

POKÉMON
REBIRTH

ULTIMATUM

Endgame Edition



EPISODE SEVENTEEN

Double Team

Mondo had felt uncomfortable with letting Errol go off alone. Not because he thought the man couldn't take care of himself - it was something about the expression upon Errol's face that convinced Mondo this was a time his friend needed moral support more than anything. But Errol was insistent, and so Mondo relented. There were places *he* needed to be, after all - issues in his own mind that required addressing.

After a ten minute walk, Mondo and Copi-in-human-guise had arrived at Scale Falls' impressive library. It hadn't been an easy journey - the two figures had been pushed and shoved by passing commuters as they navigated the city crowds. Their toes had been trodden upon and elbows jabbed into their ribs and chests. Regardless, the sight of the towering archive of knowledge before them seemed to ease the aches and frustrations of the previous escapade. Mondo was quick to dash inside with Copi in hot pursuit.

"Can I help you, young man?" asked a librarian. She was wearing a puzzled expression at Mondo's slightly wild-eyed stare upon his entering the building.

"I'm looking for something like a condensed world history," Mondo explained breathlessly.

"Ah! Books on history and mythos can be found in Aisle K," the librarian smiled.

After all the walking, the duo decided to take one of the glass-walled elevators to the appropriate floor. Copi gazed down in amazement through the transparent panes at the tops of the heads of people as they grew smaller with the increasing distance, and the shelves upon shelves of books that looked like brightly patterned dominoes. They retracted with a scared expression, hoping that no one would ever lean on one of those shelves and cause something catastrophic to occur.

Finally, Mondo and Copi stepped out onto the fourth floor and began to scour the contents of Aisle K. It was difficult to know where to look - many of the volumes present covered only a small portion of certain world events, varying civilisations or advances in technology and arts.

"How about this how?" Copi asked, holding up a thick book with a blue cover.

"'Unexplained Mysteries'?" Mondo read the title out loud, squinting at the image of a very stylized-looking UFO on the front of the book. "Oh come on, Copi...that stuff's just fiction."

"Fick...shun?" Copi eyed him curiously.

"It's not real," Mondo explained firmly. "I'm looking for historical evidence, not wild stories told by delirious people."

"There is truth in it somewhere, maybe..." Copi glanced at him, almost hopefully. Mondo looked thoughtful.

"Hm... yeah...maybe there is," he began to smile. "Well, it's worth a shot, right?"

Copi nodded and grinned, offering the book toward Mondo, who took it and opened it out across a nearby table.

"'The Phantom of Cinnabar Coast'...'The Lavender Town Hospital Disaster'...'Abduction Records'..." the young man paused, his eyes having caught a glimpse of something that drew his half-hearted glances to a standstill. "'The Mirage Flight'..."

In 1982, a plane crashed in the Orrean desert, just west of Pyrite Town, leaving no survivors. Studies of onboard flight data by cybertechnicians in Hoenn uncovered what they believed to be segments relaying the plane's flight path. 'JFK' and 'SIN'. It is assumed the latter is Sinnoh International Airport, while the former may be Johto Falls Airport, but it is hard to be certain, as the data was heavily corrupted.

To add to the confusion, no international airports were able to claim ownership of the airplane, or notify it having left any particular region. Some insisted this was because the plane's tracking system was damaged, and the fact its flight data was corrupted appears to back this theory up. However, some eyewitness reports would dictate otherwise. Sailors out in the North Sonorian Ocean told of a rapidly-emerging dry storm, and visions of a large dark shape behind the clouds. Police in Gateon Port were alerted to the appearance of weird packages landing in residents' gardens and smashing through their rooftops. Most convincing

of all, are a photographer's collations of what parts of the plane remained in tact.

The book presented Mondo with the sight of a half-crumpled cockpit, its windshield smashed, the outer shell scarred and blackened by debris and flames. It made the young man shudder internally, but he forced himself to continue scanning the image. Just beyond the plane's door was painted an insignia, just about visible despite the unfathomable ordeal the transport had been subjected to.

"At...Atlantic...Airlines..." Mondo barely whispered. His mind was suddenly a blur - there was that word again. 'Atlantic', the one thing the Sarthest University students had been able to pluck from his recurring nightmares. Had he seen that plane as it fell from the sky? Was that the event that had traumatized him so deeply, that his memories insisted on evading his grasp?

Maybe. It still didn't explain the other things about him though - the curious psychic immunity, for a start. 'Atlantic' was still the core piece of information he had to go by.

"I think I'll make a copy of these pages," Mondo murmured, standing up with the book in his hands.

"Copi?" his teal-haired companion suddenly looked a little worried. Mondo glanced at them with a puzzled frown, but then it suddenly dawned on him, along with a parallel realisation. This entire time, Mondo and Errol had been referring to their zecutylnr friend by their pokémon

nickname. Such a nickname wouldn't carry well while they were in a human form - they'd have to think of another one sooner or later.

"No no, this doesn't involve you, buddy," Mondo chuckled awkwardly. "I'm going to put this book into a machine and create a print of some of the pages I want."

"Ohh," Copi relaxed again.

"That being said, if it *wasn't* for you, I wouldn't have even thought of looking in a book such as this one in the first place," Mondo patted his companion on the back, causing them to beam appreciatively. "So thanks! Now let's find that photocopier."

Having been redirected to the area where the duplication equipment and public computers were installed, Mondo had been quietly standing by, allowing the photocopier to go about its business while Copi watched the bright green light slide back and forth under the lid.

"So what's so great about that? Looks pretty stupid if you ask me,"

Mondo flinched. The slightly raspy voice he could hear was distant, but sounded very familiar.

"Maybe to you. Looks aren't everything, anyway. The Pokétech is a really versatile gadget! Look at all the apps it has!"

The second voice was a little less familiar, but still recognizable. Mondo turned his head slowly to glance over his shoulder, and saw two figures sat at a table a few metres away. One was a boy of approximately thirteen years of age, wearing an orange sweater with lime coloured sleeves and a yellow hood which had been pulled over his head – barely concealing his brown hair. The other was a girl about three years older than her accomplice, with shoulder length blue-grey hair and a plum shirt over an olive one with a luxray motif.

"Why is there one for tossing a coin? What's wrong with using a *real* coin?"

"Do you know how hard it is to find actual pocket change these days?"

Mondo's eyes widened slightly. No doubt about it - by some weird twist of fate, he had found himself in the same city, the same *building* as two of his companions from Team Rocket. He felt his muscles tense. Should he go over and speak to them? With such near impossible odds leaning in his favour, it seemed very wrong not to take advantage of this chance.

"It's still stupid," Adam muttered, after a short silence. Denise said no more about the matter, but gave a dissatisfied snort and turned the page of the electronics directory she was browsing. There was no use trying to reason with unreasonable people, especially those closed to the

opinions of others. Being used to having others argue their point, Adam was once again caught off-guard. He opened his mouth in order to protest, but shut it again as a thick volume was placed firmly upon the table in front of him. Glancing up accusingly toward the possessor of the book, Adam flinched as he found himself eye to eye with the friend he thought had abandoned him, back in Nashgri City.

"T-Tate?" Denise inquired shakily, managing to recall Mondo's pseudonym from the shocked recesses of her mind.

"Hello," the young man smiled faintly, while Copi peered shyly from behind his left arm. "This is quite the surprise."

"Tell me about it," Adam raised an eyebrow in a disgruntled fashion. "I see you changed your mind again, as usual..."

"Yeah, I guess I did," Mondo looked uncomfortable at the adolescent's scrutiny. "I gave it some thought, and it seemed that it might be better to research my situation from a historical point of view as opposed to a biological one."

"And that's why you're looking in a book of phoney mystery stories?" Adam remarked, unimpressed.

"They're not-!" Mondo trailed off and went red.

"Just ignore him," Denise glared in Adam's direction. "I'm sure you've got a valid reason for looking in that book."

"Thanks, Neesee," Mondo replied quietly. "It's frustrating. I feel like there's an answer here, but it's just out of my reach."

"Still, now you're out of that lab, you'll have a better chance of finding your answer if you stick with us," Denise began to smile. Adam half-mirrored the expression, unwilling to let Mondo know he was shot of the grudge he'd been holding. But rather than the happy response they had expected to receive from him at this invitation, Mondo began to look even more despondent than before. "Tate? What's wrong?"

"I...I'm sorry," Mondo glanced away. "I can't rejoin the group yet, as much as I want to."

"Why not?" Adam exclaimed in upset, dropping the disgruntled aura altogether.

"It's Errol."

"Errol?" Denise's mouth fell open a little. "You mean...he's okay?"

"Oh, yes. He's fine," Mondo clarified, to which Denise let out a little squeal of joy.

"That's wonderful!" she beamed. "Everyone will be so thrilled to see him again."

"Yeah, that's the problem..." Mondo sighed and attempted to elaborate. "There are things stopping Errol from coming back to see you guys. Obstacles...in his head. It's hard to explain, but I'm the only one who can talk him round. So it's going to be a bit longer, okay?"

"Tell me, Caley," Sabrina said, picking up her mug of fruit tea.

"What had you been pursuing before you discovered your Cho'moken?"

"Well I'd intended to go sightseeing..." Caley trailed off, letting his eyes scan the paperwork and articles on the table.

"So, you were not a Pokémon Trainer?" Sabrina raised her eyebrows.

"No," Caley reached down to the Luxury Ball upon his belt, before unclipping the spherical item and bringing it to eye level. "At least not intentionally."

"Curious..." Sabrina murmured. "The link you have with the pokémon in that Pokéball is remarkably strong. It is surprising for it to be that way in one who is not a Pokémon Trainer."

"The link'?" Caley echoed.

"Oh oh!" Wilma bounced on the sofa, causing Geoffrey to tip to one side with a bewildered look on his face.

"Can *you* remember what Linking is, Wilma?" Sabrina asked, smiling fondly at the girl's enthusiasm for the subject matter.

"In the olden times, they didn't have Pokéballs," Wilma recited. "The only way to tame a pokémon was to link with them."

"That's right," Sabrina gave a nod, before turning to Caley. "Linking is the alignment of your own Aura frequency with that of a compatible pokémon."

"Compatible, huh?" Caley processed this thought.

"In the past, it was courtesy to leave the pokémon who preferred to exist apart from humans, and only attempt to link with those who were drawn to them," Sabrina told him. "These were known as compatible pokémon."

"Back then, you didn't choose a pokémon, a pokémon chose *you!*" Wilma exclaimed, while Geoffrey flopped his upper body across her legs, as if to reinforce this statement.

Caley gazed down at the Luxury Ball in his hand. Funny thing was, Kota *had* more or less chosen him, despite his fervent attempts to get the augret to return to the one he'd been in the care of.

"And this link with Kota is because I'm psychic, right?" the young man asked.

"No...linking is far from something limited to those with Cho'moken," Sabrina shook her head. "One of the core teachings of Kakureiro is the importance of a strong link with one's pokémon. After all, the more aligned your Aura frequencies are, the more synchronized you are able to act."

"*All* the best Trainers have strong links with their pokémon!" Wilma agreed emphatically.

"And every so often there occurs a rare, beautiful moment where you discover a pokémon you completely align with," Sabrina smiled.

"That, is a Perfect Link."

"Must be amazing to be that close to your pokémon," Caley marvelled. "But what is 'Kakureiro'?"

"It is a means for those without Cho'moken to grasp some of the techniques of those with the ability," Sabrina explained. "Manipulation of their own Aura, and reading the Aura signatures of others are just two of several techniques possible. Kakureiro is something I studied in the past, in order to teach it to others."

There was a fleeting sadness in Sabrina's eyes, as the Gym Leader recalled a window of time in which her actions had been selfish and unfavourable. Everything had an alternate purpose back then – this was a version of herself she was happy to leave behind. Instead, the woman turned her attention to the current task of helping Caley to better understand himself.

"Now before we begin, do you know what your speciality is yet?" she asked. Caley shook his head. "I see. Well first I need to decipher what your speciality is, otherwise I'll be wasting time and effort teaching you skills you won't be able to use properly. It's very rare for one to be good at *everything*."

"Unless you're Sabrina, she's amazing," Wilma grinned, to which Sabrina chuckled awkwardly.

"To be able to decipher your speciality, I'm going to have to ask for your trust," Sabrina told Caley solemnly. "This procedure requires me to momentarily take control of your body."

Caley faltered. He'd barely been in the company of the Gym Leader for fifteen minutes, and here she was requesting something quite intimate, at least on a mental level. Surely it would be impossible to keep the recollections of his dealings with Team Rocket from Sabrina, were she to control his body even for a second.

"I understand your hesitation," Sabrina persisted. "But I cannot help you to the full without this knowledge."

The torment of the unknown had gone on for long enough within him. Caley lowered his head slightly.

"Alright," he said. "Do it."

Sabrina acknowledged the request and moved towards the young man, her palms outstretched. As the Gym Leader's hands made contact with the sides of his head, Caley felt her presence ebbing into his mind - strong, but careful and contemplative. The sensation of the ends of his fingers, the tips of his toes, slipped away - retracting into the core of himself and leaving him suspended, a live-but-disconnected orb of consciousness. Sabrina's presence spread, ponderously reaching out into the limbs that Caley had unwittingly left behind, scrutinizing and thoughtful.

Then the weightlessness vanished. There was a violent jerk of momentum, rather like the sensation one gets in bed when their brain is convinced they're falling out of it. Blinding light hit the back of Caley's eyes, causing him to gasp suddenly. And Sabrina pulled away. For a split

second, a horrified glint was present in her eyes, but it was fleeting - unseen by her younger companions - and had been quickly replaced with her more familiar calm expression.

"So..." the Gym Leader concluded. "It appears your speciality is manifestation."

"What?" Caley blinked. "How does that work?"

"Manifesters have the ability to sculpt Aura into solid forms," Sabrina explained. "Amongst pokémon species, lucarios hold one of the top positions of manifestation skill. Though in your case, you are going to need a little help."

She reached into the case beside her, and brought out a pair of flat bracelets. Each one was set with a blue-violet gradient stone.

"These are Incandium bracers," Sabrina told Caley. "Incandium works with your own psychic abilities in order to bridge the gap between your thoughts and reality."

"Wow..." Caley breathed, as the Kantoan Gym Leader held out the articles. "You're...you're letting me have them?"

"That is correct," Sabrina smiled. "If you are to reach your full potential as Ahnloka, you're going to need these."

"Thank you," Caley replied gratefully, taking the Incandium bracers from Sabrina and putting them on. Almost at once, he felt a

made no attempt to move away upon sensing the approach of the taller figure he had ran into the back of, just a few minutes previously.

<What do you want from me?> he sniffed.

"I don't want anyt'ing but t' give you reassurance," Errol insisted. "I know dis has been a big ordeal for ya-"

Carrlin uttered a noise that appeared to be a cross between amusement and disgust.

<You don't know at all...> he muttered. <You don't know what I've been through! How Mewtwo made me feel! He said we could never appreciate the world like natural-born pokémon. Wasn't our appreciation of life good enough?>

"Mewtwo...?" the word caught in Errol's throat. Suddenly it fell into place. The reason for the odd familiarity struck him full on. "You're a cloned meowth..."

<How...?> Carrlin stared aghast.

"How did I know?" Errol tilted his head. "Jus' so happened I met dis Mewtwo fella once, on a place called Mt. Quena. And he was livin' with a buncha clones dere. During my visit, dey sorta...hm...borrowed my soivices as translator."

<When?> Carrlin frowned. <I'd lived with Mewtwo and the other clones that whole time, and I never saw you there!>

"Well I didn't look like dis, dat's fer sure," Errol shrugged. "Back den, I was more meowth dan man, y' could say."

<Y-you were the pokémon I was cloned from?> Carrlin's already wide eyes somehow widened even further. Errol's did also. For some reason it hadn't crossed his mind, but that totally made sense. Ruling out someone duplicating the experiment used to modify his egg, how *e/se* could the same set of circumstances befall another meowth?

For a moment, Carrlin's face had taken on a wistful expression of deep gratitude. He still remembered how Errol had rescued him from capture at the hands of Team Rocket and stood up to Mewtwo for the rights of everyone's memories.

<But...but...> Carrlin stammered, looking down at his hands before glancing back at Errol. <Why are *you* human?>

"Dat's quite a story." Errol chuckled faintly. He proceeded to explain exactly what had happened, though with difficulty. Doing so involved dredging up another chunk of memories of events and people that even he hadn't got over yet. Poor Amu, and Gloria - both had sacrificed everything to help him. As the story unfolded, Carrlin sat there, his facial expression shifting from horror, to disgust, and finally to bitterness.

"I guess da fact you're a clone o' me made your transformation toin out a little differently." Errol concluded.

<How could they...> Carrlin almost hissed, though there was more than an obvious hint of upset in his voice. <How could they do this?>

"I don't know, Carr," Errol sighed. "Da actions o' some people...dey don't make sense."

<I've seen what they do...trapping pokémon in capsules and forcing them to fight for their twisted amusement.> Carrlin shuddered. <I've become my own worst enemy...>

"Dat's not true," Errol insisted. "Sure, we had no control over what made us dis way, but dat don't make us doomed or cursed. Don'cha realise y' could use dis chance to show other pokémon dat humans aren't all terrible, jus' by being who ya are?"

<Humans are the last thing pokémon need.> Carrlin muttered, before swinging upon Errol angrily. <How can you be so accepting of this? You *wanted* it to happen, didn't you? You wanted to be one of those...those *things!*>

"I wanted to know who I was!" Errol protested. "Y' can't honestly tell me *you* were completely at peace wit'cha self. Dat dere weren't nothing in dere nagging away at'cha, tellin' you dat you were outta place."

<What do *you* think?> Carrlin snapped. <Mewtwo was constantly speaking of us as if we were freaks of nature, outcasts, lesser beings to be shunned. I hated those words. I wanted to prove that I was something to him.> He looks down at his hands. <I'm something, alright. I'm a

clone of a messed up product of science - how do you think *that* makes me feel?>

"If it's anyt'ing like dat insult o' yours made *me* feel, pretty rough," Errol folded his arms.

<Humans were the creatures who made you the way you are, and you *still* side with them?> Carrlin spluttered.

"I ain't siding with any one species!" Errol frowned. "Dere's good an' bad in both humans and pokémon!"

<That's a lie!> Carrlin exclaimed angrily. <Pokémon are only bad because humans control them, and force them to do bad things!>

Errol retracted, feeling a pang of guilt. Back when he was in Team Rocket, he did a lot of bad things of his own choosing. Had that just been his human side in action? He shook his head - no...that wasn't true. Several times he had encountered instances of other pokémon with twisted intentions, not least of all the seemingly-innocent togepi that launched him and his companions into space. His observation stood firm.

<I respected you back then,> Carrlin said with notable disappointment. <Now look at where you've sunk...>

Errol strongly wished to yell at Carrlin to stop being so narrow-minded, but he knew it wouldn't help matters at all. Obviously the guy was disorientated from the shock at what he had just discovered of himself. Errol took a deep breath and gathered all the patience he could muster.

"I can understand ya being upset," he tried to sound calm. "But gettin' uptight about it isn't gonna change anyt'ing."

<That's easy for *you* to say> Carrlin narrowed his eyes. <You *like* being human>

"I..." Errol trailed off. "Dat's beside da point. Going around complaining all da time will just make ya feel worse. Ya need ta look on da bright side of all dis."

<*What* bright side?> Carrlin gazed at Errol expectantly.

"Well...wit' a bit o' practise, ya could loin ta speak human language like I do," Errol suggested.

<And *why* would I want to do that?> Carrlin sniffed.

"Oh I don't know..." Errol rolled his eyes, sarcasm creeping into his voice. "Ta communicate wit' Dillon properly, maybe?"

<I don't *want* to talk with that brat,> Carrlin folded his arms and looked away. <I don't want *anything* to do with him!>

"Dillon went outta his way ta help you, an' *dis* is how ya repay him?" Errol blinked, horrified.

<It was his stupid trade that disfigured me in the first place!> Carrlin exclaimed.

"*He* didn't know it was going to change ya!"

<Why are you always taking their side?> Carrlin retorted.

"Why do *you* insist on bein' so damned difficult?" Errol cried out, finally losing his temper. The statement echoed about the passage walls, causing the conversation to cease. The two figures sat there in equal states of moodiness, then Errol tried to calm down. "You can't run from reality, Carr," he murmured. "This is what we are, ya gotta accept that."

<I don't want to accept second best...> Carrlin's voice wobbled. It seemed that Errol was finally been getting through to him.

"It ain't 'second best'," he insisted warmly. "It's jus'...different." He unbuttoned his green jacket and offered it to Carrlin. "Go on. Take it. You can keep it until ya find somet'ing more to ya style."

Carrlin stared at the outstretched hand clasping the jacket, with a surprised, almost-fearful expression. He began to reach towards it, then the sound of a massive impact shook the ground under their feet.

"What was dat?" Errol spluttered, glancing up at the tops of the buildings in a fruitless attempt to try and work out the source of the explosive sound. "Whatever it was, sounded pretty close...I'd better go check it out. And you better stick wit' me, Carr. I'll take care o-"

He stopped, detecting a sudden absence. Turning around, Errol looked on in mild disbelief as he noticed the empty space where Carrlin had previously been standing.

"Somehow I expected dat was gonna happen..." Errol sighed, putting his jacket back on. "Da guy was way too paranoid for his own good. Such a pity."

statue's own encompassing body ring, with chips of an unidentified purple stone set into every point where the lines of this pattern intersected.

"Share it!"

A frenzied spark glinted in the figure's eyes, visible under the shadow of his hood, as he placed his hands upon a pedestal before him – the long sleeves draping over the pedestal's front. The stones surrounding Butch were set aglow with an eerie light, and suddenly thrust out bolts of energy into the man, causing him to wrench upward with a yell of pain and shock. The light coursed through him, shining from his eyes in disconcerting pillars, and arced around his body in a spherical formation. Yet, as the arcs of energy touched one another to complete the shield-like sphere, they spattered out with an angry crackle, throwing Butch to the floor. The stones fell dim, their ominous hum dissipating into silence.

"What...what happened?" the priest spoke worriedly, gazing up at the ceiling as if he were to find the answer there. Butch lay on the floor, coughing violently. Inside he was frustrated, confused and upset with this unexplained treatment, but everything had been sapped from him, leaving him unable to react. "What did I do wrong?"

There was a sound of a massive impact nearby - an explosive roar that echoed within every chamber of the temple building. Frightened cries were heard from the great hall - faint, but no less blood-curdling.

"I'm sorry! Please forgive me!" the priest cried out, falling to his knees. "It was not my place to-!"

"Just...just get out of here," Butch snapped dismissively, staggering weakly into an upright position and taking off the robe he had been wearing. "Get those people out of here too. This isn't your problem..."

The priest watched, troubled and lost, as Butch tossed the robe aside and left the room.

"They weren't a messenger?" he murmured. There was no one present to confirm or deny such words, leaving the priest to deal with his bewildering conclusion alone. "But...the presence of Light seemed so definite. Did my senses fool me?"

"I should have never gone in there..." Butch grumbled to himself as he strode down the pavement. Stamina had returned to his limbs now and oddly enough, he didn't feel as angered with the priest as he thought he would have been. Desperation drove people to try crazy things, and the aged man had seemed nothing short of desperate. Maybe it was the sudden threat that had redirected his emotions. Butch was already assuming the chaos was the result of what his work partners Jessie and Cassidy were up to, and smirked to himself that they weren't able to coordinate a plan without him.

To have described the gyarados-lapras hybrid's current mood as berserk was no exaggeration. As it soared down the high street with high pitched screeches - partly carried by wind currents and partly by the liquid it had displaced - the drainage grates and manhole covers in the road began to quake and shudder, bursting forth in powerful columns of water that joined the existing cascade. People scrambled for higher ground as chunks of concrete rained down and the torrent gathered force, dragging along debris in its wake. Water levels in the street began to rise, forcing inhabitants from the surrounding buildings and out of their vehicles.

In the sky overhead, Scale Falls Gym Leader Alyth rode her salamence with a dark and determined expression. Just behind her flew her dragonite teammate, and all three figures' studied glowers were upon the makeshift raft below, carrying three Team Rocket operatives and propelled by a vapoleon-golduck hybrid.

"Give it up," Cassidy smirked. "You're just making things worse, you know. The longer you allow this specimen to roam free, the more lives are being put at risk."

"Evacuation is the Police's job," Alyth frowned. "And I have faith they'll do it right. As for me, my job is to stop *you!*"

As if this word was a cue, both her dragon pokémon fired hyper beams at the raft. As Wobbuffet deflected the beams away, Raccrupt

unleashed a Focus Blast in the salamence's direction. It was quick to dodge gracefully aside.

"Better hope they're doing better at their job than you are, then!" Cassidy laughed.

"This is Elite Operative Reynolds requesting equipment backup for the capture of subject 1AR1D05," Butch relayed into his communicator. "I want two Voltaic Dischargers sent here, stat."

"Request acknowledged," a voice was heard from the communicator. "Preparing equipment for Phasepack transfer now."

Further behind, Rose and James pedalled furiously on two bicycles they'd snatched from an abandoned street. It irked their ailing consciences somewhat, considering their change of lifestyle, but they had little choice. Transport was necessary to catch up with the fleeing genetic hybrid, and this was the first available option.

"I can't say I have any real battle experience against gyarados, or gyarados-like pokémon," James murmured. "My experiences usually involved getting thrown somewhere and hoping I landed in one piece."

"We might have had a fighting chance with an electric type on our side," Rose looked unhappy.

"Where's a frustrating yellow rodent when you need one?" James remarked.

As they descended the hill, the road vanished, completely engulfed in almost two metres of water.

"Now what?" James looked perplexed. "We'd need a boat if we wanted to go down this road any further. That or a submarine..."

Rose looked up at the surrounding buildings.

"We need to take a higher route," she concluded, looking to Sia who was sitting in the basket attached to her borrowed bicycle. "Think you can make a path with Ice Beam?"

"Glays!" Sia barked, and unleashed an ice beam at a visible portion of road.

"Aim for the top of that building!" Rose motioned to the roof of a construct set further down the hillside. Due to its positioning, the building's roof was level with the segment of road that James and Rose had been poised upon. Once the platform was sturdy enough, Rose began to cycle across.

With little to support it, even a thick layer of ice wasn't going to last long. Once Rose had made her way to the other side of the frozen pathway, she waved at James from the building's rooftop, and he tentatively rode over. Rose then instructed Sia to repeat the process, allowing the two figures on their bicycles to travel freely from rooftop to rooftop, all the while giving them a more open view of the streets below, and their target's whereabouts.

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The opportunity for Sabrina to give Caley further instruction had been snatched from her. Alarms were wailing in the city, utterances of emergency that convinced the trio to head outside and discover just what was going on. They exited Sabrina's apartment to find Police officers hurriedly directing large groups of bewildered residents and their pokémon through the streets.

"What is going on?" Sabrina frowned.

"There is a large, unidentified pokémon running loose in the city and causing mass flooding," one of the policemen relayed. "Everyone is being moved to a safer location, off the plateau. I must ask you to come with us."

"Wait," Sabrina's serious expression was unchanging. "Who is dealing with this problem?"

"Our local Gym Leader, Alyth," the policeman replied, somewhat caught off guard by his conversee's hesitation.

"And only her?"

"She is a Dragon Master," the policeman gave Sabrina a glance as if questioning why the woman didn't think this was enough. "She can handle herself."

"No..." Sabrina trailed off, her eyes distant as if she had felt something. "This threat is bigger than her."

"Now you see here-" the policeman began, like he'd taken a personal insult. But suddenly Sabrina, Caley and Wilma had gone - completely vanished into thin air. The policeman rubbed his eyes and looked down at his companion growlithe that had been standing beside him. The growlithe returned an equally bewildered expression.

The trio reappeared further into the city. While Caley looked noticeably nauseous, Wilma was wearing an overjoyed expression.

"Whee! That was fun!" Wilma grinned.

"Next time, could you warn me before you do something like that...?" Caley gurgled. "I'm still not used to teleporting."

"I apologise," Sabrina remarked. "It was the quickest way I could think of to get us closer to this creature." She swayed a little, trying to focus. "The anger I am sensing from it is...overwhelming..."

"Where are we?" Caley asked.

"The Erudite District," Sabrina told him. "Some of the oldest buildings exist here."

"But if the pokémon is near this place..." Wilma suddenly looked worried. "And it goes *through* this place, all these pretty buildings will be ruined!"

"Exactly," Sabrina nodded. "Not to mention what is inside them. We can't let that happen."

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

It was proving to be a challenging job, but Alyth wasn't about to let that put her off. As Keval tried to keep the Team Rocket operatives at bay while avoiding their assaults, Artimus directed carefully-aimed rounds of Draco Meteor at the gyarados-lapras' flanks, keeping the enraged pokémon hybrid travelling in a fairly straight direction. Her intention was to channel the creature toward the lakeside, where there would be less collateral damage.

The Gym Leader had been revelling in the fact everything was going to plan, when a shot came out of nowhere and glanced off the side of the gyarados-lapras' face, causing it to veer down a side street. Alyth's immediate response was to look down at where the Team Rocket trio's makeshift raft had been, but they had already seen an opportunity and chased their pokémon target down the street it had vanished into. She swung her furious glare in the opposite direction, only to come eye to eye with Rose who was currently upon a nearby rooftop with Sia perched neatly in the basket of her bicycle.

"Did you do that?" Alyth snapped.

exit. Adam and Denise had barely made it half way, when a chunk of the wall three metres in front of them burst inward, sending a cascade of water into the room.

As the dust cleared, Adam heaved himself from the water-sodden floor to see just what it was that had smashed through the basement wall. The creature rose up on its tail, the momentary dizziness indicating that it hadn't intended to have made impact with the building. No sooner had it locked eyes on Adam, it let out a blood-curdling screech - its face filled with an accusing malice. As crazy as it seemed, it appeared that the gyarados-lapras hybrid seemed to believe that Adam had been responsible for its recent spate of pain. Both Adam and Denise leapt in different directions as the pokémon's right fin slammed between them.

"This looks like a-" Denise began, dodging again as she fumbled in her pocket.

"Yeah. A hybrid," Adam concluded, reaching for the Pokéball on his belt. It was no longer time to be prudent. "Cyzel, get out here!"

"Rilly, I need you!" Denise followed up, releasing her pokémon hybrid companion. The arcumese and gallirill materialized alongside one another. Upon seeing what it was up against, Cyzel flinched visibly. "We need to calm this poor thing down!"

"How?" Adam pulled a face. "Read it a bedtime story?"

Denise tutted as she quickly flipped her modified Pokédex open. Sadly, any form of sleep wave was not a choice, considering they had no

pokémon that could generate one. And the only other option was not one she wished to employ, but it was all they had.

"I'm afraid we're going to have to tire it out," she responded, as Rilly attempted to push the invading hybrid out of the opening in the wall with a jet of water. "Neither a fire or a water type stand to make that much of a mark."

Adam glanced up at the wall to the left of him. The impact had dislodged some electrical cables, which were now dangling precariously.

"I've got a plan," he remarked to Denise. "Now get outta here, go find the others."

"What?" Denise suddenly looked shocked.

"Go on!" Adam urged frustratedly. Denise hesitated, but obliged and dashed back up the basement stairs with Rilly in pursuit. She felt rather stunned - here was a boy she thought was entirely selfish, making a sacrifice.

Adam turned back towards the gyarados-lapras hybrid with a resolved expression. He didn't know whether his plan was going to work, and two survivors would be a better number than none.

"Okay Cyzel, see those cables?" Adam spoke up. "Time for the Switchback."

The Switchback was a technique Adam had developed with Cyzel during their training at Team Rocket, in order to combat the hybrid's fear

of opponents larger than itself, and gain an advantage over fellow operatives. It involved stamina, good aim and a strong bond of trust between the two involved. Considering Cyzel was the only being Adam trusted with his life, this made the Switchback a very effective tool in their endeavours.

Without protest, Cyzel brought one of his sizeable forepaws round until it met Adam's back. He relaxed his foreleg slightly, allowing Adam to sink in reverse, before a rapid flick of the leg and its paw sent Adam flying into the air. Uttering a yell of determination, Adam reached out and grasped one of the dangling cables, swinging round into the side of the gyarados-lapras hybrid. There was a massive blast of electricity that engulfed both Adam and his target, causing them both to cry out in pain, though surprisingly, the latter more so. The serpentine pokémon wrenched itself from the hole it had made in the library building, screeching and writhing.

"What is going on?" Cassidy exclaimed. The trio had approached on their makeshift raft just in time to see this infuriated spectacle.

"If I didn't know better..." Butch squinted. "I'd say 1AR has already got quite a shock."

"Well, saves us some time, at least," Cassidy remarked. "I don't think it's quite subdued enough for capture yet. Give it another one for good measure."

"We're not close enough for a decent shot," Butch grumbled, shouldering the Voltaic Discharger. "Speed it up a bit Soluqua."

But the raft fell back even more. Swinging around in annoyance, Butch and Cassidy discovered the vaporeon-golduck hybrid to be crouched on the edge of the raft, clutching at the sides of her head while Raccrupt looked on in worry.

"Wobby, what's wrong?" Jessie exclaimed, as her rubbery blue pokémon companion clung to her with frightened moans.

Atop the buildings, James and Rose had paused, suddenly captivated by activity at a distance.

"Hold on," James squinted. "What is that?"

Just beyond the buildings, where the edge of the plateau reached the surrounding lake, the water had begun to churn and heave. Tiny red and light blue specks rose up from the surface, steadily growing in number and began to slide purposefully towards the outskirts of Scale Falls. An arcing wave leapt from below the plateau, throwing the specks into the midst of the city streets. As they coasted in an unsettling red and blue mass towards Rose's line of sight, her eyes widened in alarm.

"It's magikarp," she gasped. "Almost a hundred magikarp, and pokémon that look like baby lapras!"

"Caley...you and Wilma must do your best to stop the water it is bringing. I'm going to try to force-link with the pokémon."

"Us? Stop all that water?" Caley spluttered. Sabrina looked at him, and in that split second Caley understood. The Gym Leader didn't consider this task beyond him, and that in itself seemed to generate a measure of determination in the young man. He looked down at his belt and took the luxury ball from it, releasing the augret from within. "Okay Kota, let's do what we can!"

"Us too, Geoffrey!" Wilma looked unexpectedly serious. The young girl and her pokémon connected, hand in hoof, and their eyes and bodies began to glow the mysterious luminescent blue that indicated an invigorated Aura. Kota floated over to Geoffrey and took his other hoof with a paw, before offering the free one to Caley.

You remember how lending your power to me helped to make my barrier stronger, the augret insisted. We've got to all join together on this.

Caley nodded, and grasped Kota's empty paw. An almost overwhelming feeling thrust its way through him, it was as if his energy was being sucked from his body and yet channelled into it at the same time. He had become a conduit, a piece of something larger and more foreboding, contributing his own Aura while in turn receiving the unified support of the resulting strengthened force.

"Do it!" Wilma and Caley announced as one, and Geoffrey alongside Kota projected a widespread semi-transparent shield directly into the oncoming watery cascade. The gyarados-lapras slid to a halt as the majority of the water supporting it was held back.

Force-linking was not something Sabrina condoned, or enjoyed doing. True to its name and the artificially-simulated Ranger technique that preceded it, force-linking was an attempt to align one's own consciousness with that of a pokémon, regardless of whether the latter party was compatible or even consented to it. At its darkest level, force-linking was a mild form of hypnosis, typically used by skilled guardians in order to bypass a legendary pokémon's primal response and connect with its ability to reason. But such a technique was only ever intended for emergencies, as it had negative implications for the human and pokémon involved. However, it was still the better option as opposed to outright mind control. Even the contemplation of such an act sent chills down Sabrina's spine. It was a step too close to the persona she had locked clean away, and she refused to have anything to do with such a persona ever again.

The gyarados-lapras paused in mid lunge as the black-haired woman rose into the air, her eyes glowing. Holding her arms at forty-five degree angles downward either side of her, Sabrina closed her eyes - willing her mind into alignment with the pokémon's own. All at once, she

found herself engulfed in the stifling crimson uprising of her target's anger. Her chest tightened, and every neuron in her brain felt as if it was throbbing with a searing fury. Such warning signs were undeniable, but Sabrina refused to give in and resort to an outright takeover of the pokémon's being. She inched forward mentally, attempting to stretch her thoughts to that of the hybrid, but it retaliated with an excruciating screech and a blast of red-hot emotive energy. Sabrina cried out in pain and wrenched her mind away, seconds before the gyarados-lapras reared backwards - the inside of its mouth glowing brightly. The Gym Leader tried to raise a shield around herself, but the response was delayed by her momentary disorientation. The pokémon's hyper beam glanced Sabrina askew, sending the woman's body flying across the city square.

"SABRINA!" Wilma and Caley exclaimed in horror. Geoffrey initiated his telekinesis and managed to slow the Gym Leader's descent to a degree, causing her to tumble limply into some foliage outside of one of Scale Falls' art galleries. They were desperate to run over and see how Sabrina was faring, but there was still the issue of the gyarados-lapras to deal with.

Before the two figures had a chance to make their next move however, there was a loud and fearsome snap of electricity. The hybrid pokémon cried out in distress as it wrenched upward stiffly, its twitching body streaked with luminescent yellow bolts. It then toppled to the ground with a vibrant thud. Glancing up in horror, Caley and Wilma found themselves looking at the trio of Team Rocket operatives - Butch, Cassidy

and Jessie - along with their pokémon, strolling onto the scene as if they had just happened to be hiking. Two of the three group members held black devices that looked like floodlamps crossed with bazookas, and were looking most satisfied with themselves. It didn't take much deduction to work out they had been responsible for the electrical onslaught that had downed the serpent hybrid.

"Hey! That wasn't nice!" Wilma exclaimed angrily. "Surely there was a kinder way to stop that pokémon!"

"Probably," Cassidy remarked. "But it's so much more *satisfying* doing it like this." She patted the equipment balanced on her shoulder before turning to glance at Caley. "Well well. Fancy meeting you here."

"You know those people?" Wilma blinked, glancing sideways at her human companion.

"We've crossed paths before..." Caley remarked, frowning. "No doubt they've come for that hybrid."

"They've come to help us?" Wilma looked hopeful. The young man looked at her sadly.

"No..." he said. "They've come to help themselves."

"Still, this is no time for a reunion," Cassidy replied, as if to reinforce the statement. "We're here on business, 1AR is ours, and there's no room for interruption. Soluqua, deal with them."

"Raccrupt, you too!" Butch instructed.

"Not again!" Caley grimaced, as the two hybrid pokémon charged forward. Kota and Geoffrey re-linked arms and fearlessly did the same. However, Soluqua was quick to pull them apart with telekinetic force, and thrust Geoffrey towards Raccrupt for him to toy with. The helpless slowpoke uttered a noise of bewilderment as Raccrupt ploughed into him with open jaws, leaving him twitching upside-down on the concrete slabs. In turn, Kota was thrust mercilessly into the air. The augret teleported from Soluqua's psychic grasp before re-appearing behind her and administering a full force body slam. Soluqua responded by flinging herself round in a circle and blasting water in Kota's face.

Caley was desperate to stop the trio's escape, but Kota was well and truly occupied with Soluqua's attempts to down him. Poor Geoffrey had ended up in an even worse state, forcing Wilma to return him to his Pokéball before something particularly horrible happened. Things were looking very bleak indeed. The young man glanced around in upset, wondering where his companions were at this point in time. He at least hoped they were somewhere safe.

"What a waste of time," Butch snorted, removing a Rocket Ball from his phasepack and throwing it towards the gyarados-lapras. Barely able to raise its head, the pokémon was quickly engulfed in the modified Pokéball's capture beam and snatched away, before the metallic sphere returned to Butch's open hand. "We've stayed in this place too long. Let's get out of here."

"I don't think so," a cold voice was heard from above the trio's heads. Butch, Cassidy and Jessie looked up to see Alyth, standing atop her salamence and accompanied by her dragonite. All three figures were soaked to the skin and were notably irked about it. "This has gone far enough."

"Speaking of wastes of time..." Cassidy remarked, unimpressed. "It seems the poor excuse for a Gym Leader caught up with us."

"I'll give you 'poor excuse'!" Alyth suddenly erupted. "Keval, Artimus, time for the 'Phrossan Cyclone'!"

With a roar, Keval unleashed a powerful blizzard, which Artimus whipped up into a swirling cylinder by flying around the Team Rocket operatives at high speed. The attack was so widespread that Jessie's wobuffet was unable to deflect any of it, leaving his trainer and her two accomplices to cringe and flail as they were battered by snow and tiny shards of ice. Butch growled and attempted to fire his Voltaic Discharger at Keval, only to have its electrical blast dispelled amongst the relentless frozen whirlwind. He tried again, and the device choked and trembled, now clogged with snow. Butch cursed as he was subjected to a electrical backlash, throwing the Voltaic Discharger away from him in disgust.

Having sensed that things were amiss, Raccrupt lumbered hastily towards the source of activity and released a Focus Blast at Keval, which caught the dragonite on the left side of his body. Alyth cried out in shock

as Keval's blizzard was cast outside of Artimus' speed-induced cyclone and pummelled Artimus and herself instead.

"AERIAL ACE!" Alyth bellowed through the snowy onslaught, thrusting a pointed finger towards Raccrupt. Artimus plunged himself into the raticate-machoke hybrid before it had a chance to process the Gym Leader's instruction. Raccrupt's exclamation of surprise was enough to distract Soluqua momentarily, allowing Kota an opportunity for a sneak attack. Soluqua retaliated with unexpected ferocity, striking Kota away from her with a blast of psychic energy before dashing towards the main source of activity.

"Kota!" Caley exclaimed, gathering up the bewildered augret in his arms. "That looked like a strong shot, are you okay?"

She's outmatched, Kota struggled and squirmed, determined to return to his commitment. *I can't...let...Soluqua join in attacking her.*

"Kota, stop," his human companion insisted. "*We're outmatched.*"

You're just going to let those Team Rocket crooks get away with it? Kota exclaimed, his mental voice filled with disbelief and a hint of anger.

"Of course not," Caley shook his head. "There is still a way to turn this in our favour. It's risky, but it's the last chance we have."

Shortly after Raccrupt had retracted his attention from her, Wilma had run over to the point Sabrina had landed in order to check the woman's state of health. She was sprawled across the grass in a highly uncomfortable fashion - conscious, but very much in shock. Her hair was full of leaves and chunks of dirt, and parts of her clothing had been seared away - the exposed flesh burned raw from the Hyper Beam's sheer ferocity.

"Sabrina...Sabrina you've got to help us..." Wilma sobbed. "I-I'm sorry...I know you're hurt, but we're not strong enough to do this without you!"

"That isn't true..." Sabrina smiled weakly. "Some problems cannot be solved through brute force alone."

"I don't understand," Wilma sniffed.

"Return to Caley," Sabrina urged, with a slight cough. "Then all will become clear."

Reluctantly, Wilma obeyed. She couldn't see how things would improve, but Sabrina hadn't given Wilma any reason to distrust her instruction before. As Caley glanced over and saw Wilma running towards him, he could sense her deep upset, and it stirred up feelings of discomfort in him. Not simply as a result of his psychic Cho'moken - Caley did not like to see someone in a bad way, and this was far too reminiscent of situations with his younger sister Abby. Abby would have been pretty distraught too, had such a thing happened to the slowpoke

she so longed to train. And Caley didn't wish to force things, but there was no longer any choice.

"Wilma, please try not to panic..." Caley insisted, gently placing a hand on the young girl's shoulder. "I need your help."

"But-but what can I do?" Wilma quaked. "Poor Geoffrey has fainted!"

"I know, I know...and I'm really sorry that happened," Caley replied genuinely, but hurriedly. "Still, I need you to use *your* abilities now. I have an idea..."

Pitched against the likes of Raccrupt and Soluqua, Alyth and her pokémon may have been outmatched in strength, but they more than accounted for it with finesse. Butch, Cassidy, Jessie and their pokémon companions glanced back and forth in growing frustration as the two dragons circled at speed. Keval's long, flowing antennae crackled with electricity, and the dragonite unleashed a Shock Wave which Artimus thrust himself into – dispersing the energy with a vicious Dragon Claw attack and scattering charged particles over their hybrid targets. With this distraction in play, Keval attempted a dive for Soluqua, only to be halted once again by Wobbuffet's Counter shield. Having recovered from the momentary alarm brought on by the fragmented Shock Wave, Soluqua gripped Keval with telekinesis.

"Alright!" Cassidy snapped, resetting her Voltaic Discharger. "I've had enough of these childish games!" She pulled the trigger and flinched backwards as the Voltaic Discharger erupted in a blast of electrical sparks, but not before the beam it emitted slammed into Keval, causing him to wail. Soluqua released her psychic hold, allowing the dragonite to fall to the ground in tremors. "We're leaving," she announced to Butch and Jessie. "Now!"

"We can't let them get away..." Alyth hissed, as the Team Rocket trio started running across the square with their pokémon in hot pursuit. "Use Scary Face, Artimus."

Artimus uttered a loud roar, causing Soluqua to glance up just in time to get a full view of the salamence's glowing red eyes and bared teeth. Soluqua was struck by an intense fear, her limbs seemingly turned to lead as she struggled to retreat. Having realised her hybrid accomplice was not present, Cassidy glanced over her shoulder to find Soluqua frozen to the spot.

"What are you waiting for?" she snapped, receiving little response. "This is no time to lose your nerve!" The woman grabbed the Rocket Ball from her belt and aimed it at Soluqua, reducing the petrified creature to energy and retracting her inside the device. Cassidy swung back to continue her escape, only to witness one of the Rocket Balls detaching itself from Butch's belt. Completely thrown by the absurdity of what she happened to be seeing, Cassidy could only stare open-mouthed as the Rocket Ball floated into the air, and hovered in front of Alyth. The Gym

Leader plucked the spherical article out of the air with an equal look of surprise, before something urged her to glance downward. Caley stood a few metres away, motioning to the Luxury Ball he was grasping in his own hand.

"Press the button," he mouthed, conveying the action. "Press. The button."

So Alyth did. In the brilliant flash of light that followed, the gyarados-lapras hybrid practically sailed out of the air - still enveloped by sparks - and landed with a monumental thud upon the square, creating an impression in the concrete. While heavily depleted of energy, the pokémon was no less angry than when it had been captured, and the sight of the Team Rocket trio in its midst was no more welcoming.

Jessie uttered a noise not unlike that of a distressed eevee, a heavy feeling of déjà vu having crept into her gut. Since working with Butch and Cassidy, she'd been spared encounters with the dreaded event she had dubbed 'blasting off'. Yet today, she had already managed to experience it once, and appeared to be heading straight for another round. Wobuffet valiantly prepared himself for a counter-strike, but the Hyper Beam was aimed at the ground in front of them, the resulting explosion propelling Butch, Jessie and their pokémon far into the sky and out of sight. Concluding it was unwise to hang around for a reprisal, Cassidy growled in annoyance, and ran from the scene, prompting Alyth to retrieve Keval and give chase atop Artimus.

As the salamence's roars and its trainer's cries echoed into the distance, Caley, Wilma and Kota were left to stare upon the exhausted and heaving form of the hybrid water type in front of them. Its final attack seemed to have dispelled the last of its fury, and it blearily gazed around at the results of the conflict that had happened just moments before.

"Great work, Wilma," Caley smiled, raising his hand to the side of his glasses. "Your telekinesis lessons with Sabrina have really paid off! I hope *I'll* be able to train my abilities half as well as yours."

"Thanks, Caley," Wilma blushed a little. "Oh! Sabrina! We need to get her to a doctor!"

"Yes, we'd better," Caley agreed. "There's just one more thing that needs to be done."

1ARYD05 Caley's Pokédex relayed. A hybridization of Gyarados and Lapras DNA in order to develop a powerful seafaring weapon with a level of psychic ability. Temperament is unstable, requires means of control before deemed suitable for use.

"Larydos..." the young man murmured, playing with the syllables.

"I-is that its name?" Wilma eyed the pokémon cautiously.

"More or less," Caley shrugged. Reading the jumble of numbers and letters as a title was a far easier, and less synthetic method of identification.

"Can *you* talk to it?" Wilma inquired. "Like Sabrina was going to. She's too hurt to do it now, and I..." the girl quaked a little. "I'm scared."

Caley looked at her sympathetically, and decided the least he could do was give it his best shot. As Wilma returned to Sabrina's aid, the young man closed his eyes. It seemed like a good start - not necessarily good in the danger-prevention sense, but considering Caley no longer detected any hostility from either Larydos or any other source, he figured it was a reasonable course of action. He'd never attempted deliberately communicating with any being in this way before, and since his abilities had calmed down somewhat, he hadn't been an unwitting audience to the thoughts of those around him. This would require a little mental orienteering.

As Caley's eyelids flickered shut, he assumed the pose Sabrina had used in order to attempt mind-linking. None of this was necessary, of course, but it was useful to maintain concentration and direction. Suddenly his surroundings were aglow with intermingled red, blue and violet lights. A semi-transparent creature hovered before him, surrounded by a vivid aura, tendrils of which stretched from its body towards Caley's own. His mental vision sharpened, bringing Larydos into focus. It was staring at him with notable surprise and hesitancy.

Excuse me? Caley spoke up.

Wh-what? the weakened mental voice had a slightly raspy edge, but was feminine in acoustic - more uncertain than Caley had been expecting. It instilled confidence in him.

We need to talk, he persisted.

How are you doing this? Larydos responded in confusion, a little fearful. *Your voice, in my mind.*

I guess it's a gift, Caley smiled faintly. *I'm sorry if it's uncomfortable to you.*

No, no...I was just surprised, that's all, Larydos said. *I should be the one saying sorry. I was so angry with those humans that I lost control of myself. I made such a mess...*

It's okay, Caley tried to console the pokémon. *It's perfectly understandable why you were angry with them. No one deserves to be treated the way Team Rocket treats pokémon, or people.*

You know of them? Larydos' mindvoice became hesitant.

I know enough, Caley said sternly. *And...you can't stay here. If you do, Team Rocket will only return and try to take you back to their laboratory.* The young man felt the hybrid's presence prickle and shuddered in response. But the reaction wasn't toward him, but only to the knowledge that such a disgusting setup remained in existence.

This place was never meant for me, Larydos returned to a serene, yet saddened state. *Too little water. Too many humans. Other pokémon*

do not care that I am different. They came to my aid when I was suffering. Humans shun 'different'. They find it a threat. Alyth saw past that - she cared for me. But it is true. I cannot stay here... I guess I am homeless.

You...you don't have to be, Caley insisted. You can come with me and my friends.

...really?

We have been rescuing others like you, but you're the first that I've been able to reason with, Caley elaborated. Maybe you could help us in rescuing other pokémon, Larydos.

Be...help? there was a chokedness to the gyarados-lapras' mindvoice now. Yes! Yes I...I would be glad to go with you... She paused for a moment, as if a thought had dawned upon her. ...Larydos? Is that my name?

More or less, Caley smiled, recalling his response to Wilma.

It's pretty, the creature's eyes creased slightly with happiness. I like it.

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

"Another failed mission. Another lost specimen," Cassidy grumbled to herself. She didn't have the heart to make any further reports back to HQ. What was the point regurgitating the same disappointing outcome

she had given before? Darius would only fire off another of his aggravated rants, and Cassidy was not in the mood for any more of those.

She returned to the location where her mode of transport had been hidden, to find Jessie and Butch waiting there. The former of these associates was sat inside the vehicle cab – staring down into her hands, as she had done so over the past few days. The latter was leaning back on the closed driver's door, his arms folded and an unimpressed expression on his face.

"There you are," Butch commented in a matter of fact way.

"What do you mean, 'there you are'?" Cassidy snapped. "I'll have you know I just spent the last hour trying to get that bratty Gym Leader off my trail."

"Oh of course. Pardon me," Butch replied sarcastically, before launching into an equally aggravated tirade. "Getting thrown into the air and hitting the side of a rock face isn't exactly a walk in the park either!"

"I know, I had the *fun* of doing that earlier, while you were off sightseeing!" Cassidy exclaimed. "Just where *were* you the whole time I was trying to capture 1AR?"

"Just walked around the city," Butch muttered. "Tryin' to clear my head."

"Is that so?" Cassidy raised an eyebrow. "Or were you in the mood for a spot of petty thievery?" Butch glanced at the woman in mild annoyance, before noticing she was examining a point just below his chin.

The medallion was still dangling about Butch's neck - a stark reminder of what had occurred to him that day. "And sacred artefacts, no less."

"Hey I never stole this!" Butch exclaimed, almost accusingly. Then he faltered. "Wait, you knew where it came from..."

"Sure, it's a piece of ceremonial decoration used by priests in the Church of Arceus," Cassidy explained, before scrutinizing her emerald-haired companion for the second time. "But if you didn't take it..."

"It was given to me," Butch insisted. "Crazy story, really. Just happened to walk into the place - out of curiosity, okay - and this old geezer runs up to me, waving his arms about. He's adamant that I'm a member of some race called 'The Lati', whatever they are."

"The Lati...that's the collective name for Latias and Latios," Cassidy murmured, wide-eyed. "Th...that doesn't make sense. Why would he think-?"

"Pssh, I dunno," Butch rolled his eyes. "He was gabbling something about sensing presences and light resonating from me and some other crap. Pretty certain he was batspitting crazy. And I admit, I kinda liked the attention. Got dressed up like royalty, ate fancy food, the works. Next thing I know, the old guy's put me in some kind of magic circle and is zapping the livin' daylights outta me!"

"No...no, this is wrong," Cassidy was looking quite anxious, and most unlike her usual forceful self. "Something is very wrong about this."

"You're telling me," Butch agreed. "It was really messed up, and the old guy looked so desperate." He shuffled awkwardly. "Do you think...that he knows something we don't? About Arceus being angry? I thought Arceus was just a myth."

"Arceus is real, alright," Jessie remarked from inside the truck. "And if what those nerds in Team Rocket labs have done is anything to go by, I *wouldn't* be surprised if its peeved by now."

"But Arceus is in another dimension," Cassidy stated. "The Boss' plans can still be saved if measures are taken to prevent Arceus returning here. Him and any other inter-dimensional pokémon."

"Heh. And how would you expect to contain a pokémon that can pass through dimensions?" Jessie mused.

"Oh I'm sure Giovanni's got his means and ways," Butch chuckled, seemingly encouraged by this thought. Yet Cassidy remained uncomfortable as the trio arranged themselves in their vehicle and drove away from Scale Falls. Oddly enough, it wasn't the prospect of a likely-angered deity on their hands that bothered her the most. It was what Butch had told her about the priest he had met.

The only apparatus she knew of that the man could have used in conjunction with a Latios - even an assumed one - was a Sight Arc. Built by members of the Sanguine Alliance, a Sight Arc functioned as a rather crude version of a Latios' alternate gender counterpart, plucking the visions from the creature's mind and displaying them in a holographic

format for others to see. Heads of the Church of Arceus had shown no qualms in using such constructions for their own means, despite the Sanguine Alliance's chequered past.

And having a Light Type energy was all well and good...*if* one was a Light Type pokémon. Either Butch had been correct in his conclusion that the priest was more than a little eccentric...or something wasn't quite right with Butch himself. And without access to a more sensitive Aura Scanner, Cassidy had no way to settle her concerns.

"I'd better make that report," she said, retrieving the communicator unit.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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