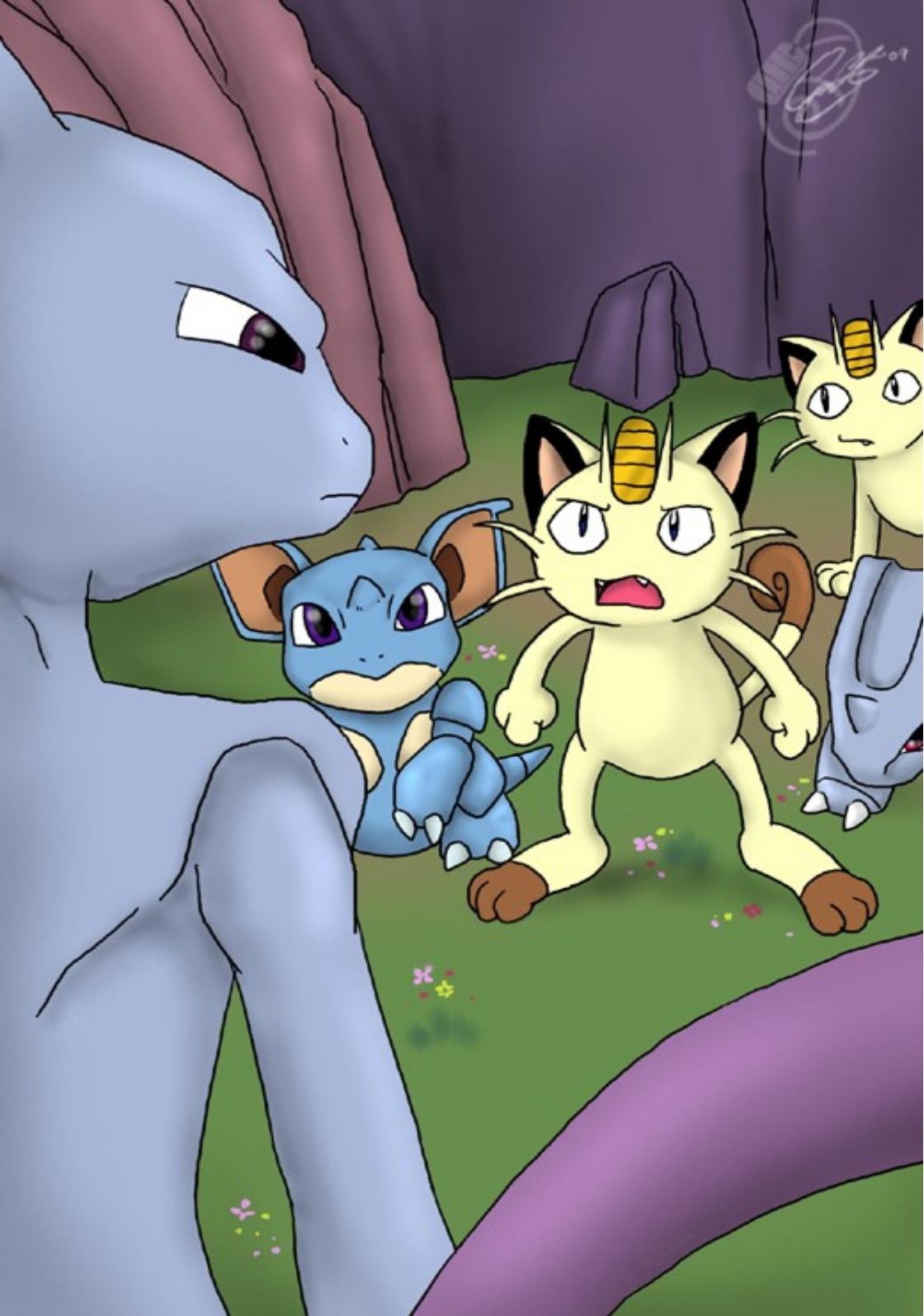


POKÉMON
REBIRTH
FLEETING SHADOW





THE MOUNTAIN OF VISION

"You can't do dat!"

It was a singular meowth's intervention that had saved the recollections of all present under Mt. Quena that night. One objection that spearheaded the thoughts of a multitude of cloned pokémon and the humans which stood by them.

"It's only natural t'wonder about who an' where ya came from," the meowth had protested, as it had glanced to the fully evolved yet youthful nidoqueen offspring. Mewtwo had detected the personal implications in this unusual pokémon's words as it uttered them in heartfelt tones. There were gaps in its memory much like his own - gaps which the psychic feline had not been responsible for and which he was unable to fill.

"...just forgetting things doesn't change the fact that they happened," the spiky dark brown haired young man had added calmly.

"Don't you think that everybody deserves to know who they are and where they came from?" the orange-haired girl next to him had inquired with a faint smile.

Yes... Mewtwo had nodded. *They deserve to know...*

And so do I.

There were two major issues facing the pokémon as he left Mt. Quena under a shroud of darkness. One of them was the issue of his own origins. The second was the question of his life's purpose. Neither of which Mewtwo had any idea to address. As he flew deep into one of Johto's nearby forests, the words he had uttered two years ago played in the back of his mind.

"The circumstances of one's birth are irrelevant. It is what you do with the gift of life that determines who you are."

And what had *he* done? Little more than isolate himself and his fellow cloned pokémon upon some unreachable plateau. Had it been out of fear? Mewtwo could not see what *he* had to be afraid of – he owned abilities far beyond those of any creature he knew existed. Perhaps the fear had been more for the pokémon accompanying him. Since *he* had been the one who had created them, Mewtwo had felt a deep responsibility for their welfare. Scattered amongst natural-born pokémon, the psychic feline would have no way of protecting them all. But gathered here...

Mewtwo snorted, dismissing his wandering thoughts. Maybe all that was just an excuse to cover up his own insecurities about the world. His intelligence was vast, able to grasp some of the most intricate scientific theorems mankind had devised. And yet, when faced with the most basic social behaviours, he felt confused...perplexed... even threatened. And it wasn't as if the cloned pokémon wouldn't blend in perfectly – they were no different from their egg-born counterparts bar a few unexplained markings.

Not like him, a creature with the appearance of nothing on earth.

Mewtwo paused to examine himself in a nearby body of water, once again introducing himself to a six foot tall bipedal figure covered mostly in sickly pale violet skin, except just below the torso where it darkened – extending the length of his equally-measurable tail. While Mewtwo’s legs were powerful and muscular, his arms were almost skeletal and had certainly not been manifested with physical prowess in mind. Two stubby, horn-like ears protruded from the top of his head while a thick tube wound its way from the back and into a point just between his shoulder blades. Research through the leftovers of laboratory data had spoken of this rather unflattering addition as a way to increase the efficiency of blood and aura flow, though as to what ‘aura’ was...this happened to be something the pokémon had yet to understand.

How could I possibly bear the name 'Mewtwo'? he asked no one in particular. *I barely look like Mew at all!*

Such a thought cast Mewtwo into a spate of longing as he recalled Doctor Fuji’s words.

“You are greater than Mew...improved through the power of human ingenuity...”

Human ingenuity may well have been used, but *how*? Mewtwo could see that it wasn’t just Mew’s DNA that had been involved in his creation simply by looking at himself, but what else *had* they used? The pokémon desired, no, *needed* to find out – accepting himself and dedicating his life to the best possible means depended solely upon it. Still, Mewtwo was at a loose end as to where to start looking for such

information. Infiltrating Team Rocket would just be asking for trouble and New Island laboratory, along with any experiment data it held, no longer existed – having been returned to its natural state by Mewtwo in an attempt to begin afresh.

Mewtwo flinched. That was it...‘begin’! The pokémon had to start his search at the location of the one whose DNA had been taken to give him existence. He had to find Mew, and this was naturally easier said than done. His only recollections of Mew related to his conflict with it.

Wait. No...there were other memories – ones buried in the deepest parts of Mewtwo’s subconscious, ones that seemed to be part of his very being. These were the memories that had haunted the pokémon since his awakening.

The mountain...

It could have been part of the reason for Mewtwo’s retreat to Mt. Quena following the events of New Island. The vision of the mountain had been both a comforting and a daunting one for him. It brought familiarity, though Mewtwo knew *he* had never seen it before. Maybe the only reason this image had returned to him time and again *was* because it was part of his very being, written into his DNA as it were. In essence, maybe that mountain was Mew’s home and all Mewtwo needed to do was grasp his vision of it and let it lead him there.

Entering his subconscious...the far reaches of his mind...this was also an unsettling concept for the pokémon. But to uncover his origins and purpose, it had to be done.

~**~~**~***~**~***~**~***

Was this really the place?

Mewtwo couldn't quite believe he was at the right location. Having descended into his hidden thoughts, the psychic feline had found himself drawn westwards over the topmost ridges of Johto and toward the open sea beyond. There he continued to soar, using the spray from the water below as a means to conceal his lengthy pale form. After some hours had passed and the sun had emerged from gracing the lower hemispheres of the earth, Mewtwo once again reached land – mentally and physically exhausted by his travelling. And this land was unlike anything he had ever seen. It appeared to shimmer with a curious bluish-green tint under his two-toed feet and jutted out in step-like elevations over his head.

Standing in that very spot, Mewtwo felt a deep sense of calm as he surveyed all before him. From here, the pokémon could see the very mountain which had repeatedly surfaced in his dreams – surely *that* was where he was supposed to be! Impulsively taking off into the air, Mewtwo flew towards the rocky edifice, but as he did so, he felt the calm feeling ebb away from his body. Pausing in confusion, the psychic feline swung round to see just why this had happened, his jaw dropping open soon afterwards.

At this distance, Mewtwo could finally see where he had been standing – under the jade-coloured ridges of a tree-shaped crystal formation.



That *had* to have been it. No ordinary mountain, however large, could possibly surpass the majesty of the beautiful structure that Mewtwo saw before him right now. The pokémon was swift to return, landing gently upon one of the formation's higher ridges and wandering down a nearby passage into its rugged depths.

Almost at once, Mewtwo found himself in the presence of a pulsing, living force. Hardly the living force that existed within the humans and pokémon he had encountered, this force was one that seemed to emanate from the very walls itself – particularly through the glowing blue crystal formations that jutted from the duller brown rock. After a few minutes of walking, the semi-dim cerulean glow gave way to a more intense natural light and the haggard textures under his feet became soft and lush. At first, Mewtwo assumed he had wandered straight through a tunnel and back into the outside world. But as he continued to examine the change of surroundings, he noticed the light was coming from another, far larger crystal formation a good distance above his head. Clear, pure waters flowed below the ledge the pokémon stood upon while fruit-covered foliage dotted the surrounding grassy landscape.

It was then Mewtwo realised - he had stepped into a cavern paradise much like the one he had formed within Mt. Quena in his attempts to protect the cloned pokémon from Giovanni's wrath. Even here Mewtwo could see pokémon happily co-existing with one another – strange and wonderful species that he had only ever caught sight of in human reference documents. The psychic feline was certain that some of the pokémon he could see weren't even supposed to exist. Perhaps the 'living energy' he had felt upon entering the tree-like structure had been fulfilling their needs somehow.

But this was not Mewtwo's reason for coming here. He had to find Mew - he had to at least *try* and find the essence of his own being.

Mew? he called out cautiously in telepathic mannerism. Some of the pokémon glanced up at the ledge at the sound of this strange new echoey voice in their minds, but none of them became panicked or agitated upon sight of Mewtwo. It was as if the psychic feline was a familiar presence to them and, in some twisted sort of way, he was.

Mew! I know you're here! he persisted, the tone of his mental voice taking on a note of anguish. *Don't hide from me, please...all I wish to do is talk....*

His mindvoice weakened – disorientation and exhaustion from having travelled so long without rest was rapidly taking its toll. Mewtwo attempted another call, but his surroundings fell dark.

The first thing Mewtwo sensed upon re-emerging from unconsciousness, was the gentle sounds of cascading water. As more of his wherewithal returned, the pokémon could feel his body had been propped in a semi upright position against a rough surface. A cluster of aura circled overhead with barely contained patience.

<My, now...what a curious soul,> Mewtwo heard, amongst the heavy fatigue. The soft words were tinged with a mixture of warmth and concern. <Your energy is familiar, yet...I don't remember you.>

Mew...?

Surely it couldn't be. The aura signature of the pokémon before Mewtwo was vastly different than the previous time they had met. He tried to open his eyes to gaze upon the source of the words, but they refused to obey at first. Stubbornly, Mewtwo wrestled his

overwhelming desire to sleep, and his eyelids finally parted.

The environment had changed. Mewtwo discovered that he had been transported to what looked like a small woodland glade, though the presence of scattered blue crystals affirmed that he had not left the inside of the tree-shaped mountain. A carpet of flower-dotted grass stretched out beneath Mewtwo's body, while nearby, a small waterfall descended into a waiting stream. The form of the circling pokémon was indeed that of Mew – a diminutive, slender feline creature with a long tail, covered in light pink fur.

<Ahh you're awake, curious one,> Mew remarked delightedly, as Mewtwo attempted to sit up from the tree he had been leaning against.

Mew... Mewtwo echoed, outwardly this time. *I need to talk.*

<Oh, you're welcome to,> Mew smiled. <I love a good talk. The unvoiced ones here do not say much, so mostly I end up talking to myself.>

She chuckled, and floated over to a disorganized pile of toys and household items that lay in the hole of an even larger tree. Grasping hold of a brown wooden object that Mewtwo recognized as a human-made instrument for creating music, Mew returned to her guest's side.

<Would you like a trinket?> Mew smiled, offering the viola forward. <I keep them here to entertain my visitors. Young ones love trinkets.>

Uh, thank you...but no, Mewtwo tried to remain polite. Mew's personality did not ring correctly with him either. During their conflict on the 'New Island' Mewtwo had claimed as his own, Mew had been

energetic, teasing and very outspoken. Here, Mewtwo was faced with a creature with mannerisms more akin to the elderly scientists whose 'human ingenuity' was responsible for his existence. Ponderous, meandering, a little eccentric. *You don't remember me?*

<Oddly, no,> Mew broke into a whimsical chuckle, placing the viola beside Mewtwo. <And I usually remember everyone!> She abruptly stopped her mirthful outburst, lowering herself so her eyes were level with Mewtwo's. <Tell me...where have you come from, curious one?>

I... Mewtwo faltered. The unexpected serious tone of his conversant's voice felt as if it had stripped something from him, exposing the frightened, vulnerable child underneath. *I travelled here from the east...a place called Johto. I'm looking for answers.*

<I see,> Mew processed these psychically-uttered words. The seriousness had not departed from her face, as if her own pondering mind had not yet been satisfied. <But where have *you* come from? Where were you born?>

I was not born... Mewtwo glanced elsewhere, feeling awkward at the scrutiny. *At least not in the way I imagine you are thinking. I was created by humans - they used your DNA, or at least part of it.*

<Now there's the familiarity!> Mew chirruped, resuming her grandmotherly tone. <Your DNA is my DNA...and my DNA is *all* DNA>

What do you mean? Mewtwo furrowed his brow. Even as a being in all his vast intelligence, he was having trouble understanding Mew's words.

<Ahhh, curious one,> Mew smiled. <I remember every being on this world. Those from the beginning, and those which have arrived

thereafter. I keep a record of all living things.>

So how do you not recall our previous meeting? Mewtwo inquired, an edge of desperation creeping into his mindvoice. *Is it...is it that there is more than one Mew?*

<Maybe, maybe...> Mew gave a resigned nod. <Not all my dealings with humans have been pleasant. They stole from me in the past – who is to say they did not birth others like me? They brought *you* to this world, did they not?>

Yes, Mewtwo replied darkly. *They did.*

How ironic, he considered somewhat bitterly, that the pokémon he had fought to prove himself against had been another clone - no different from him.

<You *are* troubled about this, aren't you?> Mew shook her head, somewhat disapprovingly. <You mustn't fret so. We are not that different.>

How can you say that? Mewtwo snorted, *You have your purpose as a life giver, whereas I...I do not know my place in this world. That is if there is a place for me besides the bringer of destruction as the humans originally intended.*

Mew gave a faint tut, yet said nothing more – instead returning to floating in a gentle arc around the glade. She paused, then glanced cheerfully at her guest, the ends of her fur beginning to gather white sparks. A multicoloured sheen engulfed her entire body, swallowing it into nothingness.

MEW! Mewtwo cried out, the pokémon's sudden disappearance having caught him off guard. As the panic ebbed, Mewtwo realised he could still sense Mew's presence, although small and distant. Finally,

he came to the conclusion that the pokémon had simply teleported outside the mountain.

<Well, aren't you coming?> Mew inquired puzzledly, having rematerialized in the glade.

You didn't even tell me you were going anywhere! Mewtwo spluttered. *And even if I'd known, I cannot teleport like you just did.*

<Oh it's easy,> Mew chuckled, reaching forward to grasp the larger stubby paws of her humanoid companion. Suddenly Mewtwo felt his heart begin to race as he detected a rapid upsurge of psychic energy within the pokémon. The scenery was gone in but an instant, plunging Mew and Mewtwo into a temporary void, before reforming them in the more distinct brightness of the outside world.

Where are you taking me? Mewtwo asked, somewhat frustrated over the lack of clarity or, in his opinion, sensibleness in his companion's behaviour.

<To your answer,> Mew replied simply. <This way.>

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After a few minutes passage across the mountainside, a tall, ornate castle entered Mewtwo's vision. It was positioned atop a large grassy hill amidst a lake filled with sparkling, clear water – connected to the mainland by means of a long bridge. Captivated by its majesty, Mewtwo found himself grow somewhat nervous upon witnessing Mew's lack of hesitation to continue her flight.

What are you doing? he exclaimed. *Surely we can't go any*

closer. It is not yet night - what if we are seen?

<This is Cameran Palace,> Mew replied. <A place of many friends, and many trinkets. We are welcome here~>

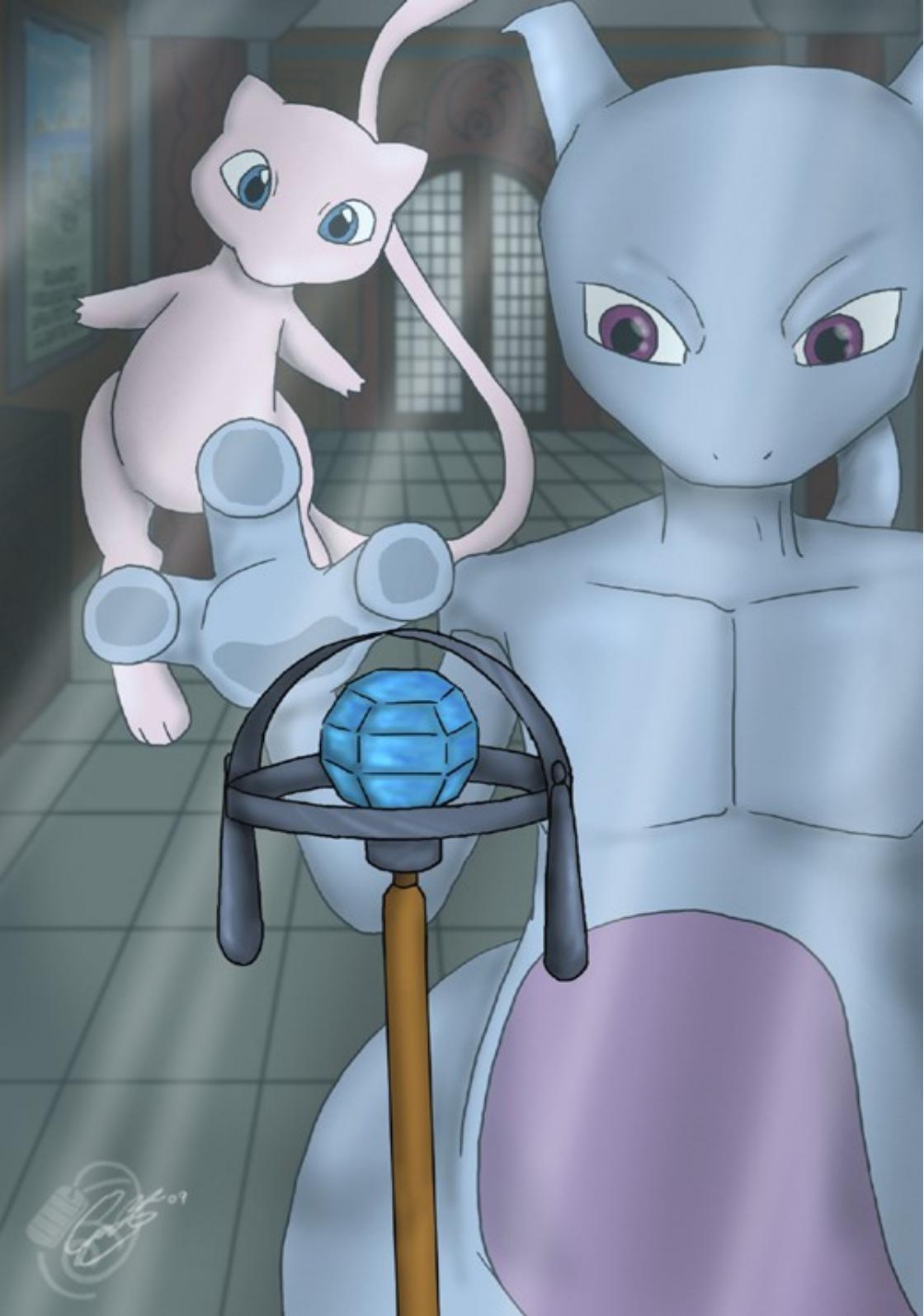
Mewtwo sensed the fine layer of fur rising on the back of his neck, but decided not to respond. He was starting to question whether Mew was even taking his request seriously. But he had come this far, and his desire to understand was a powerful one – willing to endure the most perplexing behaviours. He continued pursuit.

The two pokémon approached one of the castle's rear-facing windows, and Mew grasped her companion's paw once again – teleporting them both beyond the glass.

The innards of Cameran Palace proved to be even more meticulous and opulent than its outside. Every wall was an intricate mass of panelled carvings, each one more detailed than the last, while curtains draped between ruby red pillars and chandeliers hung from the ceiling. Mewtwo instinctively took to hovering instead of the walking he had grown more accustomed to as of late, not wishing to mark the polished marble tiles beneath his feet.

Reaching the darker end of this particular room, Mew floated near to an area which became aglow from an unseen source. As the glow intensified, it lit the edges of a tall glass case and an equally tall, thin staff that was held inside it. Mewtwo drew closer to the case, longing to touch the ice blue crystal set at the tip of the staff within.

It's...beautiful, he marvelled, after a long silence. His gaze travelled down the case, alighting on a small gold plaque fitted to its lowest point.



'This staff belonged to Sir Aaron Cleagi [21FD-47FD]' the writing on the plaque read. 'Descendant of the Ki'shuum family, redeemer of their sins.'

Redeemer... Mewtwo echoed. *What did this family do to cause such grief?*

<I do not know,> Mew replied, almost apologetically. <But I *do* know that Aaron was a treasured friend. His heart was pure, his grasp of nature was strong...>

'Grasp of nature'? Mewtwo bristled. *The domination of pokémon?*

<Oh no, curious one,> Mew smiled, though for the first time since he had met her, the smile was tinged with sadness. <His ability to wield the element of the air.>

It took a moment to sink in, but as it did so, Mewtwo's eyes gradually widened. Either he was misinterpreting, or Mew was telling him in her round-about way, that there existed humans with the ability to control the forces of nature, as pokémon could.

And this Ki'shuum family... he murmured at last. *Could they wield the element of the air too?*

<Oh yes,> Mew nodded sagely. <They were the ambassadors for the Lords of Climate – Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres>

Mewtwo snorted. No doubt selfishness, pride and a lust for control had overcome these people. Those were the all-too-familiar facets of the humanity *he* knew. Yet the human who once possessed this staff had apparently done something to counter these deplorable traits. A figure with a corrupt background, having reclaimed honour by his own upright actions. Commendable, if such things were indeed

true.

The staff fascinated Mewtwo, regardless. The crystal at its peak thrummed with a rhythmic energy, like a slow pulse. It felt alive somehow.

<The Tree keeps Sir Aaron close,> Mew remarked wistfully, gazing round at the wall decorations. <Some day, he will walk again. Have you found the answer you were looking for?>

Mewtwo sighed exasperatedly. Despite all the things he had learned that day, the pokémon felt no more fulfilled as to his origins than when he had first arrived. Yet his visit had not been completely fruitless. Mew had taught him of the existence of humans with powers like pokémon – beings which, in a way, straddled the divide between both their counterparts. As hard as Mewtwo found the thought of confronting humans of any kind, it may have been his best opportunity to be enlightened further.

Not yet, Mewtwo replied, putting on his best attempt at an optimistic expression. *But I am getting closer.*



THE GIRL IN THE STREET

Once darkness had settled itself upon the mountainside, Mewtwo returned to flight, heading southeast between the Johto and Hoenn regions like a silver bullet. Meeting his small, pink counterpart had only served to agitate Mewtwo's flustered thoughts further and now his mind refused to be silenced. He needed to keep searching for where he belonged, but even more so than that, he needed to understand *why*. It was the very same question which had faced his troubled spirit from the moment he had gained consciousness.

Yes, Mewtwo was aware of the selfish motives that had caused him to exist. The guilt still haunted the pokémon at his frustrated responses three years ago; the actions which had only served to promote further suffering and prove Mewtwo almost as horrific as the one who had ordered his creation. Pushing the emotion back yet again, the figure returned his focus to the task at hand. He had tried to make his own purpose, and that had failed. But Mewtwo was certain there had to be a place for him, even in a world he found so hard to understand. There had to be somewhere he could redeem himself, like Sir Aaron had done.

It had taken Mewtwo long enough to figure out why a pokémon would resign themselves to teamwork with a human companion, but after some deep thought it finally made sense. Humans were such irresponsible creatures; so full of themselves...and yet so fascinating,

inspiring...even at times, admirable. Even in the back of Mewtwo's mind there lay some long-buried memory of human warmth. He had often tried to reach it, but it seemed so small, so very far away.

Gazing down at the ocean a few metres below, Mewtwo took in his own reflection for a moment before glaring firmly toward the glittering lights of an approaching island. The pokémon did not wish to hide his face behind the visage of another; why should he have to? He was not ashamed of his appearance, but neither did he wish to feel out of place amongst a sea of cold and frightened stares. Sure, he could use his psychic abilities to manipulate the minds of those around him if he so wished. But this would hardly make his circumstances realistic. Mewtwo did not want an artificial acceptance, but would he ever find figures who welcomed him for who he was?

Mewtwo had felt the strong psychic auras from this island a few miles back. It felt reassuring and calming to his senses - a perfect location for a quick snack before moving onward. Carefully making sure he kept to the shadows, the pokémon hovered by open windows where figures lay in slumber and made his way across the empty town square. There was an abundance of wild remoraid in the many canals here; Mewtwo had become quite adept at using his fine-tuned abilities to select the best morsel and make sure its end was quick and painless. Pausing for a moment upon a ledge to eat his newly acquired meal, Mewtwo realised someone was watching him. He swung around angrily, only to lock eyes with that of a puzzled-looking young boy who was examining the pokémon's appearance from between the barred fence of a nearby balcony. Mewtwo's expression softened.



If only the rest of humanity were to view me with that very same innocence that you have, he murmured, before taking to the air. A few moments later the boy found himself being told off by a rather anxious-looking parent who had been previously unaware of the open window.

“But mom!” came the excited response to such chastisement. “I’m not telling tales! I really did see a giant cat-type pokémon that talked without moving its mouth!”

If he was to stay well hidden, Mewtwo would have to consign himself to the seemingly infinite streets of a big city. At least for the moment - the pokémon glanced toward the brilliant moon and gave a silent nod of acknowledgement. It was time to find himself somewhere inconspicuous to rest.

Landing gently in a darkened alleyway and causing the scavenging meowths and ratattas to bolt from sight, Mewtwo took to examining his surroundings for threats to his privacy. Then he stopped, his mouth dropping open slightly in a mixture of surprise and horror. Just beyond the entrance to the alleyway there stood a girl, no more than 10 years of age, with teal coloured shoulder-length hair. She was dressed in a tattered long coat and bore a deeply worried expression which she cast from side to side as if searching for something.

And then their eyes met. Mewtwo felt his body tense, caught between staying put or taking to flight. He couldn’t understand why he was being so hesitant over leaving and making the girl forget he was ever there. He couldn’t understand why he didn’t *want* her to forget.

The girl showed no signs of fear. Instead, the corners of her mouth turned upwards into a faint smile. It was a saddened smile, but a smile nonetheless. Mewtwo felt his legs beginning to weaken; the familiarity of such an expression was at the forefront of his mind and yet the memory attached to it was not. He lowered his head, eyes shut tightly and brow furrowed in an onset of frustration.

Why can't I remember? Why?

Mewtwo was quickly shaken from his anger by the loud blare of a horn. The girl was glancing in the opposite direction now; paralysed with fear as a shadow fell across her fragile form and grew larger and thicker by the second. Panic overthrew logic for just a moment, forcing Mewtwo into a loping run and bringing him to the roadside just in time to see a massive freight truck bearing down upon the girl with no intent of stopping.

AMBER!



Part of the telepathic scream became something more vocal as Mewtwo dove forward across the path of the oncoming vehicle, snatching the child up in his arms and tumbling the remainder of the distance to the opposite side. As the truck sped past accompanied by further horn blasts, the pokémon and its rescued charge lay beside each other for a moment; chests heaving from the exhilaration of the previous occurrence. Mewtwo was the first to get to his feet, gazing down at the girl with a genuine smile. But the happiness was quick to fade. The recollection of a name, a face, and still no meaning behind either of them only served to cause the creature further hurt within.

By the time the girl had opened her eyes and prepared to offer thanks, Mewtwo had already vanished.

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Perched on a ledge of a tall building somewhere else in that very city, Mewtwo sat in a state of deep anguish. Here he was, a psychic Pokémon with the ability to alter the thoughts of others. And yet he had no way of retrieving memories from the back of his own mind that had been hidden from him, or covering ones he so desperately wished to forget, just as other beings had been made to. Glancing to his right, Mewtwo caught sight of a manetric that was carved into a pedestal on the corner of the ledge - its jaws wide open in a silent cry. The carving bore an uncanny realism, almost as if one had taken a living pokémon and trapped it within the stone itself. As Mewtwo stared at such a creative marvel, he could not help but feel an element of sympathy for its inanimate state.

How long must we be tormented like this? he muttered in a tone full of remorse. We are both consigned independence, a life in the open air, but neither of us truly have freedom. You are trapped upon these walls, whereas I...I am trapped within my mind.

Is there not something...someone who could shine a light upon the darkness that is the empty space in my memory?

Mewtwo flinched as his thoughts were infiltrated by a surge of psychic energy from somewhere below him. Instinctively assuming he was about to be attacked, the pokémon raised a shield around himself. But no attack came. Blinking in puzzlement, Mewtwo tried to make out just what it was that had generated the psychic signal and from what direction. Since his eyes were far from capable of seeing at such distances, the pokémon closed them and took to relying completely upon his greater abilities. In a matter of seconds, Mewtwo had pinpointed the source of the energy, poised hesitantly beside the outer wall of a building with a convex roof. It looked as if the figure had been attempting to break into the building prior to Mewtwo's psychic interruption. He decided to act, feeling obliged to do so as means of soothing his aching conscience somewhat.

The cloaked figure uttered a cry of surprise as the six foot beast descended from the air and landed behind him with an eerie grace, its eyes glowing bright blue.

Stop right there, human, Mewtwo boomed. Forcing pokémon to cause suffering, whether directly or indirectly, is unforgivable.



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A stylized signature or logo in the bottom left corner, possibly indicating the artist's name and the year of creation.

He paused, realising that the person in the shadows was the only being present. This served to throw Mewtwo off guard somewhat – was it possible that it had in fact been the human responsible for generating the psychic energy? Neither figure moved, both taking ownership of a thread of fear over the situation’s absurdity. Then, they both spoke up in perfect unison.

Surely not..

Mewtwo’s mouth dropped open a little way as the hood of the unknown figure’s cloak was pulled back to reveal a shock of dark brown hair, tinted in one place by a thick streak of platinum blonde. The man glanced back at him with wide eyes, a bead of sweat trickling down an elaborate marking etched across his cheek. It was Mewtwo who regained composure first.

Do not attempt to resist, he said sternly. My psychic power is undoubtedly stronger than your own.

“I would agree,” the man responded with surprising calmness. It appeared his perspiration had been as a result of his efforts prior to Mewtwo’s arrival, and not due to the creature’s presence. “But what I have come here to do...it has to be done. I must take the Mask of Talasi from this place – it does not belong here.”

And what right have you to say whether this mask belongs here or not? Mewtwo inquired with a frown.

“This isn’t about my rights,” the man insisted. “This is about *everyone’s* rights. The people that work in that laboratory...if they were

to uncover what gave this mask and the staff that accompanied it their power over pokémon, they could use that ability on far more than just a single village. Maybe even extending similar control over humans too!"

Mewtwo said nothing. He was both surprised and impressed by the level of this figure's knowledge. Something told him such knowledge had hardly been gathered by the man alone, though Mewtwo's recently developed sense of morals forbade the pokémon to pry open his mind to find out more.

What is your name? he asked.

"I am Akiva," the man replied. "I thank you for requesting the information instead of taking it for yourself."

It is my responsibility as one empowered to use my gifts wisely, Mewtwo gave a nod. *As for you, it seems you have not been left without gifts of your own.*

"You mean my psychic Cho'moken?" Akiva began to smile. "Yes...it was why the Seer Elders chose me to undertake this task in the first place. They were the ones who taught me how to handle my abilities after I discovered them, so they know what I am capable of."

Hmmm... Mewtwo tilted his head to one side and examined Akiva's expression. He had barely been in the man's company for more than a few minutes and yet the pokémon found himself encompassed in a strange sense of peace. Almost as if he had found a kindred spirit.

These 'Seer Elders', he began. *They must be endowed with great wisdom, to have helped you find your true self. Do you suppose...they would be able to do the same for me?*

"I could not guarantee it," Akiva replied solemnly. "But there would only be one way to find out, and that is if I were to take you to the Agrarian Seer repository not far from here. Still..."

You need to bring the mask back with you, Mewtwo concluded. *I shall help you get what you came here for.*

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Far above the city buildings and partially shrouded by the night, two pokémon flew. One was a noctowl at least eight foot in length, with Akiva sat astride it. The other was Mewtwo, keeping careful watch on the noctowl's movements as the aged winged creature swooped and banked with surprising speed. Away from the island they flew, southward across the ocean until the seemingly-infinite expanse of water became an expanse of undulating hillside smothered with trees. It was far from the harsher mountains of the region where Mew's home was located; neither did it contain any thickly-populated cities like Johto or Kanto. The apparent untouched state of this region prompted Mewtwo to inquire as to their location.

"This is Fiore," Akiva told him. "A province of Sonoria and the largest area of pokémon preservation in the world. Fiore is quite unique in the sense that very few humans live here, and those that do are usually recruited as Pokémon Rangers."

Pokémon Rangers? Mewtwo tilted his head to one side like a curious child. *What are those?*

"A Pokémon Ranger is someone that dedicates themselves to



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protecting the welfare of pokémon by temporarily recruiting other pokémon to assist them in their duties," Akiva explained. "Pokémon Rangers can be found in other parts of the world, but the organization's origin lies here in Sonoria, and this is where you'll find most of them at work."

So why are we here? Mewtwo asked.

"Fiore is also where the Seer Repository I study at is located," Akiva smiled, pointing towards the dual spires of a distant building that had recently emerged from amongst the hills and continued to rise as the figures flew closer. It was a structure with an appearance much like that of Cameran Palace, though with far more discreet finishing touches that enabled it to blend more easily into the surrounding landscape.

Robed figures -which Mewtwo could only assume were Repository Watchmen- shouted excitedly from tiny windows within the building's spires as Akiva lifted up the mask which he had been keeping safely close to him. Their enthusiastic response was quick to dwindle into troubled stares and stiffened limbs upon sight of the psychic feline which accompanied the Seer and his noctowl. Regardless, they made no move to prevent Mewtwo from entering with Akiva, and he landed gently beside the man and his pokémon upon an outstretched platform which looked to have been designed for air-bound arrivals.

A young woman stood upon the platform nearest the repository entrance, hands clasped together and resting across her front. Her body was clothed in a dress of deepest burgundy with slightly puffed sleeves and a large white collar, while her head was completely encompassed in a flat, round hat of similar colour with a jewel

embedded into the front. Mewtwo felt his heart skip a beat upon sight of the woman and her attire – it bore a startling resemblance to that of the nurse he had taken from a Kantoan Pokémon Centre and used as a representative of his intentions against her will. Surely this was not a coincidence.

“Well, here we are,” Akiva accounted, stepping from his noctowl’s back. “Thanks, Breacher. You did a wonderful flying job once again.” The Seer returned the pokémon to its Pokéball and secured the article upon his belt before turning away from Mewtwo – seemingly to leave him behind.

Where are you going? Mewtwo asked hurriedly. There was a note of fear in his voice which sounded quite unusual coming from a creature of his size and power.

“I have to take the Mask of Talasi to the artefacts chamber,” Akiva explained. “But I shall be back very shortly. In the meantime, why not put your queries forward to Sister Wakanda?”

‘Sister’...?

“Yes,” the deep blue-eyed woman replied softly, adjusting her hat and eyeing Mewtwo in a calm yet thorough manner. “My name is Megan, but here we refer to each other as brothers and sisters - for while we may not be related directly by blood, we *are* related in our ideals, hopes and purpose.”

Related by purpose... Mewtwo pondered this concept. *This is something I never considered possible.*

“You had something to ask me?” Megan raised a hand, snapping Mewtwo out of deep thought. He glanced back at her, almost



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longingly.

Your people seem to know much of things I have not yet learned, he said. You see...there is a blank space in my mind which I'm sure is meant to contain memories of some sort...

"And you were hoping the Agrarian Seers could shed some light on them?" Megan concluded. Mewtwo nodded in response, prompting his human companion to smile warmly in return. "Your memories may be out of reach, but we do have the means to look into your past. All that is needed is some knowledge of where you were at the time."

Mewtwo shuddered. The visions of surfacing into consciousness, surrounded in ghastly orange fluid and watched by unsympathetic human faces, were all too clear.

Obtaining that won't be a problem, he murmured.



THE EYE OF TRUTH

"Brother Gafna?"

From the other end of a modestly-furnished room, the tall, white-haired figure clad in golden attire turned his attentions from the window towards Megan's hesitant form which now graced the open doorway. Taking note of his welcoming smile, the woman walked further into the room and gave a little bob of the head.

"What is it?" he asked.

"We have a...*unique* visitor, brother," Megan reported. "He wishes to know of his past."

"Sister Wakanda," Gafna shook his head sadly. "I long to help others as much as you do, but interfering with the passage of time, even to observe it, is something highly frowned upon. You know that."

"Yes, yes I understand," Megan persisted, her voice weakening slightly. "But I feel you may want to make an exception in his case..."

She stepped aside at this point, to reveal the pale bipedal figure with its long violet tail that, up until now, had been standing directly behind her. Gafna's next breath caught in his throat, his eyes appearing to grow watery as a result of what he saw before him. This reaction was not something Mewtwo had expected. People had shown

fear at encountering him before – this was the most common reaction. People had shown revulsion too, but never had a human been drawn almost to tears at merely his presence. Mewtwo found this quite illogical.

Once Gafna finally retrieved his voice, he approached the psychic feline pokémon, taking off his robe to expose the thinner garments underneath and draping it across Mewtwo's shoulders. Megan watched this with slightly open mouth – in Agrarian Seer society, this was a mark of deepest respect. Though Mewtwo was greatly puzzled by the act, he did not refuse it. The robe felt quite comfortable, even familiar, and somehow instilled a sense of calm in him that was more intense than that which the pokémon had felt upon meeting Akiva.

"Come with me, divided one," Gafna said, his expression unflinching. "And I shall let you see what you have been searching for."

Divided one? Mewtwo blinked, though it was an internal thought, unheard by either of the Seers. Regardless of this cryptic speech, the pokémon followed Gafna out into the corridor once again, while Megan closed the door behind all three of them.

The second passage through the repository seemed to draw more attention to Mewtwo than the previous one. Flanked either side by Gafna and Megan and scrutinized by every Seer student that walked past, the pokémon felt for all the world like he'd suddenly become an object of exhibition rather than a guest. It wasn't until the three figures left the main corridors and entered a narrower route, that Mewtwo was able to relax somewhat. He had deliberately refrained from saying anything until leaving public hearing range, lest he make his situation as an object of scrutiny worse.

Gafna pushed open a thick wooden door and ushered Mewtwo into the dimly-lit room beyond where the pokémon found himself looking upon what appeared to be a giant crystal teardrop. It was suspended from the ceiling with its pointed end facing downwards over a pool of water.

"This is the Chronocite Eye," Megan explained. "It has the ability to take a memory and...rewind it, so to speak, even to an event in time you may not have existed, just as long as it happened in the exact same location."

While she spoke, Gafna waved his hand over a pedestal nearby. Mewtwo watched in surprise as the suspended teardrop began to split apart – its pieces bending outward like the opening petals of a flower until they came to rest in a parasol-like formation.

"Stand underneath," the aged Seer instructed. Using his telekinesis to remove the robe from his shoulders, Mewtwo levitated himself a little way into the air and over the shallow wall that bordered the pool, lowering into the water thereafter. It was a minimal amount, barely reaching halfway up his lengthy feet. Glancing upward, Mewtwo discovered that, to his astonishment, the centre of this crystal 'flower' was in fact crudely shaped like an eye. And now it was staring directly down at him.

"Now, bring back your earliest reachable memory," came the next direction. "And this will do the rest."

Here goes... Mewtwo closed his eyes and trailed off as his mind let go of the present moment and the surroundings which accompanied it, falling back into the distant, mistier occurrences of his

youth. Deeper and deeper he went, prior to his time spent with the clone pokémon on Mt. Quena, prior to even his *thoughts* on creating those very pokémon. He saw momentary glimpses of the metallic helmet that sickened man 'Giovanni' had made him wear, and the blazing flames and clamouring people who were so mercilessly vaporized during his reckless destruction of New Island Laboratory.

Yes, Mewtwo knew he was getting closer now – the unmistakable black wall that separated the pokémon from his memories loomed, approaching ever faster. Just when he thought he was about to slam full force into it once again, something unexpected happened. One moment there was a sudden intense wash of blue-ish light over his vision, the next, Mewtwo found his senses rapidly detached from him. It was a curious feeling, rather what the creature expected an out of body experience to have felt like. No longer was he confined to the reaches of his own mind – now the pokémon was gazing upon the pristine surroundings of the very laboratory he'd destroyed not so long ago.

He could see the machines. He could see the scientists huddled at desks and studying various diagrams and printouts. He could see... *himself*.

It was a humbling experience. There Mewtwo was - suspended in a tall cylindrical tank of orange fluid and clearly in the early stages of development, judging by an appearance that was closer to Mew's than his current one. A series of wires were attached to various parts of his body, monitoring what appeared to be life signs that flickered up on nearby computer screens.

"It's just like all the other clones, Doctor...it hasn't gained consciousness."

Other...*clones*? Mewtwo flinched upon hearing the angular tones of a man's voice from nearby. Rather like a dream, the space in front of the tank containing his younger self that once was empty now accepted the presence of two wide-shouldered figures in lab coats. The taller one, the owner of the curious accent, had a shock of slightly wavy dark green hair, while the hair and thick goatee belonging to the older one was almost grey. Mewtwo recognized the latter all too well – this was Doctor Fuji, the man who had overseen his creation.

"I just don't understand it; its other vital signs are strong."

No sooner had these words left Doctor Fuji's mouth, one of the computer consoles nearby uttered a series of high-pitched beeps. Both scientists left the cylinder and strode over to the console responsible, currently being seen to by a brown-haired woman with her hair in a ponytail. This computer had a wide monitor containing five charts, each one of them a mass of pink, blue and green and fluctuating at different rates. During the past few minutes, those rates had mutually become more agitated.

"What's that?" the black-haired scientist inquired.

"I'm not sure," the woman replied, sounding a little anxious. *"But Mewtwo and Ambertwo seem to be communicating with the other clones."*

Amber... there was that name again, the name Mewtwo found

himself screaming back in that city with little knowledge as to why. If he'd known where his body was at this point in time, Mewtwo knew he would be tensing every muscle in desperation. The knowledge the pokémon craved so badly was inches away, he just knew it.

"But how?" the female scientist's associate spluttered, attempting to search the paper records for some evidence of this possibility. Mewtwo struggled to make out the other clones that these human scientists were referring to. After a few moments of deep concentration, he found himself glancing across the other side of the laboratory at three more cylindrical tanks – exactly the same as the one containing his younger self. These tanks played host to a bulbasaur, charmander and squirtle. Mewtwo drew a sharp breath at the sight of these vulnerable duplicates – the unusual markings upon their bodies were exactly the same markings that had emerged on the forms of the venusaur, charizard and blastoise that he had cloned.

"They could be using telepathy," the female scientist suggested.

Telepathy? Surely such a thing was not possible – telepathy was a means of communication usable by only psychic types...wasn't it? Urging his mental view to turn back once more, Mewtwo examined the woman's computer monitor and its charts. One for each experiment – the bulbasaur, the charmander, the squirtle and himself. But there were five charts, and he had only counted four clones. Where was the fifth?

Doctor Fuji left the woman at the computer and walked purposefully across the lab, prompting Mewtwo to follow him with his eyes. As he wandered past the tank holding Mewtwo's younger self, the pokémon's gaze alighted upon the one next to it. Somehow he had

not noticed this container before, despite it looking vastly different from his own. There was no orange fluid or multiple wires, just seemingly empty space. Suspended in the central portion of this space was something most beautiful...and quite unsettling. A pulsating force of yellow and red, the digital duplicate of a being's mind.

Is that...Amber?

Once again, Mewtwo struggled to recall the identity that this name belonged to, once again he failed. And Doctor Fuji refused to leave the tank containing the shifting light, reaching up his hand and stroking it against the glass in some vain hopes to caress the essence within.

"Please...please let my theories be true," he murmured.

"I must see my little girl...smile again."

Now it was all starting to make sense. The human child Mewtwo had spotted in the street – her visage must have triggered some deep-written memory that was mostly beyond his grasp. And this 'Amber'... maybe all of Doctor Fuji's efforts had never been to gain Giovanni's favour or scientific prestige – maybe they had simply been to bring his daughter back. For the first time, Mewtwo felt an element of sympathy for the haggard-faced scientist. Who knew what he had sacrificed in his bid to restore Amber. Who knew what had been responsible for the original Amber's death in the first place.

Scenery flickered before the pokémon for a second, like a slightly damaged video recording. Doctor Fuji still stood before the tank containing the holographic essence of his daughter, while the brown-haired woman with the ponytail dutifully monitored the charts on her computer screen. Everything was stable and precise and it showed in the calm, almost triumphant expression upon the doctor's face. However, as Mewtwo continued to look about the room, he caught sight of a tall, slender figure walking silently behind a bookcase with something in one hand. Artificial light flickered off the edge of the article's blades, causing Mewtwo's eyes to widen in horror.

The figure was closer now, giving Mewtwo a clearer look at what was undoubtedly a female human in a lab coat much like those of Fuji and the other scientists. While her face was blotted out by shadow, the orange glow from the cylinders she positioned herself behind showed a distinctive ring of golden hair and made it all the more fiery in the process.

He wanted to reach out and stop her. He wanted to yell, to attract the attentions of the remaining figures in the room. But Mewtwo couldn't – his limbs and voice were abandoned to him, leaving him utterly helpless. In deepest anguish, the pokémon was only able to watch as this forbidding woman reached out toward the back of one of the cylindrical tanks with the wire cutters in one hand.

"We're losing all readings from Charmandertwo," the scientist at the computer informed in morbidly emotionless tones, as the machine once again began to bleep. This time the bleeps signalled something far more conclusive, sending the multicoloured waves on one of the charts into an agonizing spasm. At the same time, the fire type pokémon twitched and squirmed inside its tank – eyes tight shut

but mouth wide open in a silent distressed cry as its body broke apart into tiny fragments. The waves upon the chart were stilled. The tank was empty, save for the wires that had once been attached to its now-dissolved occupant.

This can't be happening...

"Bulbasaurtwo and Squirtletwo are fading the same way."

It was all too clear that what Mewtwo feared the most was indeed happening. He writhed in his mental state of what now seemed like imprisonment – why hadn't they noticed the saboteur who had deftly severed the wires to each tank? By their sheer ignorance these scientists...no, these meddling humans had allowed poor pokémon to die!

Glancing up from his internal struggle, Mewtwo saw the once-vibrant glow of Amber's presence rapidly beginning to fade.

"Doctor...we're losing her too..."

NO!

At that moment, the wall that had kept Mewtwo from his past memories shattered instantly. He could see Amber now; he could feel the anguish that had clutched at his heart as he watched her youthful face with its expression of sad acceptance fade away into oblivion. He wasn't going to let that happen again.

I'll go back! he cried out desperately, feeling his psychic energies surge through him in an unstoppable tide. *I'll go back and*

somehow I'll stop that evil woman from destroying you, Amber!

I will!

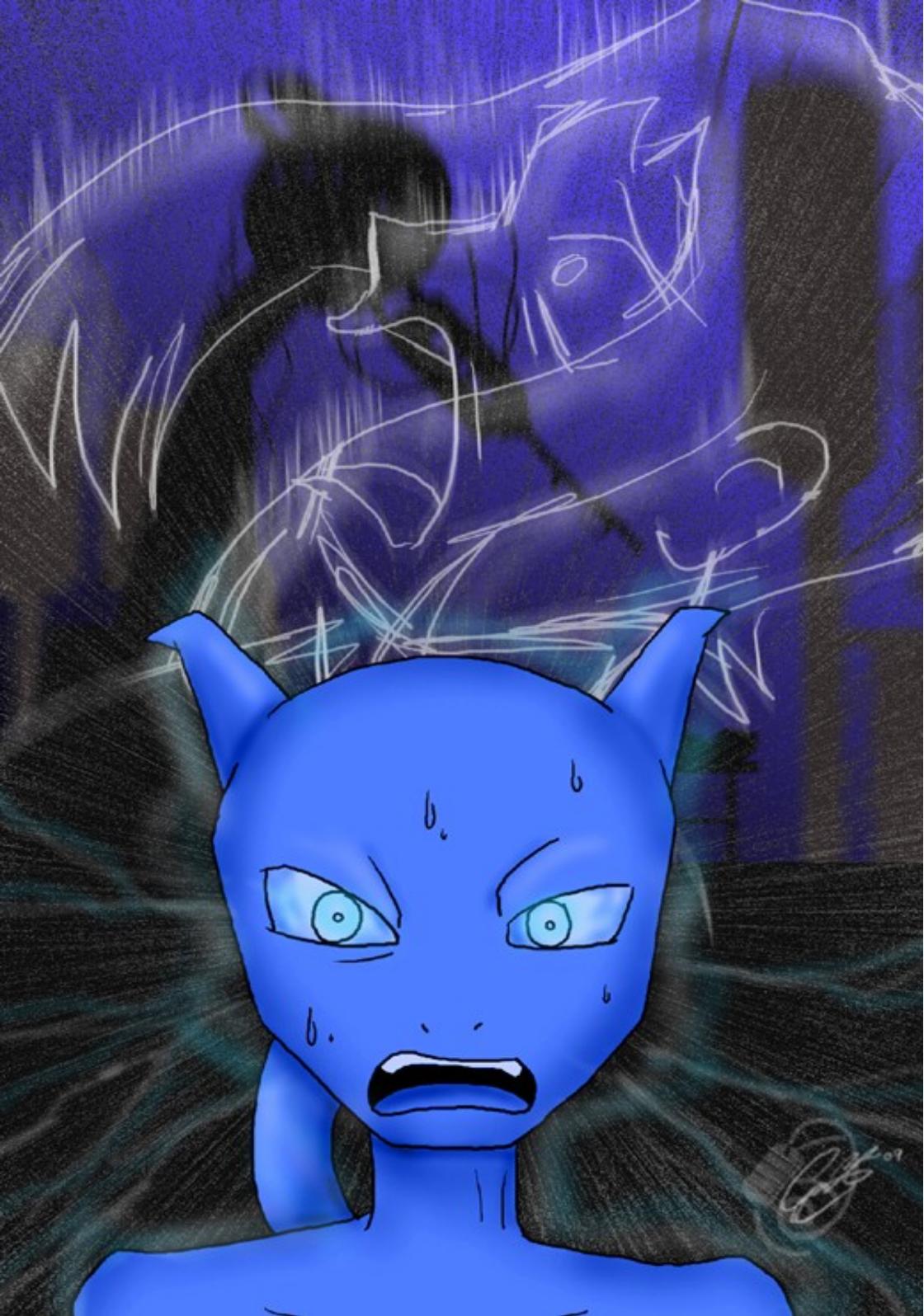
Mewtwo wasn't sure what happened next. The scenery flickered again just like before, but this time the shift was much more pronounced and noticeable. Images rushed past his eyes like the view from the window of a moving train - visions of a young man with mint green hair bound to a metallic platform and screaming in agony as long, cruel needles penetrated his arms. Energy lanced across Mewtwo's vision and in the midst of this horrific nightmare, there hung a circle of orange light which began to draw together into an indistinguishable mass.

Gafna wrenched his hand away from the pedestal as Mewtwo let out a terrible throaty screech, collapsing onto his knees in the midst of the shallow pool. Running to the pokémon's side, Megan attempted to bring Mewtwo to his senses without causing any further shock - he was shaking violently, tears running down both sides of his face.

"It seems your psychic abilities caused some kind of flux in the Chronocite Eye," Megan observed anxiously. "What happened?"

I saw it... he shuddered, after a few minutes had passed. I saw...everything. There was a man...they were extracting things from him...things they used to create me.

"I thought you might have seen that," Gafna heaved a sigh, watching the psychic feline stagger to his feet. He glanced up at the aged Seer, almost accusingly.



This was why you called me a 'divided one', wasn't it? he exclaimed. Because I'm not just a pokémon. I'm partly human too, and you knew about this the whole time!

"Not of *all* matters, Mewtwo," Gafna insisted. "Only of the circumstances which brought poor Brother Yung to his death so that you were to live."

So that's what Doctor Fuji had meant when he spoke of human ingenuity... Mewtwo concluded internally, with utmost disgust. It wasn't theirs which had improved me, it was the human ingenuity I possess that another was forced to give up.

"Andh was an incredible man," Megan spoke softly, her voice beginning to wobble. "His psychic Cho'moken and the control he had over it were beyond comparison. That is why...they took him."

It was then that Mewtwo felt quite selfish. As he watched Megan force herself to retain her composure despite rising sorrow, he thought back on just how much time he had spent in bitterness and anger over his own circumstances. Megan had obviously felt very close to Andh, the one whom Team Rocket hadn't hesitated to separate from his life. Something within Mewtwo felt drawn to Megan for reasons unknown. Was that feeling and the clothes he had disguised the kidnapped nurse in simply a reflection of Andh engraved into his own consciousness? Was it possible to transfer the desires and memories of another through their DNA? It would have certainly explained the visions of the mountain that led Mewtwo to the Tree of Beginning and the contented feeling he had experienced while standing within it, and associating with the Seers at the repository.

I...I am sorry to hear of Brother Yung's loss, he murmured at

last.

“Do not feel you are responsible for such things, Mewtwo,” Megan forced a smile, watching the pokémon’s troubled expression. “The circumstances of your birth are hardly something you can control.”

Yes. The circumstances are irrelevant, the humanoid creature reminded himself, though rather unconvincingly. His head was still reeling from everything that he had just seen and he needed some time alone to untangle the muddled thoughts from the equally knotted memories. *Is there somewhere quiet I can go to think these matters through?*

“Of course,” Gafna nodded, closing the Chronocite Eye and walking back towards the door. “I will show you there myself.”

~**~~**~***~**~***~**~***

Akiva found Mewtwo sitting inside the repository’s penthouse, staring out through the glass panels at the night sky beyond. At first, the pokémon’s pose and lack of acknowledgement for Akiva’s arrival gave the man the impression that he was intruding. Standing his ground, Akiva took a breath.

“Megan told me what happened,” he began cautiously. “Have all your questions been answered?”

No, not all, Mewtwo replied, following a long pause. *The memories that were lost to me were indeed returned, thanks to Gafna.*

But I am starting to understand that not everything in this world is within my comprehension. Some things simply have to be accepted for what they are.

“And so do some beings,” Akiva tagged on. “The world needs to accept you.”

The world is not ready for one such as me, Mewtwo insisted. But here...here, it is different. Here in this repository, I feel like I belong.

“You do?” Akiva blinked. Mewtwo stood up and turned around to face the Seer, reaching out a hand and placing it gently upon the man’s shoulders. With their wisdom, insight, reasoning and unique abilities, both elemental and otherwise, these humans were more similar to him than any pokémon. And unlike many of the humans he had met elsewhere, Mewtwo felt that he could trust them.

I now know my purpose, he told his companion firmly. To redeem myself from the past that created me and to uphold everything Andh held dear. Akiva...I wish to call you ‘brother’.

Silence fell. Man and pokémon stared eye to eye as if trying to peer into each other’s very essence. Then at last, the corners of Akiva’s dark eyes creased and his mouth enlarged into a warm, welcoming smile. The Seer reached forward, throwing his arms across Mewtwo’s back in a hearty embrace.

“It would be my greatest honour,” he said.



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