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Pre-Note

Okay, first of all, thank you for those that did review. Still not quite happy about the favorite/story alerts to review ratio but I guess I have to live with assuming getting an alert added means as much as a short positive review. What I am really wondering about is where all of you are that have been reviewing a lot during the first part.

Next NeoWolfX: I already answered your review but forgot to address one thing you said. I wasn't afraid that I unintentionally slipped in a "Siegfried" instead of "Lance" in there. I'll fix that at some point (I just don't feel like going through the site induced necessity of reformatting every chapter several times for just one tiny typo). Thanks for catching that because it was not intended. After all if I were to be mixing name versions, I would have never made that poll awhile ago. And mixing really isn't my style anyway. It's either one or the other. If there was a Siegfried in there, it was mostly a mistake on my part... perhaps because I like that name more. ^_^ I mean what kind of lame name is "Lance"? *cough*

This episode begins where the last left off, finally concluding the events off the last day of the Grand Festival. There will be some revelations but I didn't want to just expose everything at once. I'll let that slowly filter in until the end of the arc, or that's the plan as well. For all intents and purpose, this is mostly an aftermath chapter.

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(Narrator)

"Last time Dawn has managed to overcome her unexpected hard challenge in the final of the Grand Festival and finally achieved her dream of becoming Top Coordinator. However, she and Ash were not allowed any rest as the events from Cerulean Cave caught up with them before the day was even fully over."

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Seafom Islands, Kanto (Ash)

A booming thunderclap accompanied the vast lightning strike, slamming into Rhyperior just as it was bearing down on Mew. The massive behemoth stopped and slowly turned its raged-filled gaze in our direction and I found myself thoroughly baffled.

The Thunder had had no effect at all.

Part Ground type or not and even with a Limit Break, once Pikachu had achieved his own, there should have been at least some noticeable effect! There weren't many Pokémon these days that could stand up to and take the full brunt of one of Pikachu's Thunders and act like it hadn't even tickled them.

Something was clearly not right here.

At least the action had distracted the Rhyperior, its rage-filled eyes now focusing on Pikachu. My partner didn't hesitate to follow up with an Iron Tail smashing into the creature – I couldn't quite get myself to think about it as a Pokémon – with a force that could easily shatter boulders of the same composition as a normal fully-evolved Rock type could call their own.

Rhyperior staggered this time, pushed back by the sheer force. Cracks began to open where the attack struck but it didn't seem to really slow it down at all. I had to stop and brace myself to stay on my feet when Rhyperior's fist slammed into the ground. Pikachu had easily evaded the mindless but extremely powerful strike.

Whatever this thing was, it was clearly very powerful. The kind of power I didn't feel too keen about finding out its full potential. Of course, its speed was not up to par. Pikachu had no problem anticipating and evading the attacks, more bothered by the backlash the sheer force of the attacks generated when they impacted with the ground or even the very air.

"Infernape, Torterra, Floatzel, go!" At any other point I might have been excited to face an opponent like this but right now Mew's safety had top priority. Besides, I

really didn't like the feeling I was getting from that Rhyperior. "Triple Formation, Maneuver 3!"

With the ease born from long practice, my three Pokémon closed in on the opponent, even while Pikachu flipped away. Torterra fired off a vicious Razor Storm, totally engulfing Infernape as he rushed forward with Flare Blitz but then came in with a roundhouse kick that would have snapped a lesser being's head clear off, combining Blaze Kick with the raw impact power of Flare Blitz, all the while Torterra's razor-sharp leaves battering against Rhyperior's armor. Just as Infernape was past his opponent, Floatzel came shooting out of the sky, having picked up speed for a high velocity Spinning Ice Aqua Jet by diving from a high altitude.

This triple assault should have done in everything, probably even a Legendary... And indeed, the assault managed to throw Rhyperior backwards several feet. I suppose the sand buffered the fall a little but... it didn't take long for the behemoth to rise again, as if nothing happened.

No. Not as if nothing happened. The damage was clearly wrought. It should be in a lot of pain. All of these attacks were very effective against its dual type, even Infernape's variation was part Fighting type. The effect was there, too. But it seemed like Rhyperior was simply ignoring all the damage, as if not feeling it... or caring about it.

I narrowed my eyes, even as my Pokémon reformed to build a defensive line between Rhyperior and Mew. Dawn had used the opportunity to get to the Legendary and was checking it over. I did not need a confirmation to know that it looked bad. Brock would have been able to tell immediately but even without him I could tell that Mew needed real help... and soon.

My Pokémon had to abandon the next assault and scatter when Rhyperior stomped on the ground, creating an Earthquake that despite the buffering sand actually managed to shake the ground a good deal. Quickly I released Charizard as well and had him take to the air immediately, occupying Rhyperior with powerful Flamethrowers. Really, it was like beating up some kind of robot that would always get up again despite the damage inflicted.

Again I chanced a worried glance towards Dawn and Mew. We had both taken a lot of Brock's lessons to heart and practiced as much as we could but neither of us was a professional when it came to treating injuries. It seemed Mew was barely conscious again at this point and saying something to Dawn, but I couldn't hear it from where I was.

There was no need to. "Ash, Mew says this thing is not really a Pokémon anymore. Something has been done to do it and it cannot be reversed. It... it doesn't even have a soul anymore." I heard and emphasized with the sadness in her voice, a

simmering anger slowly burning brighter within myself. Team Rocket. This had to be their doing. They had tried controlling Pokémon in similar ways before but this was a new low.

I had no time to get all the details. All I could do was trust Mew's judgment that this creature was not something that should be allowed to... live. The thought had me shudder and I almost froze up at the thought of what I knew I had to do. The Rhyperior-lookalike had already proven that it would not stop, regardless of any damage, before achieving its goal.

"Pikachu, release limiter." After the final, we had modified the limiter to have it merely – or at least by default – applied to the upper portion of Pikachu's elemental power. Even after all the training, Pikachu couldn't handle it for longer than an hour while fighting tops. The output was simply too draining. "Charizard, Infernape! Flare Tornado, trap it!" The two Fire types quickly spun dual Fire Spins combining together around Rhyperior. "Pikachu, begin sequence... don't hold back."

I clenched my hands so tightly, it hurt but I refused to look away. This thing might look like a Pokémon, most certainly it had been at some point. But not anymore. I could not allow myself to show remorse for what was little more than a shell apparently or Mew, Dawn and everyone else would pay the price.

Rhyperior had already burst through the super-heated flames, even its tough rock body covered in severe burns, yet it was still going and even tried to break through the dome. That finally proved too much, the incredible voltage Pikachu could generate making it roar out in pain, body freezing up.

I backed up towards where Dawn had picked up Mew, cradling the Legendary in her arms. We had never done this against a living target at full power. Heck, even against anything else we had barely done this at full power, the destructive power too vast. In a detached sort of thought I wondered how the authorities would later explain the crater...

"Thor's Hammer!"

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Opening Theme (Shining Days, Mai-HiME)

A blue, cloudless sky. Mew flies into the picture and performs a few twists, turns and loopings, writing the series title into the air. The camera zooms in on Mew's face and it looks like the viewer is drawn in.

*aozora ippai ni
watashitachi no omoi ga chiribamerarete yuku*

Ash and Dawn are standing together on a hill, holding hands. Dawn leans closer and Ash embraces her. They lean in for a kiss.

*unmei no hito ga anata nara iinoni
genjitsu wa umaku yukanai*

The scene fades out from a television frame. May is sitting in front, watching with longing. Naru jumps into her lap and she smiles in determination, jumping up as the scene fades around her.

*hikaru kaze no naka
yume no hane maioriru yo*

Misty is swimming in a pool. She stops to float on her back, then submerges into the water. In the reflection she sees Leaf and reaches out uncertainly with conflicted feelings on her face.

*yuuki dashite mirai e
sou utsukushiku...*

Misty breaks the surface of the water with a leap, suddenly at a beach. Leaf is sitting on the shore and waving at her.
May is running towards a faraway image of Ash and Dawn with a smile of determination.

ugokidasu atsui kodou ga

Ash and Pikachu are running over a plain, jumping over hurdles and Pikachu letting loose lightning attacks.

ano hi to onaji hayasa wo kizamu yo

A split screen of Dawn and May. Piplup and Buneary are creating a giant ice stadium and Beautifly is dancing within a Ninetails flames (see Episode 1 for both). Dawn and May are looking towards each other as if they were in the same place.
A brief flash of Brock and Ako standing together with Flareon and Leafeon.

*massugu na manazashi ga suki
zutto miteitai*

Short image of Giovanni in his office with a dark disembodied form behind him.
Scene switches back to Ash, arriving at a hill. Looking up he smiles seeing Dawn, May, Brock, Ako, Leaf and Misty standing atop and waiting for him.

Camera shifts up into the sky and from where it fades out of Mew's eye again who flies down and into the prior scene, landing on top of Dawn's shoulders.

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M&M DreamWorks Presents
The Final Step to the Master Reloaded
Second Arc: Glimpses of Destiny
Episode 03: Mew's Revelation! The Shocking History of the
Pokémon World!

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(Dawn)

The impact nearly threw me off my feet. In fact, if it wasn't for Ash's steady hand, I would have been blown clear across the beach. I had always thought that this move was... badass – I cannot come up with something more appropriate – but Ash had never put more power into it than during his match with Leaf and when he did train, it was on his own. For safety sake.

Thus this was the first time I saw the result of a full power Thor's Hammer and I clearly understood why Ash never wanted to use it like this under any normal circumstances and quite a few abnormal ones. Whatever this Rhyperion had been... there was nothing left of it.

The other reason why Ash was so reluctant to employ this move became apparent when Pikachu crashed to the ground, sparks running over his body and utterly exhausted. I shouldn't be surprised. There was so much power in this one attack, it was like all of Pikachu's impressive elemental power had been unleashed at once.

Ash turned away from the sight after picking up Pikachu. I, too, wasn't sure what to feel right now. I wanted to reach out and comfort him but I was still holding Mew. One look down at the Legendary Pokémon told me, however, that Ash had done the right thing. No, perhaps not the right thing, but the necessary thing. Had he not ordered Pikachu to... kill – the word tasted bitter even as a thought – this beast, who knows how long this battle would have went or if we could have even won. I had felt it clearly even without Mew telling me, the utter... wrongness of this creature.

"How is Mew?" Ash was clearly repressing what he had done, focusing on more immediate things, but that was okay. We both knew there was no time to think about right or wrong now.

I shook my head slightly. "She's very weak. I think she spent all her power to fight them off, probably for hours already. I honestly have no idea what to do in this situation." Brock had taught us both some basics and I had actually let him teach me some more advanced first aid treatment methods, knowing he wouldn't always be there to help. But this was clearly beyond me. Furthermore I felt Mew's consciousness slipping away. I knew it was her who called me and thus I wasn't surprised how deep the connection was running.

Ash raised an eyebrow and I realized what I said. How was I so sure about the female bit? Legendaries were supposed to be genderless, right? Well, it didn't really matter right now. Ash thought the same as he quickly took out his Pokégear and checked on something. "It's not a good idea to go the regular Pokémon Center. Team Rocket could have more people out here." I personally disagreed since I didn't feel any further hostility but as sharpened as my powers had become since the battle earlier in the day, I was still a novice and I had to admit I was still rather tired.

"Ah, good, he's still on standby." A few clicks later, a Pokéball appeared in his hand and Sceptile was released from it. "Listen, this is the plan. I'll take Charizard and fly towards the Pokémon Center. If there are still pursuers left, this will get their attention. Sceptile, take Dawn back to the arena. There is a private medical facility inside, reserved for quick onsite treatment during the Festival and for specific personnel. Here, take this." With that he took out his provisional badge and handed it to me. "Just in case you are running into trouble."

Despite the situation, I couldn't help the warm feeling in my heart. Ash really had grown. Not just during battle but also in many other aspects. He really did sound kind of cool just now. Then again, quick judgment and improvising under pressure had always been one of his strong points. Now he could employ these abilities in situation like this as well.

Oh sure, I was concerned for him essential offering to play decoy but what else could we do? Besides this was Ash we were talking about, late Sinnoh League Champion. He could take care of himself.

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Sceptile covered a lot of ground fast, jumping and running at high speed, not even bothered by carrying both myself and Mew. I occasionally gave some directions but it wasn't like one couldn't see the arena as soon as we got clear of the wooded area. I used the time to try and connect with Mew in order to lend her some of my strength and was surprised how well it actually worked.

The downside was that in my state this was very draining and when Sceptile set us down in front of the arena and a security officer came running to demand an explanation, I had trouble getting out the words. "Help... emergency... Team

Rocket..." I fumbled for Ash's badge but it was thankfully unnecessary. The officer took one look at who I was carrying, gasped and immediately tried to take her from me. But that wasn't a good idea either. "No, have to... keep her stable. Take me to the... treatment room."

The officer debated a moment, then nodded. With one arm helping me along, he spoke quietly but urgently into his radio. I couldn't really make out what he was saying but I really did hope he was making sure to alert whoever was in charge of treatment and the rest of the security personnel. Ash's plan was good but not foolproof.

I could spare no further thought on the matter either. It was taking every bit of strength I could still muster to keep Mew from slipping away and I knew I wouldn't be able to do this much longer without threatening to kill myself in the process. Thankfully it didn't take long until we reached the medical facility...

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Cerulean Cave, Kanto, a couple of hours earlier (Misty)

Perhaps this had been a bad idea after all. In theory it had sounded good and truthfully it really was the only effective thing I could hope to do at this point, however, not quite the most sensible.

Adrenaline pumped through my veins and I could swear the hammering of my heart could be heard at the other end of the cave. *Perhaps it will serve for Leaf to find me*, I wondered amused. I considered myself fit. Even before Leaf had left me her notes, I had often trained alongside my Pokémon, perhaps not quite to the degree the young Master demanded of herself but even that I had gradually tuned up. Within reason since I still had Gym Leader duties and it wouldn't do to keel over from exhaustion during a match.

Right now all that came in handy as I dashed through another tunnel, three Team Rocket members hot on my tail along with most of their Pokémon. It had quickly become apparent that compared to what I was used to from bumbling idiots like Jessie and James, these ones were highly trained, their Pokémon strong – usually evolved – and they acted with far more professionalism and discipline than the normal grunt of a criminal organization was expected to.

At least I managed to succeed in getting their attention, I thought. The initial standoff had cost me dearly with Corsola taking a lot of damage and had to be recalled while I only managed to take out four of their Pokémon, mostly due to the surprise. Once that had worn off, they had quickly pressed their number advantage. And with both Gyarados and Wailmer too big to maneuver in the tunnels, I was already at a severe disadvantage.

I wished Zoroark had staid but he had split off to "deal with the biggest threat". That had to be one of these Pokémon like the Electrivire at the entrance. I didn't know what they were but I really didn't want to meet one like that again. The damage to Starmie from just one hit was extensive, even with all of his resistance training. Thankfully while we had been sneaking around, I was able to treat him and the use of Recover made my oldest Pokémon ready for action again.

Finally the tunnel parted and I sighed in relief when I found myself at one of the big parts their water was flowing. Quickly I released Gyarados and Wailmer and leaping right over my most ferocious Pokémon landed safely on an island across the water. "Gyarados, Hydro Pump. Wailmer, Water Spout!" Wailmer went first and shot a huge amount of water from his nose into the passage, just as my three pursuers emerged. They reacted quickly and had some of their Pokémon erect Protects or the like but that was when Gyarados Hydro Pump slammed right through them and took out the first wave, reducing them by six Pokémon total. Still eight to go.

Now more cautious, the three men split up to reduce the chances for another area attack and released their next two each. And the choices really weren't quite in my favor. There was a Scizor, Cacturne, Parasect, Dusclops, Absol and something I had never seen before but that my Pokédex identified quickly as a Galvantula, native to the Unova region. Not just an Electric type, which was bad enough, but did it have to be a b-b-bug?

Clamping down on the impulse, I tried to engage them in the best way my limited options allowed. I really, really needed more diverse types. The problem was that my Water Pokémon were by far the furthest along in their training and that had been the more important aspect when making my team choice before coming here.

Starmie was trying to square off with Scizor. Every matchup was somewhat bad for it considering its secondary type but none of the others could better match Scizor in speed and agility. Wailmer was having it out with Absol, Vaporeon with Dusclops and Kingdra being the only Pokémon that could somewhat more safely take electric attacks was attempting to nail the fast Galvantula with a couple of Ice Beams. Meanwhile Gyarados had to take on both Parasect and Cacturne by himself.

Right now my preference of Water types DID give me a huge advantage. Aside from Scizor and Dusclops none of their Pokémon could fight in or over the water while mine could all use the terrain to their advantage. The individual fights quickly became hit and dive dynamics on my Pokémon's part. There was little else I could do though. Managing five different Pokémon at once was not something I was used to at all.

I freely admitted I did not have Ash or Leaf's battlefield awareness and while I had trained multiple encounter battles lately I was far from being an expert at that. My

Pokémon knew what to do though and so I could focus on one battle at a time, first assisting Gyarados in getting rid of his opponents, then slowly working myself through the others. That Garvantula proved to be extremely tenacious and was starting to wear even Kingdra's strong defenses down fast. Not to mention all those electric attacks constantly threatened to carry over to my other Pokémon.

It was a long ten, perhaps fifteen minutes of intense fighting until I had managed to single out the unfamiliar Pokémon. Vaporeon and eventually even Starmie had to be recalled because they were too exhausted to be of much use and Kingdra needed to apply Rest soon. But leaving Gyarados and Wailmer – especially the former – without protection from the electric attacks was a bad idea. Of course that was when the Rockets released their last two Pokémon and I grimaced.

The large Drapion was bad enough but the Luxray was really bad news. I knew immediately keeping the fight in the water would be a bad idea. Looking around, I saw that from where I was I could take another tunnel and since the Rockets were still on the other side, it would take them time to catch up. *Leaf would be very cross with me if I did something reckless. But they only have three left. Alright let's give this a try.*

"Wailmer, jump out of the water!" It was testament to our training that Wailmer didn't question the order that could be considered somewhat suicidal. Jumping into the air, the massive Whale Pokémon hovered over our opponents. "Bulldoze!" And then he plummeted down with raw force, sending a shockwave over the ground. Drapion and Luxray jumped clear but Galvantula was caught off guard. "Kingdra, Ice Beam again!" Thrown into the air Galvantula was unable to evade this time and promptly encased in a block of ice. I was just about to recall both Kingdra and Wailmer and have Gyarados cover my retreat, when I realized I couldn't see Drapion anymore.

A moment later I realized why as it had somehow managed to cross the water and was now bearing down from directly above me, tail extended...

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Seafoam Islands, Kanto, present time (Pikachu)

In the end there was no further incident. No one bothered us on the flight and there wasn't any sign that we were being watched. That alone wouldn't have to mean anything but considering the signs of battle we had come across, I personally thought that it looked a lot like the entire team of Team Rocket agents had been solely focused on hunting and wearing down Mew. They couldn't have expected us to interfere and that made it less likely that there were still some of them hiding around.

After picking up Nurse Joy as well as Piplup and Lopunny from the center – Ash reasoned it would be safer that way –, we had quickly made our way back to the arena. By that time Officer Jenny and a small team of security officers were already setting out to secure the site where we had found Mew but we didn't pay them much attention, instead rushing over to the infirmary.

The on-site personnel had already been hard at work and Nurse Joy quickly offered her help. From the looks of it they seemed busy but not frantic, which I suppose was a good sign. Ash had busied himself with fussing over Dawn who we found out had been put to rest in another room after doing something with her powers to keep Mew alive. Honestly, that girl was getting as reckless as Ash at his worst.

Of course, I would have done the same if I could have. Mew was... special. Not just because of our meetings in the past but more like these meetings had made me realize just how special the Legendary was amongst and for all of us Pokémon. I could not explain the strong feeling I had about Mew but knew the unassuming Pokémon had a far bigger place in the natural order than we could even begin to comprehend. Perhaps we would be a little wiser when all this was over.

Not having much else to do and unable to rest as long as I didn't know for sure that Mew had made it through, I joined the rest of our friends patrolling the area around the arena as per Ash's orders. I honestly wasn't sure what good I would be if it actually came to a fight but at least I had something to focus on. Using Thor's Hammer at full power had been exhausting.

No, it wasn't the full power thing alone. At our training sessions I had become good at controlling the output and I could pull off a lower power version roughly with the same amount as I used against Shadow with only being somewhat winded afterwards. The fact remained though that this move consumed a large amount of my electricity since I basically released, reabsorbed and then channeled all the power for one big unleash. The more preparation went into it, the better. Against Leaf I had been doing a lot of attacks and the air was charged up already which made the buildup a lot easier and a lot less draining. If not for that, I would have collapsed from the strain even before Leaf had surrendered the match.

I'm not going to do a full power version without any prepwork again soon, I resolved with a weak chuckle. I was so drained, I doubted I could even produce a spark. Right now I felt weaker than before I had achieved my Limit Break and was quite sure it would take a few days to recharge.

It had never been a question of whether or not to go through with it at the time. Even if the situation had been less desperate, I had felt it even before entering the battle. The others had, too. This... thing wasn't natural. It had the shape and attributes of a Rhyperior but that was where the resemblance with a Pokémon ended.

I was glad that Ash had not hesitated, even if I could tell he was trying not to let himself think about what he had done yet.

The flapping of wings drew my attention briefly and I saw Staraptor and Pidgeot circling overhead. I knew Infernape and Sceptile were perched around somewhere at high altitude. Their agility and jumping powers making it easiest for them to seek out higher observation spots.

I really was kind of dispensable, merely providing an extra set of eyes and perspective that I was sure the others could cover quite well on their own. And it seemed like I wasn't the only who wasn't in a state to contribute anything meaningful.

"Hey. Should you be up?" I asked without turning to look at Lopunny who had come up from behind. If not for my sharp senses, picking her out wouldn't have been a problem either. Her breathing was a little harsh still and her movements far more sloppy and noisy than was usual for her. Nothing that really concerned me at this point. Back in the arena I had been inches away from committing bloody murder after seeing what this Nord guy had his Pokémon do to her on stage. Only knowing that she was too stubborn to give up, wouldn't be happy about any interference and the knowledge that after the kind of endurance training we had been through she was tough enough to hold up, had held me back. I might not have the kind of feelings for her as she would like but that didn't mean I had been unfazed and indifferent to what happened.

"Not really. Looks like everything has been healing up nicely. Pi... Prinplup is actually a lot worse off." I noted the odd tone in her voice and was unsure how to interpret it. My respect for my friend had definitely risen a few notches after the stunt he pulled. I could tell how powerful that combination move had been and shielding Lopunny from it in his state was not exactly a small feat. Neither of us was a heavy defensive type and taking attacks head-on was not how we preferred to fight. What had been done to Lopunny might have looked worse, but Prinplup's effort certainly had been more draining. And I knew he had done most of the core work for the following combinations even after that.

Lopunny knew this, too, and I was fairly certain she had become aware of the other meaning behind his selfless effort. Aside from that, I was entirely unable to predict how she would take things. Out of everything she would say to me, though, I didn't quite expect the kind of insightful question that was eventual voiced after long moments of silence. "Is that why you never really gave in to me?"

I tended to forget that while her pursuit had been relentless and stubborn, she was actually quite clever. There was no need to really elaborate on what exactly she referred to and I realized she knew exactly what Prinplup's actions meant. The only question remained what Lopunny herself would make out of this. I knew she still

wanted me. And she wouldn't give up on it until I made a clear commitment either way. And that, I think, was what she was really asking for.

Time for the truth, huh?

"I don't think we'll work out," I said eventually. At any other time I probably would have danced around the truth again, not wanting to hurt her. But after my conversation with Piplup yesterday and the events now, I couldn't do that. Tired and my mind steadily drifting back to the Legendary Pokémon being treated inside, I had little tolerance for mincing my words. And the truth really needed to be told anyway. "I tried but... I don't think I can give you what you want. If I could, I think I would know by now."

Lopunny was silent for a long moment. Just as I thought she wouldn't say anything at all and felt the need to do something, worried that I might really have been too blunt, she heaved a heavy sigh. "I know. I think I knew for awhile." There was sadness in her voice that made me wince internally, but also a sort of resignation that didn't feel like it had just appeared. She turned back to me and gave me a weak smile that relieved me a great deal. The last thing I wanted was to have bad blood between us. "Thanks for being honest."

I chuckled nervously and scratched with one paw behind my ear. "It's okay. Still friends?"

Her smile became a little brighter. "Sure."

Neither of us spoke about what she would do about Prinplup's feelings. One step at a time.

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Cerulean Cave (Leaf)

"Where the hell have you been?!"

I admit, upon later reflection, the thoroughly chastened look on their faces had been rather funny. Enough so to make a picture. Of course, at this time I hardly cared about that, doing my best to turn the two Elites into a pile of ash with my glare alone.

Personally I never thought of myself as a person that would lose their cool easily, resulting into strong outbursts of irrationality. The events today would have tried many more hardened soldiers, I was sure. As such I believe I had to be excused for my outburst at Elite Four members Koga and Bruno arriving just after Misty and I had gotten out of the cave. My mood had been rapidly declining with everything that had gone wrong with this mission. Until it had boiled over completely when I found

Misty after sprinting through the cave with such speed and desperation that the local Pokémon had all made sure to get out of my way.

Begin Flashback

God damn it. You idiot, I told you not to take risks like that!

My heart pounded heavily and that wasn't from the exhausting sprint through the damp tunnel system. Overwhelming worry for Misty's welfare had begun to dominate almost every other thought process. I should have never let her go in here alone. What kind of Master was I to put someone untrained up against an entire squad of well-coordinated, disciplined criminals? What kind of friend was I to do that? What kind of... No, I didn't have the right to even think that word and would never forgive myself for losing her here and now!

"Up ahead!" Unsure of whether running into Zoroark halfway was a blessing or only further cause for concern – since that meant one less powerful Pokémon to keep Misty safe –, I nonetheless welcomed his presence greatly. It might have taken me much longer to pin down Misty's exact position if not for him, and I could at least logically – as much as was left in my mind for logic at this moment – understand why Zoroark had split up with Misty to take on one of these special Pokémon like the Electivire that had been with Domino.

Still, of all the foolish things to do...

The thought was quickly blown away when I emerged into an open section with water. Years of battle training had me take in the situation in a heartbeat, A heartbeat that was so loud I swear Zorua must have heard it on the other end of the cave where he was waiting at one of the hidden rear entrances in case Mew would have come that way.

Misty!

"Night Daze!" Zoroark was already three steps ahead and unleashed the powerful shockwave of dark energy at Drapion. Despite being the same type, Zoroark's power was far stronger and the Drapion was caught completely unaware, blindsided just as much as Misty obviously had been. With a cry of pain Drapion was sent right into the middle of where Luxray was just about to let lose a mighty Electric attack at its opponents.

Snarling, I threw Berserker's Pokéball with all my might towards the opposite side. The large Pokémon needed little instructions as to what to do. And seeing Gyarados with enough sense to heave Wailmer out of the way and back into the water, there was only the dazed Drapion and Luxray to take the full brunt of a shattering Earthquake.

I wasn't quite finished yet as my boiling rage focused on the suddenly powerless Team Rocket members.

End Flashback

"Chill, would you? It wasn't our fault. Cynthia's back in Sinnoh right now and Lance had business in Johto. We were the only ones available and it seems they knew that," Bruno pulled me out of my memories, which made me only glare at him harder. Again it might have been funny to see the hardened Fighting type expert actually sweat under my gaze, but I frankly didn't care.

"We were ambushed flying in," Koga cut in smooth and calm. "Our helicopters were taken down and we had to abandon most of our unit to make it here as fast as we could." The older ninja's words managed to calm me down some. I knew him quite well, especially since I was good friends with Janine, and so I found myself listening to him more than I otherwise would have to anyone else in my state.

Sighing heavily, I plopped down on a small rock, the physical and mental exhaustion finally catching up to me. "They really had this planned well." Especially for a mission that I doubt could have been anything but improvised. Because, if it had been planned from long hand, we never would have gotten a chance to interrupt it in the first place. The level of quick preparation and readiness was cause for more than just concern. It meant they were all but ready to... do whatever they planned on doing.

"I just hope Mew got away after all." Domino's parting words were still on my mind but all they meant was that they were prepared for eventualities. They would have teams at key locations, not everywhere. There was a good chance Mew could get away without running into one of them.

Just as the two older Elites wanted to reply to that, my Pokégear chimed and glancing at the caller ID, my eyes widened slightly. I did not believe in coincidences and even if, this would have been too big as to think of it as one. "Excuse me for a moment." Pushing off the rock, I threw a last glance at where Misty was being checked over and her Pokémon were treated, then hit the button to receive the call.

Ash's face popped up on the screen. There was a lot of emotion there that I could even see on the small screen. From the moving scenery and the night sky I also assumed that he was up in the air. "Ash, I would be happy to hear from you but I suppose this isn't a social call?"

No, it wasn't. And my first thought proved correct. At least I knew afterwards that our effort here hadn't been entirely wasted but it would only be a good while later until I could really be relieved about the outcome.

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Seafoam Islands, Kanto (Ash)

Patience had never been my strongest point. I admit, I got better lately but situations like this still tended to greatly aggravate me. I had tried playing the tough guy in front of Dawn but the deep concern inside had only been getting stronger as I tried to push it aside.

I suppose that is how most people feel when they have to wait in a medical facility of any kind with someone they loved – be it human or Pokémon – in serious, potentially lethal danger. Anxious and helpless. Just sitting there and waiting. And the waiting was usually the worst.

There hadn't been any further incidents. Whether that was because all the Team Rocket members had already been taken out or merely chose not to pursue their target further now that we had intervened, I couldn't tell. That didn't mean it was an unimportant question. The latter would mean they were aware Mew was with us now while the former would most likely mean that they had no idea just what exactly happened.

Further puzzling was that the Rhyperior had acted on its own. Driven with fury as it was, the absence of a "Trainer" – I frankly refused to use the term for criminals – was curiously noted. I suppose for the kind of single-minded devotion the creature had shown, there was not much direction necessary. Yet again the question remained whether the handler in question had either been taken out by Mew before or had been in hiding, watching and then slipping away while we left.

My distracting contemplation was interrupted when the door to the small waiting room opened and Nurse Joy poked her head inside. Dawn and I were immediately alert and looked at her expectant. It had truly been a long day, much more for Dawn than for me. She had stubbornly refused to rest more than necessary once I arrived, dozing in and off while waiting here with me. I knew she wouldn't be able to fully relax until she knew Mew was alright. It was the same for me.

Seeing Nurse Joy's tired but relieved face immediately took away a great deal of the weight pressing on my heart. "The patient is over the worst of it. Nothing more rest at this point shouldn't be able to take care of." I sagged slightly in my chair, the tension in my body draining away and making me aware of some of my own fatigue. Dawn just smiled, tired but happy. I felt her immense relief and squeezed her hand lightly.

"If you don't mind. Mew woke up a little while ago and would like to speak with you two." I exchanged a glance with Dawn. I suppose I should be asking Nurse Joy

how exactly she would know what Mew wanted since I didn't recall her – we had all simply accepted Dawn's adamant stance on the matter – ever speaking human language like her clone. Then again... she was a Legendary and Psychic Pokémon. If far less-able Pokémon like Meowth could learn the human language than who was to say a Mew couldn't?

In the end neither of us cared, too tired to pursue unnecessary questions, and followed Nurse Joy to where they had brought Mew for observation and resting. On the way Joy admitted that whatever it was that Dawn had done to keep Mew stable, had probably saved her life. That kind of quelled the last of my anger that I had felt after hearing how Dawn in her state had tried to feed Mew power pretty much up to the point until Mew had been taken into the operation room. After which she had promptly collapsed from the strain. I hadn't been very happy about her recklessness but could at least understand why she had done it. And hearing now that it had been the right thing to do, made me feel kind of proud instead.

Shortly afterwards we arrived at the room. I noted the two security officers on each side of the door and smiled slightly. It was a blessing that most of the personnel from the Grand Festival was still present. With the size of the event and recent happenings, security had been tight and everyone here was professionally alert and ready.

Nurse Joy waited outside after admitting us inside, but told us we should keep it short since Mew really needed her rest. Frankly, as much as I wanted some answers to all the questions even more now, I could do with some sleep by now and doubted I had much mental capacity left. Dawn looked like she could sleep a day and I wouldn't be surprised if she did just that or more later.

Mew was comfortably rested on a small bed and looked – as much as I could tell – like she was deep asleep. But as soon as I closed the door behind us, her head perked up slightly and blue eyes focused on us with a mixture of emotion that I couldn't identify all of.

"It seems we only get to meet under dire circumstances," Mew said flawlessly in our language and looked straight at me. I chuckled weakly, not really sure how I should respond to that, after all it wasn't like I had chosen to do so either way. I didn't have to reply though. "Thank you both for saving my life."

Dawn shook her head. "We are just glad you are okay."

Mew smiled weakly. "I am afraid I cannot answer all your questions just yet. My wounds have been treated but I need time to recover my energy. For that I must enter a deep meditative trance and that might take several days. Before I do so, however, I wanted to thank you personally for what you have done for me. I did not wish to place this burden on you so early, Chosen." My eyes widened at that word

but Mew continued before I could inquire further. "I am afraid my powers are too weak right now to tell, so I need to ask: Has any of you have any idea what has happened to my dear child?"

Still stuck with the whirlwind of thoughts and emotions that single word had ignited in me, it took me several long moments to understand what she was asking. Unfortunately I did not have a satisfying answer for that either. "I'm sorry. I've spoken to Leaf but she said no trace of Mewtwo was found in the cave." Which could mean just about anything unfortunately.

However, Mew seemed somewhat... satisfied. Not really relieved but the sadness in her eyes at mentioning her clone had vanished slightly. "I see. I suppose I can only believe then. Now, before I rest, there is one last thing I need to do." Lifting her tail, the tip begin to glow softly and I could see that it was taking every ounce of strength left to do whatever she did. A few seconds later the light had solidified and formed what looked like a Pokéball. But it was a pure, crystalline white, decorated with unfamiliar symbols in sparkling silver.

Mew took a deep breath and then she looked straight at Dawn who blinked at the intensity suddenly directed at her. "For the time being, I shall be in your care, Dawn." And with that, before we could even properly process that shocking statement, she nudged the strange Pokéball open and vanished inside, the device not even shaking once before giving the standard capture signal.

The room was silent for at least two full minutes before Dawn broke the silence with a loud exclamation I couldn't fault her for one bit. "Ehhhh?!"

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Heal Bell Academy (Brock)

Looks like it passed.

It was already well past midnight, more like early morning. Somehow I doubted I would even get to sleep again or that it would do me any good. The first wave had awoken me only a short time after going to bed and the somewhat reduced but very strong feeling after it – much like an echo – had kept me awake.

What a weird feeling. I wonder what it is.

Of course, I knew partly what it was. Not the what exactly but the who. This had something to do with Ash and Dawn, that much I was sure. Something important happened. Something big. Something I was sure would have a great impact on the near future. I might not have the connection those two seemed to share these days but all three of us had once been chosen by the Lake Trio in Sinnoh. There had

always been a very faint echo of that connection. It was never very active but right now I could tell much more about the strange sensation than I knew I normally should.

I could also tell that the moment had passed and whatever crisis had befallen them, had been averted. Not that I expected anything less. There was little that could get in the way of those two. I saw a lot of the younger Ash in Dawn but she had her own special qualities, too, and together they had grown into something special. I truly believed they were both meant for great things and that as long as they stuck together, they could change the world.

Heh, that sounded rather cheesy. But I couldn't help myself. They were much like siblings to me, yet different from my brothers at home. While not related by blood, I felt an unmatched attachment to them and wished for nothing but their happiness. The prospect of seeing them again soon had me very excited. As much as I loved it here and as much as I loved Ako, the travels through Sinnoh with them had been one of my most cherished.

Ako. My gaze wandered over to the balcony of her room, clearly visible from mine. I was troubled. The strange experience just now had only reinforced my concerns that something was happening. Something big. And whatever it was, I doubted it would stop with some kind of Team Rocket terrorist attack and grab for power. Right now I could feel it clearly. That sense of... destiny. Something had been set in motion tonight. No, not set in motion. It had already begun long before now but tonight it seemed that whatever it was had started to catch up with Ash and Dawn and the only reason why I sensed it so strongly could only mean that I would play some part in it.

Ako was obviously fast asleep. I could see no light and I believed that I would know somehow if something was up. Which meant it was just me. That automatically posed the question of whether or not it would be a good thing to drag Ako into whatever was coming. I knew she wouldn't back out once things got serious, despite her aversion to battle. She was far too good-hearted and stubborn when it came to aiding those in need, thus she would simply ignore the danger to herself. But her gap in battle skill was what made me worry for her safety...

Of course, she wouldn't back down from the trip either. Not without an honest explanation... and upon that she would insist on coming for sure. I suppose there was no way out of it after all. I doubted I would be able to stop her from coming short of locking her in her room or something and even that would only be a temporary solution. Besides, if I was really honest with myself, I would want her with me. It might be selfish but I'd rather have her where I could make sure she was alright. Now that I finally had someone precious like that, I wanted to make sure that I would be the one to protect her.

That really sounded kind of arrogant but I suppose that is what true love does to you. I really didn't think she was weak. Ako had her own special strength but as the man I couldn't help but wanting to play the classic hero part once in awhile, too. Couldn't let Ash have all the fun after all.

Regardless, there was no way around it then. We still had some time until we had to set out for our job. I would have to step up her battle training. As much as I did want to be strong for her, I wouldn't allow that to stand in the way of making sure she could handle herself.

Part of me could understand her peaceful nature that abhorred all violence. It was one of these things I had grown to love. It wasn't just an innocent view – regardless how much I knew that the world wasn't quite so simple – but it was a strong conviction. A conviction I shared, along with everyone I had the pleasure to travel with so far. Ako needed to understand, however, that Pokémon battles didn't have to be about force and violence.

That had never been how Ash saw it. Both him and his Pokémon were motivated by the challenge to their own limits and the desire to protect those weaker that couldn't protect themselves. Sometimes fighting had to be done, regardless how much you didn't like it.

I would really be a bad boyfriend, if I didn't help Ako with her problems. And I would be an even more irresponsible one, taking her along against an unknown danger without having her sufficiently prepared. Perhaps I would need to be a little harsher, as much as it galled me, but it was for her best.

Satisfied with the resolution I had reached, I returned back inside, hoping to catch at least a few more hours of sleep. I didn't have class until earlier in the day and I suppose for once I could sleep in a little. The next weeks would be tough. Not just in helping Ako train but I would have to step up my game, too.

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Some days later, Outskirts of Cherrygrove City, Johto (Ash)

I should have done this more often, I thought with a wry smile but then discarded the idea right away. True, using a disguise would have been more effective to keep a low profile in the last year. It would have definitely helped to avoid at least some of the fans. It was ridiculously easy to pull off as well. Everyone knew that Ash Ketchum would always dress in a similar way. The jacket, the gloves and especially the hat. Even if the actual articles changed in style over the years, I had always felt most comfortable with this getup.

So, replace the jacket with a lightweight cloak – it was getting warmer after all –, take off the gloves once in awhile and definitely leave away the hat. Voila, no one had any idea who I was. Okay, not exactly no one but the hype-crazed fan that didn't really bother with details – meaning they only knew Ash Ketchum, celebrated Sinnoh League Champion, not the actual person – was most efficiently fooled.

I had done this a few times when things got really bad and we wanted some peace and quiet within a city. But I really didn't like hiding who I was. I felt naked without the hat, at least, and I was never the kind of person that shied away from open confrontation.

Now, however, there was no way around it. At least for some time. With Dawn's victory it wasn't just "Ash Ketchum, League Champion and his girlfriend" anymore. It was suddenly. "Ash Ketchum, League Champion and Dawn, Top Coordinator". That ought to make for an even greater hype. And too much attention was the least we actually needed right now. That was, after all, the other and perhaps greater reason for running around in disguise.

After having another talk with Leaf, Dawn and I had made our way off the island even before daybreak. Organizing a ship wasn't so hard for two people with enough credit to their name and appropriate connections. We had both been extremely tired from the day, Dawn even more so, but as much as I wanted to give us some rest, staying even a day would have been bad in several ways.

We couldn't know if someone was still tracking Mew. But even if not, Team Rocket would surely investigate if their team on Seafoam Island didn't report back. Any minute spent too close to the site would draw attention to us. And with the Grand Festival over, there would be a lot of people out to catch a glimpse of the new Top Coordinator, get an autograph etc., especially with me there as well.

So, until this situation was a little more cleared up, we had to keep a low profile, whether or not we liked it. That was also why I suggested we would make a brief stop in Johto. Cherrygrove was close enough to Victory Road, to cross over quickly to Kanto again. The new event was situated on an island to the north, between Kanto and Sinnoh. So, if we decided to go there, we wouldn't be too far off. In fact we could even travel north and take a ship from some of the smaller sea towns.

Arriving back at our camp site, I found Dawn relaxing in the sun. It was a warm day today and the sunglasses wouldn't raise any suspicion at all. I was kind of envious since that was all it really seemed to take to fool most people, aside from maybe binding her hair in one single, longer ponytail. Then again, I really wouldn't want to have her any other way and should be glad this was enough.

"Here we go." I dumped the bag of provisions on the ground and plopped down next to her in the grass. It was a nice day to be outside actually and for once didn't really mind not having the comforts of an actual place to stay. "So far it doesn't look as if anyone's been following us but we should keep this up a little longer."

"Mmh." Dawn was absently playing with the oddly colored Pokéball, the one that Mew had given her before actually disappearing inside. There hadn't been a sign of activity from the Legendary since then but Dawn was certain that she was doing exactly as said. Resting and getting her strength back, whatever exactly that meant. I have to admit Mew's declaration just before doing that had really shocked me. Oh, not so much about wanting to stay with us for now. Not just was it a logical thing to do for someone obviously hunted, but the way things usually went with me and Legendaries, I wasn't terribly surprised about that bit. What had me baffled was that Mew had obviously decided to stay with Dawn!

Not that I begrudged my girlfriend such a thing, not in the slightest, but it was rather unexpected, especially after hearing Mew mention the word "Chosen". That had immediately reminded me of the Lugia business and I was almost certain at this point that all this had something to do with me again. This new twist had really thrown me for a loop but it seemed like I wouldn't get any answers before Mew was awake again.

"So, what do we want to do now?" I decided to change the topic. Regardless of what all these new developments meant, we still had to decide on a new destination. Over the last year we had been content to focus on Dawn's goal and my further training. The Grand Festival was over now, so that left the question of what to do. Of course, something new had already presented itself. "I bet you want to try out this new thing." And it wouldn't hurt if I was present, I guess. Once I knew what was up with this Mew business, I would have to have a serious talk with whoever was in charge of this. I would have appreciated at least being informed beforehand that I was suddenly nominated for this new event. They really should make up their mind about a name.

The way I understood it, there would be teams in a setup of one Trainer and two Coordinators. One of the latter would be determined through a qualification round and the other would have to be chosen by the Trainer. So it wasn't necessary for Dawn to take this qualification round but I knew her way of thinking and her competitive spirit. Besides, I think we both agreed it would be better if I could actually have a say in both of my supposed partners. If Dawn won the qualification round, I would be free to make a choice that would please us both.

"And what about you?" Dawn asked, showing that she was everything but inattentive. "You've been mostly training all year. Aren't you anxious to tackle the Master League?"

I chuckled and scratched my head. She got me there, that was for sure, but that didn't necessary have to mean anything. "It's not like we can't do both. First, the qualification round is rather soon and after that there is still a lot of time until all the others are done. Second, dates for Master League matches are rather irregular. Most of the time challenges have to be made and specifics dates will be set. All in all, one match shouldn't really take more than two or three days out of our time. And lastly... I really want to know first what's going on with... this." I glanced at the Pokéball currently holding Mew. "Things are rather tense right now. I have a feeling we and a lot of other people might not have much time for simple things like official Pokémon battles very soon."

Dawn frowned, but I could see she agreed with that last assessment. Until we were a little more sure about the near future, making any further, complex plans wasn't the best idea. "So... We start setting out for this new Contest type for now and then see what comes up along the way?" She did sound somewhat pleased and I had to hide a smile.

"I think that's for the best right now."

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Veilstone City, Sinnoh (May)

"Machoke is unable to battle! Winner of this round is Eevee."

If anyone had just walked in and heard that end result they might have gotten the shock of their life. And it would be even more shocking if they knew that the Gym Leader had been fighting with her full strength just as I had requested. Under these circumstances no one would give an unevolved Eevee a chance against a powerful Fighting type like Machoke.

Such a first impression would have been negated had they watched the actual battle, probably replaced with utter fascination... but that was the point of swearing Maylene and her referee to silence on Naru's secret. I wanted to keep this one as long as possible, hopefully not revealing it to a larger audience before the new Contest. I wanted to keep this ace as long as possible to get a surprise in against Dawn.

"Good work, Naru, take a rest." Even without her special ability, she was well-trained. After all Naru had for some reason participated in every major training session since we met. She wouldn't participate in any official battles but that was okay. I understood why. But now she had offered and we needed to get some real battle experience in. A Contest battle was all about harmony, even more so than a normal battle. The first real test had been a full success, even if I knew it had been greatly attributed to Maylene's surprise to have an opponent like this.

The Gym Leader of Veilstone City had still fought hard and I found myself even more confirmed in my decision to make this small side trip north, instead of heading straight southwest towards the location of the first qualification round. Part of me had just been looking for a decent challenge to keep my skills sharp, another part had wanted to take on Maylene specifically. I had heard from Dawn how they had fought once and I wanted to see how well I would do. To be fair, the conditions weren't nearly the same and I was sure Dawn wouldn't have lost right now, but that didn't really matter to me. Besides, while she was primarily a Fighting type expert, many of her Pokémon were part Psychic or had some psychic abilities. I found that to be a good preparation for fighting Dawn's obvious newfound orientation.

"Next one?" I asked smiling and Maylene nodded enthusiastically, calling out her Medicham and Gallade. We had agreed beforehand that the second round would be a two on two battle. I decided to humor her and sent out two similar types as well. "Blaziken, Ninetales!"

It was an intense, fast paced battle. And one where I quickly learned a few things. First of all, fighting two Pokémon with strong mental abilities was extremely frustrating. Their synchronization was so perfect, it was extremely difficult to try and score a hit without the other anticipating and covering the opening. Maylene wasn't giving telepathic commands but they were issued in such short order, it was hard to follow or react to them, even with all the training we had done.

The other thing I learned was that Blaziken and Ninetales had very little experience actually fighting as a combo. The former was more used to working with Blastoise or Venusaur, even the odd combination with Beautifly, while Ninetales had little double team experience other than her combo with Beautifly. Sure we had trained this, but training and reality were two entirely different things.

The synchrony between Medicham and Gallade was starting to overwhelm them and I found myself struggling to find a way to reverse the situation. Blaziken was taking the brunt of the assault, staying out front while Ninetales was trying to give support from the rear. It wouldn't hold much longer. "Ninetales, Heat Wave, then D5." I had taken to the idea of certain code signals for specific strategies that I didn't want the opponent to know about fairly well. Personally I found myself to be a straight-forward person in my battle approach but that didn't mean I would rob myself of a tactical advantage.

For Blaziken the Heat Wave was more like a refresher while Medicham and Gallade had to briefly fall back to brace themselves against it. Behind the wall of flames, Ninetales had quickly buried herself into the ground. "Blaziken, press on!" My oldest Pokémon was already in motion, renewing the assault with a new vigor, knowing already that now was the decisive moment. I felt myself unconsciously trying to mimic Blaziken's movements. A kick here, then a jump, a quick block, a double

combination... I had started to train some close range moves with Blaziken lately and found myself liking the exercise. It really helped in my synchronization with my long-time partner, too.

The timing was perfect. Medicham and Gallade were so focused on their exchange of blows and kicks that they reacted just a little too late when Ninetales burst out of the ground and immediately let loose a devastating Inferno attack. It might seem rather crazy with one of your own Pokémon right in the middle of the opponents but fire attacks didn't really hurt Blaziken much anymore. In fact, he immediately used the blaze to power up a lightning-fast snap kick against Gallade, before spinning around into a Sky Phoenix towards Medicham. The latter somehow managed to bend away but Blaziken adjusted quickly and spun around for another kick. Hurt from the fire, Medicham's first evasion had been pure instinct and muscle memory, now it was too occupied by the pain from the heat to react properly.

"Medicham and Gallade are unable to battle! Winners: Blaziken and Ninetales."

Maylene recalled her Pokémon, then gave me a knowing smile. I blinked in confusion, wondering what she was so... smug about. After all she had just lost. "You really seemed to be in synch with Blaziken just there." Ah, that's what it was. Seems like she noticed. She was a Fighting type expert, so I shouldn't be surprised. The next bit did surprise me, but not in a bad way. "Want to have some real training? Both you and Blaziken could really improve with some proper Martial Arts training. A crash course shouldn't take too long, just a couple of days."

I thought for a long moment, yet inside I already knew the answer, felt the excitement in my body. I had planned to travel back through Sinnoh until I could take a ship anyway. A few days here wouldn't hurt and I felt I would learn more that way than just travelling leisurely. "I'd like that."

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Heal Bell Academy, Johto (Ako)

It didn't scare me. Really. Battling I mean. And perhaps using such strong words as hate or disgust for description wasn't entirely adequate either. I found the practice of two Pokémon battling each other... pointless. There was already so many bad things, so much pain in this world. Why add to this by making it a sport out of having two living creatures fight each other?

"It's in their nature. Whether you like it or not." That had been one of Brock's early lessons and he had enforced it over the last days. I could sort of understand why he was doing this but that didn't mean I had to like it. Not one bit. Just because it was in their nature, wasn't that just because on their own they were forced to do so to

survive, a natural survival instinct born from generations of practice? Or was I being presumptuous to think I knew exactly what motivated Pokémon?

"Leafeon, Leaf Blade, don't let up." I winced when the attack struck yet again. Maybe I was wrong after all. Why else would Leafeon do this so easily, against her own sister? "Follow it up with Seed Bomb!" Brock didn't let up and the barrage struck Genki several times. I knew I had to do something but this was also a battle against my own conviction. I KNEW this was for the best. I KNEW I had to overcome this. I didn't want to be a burden to Brock, even if that meant I had to get over my reluctance for battle.

"Genki, use Flamethrower!" She struggled against the assault but got off the attack. Unfortunately Leafeon was long gone then and I looked around in confusion, trying to find our opponent. Had she gone underground? That was the only logical explanation. If so I had to expect an attack from below. Recalling what Brock had coached me in, I had Genki seek higher ground to decrease the chances of getting caught by Dig when Leafeon eventually emerged.

This wasn't the first time he had been pressing me so hard in our training battles. At first he had held back, but then became more and more aggressive, resulting in more and more damage to my Pokémon. It aggravated, it hurt me, but try as I might I couldn't find that spark that allowed me to fight back. I knew all the theories. Brock was a good teacher. Perhaps not an excellent Trainer himself, he had nonetheless taught me everything he knew. But regardless of that, I couldn't put the kind of determination into battle as him.

"You are hesitating again," Brock called out sharply. "Remember the lessons about this kind of situation. This kind of indecisiveness will cost the mission. What are your priorities?!" My eyes widened when I finally realized why Leafeon hadn't shown up yet, even after Genki took higher ground. Genki never was the target.

Brock had used the principle of scenario training for this. The academy did the same but under more toned down conditions. Now though those used to simulate injured Pokémon in need of treatment while in the middle of a battle, was done by my own Pokémon. Clefairy and Luvdisc, both paralyzed by an attack beforehand. And right now Genki was their only defender and I had just...

"No! Genki, get back to the shelter!" But it was already too late. Even as Genki leapt towards where my other Pokémon were holed up, Leafeon emerged from the ground, mere meters away. Genki wouldn't make it and that meant once again I had failed to do the right thing, perhaps I really was too much of a burden. As it was, I wouldn't be of any help to Brock... or anyone else for that matter.

"Leafeon, use Seed Bomb again!" I gasped in horror. He wouldn't... Leafeon hesitated only for a fraction but then did as ordered, starting to release the attack on my defenseless Pokémon.

"No! Stop...!" Everything seemed to go in slow motion. My heart was beating so fast, I thought it would burst out of my chest any moment. Helpless I watched Leafeon rearing back and taking aim before spewing a barrage of hard seeds at high speed. Distinctly I registered Brock telling me that on the battlefield the opponent would not show mercy either. And I knew he was right. Because of my weakness...

"No," I mumbled. This wasn't what I had been trying to do all these years. I wanted to help those in need. I wanted to heal those that were in pain. I wanted to protect those that couldn't. If I had to fight and inflict pain myself, then so be it! There was no point in it otherwise. I really was so naïve. To think anything would change just by clinging to my excuses like that. If I had to fight, I would fight for my beliefs. "Genki, use Flamethrower against the rock!" Genki turned around and blasted the attack against the rock she had just jumped away from. This enabled her to push away at a far greater speed. Leafeon had barely gotten off a few shots, before Genki suddenly shot past her. "Now, Protect!" The next volley bounced off harmlessly on the defensive barrier. Knowing I couldn't have Genki hide forever, I waited for a gap in the attack before pressing forward. "Now, Flamethrower once more!"

Genki cried out in exertion but also with a kind of energetic... joy that startled me but I had no time to think about it. Leafeon had somehow dodged the stream of fire. "Follow it!" And Genki did, angling the attack down and Leafeon had barely time to touch down before needing to skip away quickly. I was just about to press the attack when Brock suddenly cut in.

"Alright, enough." I blinked, for a moment so caught up in the moment that I had forgotten everything else. Seeing the assault on my helpless Pokémon had gotten me so angry, I had for a moment forgotten I was fighting my own boyfriend and that all this was training. Brock smiled at me. "Good, looks like you finally found your resolve. Remember this feeling, Ako. It will give you the strength you need when it counts."

With a smile, he recalled Leafeon before walking over to me. "I'm sorry for having to do this. I don't think your beliefs are necessarily wrong. But you needed to understand that your hesitation would just as much threaten to cause others pain or worse. I am not asking you to become a ruthless battler. But fighting to protect those that need it, that shouldn't be too bad, right?"

The adrenaline that had built up was slowly draining away and I could analyze the last minutes with a little more clarity, finding myself amazed at just how simple and natural it had come to me after all. There had been no hesitation in every attack I

had ordered. Was this what Brock had tried to do from the beginning. Help me find my reason to fight, regardless of my own misgivings?

Slowly I returned the smile. "No, I guess it's not."

*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****

Route 46, Johto (Mew)

Slowly, very slowly my consciousness began to separate from the state of absolute awareness, the deep connection to nature and my governing element. Elation mingled with a state of total rejuvenation. I never had felt better than now. Okay, not counting the other rare times I had used this special regeneration technique. They were so few I could recall any of them and while the feeling right now was something very powerful, I tried to avoid letting it come to this since it was really only necessary when I reached the very worst... and I could do without that again for another century or so, thank you very much.

Seeing as I was outside the Pokéball and my two temporary caretakers – though I saw them more like soon-to-be charges – had their full attention on me, I was immediately reminded that it would probably not be so long until I had to go to the limits of my power and beyond again. There was a serious and expectant atmosphere in the air that I could somewhat understand after the events of that day and then imposing mine and soon to be their problems on them.

Stretching lazily, I grinned in an attempt to lighten the mood. "Ah, I slept fantastically." I suppose the dumbfounded looks when I proceeded to go straight to zipping through the air, performing loops and other maneuvers was kind of amusing. But there was a point to this. Really. Doing this kind of meditation was rejuvenating mostly for my internal powers, my mental and elemental abilities. It had the nasty side effect of making the body rather stiff. I had learned that trying to loosen up all those muscles right away was generally a good way to prevent days of sore muscles.

To their credit, the two children didn't seem to mind. Ash was grinning slightly and Dawn had a soft, somewhat relieved smile. I could feel the remaining concern for my well-being draining away from her. I had felt her mind touching mine during the last days a couple of times and knew she could only be fully reassured after seeing me like this now.

"Alright, that's a lot better." I grinned but then turned a little more serious, floating over to Dawn. "First of all. I want to thank you again. I wish I could have avoided this at least for a few more weeks and I am aware that the timing sucked a lot. It was not my intention to bother you at your important day." And I would have tried to avoid it if possible but the teleportation had cost me a lot of power. Encountering more of the vile creatures was a surprise and it had been an effort to

take out the three that had been there. Well, two of them at least. After that my power had finally run dry short of taking down the last one.

As expected, the young girl gave me a confused look. "Um, how do you...?"

I chuckled, trying my best to look somewhat embarrassed. "How do I know all that about you? Well, that's all part of a longer story which I bet you are both dying to know by now." And there was the anticipation again. Ash was giving me a "duh" expression that had me laugh. "In a moment. But first..." I paused dramatically, letting them stew just a little. "I'm really hungry."

I giggled at the instant FOAS.

{Mini Author Note: From now I shall use this shortening if I ever come into the situation to use this... What it means? FOAS: falls over anime-style. It's really one of these few anime-specific things that I cannot somehow integrate somewhat into reality but is such a well-known occurrence that I don't want to rob myself of this technique completely.}

*******TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*******

A couple of minutes and a refreshing meal later – honest, I really had been hungry, you would be hungry too after meditating for days! – I felt a whole lot better and ready to take up the questionable honor of telling these young children about the steep and stony path they would have ahead of them now, whether they wanted to or not. Because they were our only and last hope to set things right.

Satisfied that everyone – upon my request Ash and Dawn had released all their Pokémon as well – was comfortable and more relaxed than before, I prepared myself for the memories as well. Remembering this time was not exactly easy for me. But it had to be done. I wouldn't go too deep into the tale just yet. It would already be a lot to take in for them. "Close your eyes and clear your mind. Dawn, open your shields and let me in. This way you can experience some of my memories as well to help you understand better what I am about to tell you." Feeling the two humans do as I asked – connecting to my fellow Pokémon was easier – I focused my power and sent them some of these memories from long ago, carefully filtered as to not overwhelm their minds.

"Long, very long ago, in this world there were two sentient life forms. One of them were humans and the others were what is referred to in your history books as animals. For long periods of time, evolution progressed naturally but eventually the faster evolution cycle of humans began to take effect and the animals felt threatened by humans that became more and more clever at hunting them, driving some races to the brink of extinction. It was in that time that some animals were born that

possessed an unusual high amount of a mysterious energy that was believed to be generally so underdeveloped in living beings that it was of little use."

For a moment I debated skipping over the specifics right now but realized it was more essential that they had a grasp on what exactly they, too, had to be dealing with soon. "Nature Resonance Energy, or NRE for short, is what researchers later termed this power. To fully comprehend it is almost impossible. Putting it as simple as possible for now: NRE is the measurement of how in tune a creature would be with nature, for example being attuned to a certain element, a better understanding of other living beings and several other things. This power is also deeply intervened with the balance in nature, the undisrupted principles of our world. This potential is present in every living being but only a few can tap into it, manifesting in different abilities for everyone. For us it meant also a far higher awareness that goes beyond the instincts that mostly drove animals at the time."

I made a small break to let them take in this kind of information before continuing, my voice becoming solemn. "We only intended to help our brethren whose very survival was threatened by the evolution of mankind. Our leader was a kind-hearted being and being by far the most powerful of us and with him we believed to set the balance right. However..." I paused, suppressing the swell of painful memories. "We made a terrible mistake."

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(Dawn)

Within my mind I could see a circle of creatures that I would have said vaguely resembled Pokémon, I could clearly see the shape of at least two big birds reminding me of pictures of some of the Legendaries. But the image wasn't very clear and from the descriptions just given, it had to be these animals that Mew was talking about. In their center was another figure – probably their leader – but I couldn't make out anything about it at all. I wondered if that was deliberate on Mew's part but then decided it was not worth contemplating right now.

"Unable to predict the vast consequences of using these powers that we were born with, the release of such a massive amount of NRE created a great disturbance in nature and warped the very natural order of this world." This time I could see more clearly, pictures of what I knew from history books as ancient animals changing into what we knew today as Pokémon. The implication left me stunned, even if looking back on it later I could rationalize that this should have been an obvious outcome from the way the tale was going.

After all there were no traces of normal animals anymore in these days, many actually theorized that their existence was nothing but a myth, but yet we retained knowledge of them, descriptions of Pokémon were bound to them. We knew the

terms Bird Pokémon or Bug Pokémon even though we had never seen the animal from where the comparison came from.

"Humanity but even more so most of our brethren were unprepared for the change, overwhelmed by the powers suddenly granted onto them while still driven by fear and anger at humanity."

Mew's voice was now deeply saddened and I didn't need an elaboration of what most likely happened and it didn't seem like the Legendary wanted to speak further about it right now, quickly moving on with her tale. "However, that was only one of the problems that arose with the change. By releasing such a huge amount of NRE, even after enacting a change of that scale, a lot of it was left unused. This energy did not simply dissipate though. It grew a consciousness of its own. Taking in all the dark feelings of fear, hate and desire. Unnoticed IT had begun to influence the emotions of the new Pokémon race. Inexperienced with their new evolutionary state, they became easily susceptible and the influence was done on such an unconscious, instinctual level that no one noticed until the world was awash in bloody conflict between humanity and Pokémon."

This time I did see pictures of that and wished I hadn't. It was only brief scenes. Pokémon tearing into humans viciously, humans using various kind of weapons and guns to take down Pokémon. It was ugly, despicable and I could sense the deep revulsion and regret from Mew. "We, who had been in the center of and enacted this change, received powers far greater than our brethren. Thus we had to act. It was our responsibility for these events were of our own making. We challenged and eventually defeated this foul creature but for various reasons were unable to destroy it. So we had to seal it away, a seal infused with all of our powers that should hopefully hold it for all eternity."

"But nothing is forever," that was Ash who was first among us to speak up and I smiled tightly realizing I had probably thought the same thing. "Isn't it?"

Mew was silent for a moment. "No, it isn't. Everything erodes with time. Before he fell into a deep sleep, our leader, the being with the highest NRE potential of our time, left us a prophecy that foretold the reappearance of the darkness we had so carelessly unleashed and that at that time our powers alone would not be enough anymore to contain it. However, we were also foretold that in this time six humans would be born with a never before seen potential to wield NRE, each attuned to one of the primary elements that govern this world. Air, Water, Earth, Fire and the higher elements of Light and Shadow."

I had a feeling I knew where this was going and I wasn't sure if I liked it even one bit. "These humans would determine the fate of our world and whether or not the balance in nature that we had so carelessly destroyed could be regained. A true balance between humanity and the Pokémon race we had created."

At this point the connection faded away and I slowly opened my eyes again. Mew was looking at us with that mixture of seriousness, expectation and regret again. Yes, I believed to know already what would be coming next and I wasn't disappointed. "You probably have already guessed by now. Both of you are among those six that have been foretold to us. I'm sure you must have wondered where your sudden powers come from, Dawn, since no one in your family's recent past has manifested similar abilities. Psychic power is deeply tied to the higher element of Light which is also my own Primary even if that is widely unknown to most people. The psychic abilities you have discovered now are a mere beginning of the power that sleeps within you."

At this point I had enough. Perhaps it wasn't the most mature reaction but all these new revelations were overwhelming me to the point where I had trouble to keep a calm mind. "Hold it!" I stood up abruptly, drawing a startled but sympathetic look from Ash which right then I chose to ignore though. "What are you saying? That we are supposed to be some kind of super warriors to save the world from something you guys messed up in the first place? I..." The images of humans and Pokémon fighting... no, outright killing each other in a bloodthirsty conflict was something I couldn't get quite out of my head. And something like that was what we were supposed to deal with? Something that could make intelligent creatures do such gruesome things?

At this point I felt Ash reach for my hand but jerked away. Immediately realizing what I had done, I felt ashamed of my outburst but I couldn't really deal with all this right now. So I went with the first instinct that came. I ran.

*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****

I expected Ash and was mildly surprised when it was Mew quietly settling down in the grass next to me.

That made it a lot harder, too. I felt rather foolish right now already. With Ash I could have dealt. In fact he always knew the right thing to say to me in order to cheer me up. Part of me wanted that. Parted of me wanted a soothing reassurance, a sense of normality.

Normality... What was that? I didn't know anymore. Sure, I had often thought about the rapid changes in my life ever since meeting Ash. Back then, I had just been a twelve year-old with dreams of one day being as famous a Coordinator as her mother. I would have never dared dreamed about reaching that goal so fast because it was just that... A dream. A faraway point in the future that I couldn't really define. Meeting Ash had changed all that. The dream had become something tangible as I began to be infected by his drive. Falling for Ash had changed that even more. Then came the three training months, Ash becoming Champion and suddenly that

previously unreachable dream had become so close and was finally obtained. All this in just roughly two years.

But it wasn't enough apparently. And I think the speed at which new important events were occurring had finally caught up to me. I hadn't really slept well since the Grand Festival. I hadn't slept really well for the entire last year! As much as learning from Sabrina had helped, in the end it had never really allowed me to work through everything that happened, instead just pushing it somewhere into a mental shelf to deal with later. Unfortunately there wasn't infinite space in that shelf and it had just burst open when trying to stew the latest load inside.

That kind of outburst really wasn't like me at all. I was sure even Ash had been surprised... No, he probably knew me far better than that. Chancing a glance at the silent Mew, I did not need my powers to tell what she was feeling. It was written clearly all over her face and I had felt it earlier, too, yet disregarded it so carelessly. This wasn't her fault. She hadn't chosen to meet us like this, making it clear several times since she woke up that she had not intended to have our meeting go like this. I knew she was completely honest. Just as honest as her feelings of immense guilt for the past that had come to haunt her and her companions again, now threatening to drag us along into this mess. I could tell she was more than ready to ignore any prophecy and just do something herself, regardless how futile, reckless and ultimately fool-heartedly it would be.

How long ago had the events she told us about been anyway? Thousands of years? Longer? It sounded like she had lived since then, carrying around the guilt about their actions. I couldn't imagine what it would feel like. How could someone cope with that for such a long time and still retain such an aura of general vividness? In the face of such devotion, I had no appropriate words of how sorry I felt for my words and somehow wasn't sure what would even be appropriate. All I could say, was a weak but in the end honest, "Sorry."

Mew perked up and looked at me, then shook her head slowly. "No. Don't apologize. To tell the truth I almost expected this. From all the Chosen you have awakened a lot of your powers early. It must have been a strain for you. It is I that should apologize..."

"But you couldn't..." I started, then realized there this was going, broke off and stared at the small Legendary. A long moment passed. Then we both let out a hearty laugh that was so much more relieving of all the tension that had built up than any apology from either side could have achieved.

"Truce?" Mew asked eventually after we calmed down a little and I nodded, patting my lap. She smiled happily and briefly pushed off the grass to settle down against my stomach. I was surprised by how... right this felt. Perhaps we really had been fated to meet. The connection I had felt to the Legendary from the first moment

on had been strong and that hadn't just been because of our psychic powers. There had been something far deeper, I had known this immediately.

"So... What happens now?" I asked, realizing that I had unconsciously began to stroke her white-pinkish fur. I didn't stop, feeling far too comfortable right now. For the first time in months I felt a deep, true peace settle over me. "You know we'll help, right? Even if we weren't Chosen or whatever, Ash would never refuse anyone in need and... neither would I."

Mew didn't answer right away and we sat together in a more comfortable silence. I felt Ash now a short distance off. Not interrupting but within hearing distance. "It's not time yet. All the Chosen will soon be gathered in one place. While we wait for that, I would simply like to accompany you for now. It is safer for us all. And... I can start teaching you how to handle your powers better."

I did smile genuinely at that. "I'd like that a lot."

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(Giovanni)

With a frown I read over the report once more and for what seemed like the hundredth time asked myself just what had went wrong.

It wasn't that I expected a positive result. I would have settled for injury and delay eagerly by the time I learned of the tracking team's discovery. But results had been better than expected. Agent 009's team had had the clear advantage. Sure, the interference was not unplanned but there had only been two of them and in the end they hadn't accomplished much. One of my most reliable agents had also proved good foresight in splitting off some forces to cover key locations for a nearby Teleport and even went so far as to cover the Seafoam Islands in case Mew would flee to the Ketchum kid.

Which the Legendary had. A Teleport that after all the fighting and running, should have drained it and yet had not been enough to stop it from taking out another small force armed with enough Rage Pokémon to give one of the Region Champions trouble. The entire squad waiting for Mew had not reported back and security had been so tight around the islands in the wake of that day that I still hadn't been able to get any of my men close enough to get information of what had transpired. That alone was enough to tell me what happened though.

I just didn't know the exact details. What happened to Mew or where the Legendary was now. In the end the conclusion of this mission, next to the galling but negligible loss in resources was "Target Lost". And I still was unsure how to feel about this.

I was not angry about the expenditure of resources. 009 and her team were well within mission parameters. It was not her fault that this happened and I would have used the same kind of tactic. Mew's tenacity had simply been more than expected and that meant next time even more of an effort would have to be made.

And then the kids will probably be around and more ready, too, I thought grimly. So far this was mostly speculation but my Intel was rather sound that Ketchum and his girlfriend had left Seafoam Islands early. Once more those fools' experience with the boy had paid off on that end. They had reported that their departure seemed hurried but trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, right on the next day after the event, very early. Now that could have been a simple effort to avoid media attention but it smelled too much of the possibility that they had been involved, perhaps actively involved in the eventual mission failure.

Alright, not quite a failure, I thought. There had been positives about the way the mission went. For once I had succeeded, with a comparably small force, to bring two of the strongest Pokémon to the brink of defeat. The long time of research and testing had paid off in that regard. Those hadn't even been the very best that we had to offer and still the Rage Pokémon had proven themselves every bit as useful as I had expected them to be.

Being able to pull this off fast and without critical interference from the League was a big step up from the fiasco at Heal Bell. I was still miffed about not getting these documents but in the long run that was of minor consequence. I was very satisfied how well the diversionary tactic had gone off. If that was the best the League could give me, I would have them completely overwhelmed when the real thing happened.

In light of that, I could already easily consider the damage to resources at least compensated. Perhaps this event would even have the League waste valuable time and effort to investigate, maybe even further divert attention to making sure Mew was save – granted they really had an idea of its current location. That would be ideal.

Finally closing the report, I decided it really wasn't worth mourning over the missed opportunity. It had been a quick response to an unexpected chance. For that it had gone rather well. Could have been better but it was better to think of the lessons learned from it, especially the positive ones. It was time now to focus on the main goal again. Mew could be dealt with later, along with everyone else.

After all, there had been one, unexpected bonus to this mission. I had honestly not believed it to be a possible outcome but wouldn't look a gift's horse in the mouth after all.

Switching to the camera showing the insides of the special laboratory, I smirked with no small amount of satisfaction at getting this unexpected chance for revenge against one who had humiliated me before. And what was better to eventually take down Mew than one born from its own genetic material?

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(Narrator)

The scene on the security camera showed a lone, long container of glass or some other kind of see-through material, filled with a bubbling, dark substance. Contained within the middle, secured by heavy bonds and many tubes injected into his body was the unconscious form of Mewtwo.

"Uh oh, this doesn't look good. It would seem our heroes will have a more serious challenge before them than they could have ever believed. Does the fate of the world as they know it really rest on their young shoulders? And what other secrets are still waiting for them?"

*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****

Maia's Prophecy

MysticMew: *looks around* Where is she? Oy, get out here! You wanted to do this stupid segment, now don't slack off!

There is no response, so MysticMew goes in search of his muse and finds her huddled in a corner.

MysticMew: What are you doing there?

Maia: ... I saw...

MysticMew: Saw what?

Maia: Fillers. Nasty, stupid, irritating, time-consuming and yet SADLY NECESSARY... fillers.

MysticMew: *stares after reeling back from the sudden outburst* Err... Yeah, well. But you agreed.

Maia: *snaps* I know! It's still awful!

MysticMew: *mumbles* Hypocritical, little... *gets pounded by huge mallet* Ugh...

Maia: *subdued* Next time on TFSTTM Reloaded... Cerulean Passion! Will love bloom between Misty and Leaf?

MysticMew: *groans* I swear, no respect...

*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****TFSTTM*****

Author's Notes

Yes, next up will be what many anime watchers would distastefully call fillers. No worries though, it's all relevant to the plot or mostly for character development at least. I did a lot of Ash and Dawn focus for these first three main episodes, so the others will be getting some more spotlight in the next ones. There will be three, one for each "pair" like in the prologues. Since May is on her own at the moment, she'll share a – probably a little bigger one with Brock and Ako, since both of them won't have that much plot between them and the Ash/Dawn one will probably have a bit more. But that's all I'm revealing here.

Now onto this episode. I am not quite sure how well I managed to convey what was in my head. Especially the last scenes starting to explain the main plot and history. When I first wrote it, I was very unsatisfied. Now, after reading over it again and making a few small corrections and additions, I feel it's at least adequate enough that I don't have to do it all over. I'd like to know what you guys think of it and the episode in general. It was a little hard to write and I feel like some scenes really could have gone better.

As for Mew's story in general. What you have is mostly a very generalized overview so far. I have most of the back story and history developed but didn't want to give it away all at once. I will probably use the next two episodes that don't focus primarily on Ash and Dawn (and Mew now) to reveal more bit by bit.

Again, if anyone is upset about the direction I'm taking with Pikachu and Lopunny keep in mind, this is still my story and my pairings. I never really intended to do anything with them to start from if not getting asked about it. Now though I do have decided on a course and I'm going to stick with it, even if that might upset hardcore Pikachu/Buneary (or in this case Lopunny) fans. Deal with it. Besides... It's mostly a side attraction at best. ^_^

Before anyone asks, I do intend to work through Ash's feelings about "killing" their opponent in the beginning. I felt it rather logical that the events of that night left very little room to really think about it. And with the situation the days afterwards still being rather unclear, it makes sense he would rather try to suppress it for the time being.

I'll try to keep up with the writing but I might want to take a bit of a break at some point. I've been writing on this story nonstop since starting the second arc and these episodes are quite a bit longer than the first arc. I do feel a little inspirational drain (hence Maia going rather crazy... crazier than usual). So if one or the other of the next "fillers" takes a bit longer than the customary 2-3 weeks, I'm merely taking a small recreational break. I am determined to see at least the second arc through before perhaps doing something different for a change.

Ja ne, yours

Matthias