

POKÉMON
REBIRTH

FOUR KINDS **of** MAYHEM

Pillan Soler had always considered himself quite the average man. He'd completed his education with a fair set of grades, taken an apprenticeship in electronic manufacture and -for the past ten years of his life- had worked as a technician for Hoenn's biggest distributor of useful gadgetry, Devon Corporation. Things had progressed smoothly, pleasingly and predictably as he had worked his way up the ranks within Devon Corp, into the department focused upon new potential technologies.

Yes, Pillan Soler *had* considered himself an average man. But that was before the night of the storm.

He had been working late, and had thus been relatively alone - listening tensely as the winds had picked up and thunder boomed angrily overhead, causing the ceiling lights to flicker ever so slightly. As the night wore on and the unsettled weather refused to cease, Pillan decided he had to take precautionary measures and make sure the lightning rod at the top of the building was secure. After all, too much data was at stake were lightning to make impact.

Wrapping himself in his jacket, Pillan had slowly taken the spindly metal staircase to the roof. His internal logic and fear had clashed with his determination to preserve what he and so many others had worked on, and this drove his feet onward, one after the other. It forced his hand towards the lock that kept the roof door securely shut.

Pillan had pulled back the door and the first thing to hit him was the pelting rain - tossed harshly at his face by the unforgiving wind. He had squinted as he had staggered out onto the rooftop, then his eyes widened. Flapping stoically amongst the tumult of gusts and watery

spray, its long, spiked wings giving off tiny sparks, hovered a zapdos.

The man's first instinct was to run back to the door, but his body somehow did the opposite. Had this legendary bird been responsible for conjuring the storm? Pillan had found himself approaching the pokémon despite his terror, holding his arms out in a weak attempt to shoo the zapdos away.

Then it had struck him. A thin bolt of electricity which had coursed from the zapdos' body and ploughed into Pillan's own, yet he was not thrown backwards in the process. In fact, the electricity felt oddly painless - despite this, Pillan found himself quaking out of awe, nervousness and anticipation. A thrumming warmth had struck up a chord inside him, and static patterns in his mind began to form sounds. Words.

"Nexus of Thunder."

Then the zapdos had left, and with it, the storm. Pillan had crumpled to his knees, then his side - waves of exhaustion swiftly engulfing him. The next thing he had been aware of, he was lying in a hospital bed with concerned relatives and work companions gathered around. Devon Corp. President Dal Stone had ordered Pillan to take the rest of the week off, which the man had reluctantly agreed to. Yet when he had returned, everything seemed to go horribly wrong.

Every time Pillan walked down corridors and through departments, lights would flicker and the devices people were working on would start to malfunction. Pillan knew the odd mechanical behaviours were his fault, and he had been pretty certain whatever the

zapdos did to him had something to do with it. Yet he tried to ignore the matter, to pass off those events and continue life as it had been. At least until a massive chunk of data vanished from the computer servers.

Other Devon Corp. employees had not seen the connection and, despite their upset and frustration at what had occurred, had simply gone about restoring what data they had from backups. But for Pillan, it had been all too clear. Guilt had welled up inside him at the unintentional damage he had caused. The man had known all too well what he had to do. That following week, Pillan handed his notice in and gave up a job he had loved, treasured and excelled in for most of his life.

The next few days were spent in isolation, in a house where the occupant dared not activate any of its appliances. Pillan's anger and self-pity only grew as he sat contemplating what had happened. Why had he gone to the rooftop that night? What had that zapdos done to him?

One week later, someone had knocked at his front door. The knock happened to be more of a succession of loud, door-rattling bangs, and the 'someone' was a very tall, muscled figure with spiked yellowish hair who was in charge of Vermillion City Gym in Kanto. This Gym Leader had overheard of Devon Corp's succession of tragedies, and had been driven to uncover the source of them. But being in the presence of a skilled electric pokémon trainer had only served to make Pillan all the more frustrated. As far as he was concerned, he would have been happy never to see another electric type again.

"Things would be just fine if that bird pokémon hadn't shocked me and given me a wacky magnetic field," he had muttered.

"Don'cha get it?" the Gym Leader raised an eyebrow in disbelief. "Somethin's special about you, kid. Legendaries don't just appear to everyone y' know."

Pillan thought this over, still none the happier.

"Aside from the bird zappin' ya, did ya see or hear anything in particular out there?" came the inquiry.

"Just three words," Pillan responded distantly. "'Nexus of Thunder'."

"Nexus...Nexus..." the Gym Leader scratched his angular chin. "That's ringin' a bell. A pretty old bell, but still..."

"What?" Pillan looked at him with furrowed brow.

"I can't remember the specifics, but I think y' just been given some pretty neat powers, kid," the Gym Leader grinned.

"The power to blow up machines and wipe data," Pillan remarked bluntly. "Yeah...I could have done without that."

"Oh that's just cuz ya haven't got the hang of 'em yet!" the Gym Leader slapped Pillan on the back, almost causing the man to fall over. "I bet you'll think miles different once you know how to use them properly. People where I used ta live would have given their right leg for abilities like what you got."

"Must've come from a pretty weird place," Pillan remarked to himself, before raising his voice once again. "I just want my job back."

"Well suck it up an deal with it," the Gym Leader suddenly turned serious. "You've got a more important job to do."

"I...I do?" Pillan looked worried.

"I'm not the right guy t' be fillin' you in on the info, mind," came the response, as the towering figure relaxed a little. "Your best bet is to head to Mauville City and find Wattson Tesric. He knows more of this historical mumbo jumbo than I do.

Tell 'im Bob Surge sent ya!"

He wasn't entirely sure why he had followed Lt. Surge's booming instruction, but at that point in time, Pillan would have tried anything in order to stop the electrical anomalies he was finding himself causing. Soon after the Kantoan Gym Leader had left, the figure he had visited was swiftly packing a travel satchel and changing into a more suitable outfit. Mauville City was a good distance east of his home in Rinshin Town, after all, and interim bus services occurred few and far between. Like most citizens of the Pokémon World, Pillan wasn't of the correct status to afford a car. Neither did he happen to own a bike of any description. Much to his embarrassment, Pillan didn't exactly know how to ride one. He was going to have to take most of this journey on foot.

Pillan's train of thought shuddered to a halt as a loud, piercing yell reverberated into the air from somewhere up the path he was travelling. Moments later, a small, brown pokémon with a golden head crest leapt out from amongst the foliage and began to tug desperately at the leg of Pillan's trousers.

"What on earth...?" the man exclaimed, before the pokémon vanished back through the bushes. As Pillan forced his way through the leafy growth in pursuit, he found himself gazing upon a most tumultuous scene. A small boy dressed in a t-shirt, shorts and backwards-facing baseball cap clung fearfully to a tree, while

underneath, a swanna paraded angrily in circles - hissing and muttering.

"Charlie, you're awesome!" the youngster exclaimed in the brown pokémon's direction. "You found someone to help!"

"Nin! Nih-ninchuh!" Charlie begged, waving in the direction of the boy. It was obvious that he expected Pillan to assist in shooing away the tree-bound boy's frustrated attacker.

"Huh? What do you need *me* for?" Pillan asked, unsettled by the swanna's intimidating size. "*You're* a pokémon, *that's* a pokémon, how can *I* possibly do a better job than you?"

"Chuhhhh..." came the frustrated response, before Charlie dashed full pelt at the swanna. The elegant bird responded with a swift flick of a wing, knocking its diminutive target back at Pillan's feet. He stared down at it, apologetically.

"Oh I see," he concluded. "Outmatched." Taking a moment to observe the scene, Pillan deduced from his occasional evening nature documentary watching that swanna as a species were a combined water and flying type pokémon. Given his recent acquisition of an electrical quirk, that gave him something of an upper hand. But how to aim this quirk in a specific direction? Pillan cursed quietly under his breath at the decision to not bring any electronic devices with him due to its inevitable malfunctioning, then an idea struck him.

"Hey!" he called up to the boy. "Have you got any gadgets with you?"

"Wh-what?" the boy stammered.

"A Pokédex, PokéGear...something like that," Pillan elaborated. "Have you got one?"

"There's a PokéNav in my coat," the boy replied. "How's that gonna help save me from a crazy swanna?"

"It sounds weird, I know," Pillan insisted. "But its all I can think of. Just...trust me, okay?"

The boy hesitated, before fumbling about in his pocket, bringing out a yellow, handheld device and tossing it down the path. Charlie leapt into the air and caught it before offering it to Pillan.

"Okay, little fella," Pillan took a breath, accepting the device. "I'm going to...uh...charge this PokéNav and give it back to you. When I do, throw it at that swanna."

"Chuh?" Charlie blinked, then its eyes widened in alarm as the PokéNav in its human companion's hands began to spark wildly. Pillan was quick to return the gadget to Charlie's possession, wherein the pokémon momentarily tossed it up and down in its paws like a hot potato. Then focus and the memory of Pillan's instruction resurfaced, and Charlie thrust his stubby arm forward - pitching the PokéNav in a bullet-straight line towards the swanna's white, feathery rump.

"Booyah!" the youngster in the tree exclaimed triumphantly as the swanna reared backwards with a loud squawk - the electricity from the overloaded PokéNav spattering across its body. Yet the aquatic bird pokémon stood its ground, shifting only a few inches as a result of the blow. Noticing an opening to attack, Charlie dived headfirst - throwing itself heavily into the swanna's side.

"Watch out!" Pillan exclaimed, as the swanna sent out a blast of air at Charlie. The little brown pokémon was forced backwards across the clearing, narrowly missing a clump of rocks. With its pestilent threat currently indisposed, the swanna quickly turned its attentions

upon Pillan, who uttered a yelp in response. There ensued a somewhat ridiculous looking chase around the tree, with the young boy clinging amongst its branches looking on and wincing.

"How do I...get myself... into these kinds of things?" Pillan gasped for air, before the swanna thrust itself forward, its beak wide open toward the source of annoyance. Just as it seemed the bird pokémon was about to bite into Pillan, a small brown form made impact with the side of its head, resulting in the swanna jabbing its beak firmly into the tree trunk nearby.

"Heheheh... there, that wasn't so bad," Pillan chuckled nervously, while Charlie stood looking rather proud at himself and the swanna struggled and growled in its feeble attempts to pull its head away from the tree. Keeping his movements slow and calm, the young man approached the water pokémon so it could see him more clearly. The swanna hissed distrustfully, but the utterance petered out as the pokémon took note of the sincere look in Pillan's eyes. It resorted to making an unhappy noise instead, due to the discomfort of having its beak wedged into the tree trunk.

"Alright, I'll get you unstuck," Pillan said patiently. "Just so long as you go on your way and stop bothering this poor kid." He looked at Charlie. "Can you help me pull the swanna out of the tree?"

"Chuh!" Charlie nodded, before clasping his stubby arms across the bird pokémon's back. One quick tug later, and the swanna had been wrenched clear of the tree, though tossed unceremoniously across the clearing in the process. Rapidly getting to its feet, the bird pokémon huffed before turning tail and vanishing into the undergrowth, in a cloud of feathers and a splattering of water.

"No gratitude," Pillan shook his head as droplets slid down his

face. "That's a wild pokémon for you." He glanced up into the tree. "You really need to make sure your pokémon is trained for challengers that strong if you're intending to capture them."

"I wasn't *trying* to capture it!" the boy snorted, before looking somewhat ashamed. "I don't exactly have a Trainer license yet."

"So what *are* you doing out here?" Pillan persisted. "What did you do to get that swanna so angry at you? Those things keep perfectly to themselves unless provoked."

"Yeah...about that..." the boy's voice had become quieter at this point. "My ninchuk Charlie and I were pretty hungry and...well they had some berries and..."

"One thing led to another, by the sounds of it," Pillan remarked bemusedly. "Well you can come back down now. Everything's safe."

"I...I can't," the boy whimpered. "I'm stuck." He offered Pillan a hopeful expression. "Couldn't you just fly up here and help me down?"

"Fly?" Pillan spluttered. "Do I look like I have a jet pack?"

"Well I figured *all* super heroes could fly," the boy responded, raising his eyebrows.

"I'm not a super hero," Pillan groaned, before looking at Charlie. "So you're a ninchuk, huh? Looks like we're going to have to get your friend out of that tree the hard way."

"Nih-chuh," Charlie agreed. Pillan leant down and motioned for the pokémon to clamber upon his back. Once Charlie had obliged, Pillan hoisted him upwards amongst the branches where, with some careful precision, the ninchuk was able to grasp his human companion.

"We'd better get you back home and let your parents know

what happened," Pillan commented, once the boy and his pokémon were back on solid ground. "What's your name, and where do you live?"

"I'm Nathan," came the reply. "And I live in Kehera Village. But I don't want to go back there. That horrible place is why my ninchuk and I ran away! We were going to live out here until things got better."

"Whoa...things must be *really* bad if you're willing to resort to that," Pillan raised his eyebrows. "What is it, exactly? Family problems? School getting you down?"

"Nah..." Nathan shook his head. "It's these four kids."

"Four kids?" Pillan decided to sit down, he had the feeling this was going to take a while. "So it's bullies you've been having trouble with?"

"Kinda," Nathan said. "But its not just me they're picking on. It's pretty much everyone in the whole village! They dress up in really weird clothes and go around doing all sorts of messed up stuff and getting us other kids in trouble! My dad's the guy who runs official village business, and he's tried to get them to behave. But these guys don't care - they have no respect for anyone, other kids or grown ups." He paused, before his face lit up with the onset of an idea. "Hey...maybe *you* could help us out! Y'know...use your super hero powers and show those kids who's boss."

"I'm *not* a super hero!" Pillan exclaimed, almost desperately.

"Super hero or not, you have cool powers," Nathan stated with surprising firmness, taking hold of Pillan's sleeve. "My dad needs you so he can finally catch those kids! C'mon!"

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Chairman Dominic Baker and his wife Carla were deeply overjoyed to have their son returned to them safe and mostly unscathed later that afternoon. It soon became apparent just how worried they had been when an Officer Jenny and her two male officer counterparts arrived during the family's reunion. Discovering that Nathan was back home once again, the Police resumed their original duties, leaving Nathan's father to reward Pillan accordingly. No sooner had the man blinked than he had been offered to stay for dinner.

Sitting upon a padded, varnished oak chair in a lavishly-decorated dining room, Pillan started to feel somewhat out of his league. Nathan's family were unmistakably wealthy, yet despite this, the boy had been willing to give up almost everything and live off the land because of the threat overshadowing him. Pillan shuffled uncomfortably - maybe these kids were more troublesome than he had first thought.

"Here comes the starter!" Carla announced musically, walking into the room with a covered tray. Carefully placing the tray upon the table in front of her three recipients, the woman whisked away the lid to reveal a selection of steaming white food items. "Today I decided to go with something more traditional. Help yourselves, my good men!"

"What are they?" Dominic asked, while Nathan leant forward and prodded tentatively at the seaweed that one of the balls of rice was wrapped in.

"Onigiri," Carla explained, tapping Nathan's fingers with the end

of her spatula. "A snack food that I've read is quite good for you. Your ancestors would have eaten these on a daily basis."

"Ewie," commented Nathan, wrinkling up his nose. "Can't we just have soup like we normally do?"

"Trying something different for *one* night won't hurt you, Nathan," his mother insisted with some irritation at the way her son was behaving in front of their guest. "Would you like one or two, Pillan?"

"One would be great, thank you," the man replied politely, picking up a folded cloth and tucking it into the collar of his sweater to use as a napkin. He was willing to try out some traditional cuisine from his home region and the enthusiastic expression upon his face showed that all too well. As Carla made a move to serve the Onigiri, however, there was a loud crackle of electricity and the room was plunged into darkness. The light returned as swiftly as it had left, and Nathan descended into chuckling at the sight of Pillan's red-faced, awkward expression. It was more than apparent that the man had assumed himself responsible for the power outage.

"Not again!" Dominic exclaimed, staring aghast at the tray upon the dinner table. Curiously enough, the Onigiri had vanished and in its place were now arranged a row of hamburgers. Before Pillan could even react, Nathan had snatched up one of the hamburgers and held it in front of his gaping mouth.

"Awesome!" he cried. "Much better than some rice thingies wrapped in leaves."

"Nathan Ray Baker!" Carla snapped. "Don't you dare take a bite, you know these doesn't belong to us."

"Wh-what's going on?" Pillan spluttered, looking a little flustered at this absurd occurrence. As if in reply, a gruff man's voice was heard yelling from an open window of the house across the street.

"Hey! What d'ya call this junk? Where are my burgers?"

"Sorry, Mr. Larkin!" Carla called from the dining room window, grabbing the tray and heading for the front door. Both Dominic and Nathan uttered deep sighs at this point, for varying reasons.

"I must apologise for this, Pillan," Dominic spoke up. "I'm afraid what you just saw there was the work of some very meddlesome children that have been pestering our village for some time now."

"Those four kids Nathan told me about earlier?" the man inquired. "How'd they manage to switch our food with the food belonging to the guy over the road like that?"

"We don't really know," Dominic replied. "This is just one of the many unexplained yet frustrating tricks they play on Kehera Village citizens."

"And most of the time they don't work in my favour," Nathan pouted, wishing they could have kept Mr. Larkin's burgers. Pillan looked thoughtful - no doubt the children responsible would stay out of sight to prevent their parents from knowing of their actions. If anyone was going to get anywhere with this investigation, somebody would need to unmask the pranksters.

"Mr. Baker?" he began. "I...uh...I could try and help stop those four kids from making the lives of your villagers miserable. If you're interested."

"You're welcome to," Dominic nodded. "Come tomorrow morning I'll be busy dealing with a mountain of complaints. But I warn

you, those children are quite skilled at keeping themselves hidden."

"I'll keep that in mind," Pillan replied. It wasn't like he hadn't had more than his share of weird circumstances already.

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Following a refreshing sleep in a comfortable bed provided by Nathan's parents, Pillan set out on his self-imposed mission. Nathan followed with Charlie in tow, partly to see what Pillan intended to do, but mostly because the multitudes of ringing telephones in his father's office were driving him crazy.

"So where were you heading?" Nathan asked. "Before you ran into me, I mean."

"I was going to Mauville City," Pillan told him. "To see a guy called Wattson. Apparently he knows stuff that could help me with my problem."

"You've got a problem too?" Nathan looked surprised. "What's wrong?"

"You saw your PokéNav from what happened yesterday, right?" Pillan began. "*That's* my problem. I'm making electronics mess up, even when I *don't* want them to."

"So you need Wattson's help with your super powers!" Nathan concluded brightly. Pillan groaned and raised a hand, about to correct the boy yet again before halting in mid-breath.

"There's nothing 'super' about these 'powers'," he concluded, thin-lipped. "They lost me my job in Devon Corporation."

"Fah! Who cares about a stuffy ol' job?" Nathan snorted. "Now you can travel Hoenn, solving mysteries and fighting crime. Zapping enemies in the butt - PACHOW!" He struck a pose with his hands held out in clawed fashion, just to prove his point.

"Getting back to the task at hand..." Pillan recomposed himself. "Something I learned from my time in Devon Corp - To unmask a thief, one needs to catch them in the act. Same goes for any kind of troublemaker. But to catch these kids in the act, I need to know what it is they get up to." He turned to Nathan expectantly. "What kind of pranks do they pull?"

Nathan said nothing, but instead redirected Pillan's attentions to a signpost above their heads. Its size and proximity to the entrance gates were more than a passing hint that this was Kehera Village's name plaque. Or at least it had been - the words that were once there proved to be illegible now, blotted out by globs of bright yellow paint. Pillan scratched his chin.

"So they're into vandalism, huh?" he remarked.

"Yeah, that's what they're best known for," Nathan replied. "And its not just road signs - shops along the main street had to put up new signs several times this month because those four kids keep painting 'em out. Books and people's letters, too! Nothing with writing on is safe."

"That's kooky," Pillan pulled a face. "Not to mention leaves things pretty open as to where they'll appear next. Do they do anything else?"

Right on cue, there was heard a child's wailing from somewhere around the corner. Picking up speed, Pillan and Nathan dashed down a

side passage to be confronted with a boy who looked about Nathan's age, sitting on the floor cradling something in both hands.

"What happened now, Will?" Nathan gasped.

"I was muh-minding my own business playing with my SOL Capture gun when one of those horrible kids, the big one, he came and buh-broke it!" Will held out the ball of crushed plastic to back his tale, lip quivering. Nathan turned to Pillan with an almost pleading expression. It was clear he was unhappy over his friend's misfortune. Pillan began to frown deeply - painting on signs was bad enough, but this? It seemed the four kids would stop at nothing to ruin the enjoyment of others who only wanted to live peaceably with them. Something had to be done fast, before things really got out of hand.

An ominous rumble was heard, causing the trio of figures in the alley to glance up instinctively. They expected to see a canopy of familiar dark grey clouds signalling impending wet weather. However, they found themselves looking at nothing but a clear summer sky.

"This just keeps getting weirder," Pillan shook his head. "First thunder, now I swear I can hear rain falling even though there's none there."

"Actually..." Nathan trailed off as he pointed over his older companion's shoulder. It seemed that a cloud -if but a very small one- was indeed hanging over Kehera Village, and was raining upon an isolated spot. Angry shouting could now be heard under the rush of water, prompting Pillan and Nathan to run off in the direction of this anomaly. However, they arrived a little too late.

"Blasted kids!" complained an elderly man bitterly from the sodden bench he was sitting on. "Can't a guy read his newspaper in

peace?" He brought the waterlogged wad of reading material back up to eye level, but the watching youths could clearly see the writing upon it was far from legible.

"But how?" Pillan spluttered. "If that was a rain cloud I just saw, how did they-"

"Rain Dance, o' course!" the man snapped. "Don't you know your pokémon techniques, boy?"

"Those kids have pokémon?" Pillan exclaimed, more to Nathan this time. He shrugged in response - it appeared he was as aware of this fact as Pillan had been.

"Well of course they do, you uneducated buffoon!" came the abusive reply. "Y'don't expect they leapt around and did it themselves, do you?"

Pillan fidgeted uncomfortably, unsure of what to say to the pensioner and just wishing he could leave. He was about to get his wish granted - seconds later, Nathan yanked hard on the sleeve of the man's sweater.

"I just saw another one!" he hissed. "They ran off 'round the corner, c'mon!"

This time, the pair were more successful in their findings. The target in question was so engrossed in sizing up the location for their next piece of handiwork that they had failed to realise someone was watching them. Such an absence of awareness gave Pillan a chance to examine matters more closely.

Standing a little over four feet tall, the figure was clad from

head to toe in black fabric which left nothing but a length of brown, cream-tipped hair visible. This hair was tied up in a ridiculously large bow with pink ribbon, giving the overall appearance of a ninja with bizarre fashion sense.

"You were right about weird clothes," Pillan murmured to Nathan, who couldn't help but snicker at this point. "But judging by the hair, I'd say this one's a girl. What's she staring at?"

"I bet its the billboard over there," Nathan pointed. "That's the kid who paints all over everything."

Pillan blinked, wondering just how she was intending to paint on *anything* without any paint to hand. As he pondered this, the figure leapt up into the air, flicking her head round in one sudden movement. A bright blue substance spattered against the billboard, seemingly from nowhere, before the figure returned her thin boot-clad feet to solid ground once more. Noting her decision to escape, Charlie uttered an angry cry. The figure swung round upon hearing the noise, her oddly-shaped crimson eyes full of unmistakable panic. As Charlie dived forward, his target bounded instinctively in reverse to avoid the ninchuk's flailing arms. Her hair was thrown to one side with the momentum, causing Pillan's mouth to drop open slightly upon sight of it. Absurd as the concept was, the man knew what he saw couldn't be a figment of his imagination - the ends of the figure's hair were indeed dripping with blue paint!

Or at least he *thought* it was paint. With the absence of any paint tins, Pillan wasn't entirely sure. Regardless, Charlie now had the substance all over his face and was running about in a panic, unable to see. Nathan wasn't about to let this stop him from finding out the identity of the painter, once and for all. The figure let out a squeal of

alarm and turned to run, but her decision had been made too late. Nathan ended up grabbing hold of her sodden hair, pulling the figure onto her back in the process. Seizing the opportunity, Pillan dashed over and grabbed at the cloth that was covering the figure's head. It came away easily, but the vision that resulted was far from what the two boys had bargained for.

Staring fearfully back up at them with tear-stricken eyes, was the brown, furred face of a lopunny.

Before Nathan had a chance to utter a word, he was thrown backwards onto the ground by the force of the lopunny's tied up ears before the distraught pokémon scampered off amongst the buildings and out of sight.

"Well, I sure wasn't expecting that," Pillan murmured, as Charlie tried to wipe the blue goop from his face. "But at least the weird outfit makes a bit more sense now. Still, why would a pokémon with an obvious artistic talent go to such lengths to use the talent to wipe out writing?"

"Artistic talent..." Nathan ran these words over in his mind while rubbing a smear from his cheek. "Hey, that reminds me! There's an artist guy who lives in the corner of the village, maybe he'd know something about this."

"It's a bit of a long shot, but what have we got to lose?" Pillan nodded. "Show me the way."

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Nathan led Pillan to an immaculately kept, decorative cottage on the village outskirts, to be met with the sight of Archie Karnak - a

man in his sixties who was currently leaning anxiously upon his garden fence. He was dressed in a blue shirt and olive green overalls displaying pens, brushes and carving tools in the front pocket, and bore a shock of sandy brown, neatly combed hair. Taking note of the two arrivals, Archie quickly invited them inside wherein Pillan relayed everything he had seen and heard throughout his visit.

"This is dreadful," the man at the table sighed heavily, fiddling with his coffee mug while Pillan gazed through the window at a half-finished carving outside. "I was hoping it would get better before it got worse."

"You mean, you *knew* this was happening?" Nathan spluttered, looking annoyed. There was an uncomfortable silence - Pillan's eyes met with those of the aged artist, who nodded slowly.

"I wasn't entirely certain, but I had the feeling they were up to something when they kept disappearing more frequently," he said. "The children you mention are not human, but pokémon. I recruited them during my travels, astounded by their wonderful artistic skill. Here I began to teach them as my students, and while it seemed things were working out as I had hoped, something must have been amiss."

"Of course!" Nathan exclaimed. "Pokémon are meant to fight, not make silly models and paint stuff!"

"That's not entirely true," Archie told him calmly. "Pokémon are like us. They have their strengths, weaknesses and personalities, and not all of them have a desire to battle."

"Archie...we're not blaming you for what's happened," Pillan insisted. "We're just confused as to the weird behaviour of your

pokémon."

"Me too, Pillan. Me too," Archie placed his head in one hand. "Russ, Freda and Taycee seemed so enthusiastic to learn how to improve their personal talents, why would they suddenly turn to mindless troublemaking?"

"Wait, you only mentioned three pokémon names," Pillan murmured. "What about the fourth?"

"Fourth?" Archie blinked. "I only teach three."

"And yet, villagers all over Kehera are complaining about *four* kids..." Pillan mulled this over. "Archie, I think I've figured out what could be causing your students to act this way. They've got themselves another teacher."

"If that's the case, this teacher needs to be stopped," Archie frowned. "They're a bad influence on my protégés."

"Glad we agree on that," Pillan nodded. "And I think I know just how we can do it, too."

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From a treetop somewhere in Kehera, a young male figure stood vigilantly surveying the territory. Everything had gone according to plan that day - Russ and Freda had kept the villagers distracted with their own personal brand of mischief making while his favourite accomplice Taycee worked in the background, using the smeargle traits she had inherited to blot out every instance of the written word she could find.

The boy smiled pleasurably to himself, though the expression was only visible through his golden eyes since a bright red scarf covered the majority of his head. However, this satisfaction wasn't to last long. As he continued to glance westwards, the boy caught sight of a man dressed in tatty overalls, sitting at a picnic table and scribbling furiously on a pad of paper. The boy's eyes narrowed - writing? In *his* village? This man had to be asking for trouble!

Without hesitation, the boy leapt from the tree branch and darted his target's direction, his tiny brown shoes barely brushing against the blades of grass as he ran over them. A few moments later, he was within striking distance. Concealing himself behind a nearby litter bin, the boy raised his hands, stubby fingers outstretched. As he waved his arms from left to right, a small dark rain cloud began to form over the man's head. The boy snickered under his breath - no one was about to read *anything* if he could help it.

"Now!" a voice exclaimed from somewhere nearby. Before the boy was able to make his escape, a brown shape barrelled into him - pinning him to the ground with all its strength.

Archie glanced up from the picnic bench where he had been pretending to work and smiled at Pillan as he emerged from the foliage with Nathan in tow. The young man's idea had worked flawlessly and the one responsible for misleading his promising students had been finally caught. Now it was time to uncover the motive for their actions. The boy didn't look ready to talk, however - he was too busy trying to free himself from Charlie's grasp.

"Listen," Pillan began firmly. "We're not going to let you go until you tell us why you've been causing all this trouble, so you might as well stop struggling." This statement achieved quite the opposite effect

as the boy started to writhe and twitch all the more. It was obvious these attempts were starting to take their toll on Charlie, who was struggling to keep his captive under control. Pillan hurriedly tried again. "What do you have against words, huh? Why did you persuade Archie's students to help you mess things up?"

At this point the boy broke free of Charlie's grip with a loud cry of anguish. But instead of running away, he dived for the pen that had previously been in Archie's hand and was now lying on the picnic table, shoving it a few inches from Pillan's face. The trainer staggered back in alarm, only to realise the boy had no intentions of attacking him. Instead he stood there, his large golden eyes filling with tears and the pen shaking in his somewhat deformed pinkish hand.

"Roh roh..." he whimpered. "Tye, roh... tye roh tye."

"Hey..." Nathan blinked, while Kota nodded like he knew what been going on all along. "You're a pokémon too, aren't you?"

The small figure nodded slowly, before pulling the red scarf away from his face. As it fluttered to the ground, Pillan, Archie, Nathan and Charlie were met with a miserable-looking tyroque in a human child's clothing. A few minutes later, Russ, Freda and Taycee appeared - each unmasking themselves and revealing their identities as a makuhita, medicham and lopunny respectively.

"This is most disappointing," Archie sighed, eyeing the pokémon sadly. "I expected better of you three. You're all artists! You're above this mindless graffiti."

"Medih! Meh-kah!" Freda insisted, taking the pen from the tyroque's hand and waving it at Archie. "Kahm meh medih!"

"This would be so much easier if we could understand what

they were saying," Nathan commented, scratching his head. This thought only served to make matters worse - uttering another screech, the tyroque snatched the wad of paper from the picnic table and tore it into many pieces before breaking down in sobs upon Russ' shoulder.

"Wait...I think that's it," Pillan snapped his fingers. "Maybe the whole reason this tyroque has been trying to get rid of all the writing in Kehera Village is because he can't understand it. That would sure be frustrating...."

The trio of pokémon began to nod furiously while their sniffing accomplice stood to attention, his face now alight with a renewed hope.

"That certainly seems to be the case," Archie smiled, before turning to the tyroque. "But there are better ways of dealing with your frustration, lad. What would you think to joining my art school? Not only could the others teach you how to express yourself creatively, I could teach you to read and write human languages too."

"Tye! Tye roh!" the tyroque exclaimed with great enthusiasm.

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

With these matters of miscommunication worked out, normality resumed in Kehera village. While Dominic and the Police were fairly understanding of the young tyroque's issues, they also insisted that Archie and his students cleaned up the mess the latter had made and replace any signs or literature beyond repair. As these duties got underway, Pillan was summoned back to Dominic's office for a thorough commendation of his efforts and a consequential thank you

gift in the form of some of Carla's home cooking.

"So, where shall you be heading next, Pillan?" Dominic asked, while Nathan happily tucked into the burgers he had been desiring to eat for so long.

"Mauville City," Pillan replied. "I need to go and see Wattson Tesric about something important."

"Pillan's got super powers!" Nathan grinned with his mouth full, to which the young man chuckled awkwardly.

"Heheh, kids and their imaginations, eh?" he said, while Nathan protested that he wasn't conjuring matters out of his head.

"But seriously, that's quite some way," Carla looked shocked. "And you're planning to walk there?"

"I'm a bit low on options," Pillan grimaced.

"Hey dad! Could we give him a lift there in the car?" Nathan piped up, momentarily distracted from his protest. "Please please pleeeeeease?"

"I don't see why not," Dominic smiled, before a mischievous look appeared in his eyes. "After all, its not every day you get to spend time with someone who has 'super powers'."

This statement resulted in both Dominic and Carla sharing an outburst of mirth between themselves, while Nathan proceeded to sulk at not being taken seriously, and Pillan heaved a weighty sigh over the whole thing. The sooner he got his internal mess sorted out, the better.

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