

POKÉMON
REBIRTH

CLUE ME IN

“Don’t play around that old well,” those New Bark townsfolk’d say. “Bad things will happen to you.”

Well goodness, I certainly wasn’t intending to *drink* the water from it. Sure, I may have been somewhat dim-witted back then, but I wasn’t *completely* idiotic! Smart enough a kid to know those tales of ghost pokémon haunting the forest were nothing but a load of hooey, pishposh, nonsense cooked up by parents to prevent their little ones from wandering in there alone. The best bug pokémon could be found around the well in that forest, and no silly stories were going to keep me from going in there and finding them!

Back then, I wanted to be a bug pokémon trainer, y’see. Hahaha! I know...you wouldn’t believe it looking at me now, would you? So many years have passed since that day. We grow, we change, sometimes we lose a part of ourselves. Puzzles...life is one big puzzle, isn’t it? I’ll give you one of mine – how was it possible for me to obtain a room-sized sponge, let alone cram it through the door of said room? Ahaha!

But I digress. Thing is, bug pokémon may be physically weak, but their speed and craftiness sure make them excellent partners for practical jokes.

What? I never said I was out to *battle* anyone...oh no no no. Me, I was interested in pokémon for their fun value. Always looking for a laugh, y’see. Never a dull moment.

So there I was, early one morning, out with a pair of binoculars and a net looking to catch my very own bug pal. I’d asked my buddy Vernon to wait for me by the town fountain and, right on cue, there he was, carrying a small bag over his shoulder. Believe you me, he was looking very nervous, but that wasn’t any surprise. Twiggy and I came

from two different backgrounds, y'see...

“Where'd I get 'Twiggy' from?” you're wondering? Just a little nickname I cooked up. He looked like a tree, what with being so spindly, and that funny little patch of brown hair that protruded from the top of his head. And his surname was 'Elm' - it just fitted! Ahahaha!

Yes, Vernon was something of a mama's boy. Spent most of his time alone and was far too serious for any of the other youngsters' likings. He needed someone to step in and add a bit of spice to his life. A spot of 'bang' to his 'sha'. So I made that someone...me! Haha!

Must have been quite a sight to see, the loner and the joker, together like two cherubi on a stalk. Him being the little one, of course. Hahaha! But seriously, I loved that guy. And he had access to a lot of neat things which wealthy parents in the medical profession could afford with no problems. Fancy Pokéballs, for instance. I remember them well - two green-blue and white spheres with a black crisscross pattern on, lying in the bottom of Twiggy's rucksack.

“If I'd taken more Net Balls than that, dad would have noticed,” he'd insisted. Musta noticed my expression - truth to tell, back then I *had* felt pretty disappointed. But a couple of Net Balls were better than none! It was enough to get me a weedle...possibly even a ledyba! So I thanked him and we went off into the forest.

Twiggy didn't like the idea one bit. But he tended to panic over the smallest things, and stories about ghost pokémon, true or otherwise, unsettled him. I wasn't that bothered, myself - for some reason, ghost types never came near me. Guess I was scary to *them*, huh? Ahahahaha!

Thing was, Vernon had never been the luckiest of guys around pokémon. For some reason or another, he always seemed to manage to provoke them into attacking him. Not the best trait to own when your father is a Pokémon Researcher, eh? Haha! In either case, I hadn't wanted my little buddy to get unnecessarily antsy, so I'd brought along some Repel sprays for him to use if things turned bad.

That morning seemed to be a perfect morning for catching bug pokémon, too. The temperature of the air was humid enough to wake them up and still keep other predators nice and drowsy. But as Vernon and I wandered through the forest, glancing up at the trees surrounding us, there didn't seem to be a bug pokémon in sight! Or *any* pokémon, for that matter. All we could hear was the rushing of a faint breeze and the occasional cry of one of those wacky 'bird' things, and *those* never showed themselves anyway.

Vernon had started to wonder if we should've brought honey, but I was certain that whatever was in that well would do more than a decent job of attracting a top notch bug type. Sure, it *would* have done...if the well hadn't been covered over.

I could have left it at that, I know. I could have walked away and resigned myself to looking elsewhere, maybe even go back and get some honey like Twiggy had suggested. But you know kids – far too stubborn and curious for their own good. I was certainly no exception!

So there I was, being all 'Mr. Machop', trying to push that stone slab off the top of that well all by myself. At first, Vernon had just stood there and protested about my further rule breaking. But he

knew I wasn't going to give up that easily. Guess he didn't want to see me break my back like those rules, because that little guy joined right in with moving the slab out of the way.

When we finally uncovered it, woe of woes! The stagnant water that would have once attracted many a fine specimen of bug...it had vanished, just like the pokémon themselves! The well was dry as a bone, and let me tell you, that inky blackness seemed to go on forever. It was rather like one big optical illusion, and you know me and illusions!

Yes, my curiosity was to get the better of me. As if the ceaseless dark had not captured my imagination enough, the flicker of light I had noticed somewhere in the depths of that well just made me want to climb down there all the more.

The well wasn't exactly all that large. In fact, it had only been wide enough for me to shimmy down one of the sides by using sticking-out bricks and dangly roots as handholds. Lucky for me I was a lot slimmer back then, huh? Haha!

As I'd moved deeper into the earth, the atmosphere around me didn't grow darker, as would be expected. Instead, the surrounding air started to give off a faint reddish glow. I have to admit, I did feel a little afraid right then, with waves of light rippling down my arms, over my hands and fingers.

Last thing I remembered seeing before descending into the shadows was Vernon's frantic expression as he started fiddling anxiously with his glasses. Then a mischievous idea struck me, and I let out a loud yell, as if I had accidentally lost my grip. You should have seen the look on Twiggy's face! Ahahaha!

I got to see it a bit closer than I would've liked.

See, Vernon managed to topple right down the well and straight into *me*...and pretending to lose my grip ended up not being so pretend after all.

So there I was, lying on my back with my legs in the air like an upturned shuckle, with Twiggy sprawled a short distance away, muttering to himself. When I'd flipped myself upright, I noticed he was trying to rearrange his hair. He needn't have bothered, it looked better the way it was – like a sentret after a wash and blow-dry, ehee.

“What did you do that for?” we'd exclaimed, almost in unison.

“I thought you didn't *want* to come down here,” I'd added, before Vernon was able to relay his side of the story. The marks from the straps of his backpack were still stinging from where they'd buried into my cheeks.

Vernon insisted that he *hadn't* wanted to follow me into the well, that the edge had given way and left him no support. Fortunately the well hadn't been as deep as it had first appeared. Being the ever-inquisitive, I'd turned around to see where we had ended up. Twiggy didn't seem too concerned with our whereabouts, however. He'd been far too occupied with complaining. At least until he noticed what *I* was gawping at.

Would you believe it, somehow, we had ended up in a large room with a white tiled floor, filled with crazy-looking machinery. Yes, seriously...at the bottom of a well! You can imagine how wide open my mouth was just then. For a good few minutes, nothing escaped.

“What the fnargberries is all *this* doing down here?” I questioned at last. ‘Fnargberries’ was a word I used to use often – better to be ridiculous than vulgar, after all!

Vernon had pulled a face in response. Not from my odd expressions – he was used to those – but rather since he was equally baffled by the situation we’d landed in.

“Looks like some mad scientist’s laboratory from one of those weird movies you love to watch so much,” he’d remarked. Knowing him, that had been a joke. And knowing my insatiable curiosity and wild imagination, I’d taken it as fact.

Twiggy had slapped his forehead and told me this was ridiculous. Even if a science lab *were* to exist near New Bark Town, it was hardly going to be under the ground like this, he’d exclaimed. Logic and sensibility told him it was more likely to be a water pumping station or some such. But logic and sensibility have never been my strong points. Ahahaha!

Besides, what kind of water pumping station gives off a weird red glow? Something told me more was going on than met the eye, and I was determined to find out. Vernon was determined to leave, but I was the more insistent. I had already spotted an intriguing looking book upon a desk which was placed in front of one of the nearby machines.

It appeared to be some kind of journal, yet the handwriting upon the pages had been almost undecipherable. Any sentences I had been able to make out were written using such fancy words, they still hadn’t sounded all that sensible. A mad scientist’s progress log if I ever saw one.

Vernon was starting to get noticeably sick and tired of my wild fantasies, about to drag me away, when his eyes alighted upon the book in my hands. I could see the bewilderment on his face – especially easy to spot considering it wasn't a common expression to see on Twiggy.

“Buh-but it doesn't make sense!” he'd stammered. “Why build a science lab here in the forest, and *underground*, of all places?”

“They put the word 'mad' in 'mad scientist' for a reason,” I'd reminded him. “The things these kind of guys get up to don't always make sense.”

We proceeded to wonder what the person who wrote the journal was getting up to, but neither of us had any idea. Vernon had been somewhat right to compare what he saw to a water pumping station. There were thick copper pipes with little wheels to adjust the pressure attached to them all over the place. Clouds of steam occasionally blasted into the reddish air and the general sound of the whole thing was pretty painful on the ears.

Whatever was going on, it couldn't have been any small feat from the amount of huge machines in the room. I'd figured it best to walk further – partly out of a continued urge to explore, but mostly to try and get out of range of the terrible noise. Worse than my grandmother's singing, ahahaha!

I'd probably have been more disappointed about losing my chance of finding any bug pokémon in the area if the area hadn't been so fascinating. I should've been more wary...but that was me. Not enough fear to fill a farfetch'd, that was my problem!

What we came across next was to catch me unawares. Yes! Me!

A wall of tubes - that was the best way to describe it. Each tube reached from the tiled floor to the rocky ceiling, and every tube was filled with a pokémon egg. No two were the same colour or pattern. If that hadn't been jaw-dropping enough, there towered a huge machine unlike anything I'd seen before...at least not in real life. Looked a bit like the conveyor belts at the grocery store, actually. One end disappeared into a box rather like my dad's old television, except our TV wasn't exactly hollow.

Twiggy was finding it all very hard to handle. Can't blame him really - to hope it was all a dream and that he'd wake up in his bed, for everything to be normal. I'd seen it as more of an adventure, an opportunity to get the bug type I'd wanted for so long. Besides, there were far more pressing things on my mind at the time. Freeing those eggs from their containers. No doubt the scientist responsible had taken them all to use in his *dastardly* experiments.

Ahhh, childish recklessness. I'd figured what else could those buttons on that box-like device have been for, besides keeping the tube hatches shut? But friends...better to have left those beastly buttons alone - they held back many a terrible secret.

And that conveyor belt began to whirr. Before I could work out what was going on, I heard Vernon give out a strangled yelp. One of the eggs, a pink one, had been snatched from its tube into the air by a crazy bunch of arms that had come out of the machine.

Panic! I tried to pull it back, but my efforts were useless. The machine was too strong, and was dragging the egg towards its innards. I tried to turn the machine off. I slammed at every button!

'What happened after that?', you ask? Is a distant, fuzzy recollection. You can tell I thought before I acted, can't you? I still do!

Ahaha! But I do remember jumping onto that conveyor belt - throwing myself into the depths of that machine to wrench those arms from the pokémon egg with every ounce of strength I had. I struggled, I kicked. My leg must have slammed into something, because the machine suddenly let me and the egg go.

But everything after that...distant...fuzzy. Sirens...wailing. Twiggy and I ran as fast as we could, searching for a way out of that crazy place. One corridor after another. When you're a kid, even a laboratory can seem like a great, big frustrating maze. Maybe that's where I got my inspiration from, huh? Bwahaha!

No, no you're right. It is hardly a subject for comedy.

But I don't quite recall how I got out of there. Maybe it was the shock of the whole experience, or the shock of whatever strange energy shot right up my leg. I'll tell you, I swear it did something you wouldn't believe!

Here, I'll take off my boot and...see that? Haha! Not every day you come across a guy with a foot like a slowpoke, huh? I don't show that to everyone, I assure you. But you...I can tell you're not like the rest of 'em. That makes two of us!

Guess that's what you get for kicking a slowpoke egg in a mad scientist's machine though, eh? I'm just thankful that slowpoke got out okay. In fact, more than okay! He's made it out there in the big wide world, ol' 'pokey. *sniffle* I'm so proud of him...evolving all the way to a slowking and becoming the ambassador for an ancient culture.

Your expression is sceptical. You do not think a slowking is capable of ambassadorhood? He's told me so, in his letters! Here, look... "Dear Sudo - the weather here on Shamouti is beautiful as

usua-"

You're going now? Wait! Could you not stay for one last drink? I have a good batch of Tamatoberry juice in the cooler..

Madame?

Helloooo?

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