar, shall we stomp these scoundrels?” Hapu asked, looking up at her Mudsdale.

“You think you can beat us just ‘cause you got a dumb horse and some new buddies with you? Well tough luck, you little shrimp!”

The ensuing battle wasn’t much to talk about. They went up against a Drowzee, an Alolan Rattata, and a Gumshoos, perhaps the most noteworthy Pokemon of the bunch… Followed by Warhammer sending out a Delibird, of all things.

Sun meant to send out C.C., only for Zmazie to come out on their own and give a battle screech before decimating both the Rattata and Drowzee in all of five seconds with Scald. He had to admit though, it was oddly satisfying. He still wasn’t overly fond of Drowzee ever since that incident with Tapu Koko. Unfortunately, he had to quickly calm the Staryu down when it seemed like they were going to go straight for the grunts next… an action which caused both grunts to flinch away, while Sun was left to wonder if Zmazie had any past experience prompting them to suddenly behave so aggressively.

Meanwhile, Lillie sent out Flaaffy, who took all of three seconds to charge up a modest Electro Ball at the end of her tail and fling it at the Delibird. Like the others, they dropped immediately, barely even starting to dodge by time it’d already landed. Lillie herself was shocked that it was over so quickly. Meanwhile, Hau sent out Poliwag, who seemed like she would be a pushover compared to Gumshoos at a glance… but the larger Pokemon got a surprisingly painful faceful of mud before they could do a thing, followed by Poliwag whittling them down with a series of Aqua Jets and Bubble Beams. She artfully dodged and rolled away each time Gumshoos was able to get even passably close, easily hopping and slipping around its gnashing jaws and clumsily swiping paws.

Lillie’s breathing sped up a bit as she was reminded of her own encounter with a Gumshoos, even down to facing off against it with a Water-type... But she maintained composure through the fact that the grunt’s Gumshoos was just… honestly a lot smaller, weaker, and less scary, even though it was making such a show of trying to be tough.

Before long, Poliwag delivered the finishing blow, an Aqua Jet executed by blasting herself into the air and striking from directly overhead. Finally, the creature collapsed, and didn’t rise again… A fight that left Poliwag somewhat tired, but completely unharmed.

The battle seemed like it might go on a little longer, as two of the grunts were readying new Pokeballs… But then, Poliwag gave a squeaky victory cry and became enveloped in a harsh glow… As soon as the grunts realized what was happening, they were quickly demoralized.

Hau cheered Poliwag on as her body grew and shifted, legs thickening and elongating while new arms sprouted as well.

When the light cleared, there stood a Poliwhirl… looking even more eager to fight than before. Meanwhile, Lahar hadn’t needed to do a thing. The great horse simply gave a whinny of approval to the three Pokemon who battled instead. The Skull grunts begrudgingly returned their Pokemon.
“Yo, Razz! Your Gums hoos got its ass kicked by some little sissy tadpole!” Dagger called with a shit-eating grin, before beginning to howl with laughter.

“And you made it even stronger! Who’s blunderin’ now, bitch?!” Cloak added on, matching Dagger’s expression and tone almost perfectly.

“This is no time for insults! Are you two really such fucking dumbasses that you don’t realize we just lost?!” Razz cried.

“Yeah, well, he cheated anyway, usin’ a Pokemon that was about to evolve and all… I heard being on the brink like that makes ‘em stronger ‘cause of all the power stored up…” Warhammer said.

Hau just rolled his eyes. Count on Team Skull to be sore losers. And blame it on something that wasn’t even true, to boot.

Sun once again snarled at the insinuation that Hau was a cheater, taking a step closer to Warhammer as the larger man just sneered at him.

“What, you think I’m scared of you, you little freak? Just ‘cause you act like some feral bitch?” Shut the fuck up, Richard.

All four grunts stepped back. Even the girl’s eyes noticeably widened. The voice seemed to come from every direction, cold and crisp, like demons whispering in their ears.

“How did you-” Warhammer asked, stiffly stepping away with a mortified expression.

*I know everything about you, Richard J. Cummings.*

Cloak and Dagger snickered at that, and a half-whispered “*Cummings? Richard Cummings, as in you could call him-?!*” The punchline was even quieter, followed by raucous laughter, but the rest could still be heard easily while Warhammer was dead silent, staring at Sun in horror. Hau and Lillie were tight-lipped, not knowing exactly how to react. Even the Pokemon seemed tense.

“I-hey, stop it, just stop it, alright?! I’m sorry!” Warhammer cried. “I’m sorry, okay, i-is that what you wanna hear?!” he said, voice trembling.

Sun supposed that was good enough… the ‘everything’ part was a bluff, after all. The only thing he actually did was find his real name. Not that he would let Warhammer know that. But there was one more thing…

*If there are any other Team Skull members in Royal Avenue, you’re going to tell them all to leave. Now. Or else I’m telling everyone about that thing you did in eighth grade.*

Another bluff, specifically banking on how vague it was. Sun actually had no idea what Richard did in eighth grade, but he must’ve done something to elicit a gasp of genuine terror from the man.

“Alright! Alright, alright, I give! Just be cool, alright?! Be cool! I’ll call and text everyone right now!” Warhammer cried, as he got out a phone and began frantically going through his contact list.

Having seemingly had enough, the other grunts prepared to leave.
“You may have had that little psychic freak of nature on your side this time... But you all better watch your backs,” Dagger said with a sneer. “You can’t push Team Skull around that easy!”

“First, do not talk to him like that. Second, you’re saying that like we wouldn’t have won anyway,” Hau said. His tone was flat and almost over-even, as if he were making a very deliberate effort to stay calm. “It’s not like I only have Poliwhirl.”

“Tch. Whatever. Yo **DICK CUMMINGS**, let’s get outta here!” Razz called, shouting the name at the top of her lungs. Warhammer looked like he wanted to die on the spot. Hau had to try not to laugh, which would completely ruin his stern act.

With that, the grunts quickly left. The short girl, still holding the Drifloon, gave a sigh of relief.

“I thank you all for your aid. Clearly, you’re all fine Trainers... even if I have to admit, finding out that one of you is psychic was quite the shock. I am Hapu, and this is Lahar,” Hapu said, motioning to the Mudsdale next to her, who gave a soft snort of greeting. “We’ve been travelling throughout Alola as a way of growing stronger. And as for you...” Hapu started, turning to look at the Drifloon that steadily floated out of her arms. “Will you be fine getting home on your own?”

The Drifloon ‘nodded’, although it was more like they just bobbed up and down, and then floated away.

“Oh, so that Drifloon wasn’t yours?” Lillie asked.

“No at all. She lives somewhere around here, with a Trainer,” Hapu said. “Meanwhile, Lahar and I were merely here as travellers.”

“Oh, cool! I’m Hau, this is Sun, and this is Lillie,” Hau said, motioning to each of them respectively. “We’re here because it’s Lillie’s birthday.”

“How nice. Happy birthday, Lillie. I suppose that was the reasoning behind convincing Team Skull to withdraw their friends.” Hapu said, smiling softly.

Lillie felt something a bit strange in her chest upon seeing that smile and hearing that kind tone, but quickly and somewhat clumsily attempted to quash that. Especially since things were complicated enough, thinking about how she was going to be seeing Moon…

Sun nodded with a bit of embarrassment, feeling that he may have gone a bit far... But on the other hand, he needed to make sure Lillie would have a perfect day! And besides finding out the grunt’s name, he’d only been bluffing, after all. The rest would be too complicated even if it wasn’t also extremely rude.

Seeming to think of something, Hau continued. “Did you wanna come with us for a little bit, Hapu? You seem like a cool person.”

Hapu notably paused for a moment at that, seeming like she genuinely didn’t expect the question. “...I thank you. I suppose my schedule is not so hectic that I could not enjoy the company of others for a while...” Hapu said.

Lillie let out a small internal shriek at the development, having never expected that she’d actually get to spend more time with the girl. But at the same time, she felt she should’ve known Hau would pull something like that...
“Alright, awesome! The more the merrier!” Hau said cheerily. “Plus, this is enough people for a Battle Royal!”

With that, the temporarily expanded group finally made their way into Royal Avenue.

Besides just the Battle Royal Dome, Royal Avenue had multitudes of venues, restaurants, and stores. There were plenty of people and Pokemon alike walking through the streets, the area had plenty of trees and predominantly pink flowers planted, and the steady clamor of everything going on around them. Still, given that Battle Royals were the main attraction, it was no trouble to find the Battle Royal Dome.

There were even more people inside, but it wasn’t so crowded that the group failed to see a certain someone, with their distinctive blond hair and red and black clothing.

“Gladion!” Lillie called, quickly grabbing his attention although her voice wasn’t especially loud.

“There you are,” Gladion said, sounding somewhat relieved before briefly glancing at Sun and Hau. “And there you are,” Gladion repeated with a half-lidded expression and more derisive tone.

Sun’s eyes flashed in warning. It was supposed to be a perfect day for Lillie. For at least one day, they were all friends. Or else.

That seemed to quickly quiet Gladion.

Hapu introduced herself as well, which Gladion took well enough, and it also seemed to serve as a further distraction from any lingering irritation towards Sun or Hau.

“But, Lillie… I’m honestly surprised you were interested in coming here,” Gladion said. “And for your birthday, of all things…” Gladion continued. Something in him squirmed a bit uncomfortably at how he apparently didn’t know his sister as well as he thought.

“I… have to admit, at first it was because I just… felt like I had to,” Lillie started. “But after all this time… after all the things I had to go through… I feel so… different. I thought loving Pokemon was about always shielding them from harm. But really, it’s more like… trusting them enough to let them fight, if that’s what they want. Being brave enough to guide them, and support them, even when it’s hard for you,” Lillie explained. “Being here… I felt like it would be a valuable experience for my team and I. We have to learn all we can, after all. But it’s nice to be able to have fun in the process…”

“I must say, that’s a wonderful sentiment,” Hapu said. “Even from just the tone of those words, I already feel you’ve learned a tremendous amount. I’m impressed,” Hapu continued.

“Oh… t-thanks…” Lillie replied, hoping she wasn’t blushing. Sun saw that she slightly was. She could feel the struggle of keeping her IQ from imploding as she attempted to navigate conversation with yet another girl that made her feel things. If only she hadn’t come off as so cool and collected… Maybe then Lillie could just act natural.

Those hopes went out the window as Moon approached from the other side of a nearby crowd, briefly waving in greeting.

Her outfit was similar to last time, but somehow Lillie couldn’t help but think she looked even cuter
than before. She covertly swallowed, suddenly feeling self-conscious.

“Friend of yours?” Gladion asked Lillie.

“Oh, yes… That’s Moon, she helped me out once, and we battled. She’s really quite good,” Lillie explained.

“Well met, Moon. I'm Hapu,” Hapu said. Moon just nodded at her in acknowledgment, although she seemed slightly wary, her body language a bit stiff.

“...Does she have anything to do with Sun?” Gladion asked.

“A fair question, but the names are just a coincidence, at least as far as I can tell,” Lillie replied

“Hey, Moon!” Hau excitedly called, getting a significantly quieter hello in response. “Now that everyone’s here, we can get started!”

The Battle Royal Dome actually had several battlefields, some smaller and less publicized than others. Usually, only the main battlefield at the center had televised matches.

The group went off to sign up, opting for one of the smaller and less public arenas. Along the way, they came across two children, a girl with an Eevee on her shoulder and a boy with a Pikachu on his. They were all accompanied by an elegant but slightly aged-looking Espeon, the tips of the creature’s ears and fur tufts going slightly greyish-white. In contrast, the kids seemed a bit younger than anyone in the group, twelve or thirteen. The girl had light brown hair in a ponytail, and the boy had messy black hair.

The Pikachu and Eevee seemed unassuming enough, but Sun could tell the Espeon wasn’t quite your average Espeon at all. Even at rest, not needing to exert any of their power or extend their Field… a deep, deep well of strength lurked within them, churning steadily, seeming to make their entire body silently burn with latent might.

Sun had to do a double take just to make sure he was seeing it correctly. That Espeon was undoubtedly one of the strongest Pokemon he’d seen yet, without even needing to see the Pokemon actually do anything, and yet the Espeon was simply chaperoning children. Whose kids were they, exactly?

“Hi!” the girl said. “Were you guys all going to battle? We need at least two more people…” the girl said.

“...Aren’t you too young?” Gladion asked, skeptically.

“Normally, yes, but our parents got us special permission!” the girl replied, as the boy next to her reached into his pocket and unfolded what looked to be some kind of permission slip as proof. Sun could technically see the signatures, but they were in confusing cursive handwriting that he couldn’t actually decipher before the boy put the slip away again.

“Well, we have six people… so two more will make two even groups of four, which works out great for everyone,” Hau said. “What’re your names?”

“I’m Elaine, and this is my brother, Chase! He’s mute, so Espeon and I translate!” Elaine said, before reaching up to pet the Eevee on her shoulder. “Also, this is Shinka, and that’s Chase’s Pikachu, Risuke,” Elaine said, motioning to the Pikachu on Chase’s shoulder.
“Nice to meet you! I’m Hau, this is Sun, Lillie, Moon, and Hapu!” Hau said, motioning to each of them as he said it. “Sun is telepathic, so that should make things easier for Chase,” Hau added on.

Gladion coughed.

“...Oh, and that's Gladion!” Hau quickly tacked on.

“Oh, this is great! I've hardly ever met anyone psychic, and I've never done a Battle Royale before, so I’m really excited! How exactly are we dividing up, though?” Elaine asked.

“Sun, Gladion, and I could—” Hau started.

“If we battle, you’re just going to gang up on me,” Gladion sharply interrupted, crossing his arms. “Not to mention, you’ll probably just talk to each other in your heads.”

“Fair point,” Hau admitted, sighing… Sun could definitely feel that he was a bit on edge, though. He could see it too, the way Hau’s posture was just a bit tense even when he tried to relax... Going up against Gladion in yet another thing that Gladion was more experienced with…

Sun couldn’t help but feel a pang of guilt at how being involved with him had forced Hau and Lillie to take training and battling so seriously. Not just encouraged them to do so, but demanded it of them, gave them no real choice at all...

Sun was undoubtedly proud of them, coping and adapting as well as they did, but… it did seem like it partly fouled the whole point of battling and traveling being something you did for fun.

Still, before they could get too much further into splitting themselves up, someone else arrived, a more familiar face. A tall, toned, shirtless man with a brightly colored mask. Lillie looked somewhat confused as she took his features in, but Sun was immediately giddy, his brief guilt forgotten.

Professor Kukui! Sun hadn’t known he’d come too!

Sun was hugging him tight before Kukui could stop him.

“Ahaha- a-an enthusiastic fan, I suppose?” Kukui said, stiffly and awkwardly returning the hug as he did his best to mask his clear nervousness. Silently, he relayed the true situation to Sun.

“Aue, cousin, you’ll blow my cover! I’m the Masked Royal! You don’t know me!”

Sun blinked in confusion, although he did reluctantly let go. Wasn’t it pretty obvious he was Professor Kukui? His voice wasn’t that much different from usual.

“It’s- that’s not the point. It’s all in good fun, Sun. Play along, won’t you?”

Sun blinked in confusion, although he did reluctantly let go. Wasn’t it pretty obvious he was Professor Kukui? His voice wasn’t that much different from usual.

“It’s- that’s not the point. It’s all in good fun, Sun. Play along, won’t you?”

Sun silently apologized, understanding dawning on him as he indulged Kukui in his little game, doing his best to act natural after his affectionate outburst.

“Looks like you’re all trying to organize a Battle Royal!” Not-Kukui Masked Royal said. “And for many of you, it’s likely your first time… so how’s about I join in with you, show you the ropes? Is that alright?”

Chase quickly relayed something to Elaine in Kantonian sign language.
“Chase said he’ll sit it out so you can join, since it’d be more fun to watch you anyway,” Elaine said.

“Very good! I’m sure you’ll have many more chances when you’re ready, young one!” the Masked Royal said.

With that, the group finished deciding how they’d divide up. Sun, Lillie, Hapu, and the Masked Royal would go first, then Hau, Gladion, Elaine, and Moon.

Everyone signed up at a booth, writing their names and the Pokemon they’d enter with on an entry sheet just before the entrance to the arena. Sun briefly noted the full names of Chase and Elaine when he went after them. Chase and Elaine Oak.

Oak…

Sun wondered if it was a coincidence.

In turn, Gladion raised an eyebrow at the surprisingly neat handwriting Sun left. ‘Sun Kukui’. He could only guess what his real name was… But at the same time, he seemed… genuinely fond of Professor Kukui, too. Was it really just a convenient fake name, or actually what he wanted his real name to be?

Gladion decided to overthink things about Sun some other time. Soon after, the first battle started. Sun, Lillie, Hapu, and the Masked Royal. They were only using one Pokemon each, so Sun knew he needed to be careful. He’d decided on Nau. Not his most powerful, but her small, nimble frame and typing made her a rather practical decision. The vastly superior raw power of a Tsareena would’ve been nice, but Nau would’ve only evolved just the day before in that case, and would’ve probably been unused to her new body… not to mention, the probable issues with being too immature to handle it.

The Masked Royal, who was definitely not Kukui, sent out a Midday Lycanroc. Sun immediately knew he must’ve actually been the Rockruff from back home, given how he seemed rather recently evolved, but he did his best not to look like he knew. Meanwhile, Lycanroc also did his best to act like he wasn’t too excited to see Sun and Lillie.

Lillie sent out Eu, a decision Sun expected but also regarded with worry. Nau was faster, but only if Eu didn’t use Aqua Jet. Otherwise, the divide in power between them was… something to behold.

Hapu’s Mudsdale was something else even when compared to Eu. Sun was starting to think he should’ve just used C.C… But then he’d have to worry about Rock-type attacks on two fronts. As it was, Nau had the type advantage over everyone in exchange for being the weakest and most frail… Scary, but potentially workable.

Sun immediately went on the defensive, knowing Lillie probably wouldn’t be ruthless enough to immediately turn on him. As for K-Masked Royal, he wasn’t quite sure. He commanded Reflect as Lycanroc rushed towards him at frightening speed, fire trailing from their mouth as their teeth lit up to a fearsome whitish-red… but fortunately, the wolf was forced off course by a beautiful but impressively fast blue orb, full of countless sparkling bubbles. Sparkling Aria, Eu’s newest and most surprisingly fearsome attack. The detonation was followed by haunting melody, expertly guiding a flurry of glowing bubbles towards all three opponents. Nau was least harmed, and easily prepared her Reflect. Sun immediately had her go for Light Screen next, but planned to hold off on a Sunny
Day. Better to see if Eu could tear down Lycanroc and Lahar for them first.

Meanwhile, Lahar finally struck with impunity, rising up on his hind legs before stomping down with utterly ridiculous force, making the whole arena tremble with a massive Earthquake. Its special construction was probably the only thing that kept its foundation from collapsing on the spot. Once again, Nau easily took the least damage, only tottering a bit and giving a slight grunt of discomfort as she finished weaving her Light Screen into her Reflect as well, bolstering her defenses further for the highly likely showdown against Eu. Speaking of Eu, she was hit much harder, but weathered it well, being able to stomach significantly more punishment since achieving her final evolution.

Lycanroc gave a low whine as the shockwaves surged through him, ravaging his bones and muscles with deep aches and pains. He already looked to be strongly weakened… But as the Masked Royal briefly grit his teeth and stood firm, Lycanroc’s eyes suddenly flashed, as rocks began to manifest in midair, raining down across the arena with utterly brutal force.

Nau outright dodged that, her screens slowing the speed and force of the rocks enough to make it possible. Unfortunately for everyone else, Eu did too, sliding around it with an Aqua Jet and then using that momentum to slam into Lycanroc, promptly taking him out of the game. Midday Lycanroc weren’t particularly sturdy, after all. Lahar was the only one actually hit by Rock Slide, simply hunkering down rather than dodging… But even though a good five hefty boulders slammed down and shattered against his neck and his back, he acted as if he hardly cared at all. Sun couldn’t be too surprised, although that didn’t mean it wasn’t intimidating. Lahar seemed to be in the low Tier 4 range of power, above any of his opponents. His Field grew denser, a brief orange aura engulfing him as his body grew more resilient after taking the hit.

One down. Three left. The Masked Royal gracefully bowed out of battle, clapping at Lillie’s job well done. Lillie, clearly knowing who he really was, felt a bit more affected by his praise than she would’ve been otherwise… She grew flustered for just barely long enough that Hapu could take that opening.

Lahar charged in with a High Horsepower, hooves thundering upon the stage before crashing down against Eu with incredible force, over and over, Ground-type AWE sending immense shockwaves through her body. It was a positively ferocious attack, but Eu was stubborn. She would not go down so easily.

With Lahar so occupied, it was the perfect opportunity for Nau to use Giga Drain against Lahar, the massive Mudsdale giving a low series of grunts but powering through the assault, even as Nau became healthier by the moment.

Eu followed with another strong series of notes, sending another Sparkling Aria exploding mostly against Lahar, but some of the bubbles did a piddly amount to Nau as well, who merely responded with a Giga Drain against Eu. Lahar seemed more powerful, but less versatile. He’d make for a decent final foe himself, if Eu couldn’t outlast him.

Eu shuddered and whined as Nau was once again completely replenished… but still refused to go down.

She used Aqua Jet with a snappy call from Lillie, sliding right out from under the booming strikes of Lahar’s next High Horsepower and following up with another blast of glowing, ethereal bubbles…

There was a loud whinny of clear disdain, Lahar no longer able to simply shrug off the undeniable power of such attacks. But still, Lahar stood… and still, Hapu stood behind him. With a trembling voice, her body feeling weak and oddly cold, Hapu gave another order.
“Slack Off.”

Sun and Lillie felt a nearly identical sense of surprise and disdain, narrowing their eyes warily as Lahar took a brief moment to rest. His Field shrunk inwards to an extent, his body slackening as he focused on restoring and soothing what ailed him. He was quickly re-invigorated, soon shown by how he casually stomped the battlefield hard enough to send out another brief tremor. Neither of them had expected a Mudsdale with a healing move… But when they thought about it, that would probably be one of the best moves it could ask for, being so geared towards tanking hits.

Sun commanded Sunny Day at last, hoping for the best. It meant that Eu would be less equipped to take on the massive horse’s sheer bulk, but it also meant that Nau could get more out of Synthesis, and better match both in power by melting through their defenses with the sheer strength of Solar Beam.

A great ball of radiance from Nau’s arms shot up to the highest part of the ceiling, casting harsh light across the arena.

Lillie, seeming to have expected it to some degree, smoothly had Eu switch into an Ice Beam in the midst of charging another Sparkling Aria. Almost immediately, the glowing waters she accumulated became a frigid, pulsing cyan… and then extended a merciless beam, crashing against Lahar with everything it was worth.

Lillie had Eu aim particularly for the feet, rapidly encasing them in ice as Lahar struggled and grunted in clear discomfort, Hapu shivering along with him… But just as he gathered his strength and broke free, Nau fired a searing Solar Beam square into the great horse’s chest, causing him to let out a shrieking whinny. It was relatively thin, but practiced for sheer speed and efficiency over flashiness. One last time, Lahar rose to his muscle-packed hind legs, and summoned the strength to set off a tremendous Earthquake… Eu and Lillie both tottered and winced at the power of the strike, and even Nau still felt a small part of what was its surely immense power… But Lahar toppled just moments afterwards, after seeing that both of his opponents were still refusing to give in. Even after Slack Off, attacks like that were just too great for him to bear.

Hapu gave a small but satisfied smirk as she returned Lahar, quietly praising him for his diligence. She had to admit, she’d somewhat underestimated the Steenee. Although a Grass-type Pokemon, she expected the creature’s frailty would be their undoing. But Sun was instructing her in quite a conniving fashion, keeping her well-guarded and out of focus until the moment was right.

As the battle wound down to the last two contestants, Hau looked on worriedly. “Wow, I don’t know who to cheer for… Sun’s my boyfriend… But it’s Lillie’s birthday…” Hau murmured, as he worriedly looked back and forth between them for a moment before coming to a decision. “Guys, do your best!” Hau finally called, deciding not to explicitly choose a side.

“I didn’t know she was this good…” Gladion said quietly, watching Lillie in rapt attention. “That Primarina… Hasn’t Lillie only been doing this for about seven or eight months?”

“She’s really determined though,” Hau said. “She wants to do everything she can to help protect Sun and Nebby… but at the same time, I think it’s… more than that, now. It’s like the motive is evolving, little by little.”

Gladion felt like he had an idea of what Hau meant, as he took in Lillie’s body language, voice, posture, expressions… On all accounts, it seemed like she was actually enjoying herself.

“….Wait, Sun is a boy?” Elaine asked, tilting her head a bit. “But he’s so pretty!” Chase nodded
next to her, mirroring her sentiment.

“I mean, he’s not just a boy… If you want to call him a girl, that’s fine too. It’s just that how he feels about it tends to change sometimes,” Hau explained. “…But yeah, he is really pretty…” Hau agreed, as he turned back to look at Sun. Gladion could see how noticeably his gaze softened… strangely, it was almost endearing by extension, how much he could legitimately care about someone who wasn’t even actually human… and he had to admit that he generally trusted Lillie’s judgment, so if Lillie had genuinely enjoyed travelling with him for months on end, he couldn’t have been so bad… Not that Gladion was really chomping at the bit to admit that.

“Oh, I get it!” Elaine said. “Well, at least… mostly, I guess?”

Hau figured that was good enough, as he focused his attention on the battle.

With no one else to focus on, it’d be sensible to think that Lillie would just go all-out offensive, having Eu hammer her small, frail target with Ice Beams over and over… But instead, Eu began to use it to form thick walls, fending off the pressure of consecutive Ice Beams. Although each strike did melt a considerable hole into the wall, it gave Eu far more time to react to them.

From there, Nau either had to go over or around… and her own protective shields were on their last legs.

Sun tentatively chose ‘around’, as Nau darted off to attack from a new angle, her Reflect steadily dissolving away in the process.

Eu prepared to extend the wall into more of a fortress...

But Solar Beam wasn’t all Nau could do.

Nau began to rapidly prepare a Magical Leaf, but Lillie and Eu were quick enough to head the leaves off with a thick flurry of explosive bubbles, knowing they wouldn’t be dodged…

A move that left enough of an opening for Nau to fire off one last Solar Beam.

Frantically, Eu dodged with Aqua Jet at the last moment, and both she and Lillie noted the dissolution of Nau’s Light Screen… One clear shot. Just one, and it’d all be over…

But after being so aggressively involved in the battle, the same could be said of Eu…

Eu deployed a series of much larger bubbles, frame still light and nimble enough to leap between them as she did when she was a Brionne.

Sun immediately commanded Nau to follow her up, using the bubbles for her own gain as well.

He knew full well it was a risky game. Almost immediately, a bubble detonated, but Nau deftly leapt out of the way as Sun’s eyes caught the subtle vibrations and shifts that indicated detonation.

Gracefully, Nau glided to another, and another, sending off quick Razor Leaf salvos as Eu continued detonating them, one after another. But Nau’s small, light body was swift, and when it wasn’t hit dead on, it rode the shockwaves and bursts of vapor with ease. Each detonation almost helped more than it hindered, mostly only harmful when point blank.

Eu was clearly in a bind as she kept the game up, being occasionally nicked by leaves she couldn’t
avoid in time while also trying to leap around and detonate bubbles.

The Sunny Day steadily faded away too, and Sun knew his insurance against Eu was waning… There was no more time to reinstate any of those factors that made Nau safer. Eu’s Ice Beams could close the gap of a battlefield terrifyingly fast, and he knew it full well. Go big or go home, as the humans said.

But he and Nau had already switched to a new game, one designed to hijack Eu’s own. Could she keep up? Lillie’s focus was utterly ironclad as Eu maneuvered through the field of bubbles, seeming to switch more to dodging and obscuring the path of leaves with more bubbles.

Sun watched carefully, absolutely silent.

So, if it was becoming a game of who would get tired first…

Sun quickly commanded another Synthesis. Nau quickly healed, using the brief respite from constant bubble detonation.

As Eu pushed herself further, Torrent activated, bubbles swirling around her with far more speed and purpose than before as she took on an eerie blue glow. At that point, Eu’s power was reaching its zenith. Any powerful Water-type attack could completely end Nau, even with her resistance.

Sun thought to try and reactivate Light Screen too… But suddenly, the bubbles rapidly converged on Nau’s position, condensing in size and building with power, forcing Nau to focus solely on fleeing.

Of course Lillie would know she couldn’t get pulled into the long game by a Pokemon like Nau.

Sun gave a deep breath as he commanded a seemingly unending stream of dodges, hops, rolls, twists through the air, bubbles continuing to converge. He trembled, feeling what an effort it was for Nau, keeping up with the frantic pace of what was essentially being completely surrounded by homing explosives, being buffeted by glancing detonations and slowly worn back down each time she couldn’t fully leap out of the way in time…

He commanded a continuous flurry of leaves, desperation mounting.

But if they could clear enough of the bubbles, then maybe, just maybe…

Finally, through the floating minefield, an opening made itself known.

Nau lunged for it at once. Slipped into position just a split second before Eu or Lillie noticed.

Finally, a well-aimed stream of Razor Leaves ended it all. Eu collapsed to the arena floor as Lillie herself also briefly stumbled, feeling a sudden rush of light-headedness rather than the exhilarating rush of Eu’s Torrent.

That was that, then.

Lillie returned Eu as Sun immediately went over to hug her, mentally gushing over what a good job she’d done.

“Well… I did the best I could…” Lillie said quietly, with a small smile. “Thanks for not going easy on me just because it’s my birthday. I had a lot of fun… but I think where I messed up is that I
“You’re a natural, yeah!” the Masked Royal said.

“I’ve never seen such a powerful Steenee. Seems I have much to learn about overcoming type disadvantages…” Hapu said, although she didn’t seem too put out.

“Hapu, you probably could’ve won if we hadn’t ganged up on Lahar with those super-effective attacks,” Lillie pointed out.

“I’m quite sure that you alone would be more than a match for Lahar… But that is through no fault of his own. It merely signifies how much further we have to go,” Hapu replied.

“Sun, if your Steenee is that strong, how come she didn’t evolve?” Elaine asked. “Is she like Shinka? Shinka’s strong, but doesn’t want to evolve,” Elaine said, as she reached up to pet the Eevee perched on her shoulder. “Just like Daddy’s Pikachu.”

Sun merely explained that he was waiting to make sure she was actually prepared and mature enough to handle it, considering that she was less than two months old… and had only been a Steenee for about a week.

Gladion nearly choked on his own spit upon hearing that. He beat everyone with a Pokemon that young, and it was getting stronger that fast?

Then again, everyone else did about 80% of the fighting for Sun while he just focused on healing and defense… That’d probably been his plan all along, to enter a seemingly non-threatening Pokemon that could get away with a strategy like that, while also being able to become a lot stronger from battling three powerful enemies at once.

Gladion didn’t know if he was impressed or distressed.

“It just goes to show that Pokemon isn’t always about whoever has the most raw power and fully evolved team members. Most of all, battles are about strategy, determination, and cooperation, yeah!” the Masked Royal said. “Now, who’s ready for the next match?!”

Hau, Gladion, Moon, and Elaine. Once again, everyone had been required to choose their team member beforehand. The battle soon commenced.

“Dartrix!” Hau called, whipping the Pokeball out into the arena. Dartrix took to the arena with grace, relatively unconcerned as he both literally and figuratively looked down on his opponents from the air.

“Calypso,” Gladion coolly responded, tossing out a ball that opened to reveal a Sylveon, still dyed red, grey, and black like before.
Wordlessly, Moon sent out an Incineroar, her Torracat having evolved since the battle with Lillie. He gave a proud roar, breathing a spurt of flames as he took to the arena.

“Shinka!” Elaine cried, as her Eevee leapt off her shoulder and onto the battlefield, giving a rather adorable cry of excitement that made the others not quite sure how to feel.

Multiple people wondered how exactly Elaine was going to hold up, being so much younger than the rest of them… But Sun could see there was something… subtly different about her Eevee.

The fact that the Eevee so clearly expressed a Tier 3 Field, for one. Just barely, clearly not matching the raw power of any of the other competitors, but neither was it anywhere near as far behind as expected.

Just judging things as they were, Moon and Incineroar seemed most likely to win. The most raw power and bulk, with a large, advantageous movepool…

Still, Calypso took the first move, launching a massive Hyper Voice, accompanied by pink-tinged waves of power. Boosted by Pixilate, the attack relentlessly bombarded the other three competitors, although Dartix stymied the damage by taking a defensive posture with Steel Wing, which was able to smoothly segue into a fierce attack against Sylveon as Dartix fired off a speeding volley of steel quills.

Calypso gave a squeal of pain as the attack dug into their side, while at the same time Incineroar lunged for Shinka with a Brick Break… only for Elaine to respond with an order almost no one present had heard before.

“Bouncy Bubble!” Elaine cried out, with such dramatic flair that it distracted from how the attack’s name actually sounded rather silly.

Shinka opened their mouth wide and set off an attack that looked surprisingly similar to Sparkling Aria, a powerful storm of beautifully glowing bubbles that relentlessly assailed all of Shinka’s opponents… But that was where the similarity ended.

As the rapid detonation of bubbles drenched and damaged the other battlers, they all cringed in obvious discomfort as the water on them began to take on a bright blue glow, absorbing a good deal of AWE before rapidly evaporating into glowing steam and flowing back into Shinka, a process that seemed to completely revitalize her.

Sun simply blinked a couple of times, trying to process what he’d just seen. A Water-type move, from an Eevee? And it drained health, at that?

But… For Normal-types, Eevee had one of the most lackluster movepools. Sun knew, because he’d briefly wanted to capture one, thinking it would be the opposite. Most Normal-types learned a lot of different moves, and he’d expected that one with so many evolutions would have an especially incredible movepool… Only for his research to end up strongly disappointing him. Apparently, Eevee were so specialized towards relying on evolution to survive that it actually stunted their movepool potential instead of helping it. The evolutions weren’t much better, their respective over-specializations being their downfall.

Moon and Incineroar recovered from the surprise quickly enough to follow up with a second attempt at Brick Break, seemingly undaunted…

But Shinka was given yet another odd command, in the form of “Veevee Volley”.
With a burst of incredible speed, Shinka leapt out of the way of Incineroar’s downwards chop and then mercilessly launched herself straight into Incineroar’s face, somehow knocking him back by a couple of meters in spite of their massive size difference.

Apparently, the Eevee had Adaptability, judging by the way she suddenly surged with extra strength directly at the moment of impact, expertly directing a massive push of AWE and raw strength through her body and into Incineroar’s.

Meanwhile, Sylveon gave another booming Hyper Voice as Dartrix once again blunted the impact with Steel Wing, but the second attempt to get off a flurry of blade quills was smoothly dodged, as Sylveon instead made a beeline for Incineroar, who’d been forced to take a knee after three attacks in a row.

“Roost, then Swords Dance,” Hau said lowly, realizing that everyone’s attention was diverted. Dartrix quickly began carrying the order out, rapidly regaining strength as Gladion and Calypso seemed to turn towards him at once, realizing what was happening.

Incineroar swung downwards at Shinka with a brutal Brick Break, but she darted out of the way with Quick Attack and then hammered him with yet another freakishly strong Veevee Volley, causing Moon to cringe heavily as Incineroar just barely hung on.

The big cat steadily got to his feet and blasted a gout of flames from his belt, hoping to force the scrappy little Eevee back.

Gladion was regarding Dartrix warily as Swords Dance completed, knowing that Calypso couldn’t take another Steel Wing.

Incineroar was heavily weakened, so Gladion formulated a plan to get close and use them as potential shielding, knowing they were much easier to get close to than they would’ve been at the start of the battle.

“Work Up!” Gladion called. Calypso gave a battle cry as they began to emit a red glow, their offensive might spiking as Incineroar summoned up a twisting pillar of flame around himself to neutralize Shinka’s final attempt to overwhelm him with Bouncy Bubble.

Hau had Dartrix fire not a Steel Wing, but a flurry of bronze-colored missiles towards Incineroar instead. Hidden Power, Rock-type.

Unlike Bouncy Bubble, the Rock-infused blade quills sliced straight through the firewall while incurring minimal damage themselves, piercing deep into Incineroar’s thick muscle and promptly taking him out of the fight. With a low groan, the towering feline collapsed, and the flames quickly dispersed as well.

Moon only frowned and gave a brief grunt of irritation as she returned Incineroar. It was pragmatic to choose the easiest target first, but she’d misjudged what the “easiest target” actually was.

As Dartrix fired off more blade quills, which were back to their steely glow, Shinka assaulted Calpyso with an Iron Tail, much to Gladion’s chagrin. Regardless, it would take more than that to bring the Sylveon down. Calpyso blew Shinka back with a sudden Fairy Wind, then wrapped it around their own body to increase their speed and dodge.

Just barely, Calypso managed to dodge all but a single quill to their back leg in a graceful series of
leaps and backflips, using a Fairy Wind to increase the flexibility of their own movements.

Shinka wasn’t so lucky, becoming over-invested in striking at Calypso and receiving some nasty hits herself. Regardless, the little Eevee forged on, as Elaine sweat profusely, irritation clear on her face.

Hau had Dartrix get in a bit closer, but strafe his opponents, rapidly going in circles and making sudden swoops and twists as he fired off more attacks. He’d like to close the distance entirely, but Veevee Volley seemed to hit almost impossibly hard for Eevee’s size.

And so came the third of Elaine’s unusual orders.

“Knock that bird down, Shinka! Sizzly Slide!” she called, as Shinka abruptly cloaked herself in surprisingly strong flames and then rocketed towards Dartrix with a single bound, the magnificent blaze around her body helping to propel her upwards.

Hau blanched as the attack still managed to strike Dartrix dead on even in mid-air, notably because Shinka even displayed an ability to use the flames to steer to a certain extent.

What the heck was up with that Eevee?

Dartrix gave a sharp cry as he plummeted from the air, with Hau quickly commanding Roost while Dartrix was in freefall.

Gladion’s response was another massive Hyper Voice, but Hau thanked his lucky stars that he was able to pull through with Dartrix, Roost providing just enough energy to do so… But still, Dartrix was left with a nasty burn from the Sizzly Slide, steadily whittling away at his strength and conviction even further.

Shinka, however, wasn’t able to avoid the attack, and couldn’t quite weather it after having already stood up to so much throughout the battle. Elaine was clearly trying her hardest, red-faced and struggling desperately to handle the backlash of fatigue and phantom pain… but with a pained whine, Shinka briefly trembled in place, panting in perfect time with Elaine before finally collapsing.

“D-damnit!” Elaine breathlessly cried, as she earned a gasp from Chase and a sharp series of yips from Espeon. Even Hau and Gladion briefly stopped. All the color immediately drained from Elaine’s face, as she whipped her head towards Espeon, realizing that she’d said it much louder than planned. “Nooo! Espeon, c’mon! Please don’t tell Daddy and Papa I swore!” Elaine cried, as the Espeon just gave her a reproachful glare.

“I-I’ll buy you malasadas if you don’t tell!” Elaine cried. Espeon seemed completely unmoved. Their lilac eyes gave a brief glow as psychic power deftly plucked Shinka from the battlefield and brought her to the Espeon’s feet, where they proceeded to steadily rouse the battered Eevee with a gentle, gorgeous-sounding Heal Bell.

Even as Hau and Gladion’s battle started back up, Sun gathered that the Espeon and Eevee must’ve been related in some way, as the Espeon gently tended to her and sang words of encouragement… Likely, Shinka was the Espeon’s child.

Regardless, Gladion started the battle back up in earnest with a Swift from Calypso, just as Dartrix managed to get back into the air. A distraction while Calypso positioned themself for an even better attack. One more direct hit from Hyper Voice would end it all.

Dartrix somewhat sloppily blocked, deflecting many with Steel Wing but not able to react properly
as a few pink-tinged stars looped around his wings to stab into vulnerable areas…

But still, with a pained grunt, Hau and Dartrix pushed onwards, as Dartrix became wreathed in bright green light, activating Overgrow.

Gladion shouted it then, the final order. One last Hyper Voice, boosted even further by the Work Up from before.

Calypso sucked in a breath. Dartrix swooped with all the speed and force he could muster, wings bursting with silver light.

At the last moment, Calypso unleashed an absolutely deafening scream, so horrid that everyone had to cover their ears even with the safety barriers, as waves of pink light and raw sound bombarded every square inch of it.

Hau grit his teeth, personally feeling as if he could feel the scream in its full agony, right along with Dartrix…

But they couldn’t stop.

Hau knew it was technically just a battle. Just a game. But still…

If he couldn’t win against someone like this, how was he supposed to win when it mattered? When he had no choice but to win?

Dartrix struggled against the sheer oppression of the sound waves, so forceful they were actually creating enough air pressure to push him back and slow him down… But regardless, he soldiered on, as Gladion and Calypso both looked up at him in shock. They didn’t have much more left to give either.

Dartrix was slowed further as Calypso put the very last scraps of their lung capacity and willpower behind the attack, the explosive outward force only escalating further…

But still, Dartrix persisted…

And still, even as he trembled in place, clenching his teeth even as his entire body begged for him to stop, Hau persisted.

Tapu Lele’s faux-innocent visage and strange, cold gaze filled his mind.

The memories of cold, savage claws, drenched in dark blue.

The sound of all too familiar crying and shrieks of pain, still present no matter how loud Calypso’s Hyper Voice was.

Gladion looked towards him, frowning. Was he… was he alright?

“Hey…” Gladion started, but Hau couldn’t hear him. Of course he couldn’t. Calypso was screaming absolute bloody murder.

“Hey!” Gladion said again, louder, sharper, as Hau’s legs briefly buckled.

Gladion clenched his fists. Hau’s nose began to bleed. He seemed on the verge of tears.
“HEY!” Gladion shouted, just as Dartrix finally broke through. With utterly unmatched force, his Field surged brighter than it ever had, in time with a piercing green glow from Hau’s eyes… and his own Field surging suddenly, in perfect tandem.

Gladion didn’t even notice it. For just the briefest of moments, he was caught up in that surge as well. Entangled with Hau and Dartrix. For just a fraction of a second, three became one.

But in that miniscule snatch of time, it was enough. More than enough to see that crisp, morbid image, providing the drive and conviction to deliver than final blow against all odds.

The image of Tapu Koko and Tapu Lele, beaten and bloodied to within an inch of their lives, helpless at his feet.

Of holding Sun safe in his arms.

The image vanished in an instant, but not the sensations. Not the feelings.

That sickly shame, intertwined with a twisted sense of longing. That burning desperation, wrapped around engulfing terror, which was in turn bathed in a roiling sense of guilt.

But in another moment, that was gone too. Gladion was left to stare out blankly at the sight of Calypso lying completely unconscious, a long gash left across their right side. Meanwhile, Dartrix stood unsteady but conscious at Calypso’s side, one wing still stained with blood.

Gladion looked around, and no one else seemed to acknowledge anything outside of Dartrix’s victory… To them, it only seemed like perhaps a single moment of Hau’s eyes emitting that green light, and then nothing. Or at least to everyone besides Sun, who was regarding them both with a suspiciously knowing, analytical sort of gaze.

Gladion took a deep breath and returned Calypso. He stared down at the floor for a moment, collecting his thoughts.

“...So it was never really about me, huh?” Gladion said to himself, as he quietly stepped away from the arena.

“Gladion, wait.” Hau started, quickly wiping at his nose, although his voice quickly faltered. But Hau knew what Gladion had just seen. He’d caught sight of a desire that essentially amounted to… sacrilege. Blasphemy. A horrible, selfish thing to wish for, even if for only a moment.

To even think of using a twisted thought like that as his motivation to win… To wish such harm on the Tapu...

The thrill of victory was coated in a thick mire of shame and pain before Hau could enjoy it at all.

Dartrix turned towards Hau and cocked his head in concern, crooning softly before beginning to glow a brilliant bluish-white.

Hau snapped out of it just slightly, as he watched the process of Dartrix stretching taller, his power surging to new heights… Everyone else looked on as well, excitement gripping them as Dartrix continued to shift and change until he was no longer Dartrix at all.

The light faded away, and there stood a fine Decidueye.
Sun clapped in celebration, as the others looked on with wonder… But Lillie just watched her brother carefully, trying to read his mood.

“Holy crap, you did it!” Hau cried, as Decidueye gave a long hoot of triumph before gracefully leaping over to Hau, and receiving a heartfelt hug in response.

Hau was silently grateful, knowing that Decidueye must’ve partially intended for his evolution to cheer Hau up again… but the looming unease of knowing that Gladion saw what he saw was still there. Hau quickly returned Decidueye, knowing the adrenaline rush of evolution would give way to exhaustion soon.

Almost immediately afterwards, Hau rushed after Gladion, who was fortunately just going to speak with Lillie and Sun rather than making an effort to get away.

“Gladion-” Hau started, shoulders sagging slightly. “I’m sorry. You shouldn’t have had to see that. Not Calypso getting defeated, just… the other thing.”

“...It’s not like you’re the only person to ever be angry about stuff like that,” Gladion said brusquely, looking at Hau with an intentionally bored expression, as if it weren’t a big deal. Lillie could swear there was just a hint of an attempt to be comforting in his tone, but she wasn’t quite sure.

“It’s fine if you don’t want to say anything, but… what he's talking about, Hau?” Lillie asked, although she suspected she already knew it wasn’t really about Gladion. ”Are you alright? You seemed... a bit off,” Lillie continued.

“I'm fine. It's just... it was about the Tapu,” Hau responded, only loudly enough for Lillie and Gladion. Truthful, but without having to go into the same visceral level of detail.

“...Just because they’re gods doesn’t mean you can’t be angry at them…” Lillie quietly responded. “Personally, I'm not very fond of them either,” Lillie continued, her tone becoming just a bit icier. “I’ve just been trying to stay calm about it because their ruins are important to Nebby…”

Wordlessly, Sun simply stepped forward to gather Hau into a tight embrace. Hau immediately melted into it, not realizing just how much he needed it. It was only then that he realized just how drained he felt, pushing himself and Dartrix 110% to defeat Gladion, Elaine, and Moon... but mostly Gladion.

Both Hapu and Moon just exchanged silent glances, both knowing it'd probably make things awkward if they tried to pry for more clarification on what exactly the others were discussing.

Gladion pursed his lips tight as he looked at Lillie. As badly as he wanted to know what happened, it felt like he hadn’t really earned the right to know more yet. In part, she’d had to see whatever happened because he’d left her with no choice but to find her own way, and go off with those two. But there was one other thing…

“So… when your eyes glow, what exactly happens? What was all that?” Gladion asked.

Hau seemed rather put off by that question, only responding by glancing at Sun, who simply nodded, then glanced at Lillie, who also nodded.

Gladion didn’t exactly expect to ‘hear’ Sun silently explain that he unintentionally gave his friends superpowers that they weren’t entirely sure how to master, but he supposed he should’ve, in retrospect. So many other things about him were weird as shit anyway.
“Knowing you just keeps getting weirder…” Gladion said, sighing. “And more concerning…” he silently tacked on, purely in his own mind.

Still, Elaine and Chase quickly came up next to Gladion soon after that, bringing him out of his thoughts.

“Hau, that was so cool! Your Dartrix even evolved! And Gladion, your Sylveon is so pretty! Where’d you get one like that?!” Elaine asked.

Chase gave a quick series of gestures, and Elaine made a face.

“That Sylveon was not dyed! That’s dumb! You really think Gladion would do that just because a regular Sylveon is too girly looking?” Elaine argued.

Gladion coughed loudly, pointedly averting his gaze.

Chase gave Elaine a shit-eating grin. Elaine just gaped at Gladion.

“W-well, i-it’s pretty! And, um, special! It’s not like dying your Pokemon just to make it look less girly is childish or anything!” Elaine continued, attempting to salvage the situation.

Both Hau and Moon stifled laughter, Hau more poorly than Moon.

Gladion looked like he wanted to fall into an Ultra Wormhole.

“If I didn’t know any better, it’s almost like you wanted an Umbreon but accidentally got a Sylveon instead…” Hapu said, causing Gladion to flinch in an immediately noticeable fashion even as he continued avoiding everyone’s gaze.

“So what if I did?! That was a long time ago!” Gladion snapped, cheeks burning.

Hau immediately burst out laughing, unable to hold back any longer. Sun quickly joined in, the laughter only intensifying Gladion’s blush.

“I-it’s not my fault she’s still colored like that! It’s because she got used to it and now she gets all whiny if I don’t maintain it!” Gladion defended.

“I’m surprised you didn’t name her Evanescence,” Hau threw in.

“Evanescence isn’t an emo band!” Gladion shot back.

“And how do you know that unless you know emo bands?” Hau responded, grinning mischievously.

Gladion clenched his fists as his stance stiffened and his lips pursed tight, clearly at a loss for what to say. “I… I have eclectic tastes, alright?!”

“Now, now, everyone…” The Masked Royal said, although Sun and Lillie both knew the “mysterious” man well enough to suspect that he was actually sort of enjoying their banter. “In a professional setting, always respect your fellow opponents, yeah. Unfortunately, that’ll be my last word of advice for today, as I have other battles scheduled! I’ll see you all again!” the Masked Royal said… but not before passing close enough to Sun that he could subly slip him a small object and communicate something only he could hear.
“For Lillie.” came Kukui’s thought, as Sun just covertly nodded, quickly hiding it away.

But concerning the situation at hand... Sun was respectfully convinced that Gladion was a total nerd.

Having shared that thought with Hau, Sun grinned as he heard Hau stifle another laugh.

The group said their goodbyes, and besides the Masked Royal, everyone made for the exit.

The Espeon with Chase and Elaine gave a couple of yips, much to their apparent frustration.

“Espeon says we have to go too now…” Elaine said, looking down at the floor a bit forlornly.

“Wait, Elaine- What were all those crazy attacks your Eevee had?” Hau asked. “I thought they didn’t really have big movepools.”

“Oh, that… Didn’t you hear about the new moves my daddy and papa invented? They figured out how to get an Eevee to pull from their evolutionary AWE reserves to use an elemental attack they normally never could. So far, Shinka is the biggest success. They have new moves for Pikachu too! Not as many, but Papa’s Pikachu is really good with them, and Risuke is coming along too!”

Some stared, confused by the way she was speaking like they were already supposed to know who she was talking about… but Hau began to piece it together.

Two apparently famous fathers, one with an unevolving Pikachu…

Some kind of special clearance to battle, clearly provided by someone of great esteem…

A powerful Espeon watching over them…

“Elaine Oak” written on the signup board, perhaps the surest sign of all.

“Holy crap… you’re Red’s daughter!” Hau cried, much to the shock of most present, although Hapu and Moon did a rather good job of restraining it.

Chase and Elaine just confusedly looked at each other and then back at the group. “None of you knew that already?” Elaine asked, cocking her head.

“Not at all,” Lillie said. Moon just quietly shook her head.

“I preferred not to jump to conclusions,” Hapu said with a shrug.

“Chase and I were so used to people in Kanto knowing that this feels kind of weird,” Elaine admitted. “It’s different, but… not in a bad way,” she concluded, with a bright grin.

Chase followed with a series of hand movements, which Sun interpreted as an invitation to meet their fathers.

It was really rather interesting, interpreting him. Different from other communication by a long shot, but the patterns and conventions were definitely there, just as much as they would be with a spoken language. If anyone in the… other place were like that, they’d just be fixed right away.
...Provided they were important and useful enough to justify the resources...

Otherwise… Well, Sun didn’t like to think about it. What few memories returned in that brief moment alone were more than enough to put him off.

Once Elaine translated, everyone readily agreed, although with varying degrees of nerves, excitement, and trepidation. Hau was practically buzzing, Moon’s expression looked oddly intense, and Lillie looked like she was trying her best to stay calm. Gladion just did his best to act like he wasn’t bothered while simultaneously trying to subtly fix his hair and straighten his clothing out.

“Bet you didn’t expect that you’d meet celebrities on your birthday, huh?” Hau asked Lillie. “This is gonna be great!”

“Y-yes… I just have to not pass out, and it’ll be wonderful,” Lillie quietly replied. She hadn’t even grown up with any particularly intense admiration of them, it was more the short notice and the principle of the thing.

“But wouldn’t you have met a bunch of important people before?” Hau asked. “Was it hard to handle then, too?”

“Well, sometimes, but… Either way, this is different! I’m not in my best clothes, it’s been such a long time since I’ve been to a proper hairdresser, I got all sweaty from the battle, and, and I, I just-I’ve gotten so careless after all this travelling,” Lillie said, worriedly staring down at herself. Usually, it was a huge relief to know that no one realistically expected a Trainer to look perfect all the time, or wear makeup, or use a ridiculous amount of skin and hair products. For the most part, she’d say it’d been a good experience for her self image… But that wasn’t counting situations like meeting world-renowned Trainers on incredibly short notice.

“You look good,” Gladion and Moon said at once. Gladion raised an eyebrow at Moon directly afterwards, but she put on her best poker face, making it nigh-impossible to decipher the full depth of her thoughts.

Lillie started going red.

“I agree. You look lovely, so there’s nothing to worry about,” Hapu added on, which only made Lillie go even redder.

“Something as small as what a couple of people think you look like is nothing to obsess over anyway…” Gladion said, in a slightly unsteady way that suspiciously sounded almost like he was trying to convince himself too. It didn’t help that he was actually looking down at the ground, and not at Lillie.

He was taken aback by a sudden soothing presence in his mind, and a silent assurance that he looked fine too. But if he or Lillie wanted something else to wear, Sun’s powers did involve illusions...

Gladion turned the offer down, although he had to silently admit that it was a lot more thoughtful than he’d been expecting. Not to mention, from what he’d gathered… He couldn’t really call Sun’s taste in fashion bad. He obviously put thought into it, he wasn’t just some alien slapping human clothes together. But was it a genuine interest, or just him copying things he’d seen to be ‘more normal’?

Then again… it couldn’t possibly be about that. Sun was openly fine with being either a girl or a boy, and didn’t make a particular effort to hide his powers, only his actual species. He didn’t go to
great lengths to avoid notice… a fact which still somewhat annoyed Gladion. So the best possible explanation really was that Sun simply enjoyed human fashion.

Gladion couldn’t shake the feeling that it was… oddly, almost endearing.

Gladion didn’t know how to feel about the fact that Sun honestly looked… kind of nice. Harmless. Not someone that could burn you alive with their bare hands.

But of course, Gladion already knew all about people who could fake things like that. With that in mind, he decided to think about literally anything else.

The group promptly left the building, and they ran into who they were looking for before long. Red and Blue weren't exactly hard to recognize for most people.

Sun looked at the two, curious. Field strength a mere Tier 0, just like most anyone... But... regardless, there was such an elegance to it. Directed and contained so perfectly, down to the tiniest flickers, the most subtle ebbing of its power. The smoothest and most immaculate he’d seen from humans yet. Subtle, humble, but easily intricate and impressive enough to match the sheer spectacle of a Pokemon’s much more powerful influence.

There was a Pikachu there as well… His Field retracted, his power not necessary for the time being... But Sun could tell just from a glance that it was far beyond most Pokemon, let alone most Pikachu.

A great storm seemed to dance within his tiny frame, and wisdom in his little brown eyes. It’d been over twenty years, but still, he was healthy and strong. The same disproportionately ferocious might and unquenchable vitality as what hid in the Espeon.

Regardless... beyond their Fields, Red and Blue were handsome, but nothing ethereal or indescribable. Sun recognized them both, but even in person... they were just people.

“Look, we met these people in the Battle Dome!” Elaine said, gesturing excitedly to the group. “Their Pokemon are so good, and they're really nice!”

“It’s an honor...” Lillie said quietly.

Blue just smirked for a moment, then briefly laughed, although he quickly contained himself. “Sorry, not making fun of you, I swear. It’s just that you don’t have to be so formal, that’s all. I’m just happy you kept our kids entertained for a while. What’s your name?”

“Lillie, sir,” Lillie said.

“Good to meet you! And you are-” Blue started, turning towards the others.

“Hau!” Hau blurted, louder than necessary. “I'm- I’m a huge fan, I saw a bunch of your battles, both of you- I have my own Pikachu, even!” Hau said, as he quickly sent Pikachu out. For his part, Hau’s Pikachu caught the eyes of Red’s... and immediately scampered behind Hau’s legs, seeming both awed and cowed, although the other made no attempt at hostility. He could sense it too. The impossible might thrumming through his every cell, the strength of the miracle burning in his core. It was very possible that until that moment, he hadn’t imagined that a Pikachu could possibly be so
“Hey… c’mon, it’s okay if you’re a little nervous… I’m right here,” Hau said softly to his Pikachu. That seemed to encourage him, as he steadily came out from behind Hau’s legs, then leapt into Hau’s arms.

Red gave silent approval, nodding in acknowledgement as Blue asked the others for their names as well.

Hapu and Moon were controlled about it, although Sun could notice the way Moon fidgeted, her eyes wide and body barely able to stay in one place. Gladion was a bit withdrawn, seeming unable to look them in the eyes, although he was polite enough in the way he spoke.

Blue and Red seemed surprised when Sun’s reply came without him moving his mouth, but recovered quite quickly.

“Wait… are you that kid with the crazy high Mantine surfing scores on Big Wave Beach and Heahea?” Blue asked.

Sun blinked a couple of times in surprise, his expression alone was enough to make it clear that he wanted to know how Blue knew that.

“Naturally, I tried it myself a few times… But it’s really not as easy as I thought. Balancing is easy enough, even though it gets a lot faster than you’d expect. They’re Flying-type, so they block out the wind pressure for you… But the tricks are totally different,” Blue said with a rather dramatic sigh. “The balance and timing you need there is insane.”

Somehow, something about the fact that even someone like Blue had things that impressed him and things that challenged him calmed the group a bit. Sun wondered if that was Blue’s intention in bringing it up all along. A bit of humility to make them more comfortable.

Sun half-wished he could just admit that he was genetically engineered and forced through harsh tests and exercises… Even being weakened after the regenerative treatment, he probably still had enough muscle memory and inherent advantage to pick it up a lot faster than usual.

Not being able to admit to it made it feel like he was secretly cheating, even if he hadn’t exactly meant to cheat.

Sun quickly refocused on the present. No reason to dwell on that other place.

The rest of the conversation was surprisingly comfortable, but not too long, as no one wanted to hold them up for too long. Hau managed to get them both to sign a T-shirt and have Rotomdex take a couple of photos with them, although Hau also made it clear that he wouldn’t upload them anywhere.

Chase made bunny ears behind Elaine’s head, and Blue made them behind Red’s… But the biggest shock was that Sun had somehow gotten away with creating the illusion of a giant bottle of ketchup being drizzled over Gladion’s hair.

After raucous laughter from Hau, Elaine, Blue, and even Chase and Moon, along with much complaint from Gladion, who was comforted only by the fact that Hapu managed to retain enough composure to at least briefly attempt to pacify him, the photo was… allegedly … deleted and retaken. Rotom may or may not have secretly saved a copy of the original.
Just before leaving, Red briefly paused before Lillie and silently motioned for her to put her hand out. Lillie obliged, suddenly feeling a mysterious vibe behind Red’s eyes, a vague shimmer of color that she wasn’t sure if she imagined or not. Slowly, carefully, almost as if it were some kind of ritual, Red placed something in her hand. At a glance, it seemed like it was just a strange cat’s eye marble… A rainbow gradient ran through it, and it almost seemed to shine softly on its own. But it was unusually warm and slightly tingly to the touch, and there was a sense of steady, palpable power slowly thrumming within.

The whole group gathered around. Sun noticed how the stone itself seemed to somehow have an AWE Field of its own, subtle but constant, pulsing like a slow heartbeat within its core.

Hau was the first to point it out for what it was.

“Isn’t that a Key Stone?! Aren’t those like, rare and special?!” Hau cried.

“Damn,” Gladion said with hushed awe, the sight apparently enough to impress even him… mostly everyone else seemed speechless.

Lillie’s eyes immediately widened as it fully sunk it, and it took most of her self-control to not just thrust it back into Red’s hands.

“I-I couldn’t possibly-” Lillie said quietly. “Especially for nothing in return… I didn’t even do anything to-”

Red quieted her with a mere gaze. The gaze of someone who’d seen so much.

“So you’re really sure about this?” Blue quietly asked Red, although the look he shot him seemed to say so much more than that one sentence alone. When Red just nodded, face set with conviction, Blue didn’t argue further. He just turned to Lillie and spoke.

“Look, I know this is probably borderline spooky to you, but… I’ve learned that Red doesn’t do things like this for no good reason, even if it isn’t obvious right away,” Blue said, looking her dead in the eyes. “Not to be cryptic, but we unfortunately don’t exactly have time to explain the whole story there. We have an important appointment-”

“With Auntie Green!” Elaine chimed in.

“Well, she’s really just a family friend, but yeah,” Blue finished.

“Well, regardless...Thank you very much,” Lillie said quietly. “I’ll treasure it always.”

Red gave a subtle smile and signed “Happy birthday,” before waving goodbye.

“Bye, it was fun meeting you all!” Elaine said, as Chase waved too.

With that, they went on their way. Lillie quickly put the Key Stone away, already feeling paranoid about dropping it and losing it or having it stolen. It was nearly the same anxiety she got whenever she got too close to one of her mother’s expensive belongings.

From there, the group did a variety of other things as well. First was going back to a Pokemon
Center to heal all of their Pokemon, and gather around a table and some couches in the corner of the lobby to show Lillie all of her presents.

Sun had ordered her a book on ocarina practice, a couple of fantasy novels, a couple of shirts and a dress he’d figured she’d like, and some news toys for Nebby… But the real surprise was yet to come.

Hau got her a new ocarina, one with an appealing silvery design, although it had the same number of holes as the other…. Which was soon followed by a “nested gift boxes” gag, managing to go on six boxes deep before finally revealing a 5,000 pyen gift card to a bookstore, much to Lillie’s surprise and relief… the fact that everyone, even Hapu and Moon, was holding back laughter by the time she finished made her glad it only went on for that long.

“For a moment there, I was legitimately worried that this was empty…” Lillie said with a sigh.

“Maybe it is empty. Maybe… maybe you’re just holding one of Sun’s ~illuuusiooons~,” Hau said cryptically, his tone exaggeratedly dramatic.

“Don’t say that!” Lillie cried, looking at him with genuine mortification.

“Nah, it’s real, don’t worry. We’re usually not that evil.” Hau said with a smirk, as Lillie sighed in relief.

Surprisingly, Hapu went next, smiling gently at Lillie as she began to speak. “Of course, we only met today… But I did unknowingly rope you into helping me with Team Skull on your special day, so please take these. It’s humble, but I hope it’ll be useful,” Hapu said, as she went into her backpack and deposited about ten Leppa Berries and ten Lum Berries on the table.

As Lillie thanked her, assuring her it was very thoughtful of her, Gladion went next, putting a simple Ultra Ball on the table and silently motioning for Lillie to open it.

Lillie obliged, full of trepidation as she picked it up and promptly released the Pokemon within… As it turned out, it was a Swinub. Small, furry, brown, with stubby little legs and beady eyes hidden beneath thick fur. The little creature gave a surprisingly adorable little squeal before starting to hurriedly sniff around their surroundings.

Hapu’s eyes noticeably lit up at the sight of the little creature. “Impeccable taste, Gladion! A fine Pokemon indeed!” Hapu said. Sun hadn’t even seen her other Pokemon, but he was quickly getting the sense that she favored Ground-types. Gladion just turned away a bit, seeming slightly bashful about the praise.

“Woah, where’d you even get one?” Hau asked.

“They’re annoyingly rare in Alola, but there are some around Tapu Village. I made sure he knew he’d be going to someone else, so he’s already prepared for this. I figured this’d be good, since Lillie only has three Pokemon who battle… and the type combination means Swinub has super-effective attacks against the next four Trials Lillie will be up against. Isn’t weak to fire either, because I made sure his Ability is Thick Fat too,” Gladion explained.

Sun was an odd mix of touched, impressed, and slightly jealous of how thoughtful it was.

Lillie, on her part, was very grateful, happily nuzzling the Swinub close before she and Gladion went about the process of properly transferring ownership of its Pokeball.
Last was Moon, which came as a shock because Lillie honestly hadn’t expected or ever asked Moon to get her anything… if anything, Lillie still sort of felt like she owed Moon something for her help with Flaaffy… and her help calming Lillie down when she started sobbing over it.

It was a white scarf with relatively thin fabric, more suitable for decoration rather than keeping warm. But at its ends, for about the last 1/5th of its length in either direction, it was studded with a litany of little silver stars.

Lillie began to blush, then blushed even more fiercely when Moon quietly added on that she knit it herself.

“You… made this… for me?” Lillie said quietly, disbelieving. The quality was easily something that could be sold in a store. Moon just nodded, outwardly acting if it were the most obvious thing in the world… although she was having trouble actually looking Lillie in the eye.

“…I have free time,” Moon quietly replied, although she still averted her gaze. Lillie would never admit that her heart was beating alarmingly fast, or that her palms were weirdly sweaty.

Although Burnet was busy with research, and Kukui was busy too, for completely non-suspicious reasons that had nothing to do with secret identities, Sun still had their gifts. Six Max Elixirs and six Max Revives from Burnet, likely in case of emergency. Kukui sent a TM for Bulldoze, which was conveniently well-timed with Swinub’s fresh arrival.

“Thank you so much! All of you… this is really so wonderful…” Lillie said, verging on tears of joy. Hau and Sun both simultaneously swept her up into another tight hug… and Gladion somewhat reluctantly followed after they finished, clearly a bit flustered about showing affection in front of others.

Next, the group had lunch at a malasada shop, since Hau had apparently heard that they were selling mythic malasadas, a limited-time specialty item. Not only delicious, but safe and appealing to an extremely broad range of Pokemon. Lillie didn’t really mind having them in lieu of a birthday cake, especially not once she actually tasted one. She was originally a little skeptical, half expecting that it would just be some mildly unusual flavor marketed as “special” to sell more… But she was wrong. It tasted like high-quality Lum Berry filling, but expertly blended with a few other subtle flavors that she couldn’t quite place. All she could tell for sure was that it was so rich that her mother wouldn’t have let her eat it beyond the absolute most special occasions.

Meanwhile, everyone besides Hau and Lillie stared in wide-eyed disbelief when Sun put mustard on his… but grabbing their attention just as much was the fact that Hau somehow obliterated two dozen by himself. Hau’s explanation was only that mythic malasadas should be enjoyed to the fullest while you have the chance.

Fortunately, they were still able to get plenty to give to their Pokemon later too, considering that they had far too many to feed on the spot.

From then until nightfall, the rest of the day was spent on a variety of things. But they spent most of their time in a place known as the Royal Arcade, despite Gladion’s grumpy insistence that he was “too old” for something like that.

There was a rule of each person being able to have one Pokemon out at a time, so the group used
that to its fullest. Lillie used some of the time to get to know her new Swinub, but it wasn't exactly great. The loud noises and unfamiliar odors intimidated the little creature, so she couldn't let him out for too long.

Between Sun, Hau, and Moon’s efforts, Lillie was gifted at least six more stuffed plushies of varying size and species.

For all of Gladion’s supposed disinterest, he still spent about 12,000 pyen in total, and somehow lost six games of Dance Dance Revolution in a row, all to Salsa.

He had no idea how in the world Lillie could have possibly trained such a ponderous creature to be so strangely nimble. It had such stumpy little legs...

Once nightfall came, Sun ‘mysteriously’ went off on his own, although everyone could tell Hau knew perfectly well what was going on. While giggling to himself and giving them all the absolute minimum of information to go on, he led them all to the central plaza area of Royal Avenue, then told everyone to simply ‘wait and see’.

Sun didn’t have to go particularly far to get to where he wanted to go. He just needed good elevation.

Sun sent out Zoroark, and both quickly scaled the highest tree they could find towards the opposite end of Royal Avenue. It was quite removed from all the hustle and bustle, and allowed them to look out over the entire area. Fortunately, Royal Avenue didn’t have anything taller than the Battle Royal Dome itself, so it seemed there’d be good visibility for what Sun had planned. Next, he scanned the crowds with his powerful eyes, simultaneously using his bond with Hau and Lillie as a sort of compass to direct where he should look. He found them soon enough, sitting with Gladion, Moon, and Hapu on benches in a sort of central plaza area, well-positioned to easily see what he was about to do. All according to plan. Hau never disappointed.

Sun gave an excited grin, having practiced many times for the moment. Zoroark was out with him, waiting for him to give the signal. Her illusion abilities had expanded greatly since evolution, but battles mostly relied on her other skills, and weren’t the best way to train her illusion abilities. Having her help with his plans had been a good way to train her more in that regard while simultaneously serving another purpose as well.

Simultaneously, Sun and Zoroark raised a hand into the air, and began an illusory fireworks display. The light and color, but none of the sound. As whimsical as it seemed, it was a genuine struggle to stretch his Field high enough into the air to actually ensure it would be seen, but that was part of what Zoroark was for. The sync of their Fields pulsed together, intertwining and supporting one another, making the skyward stretch that much easier.

The sky swam with colors, both glittering explosions and things that wouldn’t be feasible with fireworks alone, becoming more of a fanciful lightshow instead. Elegant duels and aerial battles between massive creatures formed of light, set to a backdrop of bursting colors. Stars, roses, streaking meteors of scarlet, patterns that branched and spun outwards in elaborate swirls and fractals.

Everyone stopped to look, smiling and gasping at the display, although only a handful knew who it was actually from, and the reason why.

Lillie watched, enraptured. To most people, it would seem like just a lightshow, but she recognized
the content. Things specifically designed to appeal to her and grab her attention, knowledge steadily gleaned over more than a year of constant companionship. Explosions of her favorite flowers, her favorite colors, bursts of light shaped into the bright shapes of her favorite Pokemon…

Even Moon was smiling the most either Hau or Lillie had seen yet, while Hau was cheering and clapping, trusting that Sun could still see him from his position.

Gladion still wasn’t completely sure how to feel. It was almost… jarring.

The same person that attacked him, came snarling and smoldering and pounding against his mind… Had not only organized a fun day for Lillie’s sake, but bought her presents, won her toys, and specifically practiced a special lightshow just for her…

It was… almost suspicious, in a way. So much effort that he was having trouble believing it was really all out of the goodness of Sun’s heart...

But Gladion supposed that it wasn’t like he’d done nothing at all to bring on Sun’s prior behavior.

He, at least emotionally speaking, harmed someone that Sun loved. And Sun would work just as ardently to protect them as he currently did to please them.

In that context… How he responded wasn’t really alien at all. The execution was, but the cause wasn’t at all difficult to parse.

If humans had the same powers, it wasn’t that much of a stretch to think that some of them would act the exact same way.

Gladion… couldn’t exactly say he disliked a person like that.

“Gladion?” Lillie asked quietly, turning to him during a brief lull in action. Sun was getting tired, along with needing time to focus and mentally prepare what the next ‘fireworks’ would look like. “What’s wrong? You look distracted.”

“I was just thinking… Sun really cares about you, doesn’t he?” Gladion asked, voice a bit soft.

“He really does,” Lillie responded with a smile. “But why are you bringing this up, exactly?”

“I spent a lot of time…” Gladion puzzled over how to word it without being too plain or explicit about Sun’s nature. “Othering him. Building him up in my head as this big, weird, ...something. Thinking he didn’t really belong. Puzzling over him like he’s just some kind of curiosity.” Gladion continued. He figured that was a good way to put it. Anyone else listening would just think he was talking about Sun’s gender, or style of dress. “But he’s just a different kind of person. Like it or not, I at least have to accept that much.”

Lillie only smiled more, relief and joy washing over her as she heard Gladion say those words.

It really was a lovely birthday.

Chapter End Notes
This is so long… whymst I do this to myself…

“Oh make it longer, it’s been a while, you should make up for it” Thanks for torturing present me, past me! Did yuo kno that I have to EDIT and PROOFREAD this fuckshit?! No, because you only think about yourself!

So, chapter stuff:


Zmázie (Zz-mah-zee): A play on it, bearing intentional similarity to “Zossie”.

Lahar: A kind of volcanic mudflow.

Shinka: Although this is the Japanese word for ‘evolution’, it has multiple other potential meanings depending on how it’s written.

Risuke: An actual Japanese name, but in this specific case it’s from “biri-biri”, a Japanese onomatopoeia for electricity, and the “-suke” suffix on a lot of Japanese male names.

For reference, “Incanze” in my mind is actually pronounced like “In-cahn-zé”, with an accented e. But it’s not critically important, so yeah. (I’m lazy when it comes to accent marks)

Yes, Viridian Children are from Pokespe. This AU hodgepodes bits and pieces of everything, really.

I do know that Zossie and Dulse are supposed to show up again before you go to the Battle Royal, but I’ve altered event sequence a little.

“Jeez Beetles, it’s Lillie’s birthday, but *Hau* evolves two Pokemon?” I gotta admit this is half because I just like Decidueye a lot more than Dartrix, so I was getting a little impatient to finally get Dartrix out of the way.

"Ohr, but Beetles, why does this chapter keep bullying Gladion?” it’s because people who take themselves that seriously need to be lovingly knocked down a peg. I do like him, he's just the easiest target for jokes at someone else's expense.

Also, the idea of Chase and Elaine being Red and Blue’s kids isn’t my own idea, I’m just borrowing it from stuff I saw on Tumblr. (And yes, I actually did like Let’s Go. A close friend got it for me, so it’s actually rather important to me)

To briefly explain how this all factors into this universe’s timeline:

Here, Red and Blue are 36, rather than also being kids in Lets Go. They started doing Kanto’s gyms at 15, and it took them about two years to finish.

By time Red completed his journey and his Mountain Hermit Phase, he was about 20. He and Blue were like 28 when they got the kids. The kids were adopted, so they were both already four years old.

So, Chase and Elaine are currently about 12 and a half… Meaning that my universe’s alternate version of Let’s Go would happen right as Alola’s events are winding down.
And I know Battle Royals aren’t actually supposed to be ‘last Pokemon standing’ in the
gameverse, although I think they are in the anime, but here they definitely are. Because
I’m God, and Gamefreak answers to me, effective Right Now, Immediately In This
Moment.

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