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| The Nuzlocke Sega |
| The Ignition |
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| The Nuzlocke Sega Book One |

Prologue

 The boy lay there dying as his life faded away. His mother stood there, and I almost backed away when the boy turned to me.

 “Tell me a story.” He managed to croak this much out, and looked at me pleadingly.

 I looked down at him in pity, and tried to make up something, anything. Eventually I realized it was hopeless, I couldn’t make up something on the spot, so I decided to tell him the truth.

 Sitting down next to him, I began the story. “This isn’t just any story, this is my story. While you may be sick of war, it’s so much more than that. It’s heroism and despair, it’s love and hate, it’s life and death. It’s the reason why there is still hope. I hope it’s all right with your mother though.”

 She stared out for a moment, and then asked me to continue.

 “Very well then, I guess it begins a few weeks ago, on a clear morning at dawn…”

Chapter One: Ivy

 I stood for a moment, gazing at the first radiant beams of the sun rising over the crashing sea. A cold wind blew, and I briefly shivered, my smile failing to leave nonetheless. Nothing could keep me down today. The trees were taking on a new vibrancy as the colorful dawn of fall appeared in Pallet Town. There were always celebrations in the fall, for many reasons of course. The chance of a good mood ensured a federal holiday, just to increase some fading loyalties to the empire. That day, Ariel Day, was approaching quickly, but still would not come for another two months.

 Ariel Day was a day of commemoration as to the saving of the land from the brute forces of destruction. Before a hero arrived from across the sea about fifty-five years ago, there was only chaos. The villages were locked in a state of primeval war, doomed to fight for eternity with no advance. This was symbolized by the deities of the land, three rogue monsters who embodied the storm. One hero had tried to advance the land and end war, and there had been a subsequent rage from the gods. A hurricane of destruction was unleashed on the land, and one day in late fall, the initial newcomer to the land managed to defeat the three in battle, and seal away their powers within seven tiny amulets which were given to the provincial leaders. After that, a new government arose in the Indigo Plateau to prevent future wars.

 Of course, even though there were still those alive who could remember this, it might as well have been ancient history. There was always a price for peace, or so I was told. A few years back, someone had actually tried to unleash the ancient gods using his Pokémon. The government had never been the same afterwards. Limits were put on the gaining of Pokémon, and only a select few individuals were ever allowed to travel. It was said to prevent wars, but I didn’t get it. Of course, there were a lot of things I didn’t really get.

 I sighed as I glanced at Professor Oak’s lab in the distance. That was the center of the quest for knowledge, and the official governing point in Pallet Town. I volunteered there in most of my free time, and it was honestly pretty fun. It made me look at things in a different light. While most kids my age viewed Pokémon as the occasional Pidgey that crapped on roofs, I looked at them as friends more than animals. I had helped raise a few Pokémon at the lab, such as Terra the Fearow. I was the only aide allowed to work with Oak’s favorite Pokémon. It was intelligent, more so than some of the humans I knew. It recognized the people it liked to, flying up to them and pecking them on top of their head. It also did that to people it hated, but the peck was quite a bit harder.

 Another one of the Pokémon I worked with was Ivy the Bulbasaur. It was a cute little animal… or plant… or whatever. There were still things I didn’t know. It had a distinct circle above its left eye, slightly darker than the rest of its body. All Bulbasaur had something like that, a means of identification. It was a sweet Pokémon, but very timid. It would always bolt under a desk when someone it didn’t know walked into the room. It would take hours to coax it back out, normally involving bribes of treats. This was in stark contrast to another Pokémon at the lab, Ember the Charmander. Ember was a fiery beast, never quite realizing or caring that Pokémon could die. It was constantly picking fights, even to the point where it dared to attack Terra once. After about two weeks in recovery, it never picked a fight with a bird again. That didn’t keep it from attacking though. In all fairness, it might not have been evil. It just had a potent combination of boredom, power, and ignorance.

 I was steadily roused from my thoughts by the sound of a beeping alarm in the distance. It was time for the rest of the world to wake up. I never got to sleep last night; I seldom did. But when I did sleep, not even one of the storm gods could awaken me. Of course, no one ever slept the day before they turned fifteen. The government had decreed that any trainer could receive a Pokémon at the age of fifteen. In my case, I looked forward to this with even more enthusiasm than most. It was barely a change, I worked in the lab with Pokémon anyways, but it somehow made all of the difference. I would finally have a Pokémon of my own, something that wouldn’t just get shipped off to some other department in time. I figured it would probably be Ivy or Ember, and didn’t really care which one I got. They were both my friends.

 The lab was a massive structure, the only two-story building in Pallet. It had a pale brick exterior with a massive iron doorway in the center of the wall facing the sea. Two great Radio cables rose from the top, connecting the town with the continental PC system, a means of transmitting items and Pokémon from town to town without any actually contact occurring between the two. For all of the solemn magnificence of the exterior, the inside was loosely-controlled chaos. The inside was made up of a labyrinth of metal-coated passageways between the key rooms of the laboratory. It was often joked that navigation was needed more than knowledge in the lab. I signed the logbook to mark my arrival, and slipped on a pair of latex gloves to prevent outside contamination from reaching some of the more delicate experiments.

 Even at this early hour, the lab was ablaze with activity, aides rushing back and forth trying to fulfill the tasks demanded of them. One of them hastily jogged over, and told me that the professor was waiting in his office. I had to cautiously maneuver the hallways to avoid getting trampled in the stampede of crazed assistants in white lab coats trying to prevent the all-present risk of crisis in the largest laboratory in the nation. I laughed silently at the contrast in and outside of the lab as I walked towards Oak’s office.

 Not many people could even get to the office. I was one of the very few who could do so without asking directions. I spent most of my time at the lab, while most others were away playing games. Don’t get me wrong; I was very athletic and still loved to play with the other kids, and I won most basketball games I played; but I liked other things better. I liked to read and study things as well, something most other people never got. I guess I could find myself in the quiet of a book more than I could in the middle of a Basketball game. I was also naturally curious, and books, although censored and in short supply, could help me find out more.

 Oak’s lab was a small space, with scarcely more than three chairs for visitors, a desk, and a PC. Oak was there, and smiled at me as I came in. He was an older man, about seventy years of age. He didn’t let that slow him down though, and he still actively maintained the lab with a smile plastered on his face. He was supposedly once a great trainer from across the seas, arriving shortly after the first Ariel Day. He must have been young then, scarcely older than I was. He had many Pokémon, some of them from past adventures, but was seldom seen with any other than Terra. The big bird waddled over to me, pecking me on the head, and slashing someone who I hadn’t noticed was there.

 Gary Oak was the Professor’s grandson, and polar opposite. He was relatively uncaring, driving those around him with fear. The Professor tolerated him, but never really let him do anything at the lab. We all still had bad memories of the onetime Oak had given him a chance. I still shuddered whenever I saw him. I vaguely remembered that we shared a birthday, and thus we were both getting a Pokémon today.

 Oak sighed at Terra, slightly reprimanding it for slashing Gary, but I could tell he didn’t really care about it, and Terra was content with things. Gary was looking as irritated as ever, and finally spoke up. “So, where’s my Pokémon?”

 Gary Oak referring to anything as “my Pokémon” gives me nightmares to this day. Oak seemed equally unnerved, but rose and began to speak, two Pokeballs appearing in front of him at the click of a button. “Gentleman, your time has come. Today you begin your journey into the world of adulthood. There will be challenges along the way, but I have confidence in you. First off, Red-“

 “Hey, why does he get to go first?”

 Oak sighed, shaking his head. “Because he does. Where was I, oh yes. Red, you will be receiving Ivy and, unsurprisingly, a job at the lab.”

 I smiled calmly, and lifted Ivy’s Pokeball, calling it out to my feet. I sat back, ready to start my journey. But, then Oak continued, with a mournful expression on his face. “As for you Gary, you will be receiving Ember, the Charmander.”

 And there my world went, right into darkness. I hadn’t even considered that Gary might get to ~~abuse~~ raise one of the Pokémon I had trained. That aside, Gary was dangerous with any Pokémon. With a Pokémon that was naturally aggressive, he could be a monster. I felt Ember’s chances at calming down fade into oblivion as Gary lifted the Pokeball.

Chapter Two: Gary

 Gary had a dangerous glimmer in his eyes; the look of a madman suddenly bestowed with power. Oak noticed it too, and seemed slightly unnerved as Gary unleashed Ember. Ember didn’t exactly like Gary, and with good reason. No lab Pokémon had ever liked Gary after he was given a chance to help his grandfather for a single day. He could never be a trainer, he simply didn’t view Pokémon as sentient beings; they were mere tools in his eyes. That had become apparent enough three years ago. No one ever discussed the incident. The bloodstained walls were repainted, and everything covered up and ignored. But no one could forget.

 The moment Gary was assigned a task involving a Pokémon, he had sent it out. It was a Squirtle, a Pokémon meant to be given to a trainer in the next week. It was ready for battle. Gary had walked down the hall with it, and challenged an aide to a battle. The aide, obviously declined, and reprimanded Gary severely. Gary didn’t like that, and ordered Squirtle to shoot a water gun at the aide. He avoided it, but the stream of water hit an electrical generator, and caused it to explode. Miraculously, Gary survived with only minor injuries. Most others in that wing were not so lucky. No charges were ever pressed against Gary Oak, but no one honestly believed he would get a Pokémon license. But for some reason, the Professor had forgiven Gary, and no one ever questioned his decisions.

 I had never forgiven Gary. I hated him with every ounce of my being. Especially after… I didn’t think any further. I avoided that memory. Oak cleared his throat, awakening me from my thoughts. “Yes, and as for you Gary, you have been assigned to be an apprentice trainer from the empire.”

 Gary flashed his wicked smile. My mouth hung open in shock. That position was only given to those who were deemed as potentially powerful trainers. They were apprentices to become the gym leaders of the land, and the position had not been given out to a resident of Pallet Town in at least a decade. Oak gave me a weary look that told me he would explain later. He turned back to Gary, and said with nearly no emotion, “Your immediate task is to get to the Pokémon League Headquarters. You will receive further instructions there.” He sat back, turning to me. “Red, you will be heading north as well. There is a valuable piece of electronic equipment waiting in the Viridian Pokemart. Sending it through the PC system would disrupt some of its programming, and so I need you to pick it up in person. There are your instructions. Gary, you are dismissed.”

 Gary got up, and I could tell what was coming. “Now that we’re both trainers, I think it’s time we had ourselves a battle.” I knew there was no way to refuse; he would probably just have Ember torch me if I declined. Ivy was shying away behind my legs, and Gary was smirking at its cowardice. I sighed, and picked Ivy up, talking to it soothingly to try and get it to fight. It reluctantly agreed, and stared Ember down, shaking while it did so. Gary smirked, and ordered Ember to attack. It leapt up, scoring a nice hit on Ivy, who replied in pain, with a somewhat-weak growl. Ember slashed again, but Ivy intercepted with a tackle of its own, sending Ember spinning back. The two clashed for a time, Ivy growing more and more confident, until it gave a small roll, and tackled Ember to the ground.

 Gary stood there in shock for a moment, and then withdrew Ember, cursed at it for being a weakling, and briskly walked out the door. Oak was smiling as always, but it seemed to be more than happiness this time, a kind of hope perhaps? I wouldn’t know. I hadn’t really felt much of anything after… I reminded myself again to avoid the memory. “Well, that was certainly a humbling moment for Gary. Thank you for that. Oh yes, and on to business.”

 He motioned for me to sit down, which I willingly did. “I didn’t want Gary to get his Pokémon today. However, there was substantial pressure from the Pokémon league to do so. I used to have quite a bit of influence there, but in old age…” He stared out the window, lost in his own thought, before gradually returning to reality. “It is probably for the best that he is out of Pallet. You might understand one day, but for now, just trust me. Oh, and in Viridian, could you keep an eye on Gary perhaps?”

 I agreed to his request, still wondering what he meant by it being better to have Gary away. I pondered this all the way to my mother’s house. I introduced her to Ivy, and told her I was going to Viridian. She gave some small reply to both; we didn’t really talk to each other. It didn’t used to be like that, but after- I really have to stop thinking along that line. She had never really recovered, and I held her responsible for never getting over things and moving on with life. It was pretty miserable living with someone in permanent grief, so I normally avoided things at home and worked at the lab. At least there people didn’t talk about their families nonstop. Maybe that was why I didn’t get along with the other kids as well as I should have. Jealousy would never allow it.

 The route to Viridian was really rather short, with a few odd Rattata and Pidgey being the only opposition. A newly confident Ivy defeated any that attacked with ease. The aggression of wild Pokémon was another strange aspect that needed to be studied. Most believed that it had something to do with the after-effects of Ariel Day, but the restoration of order should have decreased the number of attacks. In reality, no one really knew, and no one cared to know the answer.

 Viridian City might as well be named Fort Viridian. There are a few small building lying on a road system, but for the most part, the town exists because of a fort. It was the primary line of defense in the region in case somebody dared to attack the league. In exchange for protection, the residents allowed the town to be run entirely by the distant government at the Indigo Plateau. Ivy and I approached the Pokemart, a large blue building with a Pokeball symbol on top. Inside were rows of shelves, crammed full of enough materials to keep the town going. It was disproportionately cold inside due to the wind coming from a fan on the clerk’s desk. Ivy was shivering, irritated with the sudden drop in temperature. The clerk glanced up, and put the paper he had been reading down.

 With fake enthusiasm, he noted that he hadn’t seen us around here, and asked if we were here for Professor Oak. When I replied we were, he handed us a thick yellow parcel, only slightly smaller and lighter than an encyclopedia, and told us to have a nice day. The tone of his voice made it sound like he would rather wish us a nice jump off of a cliff. I grunted something back, as he went back to reading the paper.

Chapter Three: Dawn

 Ivy and I made good time jogging the way back. It was a bright day, where summer seemed to be making a last stand into fall. Ivy was enjoying the sunlight, thoroughly pleased by the light. I was glad that it had finally seemed to stop being so reclusive around others. It disliked the crowds in Viridian, but it wasn’t entirely put into hiding by them. I figured there were a number of reasons involved. Since I was constantly around, it probably wasn’t as nervous as it was when it didn’t have a clear, primary caregiver. The victory of Ember, one of the Pokémon it had lived in fear of probably helped its self-confidence. Of course, it could have just been being outside in the woods for once. There weren’t many plants in the lab.

 I was taking things slightly better myself. I had laughed about three times today. That’s more than I laughed in some years. Having Ivy around was almost certainly the cause of that. It was pretty hard to stay down when a cute little plant/dinosaur was constantly running around and having fun. Despite Oak’s wishes, we did not run into Gary in Viridian. That was probably not a bad thing. I didn’t see how Oak thought I could really change or even restrain Gary. It was just too much to ask after…

 Ivy looked up at me, with a somewhat concerned look on its face. I had probably been scowling, and it wouldn’t know why. I smiled at it. There were certain things that no one ever needed to know about. I tried my best to keep up a happy illusion for the rest of the path, but dwelling on the past so much in the same day was starting to take its toll. If it wasn’t for Ivy, I would have almost certainly broken down.

 One of the Professor’s aides greeted us as we signed in, and escorted us back to the Professor’s office. He was sitting there, filling out a report on something, when we came in. He briefly glanced up, and proceeded to lock the door He gave me a firm look, and began to speak. “You must never tell anyone what we discuss here today. Am I clear? Good, and now we can begin.” He stared into space, as if remembering something very important, and then he began to speak. “You’ve heard the stories about the formation of the empire correct? Good, now tell me, what was there before the empire came?”

 I squirmed awkwardly. I had been told that there had been some form of tribal anarchy, with a great council of sorts managing the region. I gave an answer along those lines. He sighed, and continued. “You are correct, if only halfway. There was a council. And beneath that, there were seven smaller village groupings. There was some organization, but no developed state. People and Pokémon lived together in a state of freedom and equality. While there were wars, they were few and far between. Trainers gathered annually for a large tournament of sorts, a peaceful means of showing the bond between Pokémon and trainer. But that disappeared in the last seventy years of imperial rule. And that is the biggest regret of my life.” He stared off into space as he continued. “And so I decided to change things for the better. I am too old, and all of the youth of today are corrupted never fully realizing the bond between Pokémon and trainer. I have waited so long for someone I could trust, someone like you. I want you to run an important errand for me. On the surface, it will be a quest to observe and collect data on every Pokémon in the world. But it will be deeper than that. I want you to demonstrate the power of harmony to the leaders of this region. Challenge them to battles, and show them that love can prevail over strength. Promise me that you will do this.” He leaned in closer, and I had to make the most important decision of my life. I glanced over at Ivy, and saw the look in its eyes. I looked up, and prepared to tell him my decision.

 “No.” I told the Professor, as disappointment flooded across his face. “I respect your dream, and I won’t tell anyone about it, but it isn’t worth undermining the stability of the nation to prove a point.”

 Oak stared into space for a few moments, and started to speak when an aide started knocking on the door. He sighed, put the Pokeballs and electronic tablet in a bag, and opened the door. “What is it this time, Tracey?

 Tracey was one of the Professor’s favorite aides, and he really didn’t deserve the reaction he received from the Professor. He was a kid of about seventeen, and had a similar back story to mine. I wondered if he had received this talk with the Professor. Form the look on understanding on his face, I guessed that he had. “Professor, there’s something we need you to look at, and fairly quickly.” I could detect a sense of panic in his voice, although he was doing his best to hide it.

 Professor Oak sensed it too, and hurried off with him, leaving Ivy and I alone. I had other reasons for declining the Professor’s proposition. Pokémon died, and a leader wouldn’t be one too care. They were the hardcore battlers of the land, virtually invincible in combat. It was unheard of to want to oppose one. Sometimes the empire pitted their most prominent trainers against a leader to test their skills. The battles were normally televised, and they were some of my least favorite things to watch. Most kids at school loved them, and constantly talked about them. But they didn’t know what it was like to have a bond with a Pokémon. They couldn’t imagine that it would actually hurt more than any injury to watch a partner die.

 I was called back to reality by the Professor loudly swearing in the computer room. I peeked out of the door, and saw him staring at a monitor, completely transfixed by the image onscreen. He was muttering something about betrayal, and trembling like he wanted to kill someone or pass out, and wasn’t sure which. Tracey seemed to be pleading with the Professor about something. Professor Oak snapped out of whatever he had been doing and rushed down the hallway towards Ivy and me. He shoved the bad containing the Pokeballs into my hand, and yelled at me to get out of town, as he proceeded to run down the hallways and yell a similar thing at everyone else in the lab.

 After some hesitation, I took off, Ivy following behind me. We didn’t stop running until we reached the edges of Pallet, and then only because of the silhouette on the ground that piqued my curiosity. A large, white Dragon with a man flying on its back flew overhead. It paused in the center of the city, and began to summon energy to its mouth. I had seen the attack, called Hyper Beam before. It was arguably the most powerful move a Pokémon could learn. And one was being fired right at the lab. I started forward, but Ivy held me back. It was hopeless.

 The creature unleashed its devastation; hitting the lab and causing it to collapse with beam one. It then proceeded to burn the rest of the town, striking down those who tried to escape. I couldn’t bear to watch it, and so I picked up Ivy and started walking. I hadn’t wanted to take Oak’s challenge, but I didn’t have much of a choice. I knew the empire had done this. No trainer outside of the Pokémon league would have the power to destroy an entire city. Besides, it wasn’t as if the town had made many enemies. I considered the situation, and came to one conclusion. Someone had passed on knowledge of the professor’s plans.

 For now, I didn’t really have much of a choice but to head north. I wouldn’t be welcome in the city, but I could always camp on the outskirts. I had another idea too. I realized that if I wanted to avenge Pallet by taking Oak’s challenge, I needed another Pokémon. That would of course mean that I had to catch one.

 We camped about a mile to the west of Viridian that night, Ivy gathering wood, and I building a small fire. We talked for a little while. We had kind of just had our world, rather literally, lit on fire and blown apart. It was nice to have somebody else to descend into madness with.

 Ivy was perfectly comfortable sleeping in the forest among the plants; it was a grass type after all. Not so much with me, but I managed to get a little sleep. I briefly considered having one of us take watch, but no one really knew we were alive, so I didn’t figure it was worth it. Flames danced across my dreams, consuming the night in an inferno of terror.

 The next morning was not kind. Ivy looked refreshed and revived, but I was pretty sore from sleeping on the ground. I brushed the leaves off of me, and then proceeded to search around for some berries. I hadn’t considered food being a problem, but I realized that if I got any more Pokémon, food would become a huge problem. Unfortunately, more Pokémon was exactly what I needed to succeed. I knew that most leaders specialized in a certain type, as they could really have any Pokémon they wanted, and only chose their favorites. With seven leaders in the country, it was extremely unlikely that any one Pokémon could face all seven leaders without experiencing a type disadvantage. That was why I needed another Pokémon, as it would really suck to get through six leaders, and then get swept by the last due to a type disadvantage.

 I kept an eye out for a Pokémon, and then eventually found one. It was a small rat Pokémon hiding under a tree. It looked substantially more powerful than the other Pokémon I had seen in the wild, and figured that this would be it. Ivy advanced, and the two began to circle each other. Ivy lashed out, tackling the Rattata into the ground, the opponent, who I had now noticed was a female Rattata, lashed against Ivy with its tail. This went on for one more round of combat, until I told Ivy to stop. I reached into the bag and pulled out a Pokeball. The Rattata shot forward in a final tackle at blazing speed, but was blasted back by the force of the Pokeball. The ball rolled to a stop, and twisted three times before clicking shut. I had captured another Pokémon. I named it Dawn, to symbolize the dawn that would come from the imperial darkness.

 I spent one more night like the first, giving Dawn a chance to rest for whatever lay ahead. The next morning, a much unwelcome visitor gave me the jolt of my life by striding into camp. Gary Oak, walked in smiled wickedly, and told me I was under arrest. I knew it then. He had known about his grandfather’s plans, and immediately run off to the league to report him. He couldn’t understand love, only discipline, so he sided with what he understood. I knew what was coming. I had to avenge Pallet, and he wanted to battle anyways. It was on.

 He sent out a Pidgey that looked too weak to actually learn any flying moves. I sent out Ivy to counter it. The two lunged forward in massive tackles, blasting their opponents back. I noticed that Pidgey looked substantially weakened and reminded Ivy that it was Gary, not his Pokémon, we were fighting, and Ivy gave a final blow to knock out, but not kill, Gary’s Pidgey.

 Gary kicked its unconscious body and growled something about it being inexcusably weak. Ivy hissed and lunged forward, to which Gary replied by sending out Ember. I knew that Ivy was at a disadvantage to it, and decided to use Dawn in battle. Dawn lunged forward with a lightning-fast tackle to the face, with which Ember returned a slash to Dawn. Ember looked at me, almost pleading for forgiveness; it was fighting out of fear. I really hated Gary now, and pure anger ran through my veins. I ordered one more tackle, but something went wrong. Before it collided, Ember hit Rattata in the neck with its claw; a lucky strike at a weak point. Dawn gave one last hiss as its life faded, giving a look of failure in my direction before it went limp. Gary was smiling, thoroughly enjoying my reaction. I decided there that he would die very painfully. Ivy came forward, not even caring if it was at a disadvantage, and proceeded to beat the life out of Ember, who was too stunned at the brutality of Ivy to actually react. Gary realized that he would be at a serious disadvantage if he allowed Ember to die, and suddenly Dawn’s death became a lot less funny to him. He withdrew Ember, and ran away quickly, leaving me with Ivy and a dead body.

Chapter Four: Forest

 Like it or not, Ivy and I did have to get supplies eventually. Regrettably, that involved going into town. I didn’t really like the idea, but I figured that we would need to start defeating leaders eventually, and aside from Gary Oak, no one knew we were alive. It was quite the experience, unnerved at every step that someone would come up and try to kill us. The day consisted of stocking up on supplies, scanning the town, attempting to find out information about Pallet. To the last end, there was little information to be found. There had been a fire in the south recently, but no one was really sure what it was about. No one else had come through the forest. The thought was depressing, but not surprising. Besides, if there had been survivors, they probably would have been injured and have to stay in the area.

 Ivy seemed to enjoy himself, playing with other Pokémon he met while I talked to their trainer. It was rather fun to watch him chase after a Squirtle for the better part of an hour. He ran down the streets, eagerly urging me to keep up. Against my will, I sometimes did find myself running after him, and even laughing. And then I would remind myself of the task ahead, and the reasons behind it. Ivy didn’t seem to care. He was affected, but he didn’t seem old enough to really grasp the situation. That might have been a good thing, as he was the sole reason that I didn’t quit there.

 It was while Ivy was running that things went wrong. Ivy ran along absentmindedly until he bumped into a trainer. He was a tall man, distinguishable by his fierce blue eyes that radiated power. He was in a blue coat, with an intimidating red cape hanging behind him. This wasn’t a common appearance, but I would have recognized him anyways; this was the man on the Dragonite that destroyed Pallet.

 I tried to keep myself under control, hoping he hadn’t seen the flash of hatred and terror in my eyes. He stood there though, gazing at me as if seeing straight through me, his terrible eyes almost glowing. “Hello, young trainer. Don’t see many Bulbasaur these days, in fact I must ask you where you got it.”

 I knew it was pretty much over. I stammered something out, and subconsciously backed away. I couldn’t fight someone with the power to destroy an entire city. Ivy sensed my uneasiness as well, and proceeded to back up, somewhat defensively of me. The trainer continued his smirk, knowing full well that he had me in his hands, and fully enjoying my reaction. At this point, I had the dumbest idea of my life.

 “Ivy, use Vine Whip!” Ivy hesitated for a brief moment, and I feared that it wouldn’t attack. Then as the trainer just seemed to realize what I was doing, Ivy shot out a string of vines, knocking him off of his feet as we ran hard, never looking back.

 We ran north until we reached the edges of the forest. There wasn’t even a path here, no road to go by. I pondered how we would get through, and then just ran for it, Ivy trailing behind me. It was a dark and creepy maze of trees, stretching for miles. No one had seriously used this as a means of travel for years, and most of the minimal contact between Pewter and Viridian occurred in a small side path leading to Diglett’s Cave, the large underground path for imperial agents to get from the major cities to the Plateau. No one wanted to go through the god-forsaken forest. I hoped that no searchers would either.

 On the other hand, Ivy loved the forest. He ran on ahead, periodically stopping to let me catch up. This was his home, and he seemed fully comfortable here. Honestly, I hated it. The bugs were everywhere, and their eyes faintly glowed at the edge of the darkness, giving a creepy feeling that I was being constantly watched. The few bugs that did attack barely posed a challenge, Ivy tackling them to the ground, crushing them with his weight. There were a few evolved bugs too, but those were easily crushed given enough hits, and were generally not very aggressive.

 Of course, I’m never particularly lucky about anything. Before long a squad of young bug catchers who worked in the forest was deployed. Most of them were very young, just barely having earned their license. I briefly wondered how weak the empire thought I was. The first wave to reach us came from Viridian. They’re leader stepped forward, clearly self-confident. He raised his Pokeballs, and sent out a Weedle and a Caterpie. I looked down at Ivy, already braced to fight and sighed. I didn’t see much of a point in arbitrarily killing a trainer’s Pokémon. Unfortunately, I didn’t have that luxury. Ivy had to tackle but twice, and two stains of guts were left on the ground. Most of the group ran after that. A few stayed and fought. They were shown no more mercy than the citizens of Pallet.

 The second group to reach us came from the North, Pewter city. They had a slightly older leader, maybe sixteen or so. He was even more confident than his southern counterpart, and gave me a look of unworthiness when Ivy took his battling stance. He smiled wickedly, and ordered his Weedle to poison Ivy. The sting did a good deal of damage, but Ivy got up, not poisoned and merely irritated. The opponent’s smug look faltered a little, as he realized that Ivy was a poison type as well, and not just a grass type. Ivy didn’t wait for my order, and proceeded to bash down every Pokémon belonging to the opposing side. After a few minutes, the floor was littered with torn brown and green flesh with poisonous goop lying around; quite a lovely campsite.

 I figured there was at least another day before any more search parties were launched, so we slept in the forest that night. Ivy wandered around the edges of the site, before eventually lying down under an elm tree and going to sleep. I stayed up later, thinking things over. The first gym leader lay ahead in Pewter city. The fight would inevitably come tomorrow. Of course, there was the other man too, the one with the flaming eyes. I knew somehow that we would inevitably battle things out. But that all lie ahead, and for now I needed to rest.

Chapter Five: Stones

 Fire clashed in the sky, blue colliding with red. Pallet was in flames, burning to the sky. A blue flash arched across the town, and a cryptic laugh rang out. “You’re next Red, you’re next.”

 Ivy nudged me awake, concern cemented on his face. “Just a dream, just a dream.” I sighed, the words going to myself as much as Ivy. Ivy still looked dubious, and kept its head cocked at an angle, but he wasn’t going to inquire anymore. It was hard to tell time in the forest, but judging from the little light that came through, the day had come about three hours ago. I lazily got to my feet, realizing that the last few nights were starting to take their toll. I hastily made something out of the few supplies we had gotten in Viridian, but those were running discomfortingly low. We would have to get more supplies soon.

 The remaining walk out of the forest was done somewhat hesitantly, with every step towards Pewter bringing a greater sense of discomfort. There would almost certainly be an ambush, and every step increased the possibility of it. But it never came. I walked with nervous anticipation all of the way out of the forest, but there was nothing but an uneasy silence, and the anticipation of the worst.

 The edge of the forest was ten feet away now, and still no attack. I knew that there would almost certainly be some sort of attack coming at the edge, and got Ivy prepared to attack. Surprisingly, there was no one there. This was starting to get really creepy, really quickly. I edged cautiously out of the forest and got a better look at the town. It was far larger than Pallet, and an actual town unlike Viridian. The town was arranged around a series of fortifications abusing natural terraces for defense. A large, stone palace stood in the center of town, with a foreboding aura around it. That was probably the gym. At the very back of the town, a large laboratory towered over everything but the gym. That was the Pewter museum, one of the five laboratory sites in the region. It was the smallest facility of the five, but it was still an impressive structure. It was an old building, one that had been there for decades before Aero Day. It specialized in stones found in the surrounding mountains. It was supposedly working on a major project for the government, but the details were unknown.

 I focused more on the town, and observed something very peculiar. There was no one there. Literally, no one was guarding the terraces, no one in the streets, no lights on in the buildings, no one visible at all. This was the eeriest thing I had seen all day. Ivy started nervously chewing on the grass. It didn’t like this either. I judged the path between here and the gym, and gauged it as about a half mile, nothing we couldn’t do. I glanced down at Ivy, and whispered for it to get ready, and then we charged.

 There was no resistance until we reached the gym. The town stayed silent and dead; no movement, light, or sound. We ran past the Pokecenter, the Pokemart, and countless houses, but there were no signs of life. I wondered if the town had been evacuated, but quickly dismissed the notion. I couldn’t cause that much trouble, could I?

 The gym was an imposing palace, carved out of a single enormous stone. The obsidian exterior glistened in the mid-morning light, and the narrow passageway leading in was plunged in darkness, making it impossible to see the inside. I gulped, unable to swallow the feeling that something was in there, and then I heard it. There was breathing inside the doorway. I hesitantly backed off, as footsteps sounded out from inside the gym. Ivy took a defensive position, and only barely had time to guard itself when the Sandshrew slashed at its eye. Ivy rolled back, giving it a nice tackle, to which it spun around briefly and then hit the ground undamaged, and ready to go. Its trainer walked out from the shadows. He was only a bit younger than the other trainers I had fought, but there was defiantly something different about him. He was less confident, but more determined. He expected defeat, but the look in his eye told me that he would never give it away easily. Sandshrew spun through the air once more, smashing down right where Ivy had been a moment before, and slashing yet again, only to be blocked by Ivy’s paw. Sandshrew whirled back, and spun forward as hard as it could, its body wrapped tightly in a ball. Ivy lashed out his vines, and the two collided with intense force. Ivy strained to get enough energy to hold Sandshrew back, while it was clear that the Sandshrew was losing momentum. In one last attack, it tried to slash at Ivy’s vines, but the moment it broke out of its spin, it was slammed against the wall, never to rise again.

 I walked right past his trainer into the gym, unwilling to look back, but always on guard. Eventually, we entered into a room lit by faint torchlight. At the other end of the room, a man in his early thirties set on a small granite throne. He rose when he noticed my entrance, and I noticed his Pokémon behind him. In hindsight, I have no idea how I missed it. It was an enormous stone snake, taking up literally half of the room by itself. It looked very powerful, almost as strong as the Dragon that had burned Pallet. I stood there shaking. I couldn’t fight this thing. The man walked forwards, and stopped a few yards ahead of where I was standing. He stared into my eyes for a moment, and then paced back to his chair.

 “So, you’re the kid who put me into this mess, right?” I nodded, still petrified by fear. He sighed, and I thought he was going to order his snake to kill me. “Great, just great. Do you know how much trouble you’ve caused? After that little spat with the elite four about using children to fight, I’ve had to put the city into lockdown to avoid another Pallet incident. However, since you are against the league as well, I’m not going to kill you. At least, not yet. Instead, I have a little challenge for you. We have ourselves a battle, one versus one. If I win, you die. If I lose, you can stay in Pewter for a while. Sound good?”

 I stared at the Onix behind him, before finally answering yet. I would probably die anyways if I said no. He looked at my expression and laughed. “Oh, you think you’re fighting Rocky here, do you? Well, I don’t waste it on normal fights. I don’t want to lose it in some fluke chance of luck. So instead…”

 He pulled out a Pokeball, and unleashed a Geodude, a small hunk of pebbles that was somehow alive. Ivy growled by my side. It could handle this one. Ivy charged forward, lashing its vines in the air. Geodude curled into a ball, and took the first hit unscathed sailing into the air. At the top of its jump, it uncurled, and raised its fist, prepared to strike Ivy on the way down, Ivy lashed its vines straight up, and there was a sickening crack as the Geodude split into pieces.

Chapter Six: Survivor

 He gazed at the pile of rubble at Ivy’s feet, momentarily stunned. He began to fidget nervously with his back pocket, before eventually chucking an object at me, which Ivy caught in his vines. “That would be the Boulder badge, one of the seven emblems of the Kanto region. You’ve earned it by defeating me.” It was my turn to be stunned, as I palmed one of the national treasures of the land.

 He gave me a wry smile, and his Onix began to stir. “Now that all of that is out of the way, I think somebody would like to see you.” His Onix had fully pulled upright, towering above both of us, but the leader paid no attention, as he started walking towards the tunnel that had been newly revealed in the back of the room, and motioned for me to follow. “Sorry, my name’s Brock. I’ve been leader here since my father left for Johto a few years back. That entire display was staged to see how good you were.”

 A look of confusion must have flashed across my face, because he laughed and said that everything would make sense soon enough. “Soon enough” turned out to be about a mile. It doesn’t sound like a lot, but a mile groping along in total darkness with no idea how far the destination is happens to be pretty bad. Ivy was pretty forgiven whenever I accidentally kicked him in the darkness. When we finally emerged from the tunnel, we were in front of the Pewter Museum. I wondered why we couldn’t have just walked above ground, but Brock started walking inside immediately, and I didn’t have time to ask.

 Despite the cryptic emptiness of the museum, the inside of the lab was buzzing with activity. Nervous scientists and nurses ran around, and I smiled at the similarities to Oak’s lab in Pallet. It was comforting to see something similar after the world had dissolved into chaos. Brock glanced back to see if I was following, before ducking through the crowds into a back room. I hurried along, trying my best to let Ivy keep up with me.

 The room was a rather large conference room, with an enormous rectangular table, with chairs lining both sides. At the moment though, only one person was in the room. I smiled at the person I never thought I would see again, and Tracey smiled back, pulling a chair out from beside him. Brock sat down on the opposite end of the table, and cleared his throat.

 “Well, Red, now that you’re here we have a few things to explain. Now, I know that you want to know what happened after Lance destroyed Pallet. Oh, right. Lance is the current head of the Elite Four, after the champion was disposed of.”

 Tracey cut in, “Brock, he doesn’t know about that yet.”

 “Sorry, I guess that I have to begin quite some time ago then. Lance has always been ambitious, and somewhat unstable, to put things lightly. He never got along with the champion either, even after he was deemed worthy of entering the Elite Four. In fact, he viewed the champion as weak and subversive to the empire, so he decided to take him down. He was defeated, of course. No champion is ever weaker than the Elite Four due to possibilities like this. But the champion was too kind, and decided to spare Lance.”

 “He didn’t care; in fact, the forgiveness convinced him even more of the ineptitude of the champion. He tried to kill the master, and he almost succeeded. However, a few key individuals tried to hide the league master. This made Lance mad, and newly empowered over the elite four, he decided to send a message. He needed a reason though, and Oak’s little attempt to rally the leaders against the Elite Four gave him that chance.”

 Brock paused, and stared off into space for a moment, while Tracey continued. “He wanted me to do it a while back. The goal of the mission was to establish actual contact between the gyms, and cause the people to rally behind a single, new champion. I didn’t want to. I realized that Lance wasn’t just going to sit back and watch it happen. But trying to do it a second time, with a spy established; that was idiocy and it led to the events of the last few weeks. Of course, a small base of anti-Elite four leaders and scientists has emerged across the land, Brock being among them. He kindly took in most of the survivors from Pallet, and decided to lock down the city in case Lance decides to go on another rampage.”

 Brock cut in again, “This leaves us at an opportune moment. Many resistance figures can be moved to action now if you can just show them a solid display of strength. So, we want you to go around and do that; seeking out individuals across the land to build a solid camp to challenge Lance’s dominance over the league. Oak wants you to as well.”

 “He’s alive?”

 “Yes, we couldn’t care for him here though, so he’s elsewhere right now.” Tracey hesitated, “He’s not in very good condition at the moment, so he’s out of the fight for a while.”

 There was an element of restrained hope in his voice, a sort of longing that he could believe his own words, and I knew that things were pretty bad. There was one question that I wanted to ask, but I was afraid I knew the answer. “And my mother?”

 Tracey’s expression gave me all of the answer I needed, and I stormed out of the building, ignoring whatever was being shouted at me, and making sure to leave anyone who followed me in the dust.

Chapter Seven: Evolution

 Ivy stumbled along awkwardly to meet me. I pet him for a while, not really mentally present. My mother and I had never had a particularly good relationship, but the pain was still there. It was easier this time than last, as there were other distractions to worry about now. My father had once been the professor’s top aide. He was also the strongest trainer in Pallet Town, never really defeated by anyone. Some claimed that the professor was stronger, but he had stopped battling long ago. No one was really sure how he had died. He had gone out to the sea to do an experiment, and disappeared. He had washed back up on shore a few days later, but by this point, any evidence was gone. It was worse that day, having to hear the news twice. Gary was even more arrogant and abrasive during the following weeks, always taking any chance he had to make a nasty comment, or just strike out at me.

 My mother was worse. She never got over it, right up to the day she died. I started working at Oak’s lab whenever I could to get away from things at home. I recognized how tragic the situation had been, but it was time to move on. Oak had become a father figure of sorts, as he was honestly the only person I ever bothered to pretend to be emotionally alive around. Emotion was a double-edged sword, and for me the side facing me was far sharper than the side pointed away. Oak was an exception, he was always so caught up in the wonder of Pokémon, that it was nearly impossible to get bogged down in despair when he was nearby. I still had almost nothing left, only shades of black and white. Black was hatred, and white was appreciation. Anything else simply did not exist.

 Ivy was quite different. He loved life too much to ever get locked into anything negative. He simply had yet to feel pain. I sincerely hoped he never did, but as always there was a darker side. I almost wanted someone to share it with. However cruel the thought was, it was defiantly there. I could ignore it, but I could never destroy it.

 Tracey eventually did come out, and just sat there. He had a similar background, losing his father in the Gary Oak incident. We didn’t talk at all, just sat there staring into the silence of the city. He sent out his Scyther at one point, and Ivy left to play with it. We were alone now, and could finally talk. Tracey sighed, and broke the silence first.

 “I made my decision. I’m going to stick around in Pewter for a while and then head along a southern route to Fuchsia City. There isn’t a leader there, and its reliance on the Safari Zone should make it a fairly easy target. I don’t care what you do, and you have every right in the world to stay here in Pewter. But, the world is changing, and sometimes you just have to move on.”

 That was a very devious move on his part. I thought of how much I hated my mother’s refusal to get over her grief, and my own resolve to move on. I couldn’t really say no when he put it like that. “Fine, I’ll do it. Wherever you want me to go, I’ll go there. It isn’t fair to anyone that the government can arbitrarily destroy a city due to the actions of one person.”

 Tracey smiled, and pulled out an electronic package, handing it to me. “I was waiting for you to make that decision. Take this Pokedex. It contains information on Imperial and Rebel strongholds, as well as an encyclopedia on Pokémon you might encounter. Your first target will be Cerulean to the north. There is a very strong imperial center in the town, so the fight will be difficult. However, getting the scientists in the town independent and working against the empire is necessary to victory. The leader there specializes in Water, so you shouldn’t have a very hard time as long as you have Ivy.” He called out to his Scyther, withdrawing it into its Pokeball, and set out towards Diglett’s cave and Fuchsia City.

I set out to the East and Mt. Moon, a major barrier between East and West Kanto, but also another point where no one expected an attack to come from. It was already visible in the distance, and could not have been more than a day’s walk away. Unfortunately, that was when the sirens came to life.

A large army was approaching from the direction of Mt. Moon. It wasn’t only the empire who had not expected an attack to come from the mountain. Scientists rushed out of the lab, unleashing a slew of Pokémon to defeat the oncoming army in what was sure to be a massive battle. Commanders aligned trainers along the terrace defense system to prepare, and I was hastily put into position in a southern position. The army of trainers and Pokémon rushed forward, with a wave of Spearow and Pidgey flying over the terraces, only to be intercepted by the birds defending the town. Nature itself seemed to be tearing itself apart, with forces from both sides rushing forwards, and engaging in a cruel slaughter. A few trainers did seek to breach the terrace I was guarding. Most of them were easy enough, with only a few birds ever truly being threatening.

Then the battle for my terrace stopped. Ivy was starting to shine, until the light spread around his body, growing more intense by the second. The few trainers remaining watched in awe and terror, as the mass of light convulsed and expanded, taking upon a new form. When the light finally stopped glowing, a new Pokémon stood in Ivy’s spot. It was fundamentally the same fusion of plant and animal, but it looked nastier, and had a poisonous aura surrounding it. It gave a mighty roar, and sent a green wave sailing over the opposing force. Pokémon and trainers dropped down on the spot, helpless as they slept. The defenders stared in stunned silence, and then someone starting clapping. It picked up, and soon the city was filled with cheers of victory. The battle of Pewter City had been won.

Chapter Eight: Mountain

 The celebration had lasted later into the night, but it was time to move on. Ivy and I walked out to the East, the silhouette of Mount Moon rising on the Horizon. It was a fairly short trail across the eastern end of the Pewter defensive network. There were a great deal of rough areas where the Earth had been torn up in yesterday’s battle. Most of the survivors were being held in Pewter to alleviate the risk of destruction. There were still a few bands of resistance scattered about, most of them fairly young. All of them were crushed without much of a chance to resist. It would take some serious power to stand before Ivy and win.

 A small mining camp existed at the edge of Mount Moon, and I decided to rest a while there before trying to scale the mountain. No one had ever discussed the project that the museum was working on. Apparently it was top secret, even in these times of chaos. Some other details about the museum had become apparent, though. The museum mostly worked with fossils that were found on Mount Moon. These were from extremely old creatures, and no one had been able to accurately date the fossils. Some said that they were older than the land of Kanto. While I was a bit dubious about that claim, the fossils were defiantly quite ancient. The other thing that was mined from the mountain were moon stones and meteor fragments. I had a suspicion that one of those was the focus of the project.

 Both had arrived on the planet several millennia ago. It was said that there had once been a massive battle that had once forced the land and sky into a war. While the focus had been far away, it had still almost destroyed the land here. Eventually, a meteor struck the combatants, and calmed them down into a state of sleep. This meteor had blasted across the globe, and fragments still remained scattered about. It was said that Mount Moon had an unusual concentration due to another strike. Details of this were unknown, but it was said that a great force lie asleep under the mountain that would only stir once an eon. It was my personal suspicion that the empire was trying to awaken and control this being.

 Of course, these were all myths and ancient legends. Nobody took them seriously, and it was still only a remote possibility that my theory was correct. Still, looking up at the foreboding shadow of the mountain, it was impossible to deny a sense of power radiating from it.

 Ivy and I woke up before dawn next day to prepare for the climb. It was going to be a long, uphill trek, and it was likely that there would be some defenders from Cerulean in wait. Fully aware of this, we entered into a small cavern that would lead to the first climb. According to the Pokedex, most of the climb would occur beneath the surface. There were a number of tunnels, periodically twisting above ground, but the actual surface of the mountain was too steep to climb without using the tunnels. However, a number of cracks in the ceiling would still illuminate the passages, preventing total darkness. Still, it was a rough climb without an army of trainers trying to kill you.

 The first tunnel went without much happening. A few trainers lie in wait, but Ivy could normally deal with their Pokémon rather easily. There were a few Geodude in the cavern, but they could do next to nothing. After about a mile’s walk, we arrived at the first clearing. It was about three hundred feet above the base of the mountain, and provided a nice view of Pewter city. However, there was still a long way to go.

 There was once again little resistance in the next cavern. However, there was a bit of a surprise. The cave broke into an enormous dome, probably extending to the peak of the mountain. Lining the top of the dome were hundreds of Zubat, hanging down among the Stalactites. There literally covered the sealing of the cavern, their defecation similarly lining the floor. I gave a nervous glance at Ivy, and we tried to creep through. We almost made it too. Ivy hit a rock while creeping, causing it to roll and hit a stalagmite with a soft pinging noise.

 The Zubat woke up in agitation at the noise, which affected them disproportionately, and starting fluttering around in agitation, as a few started diving towards us. Ivy gave a motion for me to get down, which I followed wondering what it was doing. It opened up the bulb on its back, and a stream of glistening green powder erupted into the air. The Zubat started to calm down, and either went back to sleep, or fell to the floor in exhaustion. Ivy smiled at its work, and started to move on; I followed before the powder came down.

 The next clearing was on top of the world. This was almost certainly the highest point in the Kanto region, with the view stretching for miles. I could see Pallet, with the fires still burning. Cerulean lie to the East, an expanse of water and land colliding in a small area. Saffron City lie somewhere in the southeast, noticeable by a huge expanse of metal and light that lit up the world even this far away. Fuchsia city and its Safari Zone lie in the far south, just north of the Southern Islands. Only small groups of researchers lived there. The largest island was named Cinnabar, and contained a volcano that was known to erupt somewhat frequently, expanding the island but destroying everything on it. Surrounding it were the Seafoam Islands, small rocky outcroppings in the sea that were all connected by frozen tunnels beneath the surface. No permanent cities had ever been built in this part of the world.

 The view was interrupted however, by yet another group trying to kill me. I hate it when that happens. Anyways, this group looked much tougher, and moved as a pack. They wore black uniforms, and walked with a military posture. The leader halted, and all behind him stopped immediately.

 “We are Team Rocket, personal soldiers of the Pokémon league. We have come to end the little discontent faction in Pewter. Move away or die.” I hate death threats too. “So be it, but you cannot survive. Koffing, let’s go!”

Chapter Nine: Water

 Ivy growled as the leader sent out his Koffing. It was a small little creature, smaller than Ivy, but I guessed it would be difficult due to his advantage of being able to float. Ivy didn’t care, and spat out a barrage of seeds, which entangled the foe, and tied him to the ground. Ivy strolled over and finished off Koffing with a tackle. For all of the build-up, it hadn’t really been that hard. Other soldiers came forward with their Pokémon, all being beaten back rather easily by a combination of Leech Seed and Sleep Powder with an occasional attack thrown in the mix. It was a slaughter, and by the end of it, Ivy stood there menacingly, daring anyone else to approach.

 On the way down, night came upon the mountain with one of the most beautiful sights ever witnessed. A small meteor shower lit up the sky, casting blazing arcs of light across the full moon. As the shower continued, a crowd of small white Pokémon came out and began a mysterious chant. It was a group of Clefairy, one of the rarest Pokémon in the region. As they preformed their chant, it was as if time stood in that moment refusing to leave. It was a sight as old as time itself, and a fine example of the beauty of this world.

 After fifteen long hours of hiking, Ivy and I finally arrived at the edge of the road. Cerulean City stretched out before us. It was another large town, but far different. A large sound stretched to the north, bringing water to a town that would have otherwise been dry like Pewter. Canals stretched across the city, bringing water to every reach of it. The city itself was comprised of several small city-block sized islands separated by the canals from each other, but each connected by an elaborate bridge system. The Pokedex claimed that a series of switches within the gym controlled the bridges, allowing the city to lock down in case of an attack.

 To the North of the city, a single island stretched into the sound. There were several docks and bridges on the edge of the island, overlooking the sea. In the island’s center stood Cerulean Lab, the largest lab in East Kanto. The lab specialized in small, technical experiments in many different fields; however it specialized in evolution and the infrastructure projects in Kanto, such as Victory Road, the Cerulean bridges and Canals, and Diglett’s cave. The plans for the major defenses of the empire were invaluable, and thus defeating the leader of Cerulean was a priority.

 Closer to the mountain, a cave loomed menacingly. Its entrance faced the city, as if a black hole upon which nothing would ever escape had decided to attack Cerulean. The very sight of it sent chills rattling down my spine for some reason, and I was rather certain that I did not want to find out what lived in there. Even closer was a terrace, where two martial artists were locked into a Pokémon battle. One was using a Machop, and the other had a Mankey. Machop was making several bold punches and thrusts towards the Mankey, which deflected all attacks by jumping into the air, and countering with a kick. The battle looked evenly matched, and I figured it could go on for ages. Besides, I had more important things to do than watch the battle.

 The gym was located on the largest island, right in the center of town. It was a palace similar in size and structure to the Pewter city gym, but this gym was constructed out of light colored shells and coral, to convey the image that it was a palace raised straight off of the ocean floor. Surprisingly, there was no resistance or even strange looks going into the city. Apparently my picture could only travel so quickly, or no one had expected I could get past Team Rocket.

 Inside of the gym, a single vast tank with a few wooden bridges comprised an enormous room that took up most of the building. Under the surface of the water, water Pokémon big and small swam around. I wondered which ones I would have to face. The gym leader was sitting on a small metal chair on a raft in the center of the pool, clearly awaiting my arrival. She was only about my age, but still looked like she could put up a fight if she came down to it. Ivy and I approached the edge of the water, preparing for the coming battle. The leader rose from her chair.

 “Welcome to Cerulean Gym. My name would be Misty, and I presume that you are Red, the kid who’s given the league quite a bit of trouble. It isn’t that I oppose what you are doing, but merely don’t agree with it. Sure, the league might be bad, but is it really worth fighting? You know that by pushing Lance further, you’re just condemning thousands to die? My parents tried to defy him once. They aren’t around to run the gym anymore. I learned from that. The fight is hopeless. Therefore, to preserve my city from certain destruction, I, Misty, except your challenge.”

 She sent out a Staryu, a small star-shaped Pokémon with a glowing core. Ivy growled, fearing no water type. Staryu rushed across the water, skimming it faster than Ivy could ever react, It slashed across Ivy’s face, before it promptly struck out blindly with a vine, scoring a slight connection, and pushing Staryu back across the water. Misty decided to take a different approach, and ordered a swift. A blast of light shot out from its core, which Ivy shot out an arc of leaves to counteract. The two collided mid-air and Staryu was repulsed back to a stunned Misty. Misty slowly reached down to her chair, and held out a Pokeball, her hand shaking at the possible ending to this. A Starmie, similar to Staryu but larger and more complex stood before her. It tore across the water, slamming into Ivy’s vines and blasting them apart, as it shot a beam of water at Ivy while he was stunned. Ivy was struck back, and appeared to be confused by the recent impact. He shot a cloud of leaves into the air aimlessly, while Starmie prepared a pulse of Psychic energy. At the last moment possible, Ivy struck blindly with his vines, knocking Starmie back. Both sides were too exhausted to continue.

Chapter Ten: Conversion

 Misty looked back and forth between the two tied competitors. She eventually looked up at me and started laughing. I started as well; neither of us could defeat the other, and yet we so desperately wanted to break the impasse. She tossed a badge across the water, this one shaped like a blue teardrop.

 “Well, I do have other Pokémon. However, I don’t think it’s in either of our best interests to go on. If I did decide to finish things, I would never live down defeating someone with only one Pokémon by using an entire gym. Also, you’ve convinced me of something. If a little kid like you can challenge one of the empire’s best leaders and tie, you might have quite a bit of power after you’ve been properly trained. After all, with all seven leaders united, the league can’t do a thing. Thank you for giving me a reason to betray the league.”

 It was my turn to be stunned. She was supposedly one of the most hardcore pro-League leaders in the empire, and she had just given in. I thought for a brief moment that the league had no chance after every single town fell, but I was brought back to reality by an announcement flashing across the town’s P.A. system. There was a meeting in front of the gym in ten minutes, and all citizens were expected to be in attendance. I briefly wondered if I should attend as well, when a scientist walked into the gym.

 He appeared to be in his twenties, and if he wasn’t wearing a lab coat, I never really would have identified him as a scientist. He had short blond hair, and no glasses or goggles to speak of. He was dressed fairly casually with a red shirt and jeans under his lab coat. He walked with confidence, and he honestly looked more like a celebrity than a scientist. He paused when he saw me, and I could tell that he had been looking for me.

 He edged closer, “Red?”

 “Yes?”

 “Oh, okay, so it is you. I had been told you were coming, and wanted to help you persuade Misty not to fight, and help out if it came down to it, but it looks like you have that taken care of. Sorry, I guess I got a little ways ahead of myself. My name is Bill. I run the lab to the north of here. I am also one of the leading resistance figures, and couldn’t wait for a chance to actually do something for once.”

 The announcement system roared to life, droning on in its monotonous static. “Attention. Attention. The meeting will commence in one minute. Attention. Attention. The meeting will commence in one minute. Thank you.”

 Bill sighed, and led me outside. Every inhabitant of the city was there, and the crowd numbered in the thousands. They were all assembled in a bizarre fan shape radiating away from the gym steps, where a podium had been hastily placed. A vibrant chatter rumbled through the crowd, as citizens debated the possible cause of the meeting. Everyone was silenced when Misty finally took the podium.

 She seemed somewhat nervous, as if she wasn’t entirely confident in her leadership. It was interesting to watch a gym leader fully conscious of every eye upon her. The crowd stared all the more intently, and she finally began. “People of Cerulean, you have been told of recent events. The seeds of a rebellion were recently destroyed with the burning of Pallet Town. However, the leader to the West, Brock, foolishly decided to rise up against the league. Imperial forces and local militias were deployed to put his lunatic uprising down, but all forces were crushed by a single individual. And this individual is here in Cerulean.

 An uneasy chill rippled across the crowd, and I wondered what Misty was doing. “He is here among us today, and he fought me into a draw earlier this morning. I have recognized his power, and have decided to change the course of Cerulean policy. It is unlikely that the empire could win a rebellion that was region-wide in scope. This scenario is highly likely. Therefore, we are going to side with the likely winner of the war, Red-“

 A bullet streaked through the air, striking Misty on her left arm, missing her heart by mere inches. As she fell to the ground, the crowd dissolved into chaos, as more explosions were heard in the distance. A small guard of uniformed soldiers was fighting their way into the crowd, killing indiscriminately as they went. I recognized the uniform; Team Rocket had come to put the uprising down. I wondered how they could have known in so little time, but it was pointless now. Clouds of toxic gas were rolling into the square, killing people on the outside of the circle and continuing its advance into the crowd. There would be no survivors. Above the gale of wind, a single figure flew into the fray. It was a man on a large bird, not a dragon like Lance’s. It swooped down to the steps of the gym, slowing down as its rider got off, and I found myself staring straight into the sneer of Gary Oak.

 “Well, well, well. Imagine meeting you here.” There was an edge of fierce sarcasm in his voice, and I was certain he was aware of my presence in the city beforehand.

 “You can rot with the storm spirits you traitorous murderer.”

 He smiled vaguely; clearly pleased at the effect he had on me. “Did you really think that you ever stood a chance? While the leaders could beat an unsupported league, I think that you got caught up in that image. In all reality, the league has all of the support it could ever need. But still, I feel kind of bad just killing you the slow way. So instead, I’ll give you the chance to die like a man. Pidgeotto, here we go!”

 His Pidgeotto gave a battle cry, while Ivy braced itself for the worst. This was a legitimate flying type, and could probably kill Ivy without much trouble. Pidgeotto sent out a gale of force towards Ivy, who shot a barrage of leaves into the gale. The force wasn’t enough, and Ivy was slammed with the force of the winds, and its own attack, sending it reeling back towards me. I knew it was virtually over, but I still had a plan in the back of my mind, and I prepared to gamble my life for it.

Chapter Eleven: Tactics

 “Dodge as far to the left as you can!”

 Thankfully, Ivy didn’t question, and jumped far to the left, leaving me to take the full brunt of Pidgeotto’s attack. I slammed back hard into a column, my arm colliding first and making a sickening cracking sound. However, Pidgeotto was much more focused on Ivy, and sent out a gale of energy towards it, which it managed to dodge. I smirked at Gary as my strategy pulled off, but it was somewhat weak due to the pain. The gale was driving away the clouds of poisonous smog. I had saved the assembly for now. Ivy knew what to do, and shot a cloud of green powder at Pidgeotto while it was distracted, leaving it unable to continue, and Gary forced to withdraw it.

 A simple Rattata came next, and I wondered why Gary was using it. It didn’t seem in his nature to use something that was fairly weak and really common. Rattata rushed forward at a blazing speed, but collided with a barrage of spores from Ivy, which began to sprout on impact. Rattata was choked in the expanding vines, and Gary was forced to withdraw Rattata as well. And then the big gun came out.

 Ember, looking far stronger than the last two fights took the field. I was once again at an inherent disadvantage, and almost outclassed in raw power as well. Ember was momentarily distracted by the situation. His former caregiver was standing before him, obviously in pain and somewhat unwilling to continue, and his current master was telling him to aim to kill. The conflict of his feelings and his orders gave Ivy just enough time to shoot off a wave of emerald powder, putting Charmander to sleep, and allowing Ivy to smother it between vines and tackles. I let Gary withdraw it. It wasn’t Ember’s fault that it had to fight.

 Gary tossed his last Pokeball up in the air, and then unleashed its inhabitant in a blaze of light. It was an Abra, a telekinetic powerhouse that was asleep more often than not. It levitated in midair, as Gary gave an order, and a pulse of energy shot towards me. I was pushed back across the stage, before blacking out due to injuries.

 I must have slept forever, but I was still sore when I awoke. I groaned in pain, and checked to see what was broken. My arm was tied up in a sling above my head, and there were bandages in various places across my body. Ivy’s Pokeball was not with me, and Ivy was nowhere to be seen. I remembered that Psychic attacks hit Ivy hard, and I feared the worst. Trying not to think about it, I glanced around at my surroundings. I was in some sort of a hospital, the Pokémon Center perhaps. There were rows of people lined up everywhere, with a few nurses hurrying around to try and take care of things. Bill was in a distant corner talking to a nurse, and typing up something on a computer. I glanced around in my immediate area, and noticed that the bed next to me was occupied by Misty, who was on some kind of elaborate life support system.

 Bill glanced up, and saw me awake. He trotted over, making sure not to get in anyone’s way, but still making good time. He pulled up a chair next to my bed and sat down. He took a Pokeball out of his pocket, and put it in my hand. I tossed it up weakly, and Ivy appeared by the bed, seemingly unharmed.

 “He got lucky. Abra wasn’t fully awake, and missed by a little bit, letting him avoid any serious damage. You didn’t get quite so lucky. It’s mostly trivial wounds, although that arm is going to take awhile to heal. Until then, you might want to stick to low key missions, probably escorted whenever you do leave a rebel stronghold.”

 He picked up some instruments and started doing some tests while he talked. “Can you lift your right arm a little? Good. Anyways, after the gust was blown away, the scientists and gym trainers took on Team Rocket while I finished off their leader’s Abra. It didn’t really last very long, but the cloud itself did- sorry about that- kill quite a few. As you can see, there were quite a few injured in the- it won’t hurt as much if you stop jerking- battle.” He sighed, as he tried to keep up the conversation and his tests, but eventually decided to only do the former for now.

 “The only notable event in the war you missed was Saffron rebelling. Team Rocket has a strong presence in the city, so there is still quite a bit of violence raging in the street in a brutal inner-city warfare scenario. Lavender Town broke off without much of a fight at all, securing both sides of Rock Tunnel. Vermillion and Celadon are the only cities that still have pro-empire sentiments. A major meeting of rebel figures has been called in Vermillion harbor though, in an attempt to pressure the leader over there. Of course, the meeting is very secretive and all, so no one outside of the key resistance figures really knows it’s happening. You’ve been invited to that, so you’re coming with me should you choose to go.”

 He saw the look in my eyes, and correctly predicted my question. “No, Oak will not be there. He’s been under intensive care since the attack of Pallet, and hasn’t really gotten better. He might pull through, but it’s fairly unlikely, and won’t happen for a while. Now, I can’t have you rushing off and getting killed while he’s still alive. He would probably be unable to come out of his present state if you did that. That is why it is so critical that you don’t do anything stupid for a while.”

 His watch buzzed in a mechanical fashion, and he had to run off, leaving me with three days to think over what he had said.

Chapter 12: Payback

It took most of that day to get out of bed for any substantial period of time, but I did eventually manage to do so. It was still another few days before I was fully used to working being left handed. Thankfully, I recovered in just enough time for Bill, who was currently acting as the leader of Cerulean, to deem me worthy of going to the Vermillion conference. Misty had managed to walk in the last few days, but couldn’t really get to Vermillion.

When we finally set out for Vermillion, Bill, his aides, and I had gathered at the Day Care center to the south of the city to make one last stop before we made the journey. Most of it would be through underground caves since Saffron was locked up in civil war. The caves went in two major paths; East-West and North-South without any contact between the paths. Saffron was originally created as a point where a shaft straight down would unite the caves. The shaft existed, but it was treacherous and we didn’t need to use it.

As we were just setting off, a figure ran over the hill, and yelled at us to slow down. It was Misty, out of breath and trailed by a nurse from the hospital. The nurse started to explain something, but Bill gave her a sympathetic nod and addressed Misty. “I’m sorry. I realize that you are the leader of Cerulean, and as such key to the revolution, but you cannot go. Many resistance figures would not take kindly to the presence of a newly inspired revolutionary overhearing the key strategies for the war. Also, the cave system we are taking will be fairly strenuous, and you probably could not go as of today. In the meantime, you are in charge of running the city, as you are clearly healthy enough to resume your old duties.”

Misty definitely wasn’t used to being talked to like that, but Bill had a feeling of quiet power about him to add to his unmatched charisma, and Misty relented in the end, led away by the nurse who had apparently tried to restrain her. After she was out of earshot, Bill started the trek first, laughing to the rest of the group. “She just got shot three days ago, and she’s already trying to go through a walk of several miles through strenuous territory? That girl is either going to win us the war or get herself killed while trying to do so.”

It was interesting how much trust Bill put into someone who he had been trying to kill a few days earlier, but other questions were closer to my mind. First off, who had told Team Rocket about Misty’s change of heart? It had only been that morning, so logically there must have been a spy in the city. More importantly, there had to have been a spy in the gym, one who could monitor the cameras. This set a very dangerous situation up with the possibility of information reaching Cerulean gym, and thus it was likely that this was the real reason Misty could not come, being shot in the last three days aside, of course.

The cave system was a blur, but it was very long and tiresome after the injuries sustained three days ago. Bill helped me get through, but it was still fairly brutal. The caves themselves were holes cut into green limestone sheets beneath the surface, with unlit lanterns periodically placed along the walls that Bill lit with his Flareon.

When we finally arrived at the edge of Vermillion, I got my first look at one of the largest cities in the empire. It stretched on for miles, with clumps of buildings arbitrarily popping up inland, but a thick wall of civilization along the coast, with a majority of the city apparently being within a mile of the harbor. We had to go in groups to avoid suspicion, and Bill and I were the last to go. Nobody had really expected me to be there, and Bill wasn’t famous enough, that our passage was surprisingly safe. Inside the city, I noticed two sides to it. There was the daylight side, the facilities of a normal city such as Pewter or Cerulean, a gym, a Pokecenter, a Pokemart, houses, and even a small, minor laboratory, but there was another side. There were the back alleys and the taverns where the constant influx of sailors drank at night. Team Rocket agents were milling around in the streets, keeping the city pro-empire by force if need be. This city was possibly more bipolar than I was.

If the S.S. Anne was a building, it would be the second largest in the Kanto region. The ship was enormous, stretching as far as the eye could see in both directions and comprising most of the harbor by itself. Whoever thought that this ship wouldn’t attract attention was an idiot. But then again, maybe the resistance leaders liked to party.

Inside of the ship’s main conference room, about fifty or so individuals were sitting at a U-shaped table that stretched across the room. The conversation stopped when Bill and I walked in, but resumed once we had sat down. The meeting hadn’t come to attention yet. We settled in, and wondered when the meeting was going to start, when the lights went out and the door slammed shut behind us. Above the chaotic noise, a voice rang out that silenced the crowd.

“Prepare for double and don’t ask why.”

“And make it double as you die.”

“To protect the land from devastation.”

“To preserve the peace of the nation.”

“To denounce the evils of truth and love.”

“To kill in the name of those above.”

“Team Rocket blasts off at the speed or light.”

“Surrender now or prepare to die.”

Chapter 13: Voltage

 When the lights came back on two members of Team Rocket stood poised, with a Koffing and Ekans at the ready. I thought back to the toxic wave from Cerulean and realized what was about to happen. The gas would spread quickly in this room. There would be no escape.

 A girl in the back walked calmly to the front of the room. She was young, probably younger than I was. She wore entirely black, and walked so that it was impossible to hear her movements. She had black hair and black eyes that fully gave the impression that she was not someone you wanted to meet alone in a dark alley at night. She boldly walked straight up to the agents, and sent out a Muk. The agents stared back with a cold amusement in their eyes.

 “You’re father sends his regards, Janine. It’s a shame that he had to order you killed. But so be it, you aren’t going to stop things this time.”

 She looked down for a moment, and then looked back up, fierce resolution shining in her eyes. “It’s a shame that you’re going to have to go back to him defeated by a little girl. Muk, enough with these people, let’s finish things off.”

 The agents exchanged uneasy glances, as the room was engulfed in silence. No one rose to help her, out of fear or shock. Janine didn’t wait for Team Rocket to make the first move, it stretched its body to enormous proportions, and swept both Pokémon in its fists, crushing the life out of them as their trainers looked on powerlessly. After Ekans and Koffing lie dead on the floor, Team Rocket stared down Janine for but a moment, and then fled. The applause was short lived, as the main force arrived.

 Hundreds of militia and agents stormed into the room, lining up at the perimeter. A man in his early forties dressed in combat gear stepped forwards. “Good evening, traitorous scum of the empire. For those of you who don’t know me, I would be Lieutenant Surge, one of the very few people who appear to have maintained sanity in this war. That would be due to one simple fact. I was a general the last time someone dared to defy the empire. If I remember correctly, that pathetic excuse for an uprising was crushed. This attempt will fail likewise. Now, if anyone wishes to fight, may they please step forwards and die.”

 Janine and I stepped forwards with no hesitation. Lt. Surge looked between us, a lunatic smile forming on his face. “It’s a sad day when both sides of a war send their children first to die. Regardless, it is not my place to kill you Janine; you’re father wishes to have that honor. In the meantime…” He glanced over at me, and resumed his speech. “The kid who caused us so much trouble in Cerulean, I want you to know that it won’t happen here. Misty was weak and chose not to fight. I will not be the same. Prepare to face the true power of a soldier!”

 He sent out a Pikachu, a little electric rodent that Oak frequently had at his lab. They were dangerous little beasts, and quite capable of destroying many unevolved Pokémon. Ivy stood by my side, ready to fight.

 Pikachu leapt into the air, bouncing over Ivy, before slamming straight down at full force, Ivy took the hit, but tackled Pikachu once it rolled off, scoring a nice hit on the rodent. Pikachu rolled away, and shot a pulse of electricity towards Ivy, which it deflected with a barrage of leaves. Pikachu saw an opportunity, and tackled its way through the barrage, knocking Ivy back. However, Pikachu misjudged Ivy’s recovery speed, and ate a stream of leaves to the face, and putting it out of the battle.

 Lt. Surge seemed almost completely unaffected, and sent out the larger and more powerful evolution of Pikachu, Raichu. Raichu stood with its tail held high in anticipation, and electricity cackling from its cheeks. It looked like the kind of Pokémon who could put up a fight against anything and come out victorious. I refused to surrender, and the fight continued.

 Raichu jumped into the air, sending a huge stream of lightning towards Ivy. It hits Ivy with full force, and I ordered a razor leaf to hit Raichu while it recharged. Ivy, however, was convulsing violently, and I realized that the strike was messing with the electrical currents in Ivy’s muscles. Surge realized this as well, and took the moment to let Raichu set up. Raichu was consumed in a blaze of light, and a circle of ten Raichu surrounded Ivy. Ivy struck blindly with a shower of leaves, but when they hit the illusions they merely dissolved, as the remaining copies tackled Ivy to massive effect.

 Lt. Surge was thoroughly enjoying the moment now, and began to gloat. “Oh, you could only get so far in the end. You had your chances. You could have just surrendered several times, or taken your broken arm as a sign to stop. But no, you charge ahead like a hero. You failed to realize something. There are no heroes in war. It’s slaughter of the innocent, deaths of the great, and fall of order. There is no honor in this fight, and yet for some reason valiance could get you somewhere, and- are you even listening to me?”

 In truth I wasn’t. I was staring at the ceiling, consumed with the possibilities there, and a faint smile came to my lips as I gave my last command to Ivy, “Razor leaf.”

 The ceiling collapsed under the slashes of the onslaught, and fell down in an avalanche of cement and wiring. I ran backwards, dragging Ivy with me as the downpour continued, but Surge wasn’t so lucky. He was crushed in his arrogance, destroyed by strategy instead of force. It was then that I noticed the on looking crowd, staring in awe. Janine walked over, stared into the rubble, and simply said “Nice job.”

Chapter 14: Onwards

 The battle on the S.S. Anne was later won, with the resistance leaders on board crushing anyone who dared to resist. There wasn’t much more fighting, maybe about ten minutes worth before the combined forces of the resistance crushed the Vermillion militia and the forces of Team Rocket. Later in the day, the resistance with the help of a small task force from Saffron managed to take Vermillion city and establish a temporary government. Upon digging through the rubble in the conference room, a badge was found on Lt. Surge which was given to me as a symbol of my victory in the battle.

 The meeting was resumed on the mainland the next day. I met a lot of the other leaders at the conference. There was the Warden, a figure who had presided over the Safari Zone project. The Safari Zone contained many of the empire’s Pokémon reserves in a huge expanse containing an area several times that of Saffron City. He had fled the city with Janine following the destruction of Pallet Town.

 Janine was the daughter of an executive in Team Rocket, and had been given a Pokémon far earlier because of it. She had chosen to betray her father once fighting broke out, and had joined the resistance forces. Little else was known about her, as she tended to keep to herself. She had been trained in the art of the ninja, also known as the art of silence for good reasons.

 Mr. Fuji was there as well. He was the elderly gym leader of Lavender Town to the North. He was in charge of the empire’s burial sites and was all too well aware of the cruelty committed in some areas of the empire. He was officially in charge of the rebellion, but preferred to let others handle the actual fighting. I was under the impression that he would not fight at all if given the choice.

 Brock also made an appearance at the conference. As usual, he came off as more than a little paranoid. He was constantly glancing at the entrances, making sure that a repeat of the S.S. Anne incident didn’t occur. As one of two gym leaders in attendance, he was given quite a bit of respect. Like Janine and Mr. Fuji, he only spoke when required.

 Contrasting this was Bill. He was largely seen as the driving force on the rebel side, and with good reason. He was obviously the most imposing figure there, with a sense of charisma that outclassed all other leaders combined. He was also the most active, pointing out new and alternate strategies, and evaluating anything presented without fail.

 Another active leader was Blaine, leader of the Cinnabar Island lab amongst other things. He was an eccentric old man, but still conveyed a sense of vitality about him that managed to annoy the respect out of all present. He came up with the most radical of ideas, and seriously challenged ideologies that were in place.

 It occurred to me several times during the meeting how needless it was. Nothing important was decided, and it was just a risk to have so many key figures in the same area, and it must have been a coordination nightmare. If anything, the only purpose of the meeting seemed to be to introduce some of the younger leaders to the older ones, and I questioned if that was even worth risking the entire war over.

 Janine and I formed a kind of trust at the meeting. Neither of us ever really spoke to the other, but it was a silent trust. We each were somewhat comfortable around the other, which was quite something, as we weren’t really the most commutative of people. I think it was a trust in the others abilities, as we were willing to respect the achievements of the other on the S.S. Anne. People noticed, and we both dismissed it as nonexistent and went out of our way to humiliate whoever asked if it was brought up. It was a kind of game to keep us through the otherwise dull meeting.

 I received my next orders from Mr. Fuji. He asked that I go through Rock Tunnel, sweeping through any remaining resistance in the area. I agreed to the idea of something to do, so I went along with it. There had been a long debate over who went with me, but it was resolved when Janine volunteered. It was normally a bad idea to disagree with her.

 We had to stop up in Cerulean before the actual trip. The city appeared to have started to recover from the events of the last few days, and a sense of uneasy recovery surrounded the city. This was mostly symbolized by its leader.

 As Janine and I prepared to go towards Rock Tunnel, Misty interrupted in much the same way as the last time. She didn’t bother to ask, she merely said “I’m going.” Janine and I exchanged nervous glances, and she was forced to explain herself further. “Look, I’m out of bed now, and the best therapy is to actually work. Besides, I can’t have Red here stealing all of the glory, can I?”

 At this point, I realized that it was probably hopeless to convince her otherwise, and she was allowed to join. We could use all of the help we could get on this minesweeping crew. There was a small line of resistance formed in front of the Pokémon center near the entrance. Misty’s Starmie, Janine’s Muk, and Ivy easily swept through everything in our paths, with Ivy even taking on a number of birds without injury. When the last few had been cleared, Ivy began to glow. When the light settled, a huge Venusaur stood in its place. Roaring with enough force to shake the Earth for miles, Ivy ran straight into the darkness, with three humans trying to keep up.

Chapter Fifteen: The Darkness

 I’ve been in caves before, but this was by far the creepiest. There is no light, literally total darkness. Powerful Pokémon lurk in Rock Tunnel, including Onix, one of the largest known. It is impossible to navigate the dark caverns without merely feeling the walls, and at this point, there were trainers waiting in the darkness, intent on killing me while I could not see them.

 Janine finally spoke after a moment of awkward silence where we realized how hard this would be. “Well, I can navigate on a little light, but none of my Pokémon can actually create it. Red, I know Ivy can’t. Misty, maybe one of your Pokémon could make up for you’re dead weight.”

 She was rather blunt, and the words were subtly marked by resentment, but Misty pretended not to notice. Misty fumbled around for a moment, and then unleashed her Starmie. The core shed a faint light upon the room, but I still couldn’t see much. It was all Janine needed, however, and she ran off into the blackness, periodically stopping so we could catch up. I had no idea how she could see where she was going, but I figured it was some ninja secret or something. Misty was having some difficulties keeping pace, but pride prohibited her from ever getting too far behind. Besides, we were kind of relying on the Pokémon at her side.

 It wasn’t long before Janine ran into the first trainer. He sent out a Lickitung, which stumbled blindly in the near-darkness, while Janine sent out a Golbat. Golbat was very well accustomed to the dark, and effortlessly crushed Lickitung without taking a single hit, and killed its trainer with one swift bite to the neck. Misty and I were a bit uneasy around Janine after that, as she just treated killing like a natural aspect of life like breathing. We weren’t quite to that stage yet.

 After watching a few more of Janine’s battles, it became apparent that she relied entirely on skill and tactics to win most fights. In Rock Tunnel, she used Golbat to confuse and defeat her opponents. It was quite a sight to behold, but I wondered how well she would do in direct combat. I also figured that I never wanted to find out.

 Golbat must have been getting tired, so I insisted on keeping pace with Janine, finishing off opponents with the newly evolved Ivy. It also helped us keep each other some company in the dark expanse. We couldn’t talk very much due to the threat of enemy trainers, but it was still nice to have somebody beside me in the dungeon. Ivy and Golbat together could destroy everything in our path. Ivy would put the opponent to sleep, and Golbat would kill them with a quick bite to the neck. Up close I noticed that Golbat killed with the same uncaring feeling as the Rocket Pokémon, and I figured that it was more than a coincidence. There were so many things I wanted to ask Janine that had to wait for later.

 The forced silence was killing Misty as much as the wounds were. She was the kind of person who might be able to stay quiet for fifteen seconds under threat of death. She was a kind of direct contrast to Janine and me, reckless to an obsession and with arrogance to match. I could tell she was using the trip as a way to spite Bill for not letting her go to Vermillion. However, she could back up the arrogance with a number of powerful Pokémon such as Starmie, Blastoise, and Poliwhirl. She easily took out any Pokémon that ambushed us from the back, even taking out an Onix with a Poliwhirl at one point. Also, anyone who could navigate dark cave within a week of getting shot earns my respect.

 In all reality it wasn’t a very difficult assignment, and before we knew it we had arrived in Lavender Town. The town was only slightly larger than Pallet and Viridian, but still had its own distinct feeling. To summarize the feeling into one word, I would have to pick eeriness. There was just a cryptic and depressed nature about the town, from the very few people in the streets at midday, to the massive black tower protruding from the center of the city.

 That was Pokémon tower, the graveyard of Kanto and Johto. It rose high above the world, being the tallest building in Kanto asides from Aero Castle and the skyscrapers of Saffron. It was said that the tower contained the souls of all who died in Kanto. True or not, I couldn’t go anywhere near a graveyard until the memories of Pallet and the hospitals in Cerulean and Pewter died down. Sadly, time would diminish everything.

 The people at the Pokémon center were really nice, but just the presence of the Pokémon tower made me extremely quiet and depressed. It was a shame that a tower that tall was needed for a graveyard, and only for just the last seventy years. I wondered how far the world had risen since the pre-Ariel Day chaos. I barely talked in the city, and withdrew to the rooftop after dark, just staring out into space and thinking things over.

 Janine came up eventually, but I didn’t notice her until she sat down next to me. I jumped a little when I noticed her, but came back to somberness almost immediately.

 “I hate it when you do that.”

 “What?”

 “Sneaking up on me like that, I swear you could hide from me in broad daylight and I would never notice you.”

 She brushed some hair away from her eyes, “Training I guess. My father led a ninja sect down in Fuchsia.” She cut off there, unwilling or unable to continue.

 “About your father-“

 “Don’t ask the question unless you are willing to answer in kind.”

 “What?”

 “If you want to ask me about my past, I will ask you about yours.”

 I sighed, wondering if it was really worth it, and then told her my back story leading up to the burning of Pallet, the first time I had ever told anyone how I really felt about anything truthfully.

Chapter Sixteen: Truth

 She stared into my eyes unmoving while I gave my story. It was rather unnerving that way, but it felt good to finally tell another human being. She stared off into space for a moment after I was done, but didn’t ask any questions.

 “It’s my turn then. It’s pretty hard to relate after hearing your background, but I think I can explain it. My father is an executive in Team Rocket, which was at one point a very small, backwards organization that had not seen much activity since the last uprising. He worked as a ninja master as well, as being an executive for a failing organization really doesn’t bring in much money. My mother was a breeder at the Safari Zone, working to maintain the population of the facility. They met while my father was in Fuchsia, and he eventually decided to settle down and get married. There wasn’t a gym there, so he had to work fairly odd jobs. Then Lance had his first spat with the champion.

 “After Lance was defeated, he realized that he needed an army for himself. So, he turned to the creator of the last revolution and his cronies, also known as Team Rocket. The income started flowing in, and my father left Fuchsia and my mother, leaving her to care for me alone. I grew up much like you did, working in the Safari Zone to escape some of the obstacles in my life, the taunting about my father’s faithlessness being high among them.

 “Of course, my father came back later. He was looking to recruit me into Team Rocket after hearing about my skills in the art of the ninja. Mother said no, she was killed. I was ultimately brought up in Team Rocket for three years, given Pokémon at an illegal age and encouraged to train to the extreme. It honestly wouldn’t have been bad if my father hadn’t been there. He wasn’t honestly that bad of a person, but I could never get over watching mother die on his orders, and never really let myself like him.

 “Then there was the fire in Pallet, the little spark that lit the world on fire. I was in Fuchsia fulfilling a mission there when the news came. I managed to intercept the Game
Warden when he was leaving the city, and beg him to take me with him. He reluctantly agreed, and I believe that you know a lot of the story from there.

 It was my turn to stare into space in silence. She had it so much harder than I did. It wasn’t enough that she was only living with one parent at any given time; for the last three years she had had to live in a cutthroat criminal organization against her will. If that didn’t count for a crappy life, I’m not sure what did. She sighed, and gazed off at the Pokémon tower. “You know, I’ve never told anyone that?”

 We laughed as the words came at the same time, so true for both of us. We might have just set there all night laughing if we hadn’t been interrupted.

 “What are you two doing up here at midnight?” Misty strode onto the surface, and on instinct, both Janine and I had no emotion at all showing. “What, did I interrupt something.”

 Janine got up, clearly having the intent to leave. “No, we were just talking. Thank you, and good bye.” She brushed past Misty, leaving the two of us alone on the rooftop. Misty sat down on the edge of the rooftop wall, facing me as she sat.

 “You know she loves you.”

 “What!”

 “Well, for one thing, getting any emotion out of her at all after three days. Please, if that isn’t a sign, what is?”

 “It’s not like that.”

 “Then what is it?” It was my turn to leave now, leaving Misty smirking victoriously.

 The next morning, we were called to meet Mr. Fuji in front of the town gym. The gym was notably small and very easily overlooked from an outsider’s perspective. It was just an average house in the city, with a small sign and a picnic table in front. Mr. Fuji was waiting at the table in front, and gestured for us to sit down. We did, but Janine and me making sure to be on the opposite side of the table as Misty. Mr. Fuji seemed a little bit perplexed by the harsh feelings, but ignored it.

 “Your next assignments have come in. However, before you hear them you must be informed of recent events. After the tide started turning in Saffron, and the fall of Vermillion, Celadon has joined the rebellion, albeit somewhat reluctantly. Red, your presence is wanted to finish off the remaining Team Rocket forces. Janine, you have been assigned to Saffron city to help push back imperial forces, Team Rocket, and the guards at Silph Co., the only pro-Lance laboratory in the nation. Misty, you are not supposed to be doing anything yet, and you are to stay here until further notice.”

 “But-“

 “No, you will do as you are told. Navigating Rock Tunnel was impressive, but you had help, and you are just dead weight in any of the three occurring battles. Therefore, you have been requested here, close to the front lines of all three should help be needed. This is not something you may question.”

 I must admit, that it was rather impressive that an old man could conjure enough force to put Misty in her place. However, he was right in all three assignments. Celadon was almost certainly the easiest front, and I was still only an average trainer. As for Janine, it was probably a bad idea to let her get anywhere near the bulk of Team Rocket, including her father, in Fuschia. I was uncertain as to how she would handle it. But for now, I was off to the caves under Saffron one more time, this time heading East.

Chapter 17: Rainbow

 Celadon City looked like a world that was hanging on by a thread. The buildings and streets were scarred from the recent battles, and there was an aura of uneasiness radiating across the town that made every moment appear like things were about to explode. It must have been a beautiful town once, with multicolored buildings and abundant water, and it was still beautiful even now, but if was obviously a warzone however it was looked at. Waiting at the entrance to the town was a small guard of tough-looking trainers defending the city from any possible external attack.

 Upon seeing Ivy and I, one of the guards began to phone some things into a Pokémon center, while the rest of the guards appeared unchanged, completely unaffected by anything. The guard on the phone placed it down, and turned towards me with a swift motion that strongly resembled military training.

 “Welcome, Red. You have been called to the Pokémon center for the night. You will receive further instructions in the morning. Is this clear?”

 “Yes, I understand.”

 With that forced exchange of words, Ivy and I began our trek into the first major battle we would fight in. Most of the city appeared to be in total lockdown, with only a few citizens and trainers wandering the streets. There were sounds of explosions further to the south as the gym trainers and Team Rocket engaged in combat over the face of the city. When we arrived at the Pokémon center, I had to withdraw Ivy into its Pokeball, however much it hated the experience. It was getting to be too big to go through doorways.

 Inside, there was a rush of activity resembling the Cerulean Pokémon center. The bodies of the injured were constantly being rushed around the newly converted hospital. I didn’t really want to look, but I judged there to be roughly one thousand injured. This was not including the dead, or the injured on the other side, which would make the battle appear much larger than the thousand injured could portray. One nurse took notice of me, and hurried over, pointing me to a room on the second floor that I would spend the night in.

 It was still late afternoon, and I was restless. I wanted something to do, but I wasn’t allowed to leave the Center yet, so I did the only thing I could do. I decided to help the injured before me, providing updates, inspiration, whatever they needed. I wasn’t sure if I would simply get in the way, but it was worth a shot.

 There was a bit of a stir when I walked in, none of the nurses objected though. One even thanked me for it. As I walked through the rows of unending wounded, I tried to remember my injury. There had been a desire to know what was going on, and a need to be a part of it all. I figured that many of these people would be in the same position, and a few words on encouragement were the least I could give.

 Reactions were mixed. Some were happy to have someone to talk to, some had heard of my defeat of three leaders in battle, and other stories. Most people were generally happy to see me. No one seemed to regret their decision to fight, and many were overjoyed that the youngest of trainers were leading the charge; a symbolic gesture of changing leadership.

 Then there was him, the man I could never forget. He couldn’t have been much older than seventeen, only two years older than I. He had taken a nasty blow to the left arm, and the bleeding had only begun to be stemmed. He hadn’t woken up since he had been taken in earlier in the morning, and none of the nurses were certain of who it was. He did stir when I got closer, and looked at me with a distant glance of confusion, and I wondered if he was fully aware of where he was.

 To my surprise, he gave a pitiful laugh, barely audible but with all of the meaning in the world. “So, you’re the hero of Pallet, the one who defeated Surge, right?”

 “Yes.”

 “I don’t have much time, whatever you say, so don’t try and talk me into believing it. However, Rainbow has time, yes he does.” He reclined back into his bed, and I was quite certain he was delusional when he continued, “Take him from me. Use him to show old Lance what the little kids can do. Promise me you will.”

 He held out a Pokeball, and I took it from him. “I will.” He gave one last smile, and mouthed something indistinguishable as he fell into sleep for the final time. I sent the Pokémon out, and was surprised to see an Eevee, a very rare Pokémon with the power to evolve in several different ways. It was a small, cute bundle of fur, and it looked to sweet to be seriously upset, but it was hit very hard by its trainer’s death. I wondered how long I would have to stand there with it, when it got up, and looked expectantly at me. I picked it up in my arms, and walked away with it, amazed at how quickly it had moved on.

 Ivy was not at all happy with me getting a new Pokémon, especially a cute one that I could carry with me. A nasty glance from me was enough to shut him up for a little while at least, though. Ivy was bigger than the room I had been assigned, so I had to withdraw it to its Pokeball for most of the night, while I let Rainbow, as I recalled the trainer had called it, sleep on my bed. I had a hunch that Ivy really wouldn’t like that.

 The next day we were called to the gym shortly after dawn. It was a good distance across the city, and it provided a good chance to survey the devastation of the battle, with Ivy walking at my side, and Rainbow curled up in my backpack. The gym itself was easily distinguishable. It was an enormous greenhouse at one point, but the roof had been shattered into pieces from the recent battle, and the leader was sitting outside.

 She was a young woman, about twenty years old, and she introduced herself as Erika, the Celadon City gym leader. She went over the various details of the battle, a charge on Hazel Street, a counterstrike near the gym, a stab straight to the game corner, and other aspects of the battle that I tried to remember.

 Eventually, she realized that my interest was waning, and challenged me to a friendly battle, which I gladly accepted. She sent out her Tangela, and Ivy stepped forwards. I wanted to fight it out like the last three gyms, Ivy soloing, but I decided to give Rainbow a shot, to which Ivy was very displeased. Tangela lashed its vines towards Rainbow, but the Eevee shot forward in a lightning-fast tackle, striking Tangela hard, while following up by spraying sand at its face. Erika smiled coldly, a wicked look on her face, “Poison Powder.”

 “No!”

 A blast of toxic spores was shot towards Rainbow, engulfing its body with poisonous substances that were almost certainly lethal. “What did you do that for?”

 She smiled, not answering my question as I pulled Rainbow back and brought Ivy in for the kill. Tangela lashed its vines forwards as Ivy counterattacked with its own cut. Tangela was hit hard, and Ivy slashed it straight in the face, sending it to the ground dead. Erika showed no more emotion, continuing her wicked smile as she tossed me a green badge as she walked into the remains of her gym.

Chapter 18: Recovery

 Ivy and I ran as fast as we could through the streets of Celadon, with more dread creeping into my heart every time a flash of light was emitted from Rainbow’s Pokeball. I thought back to Dawn, and its defeat almost instantly after capture, and desperately hoped that this would not be a repeat of that incident.

 When we finally got into the Pokémon center, I had to ask around desperately for someone, anyone to help. Everyone seemed busy, or couldn’t understand my lunatic ravings when I felt a hand on my shoulder.

 I whirled around to see Janine standing there. She didn’t waste time, “Poison?”

 “Yes.”

 “Give it to me.”

 I handed Rainbow, now almost dead, over to her. She sent out her Golbat, and ordered it to go for the throat. In hysteria, I think I tried to attack Golbat after hearing Janine’s order, but she blocked me from doing so. Golbat latched its fangs into Rainbow’s neck, and started sucking out blood. It stopped midway, and simply brought its fangs out of Rainbow’s neck, hopping back as Janine bandaged the incision.

 “What was-“

 She brushed my comment aside, but muttered out something as she worked. “Sucked out the poison. Get good at doing that after some training with Team Rocket.”

 I didn’t bother to question her anymore, just content to sit and watch her work. Rainbow fell asleep shortly after the bandage was finished, but it looked like it could pull out of things in the end. Janine began to repack her equipment into her small backpack. After she was done, she rushed straight outside, leaving me alone.

 I sat out on the rooftop that night, half-hoping that Janine would make a return appearance. I wondered why she was in the city, especially since she was supposed to be fighting in Saffron at the moment. I also wondered what Golbat in the world had the restraint to not make a kill, since Rainbow seemed unlikely to die at the moment. I further questioned Erika’s motives for trying to kill Rainbow; I couldn’t think of a good reason to do so.

 It was a different view than the last time I had sat on the roof of a Pokecenter. There were fires in the distances, and explosions continued to rattle the night as the militia and rebel forces clashed with the armies of Team Rocket. The war was virtually over, but there was still so far to go. There was not a single leader left loyal to Lance, but Team Rocket still had the upper hand in two cities. This, of course, was not even counting the nearly unlimited reserve forces Lance would keep in reserve at Fort Viridian, Victory Road, and the Indigo Plateau.

 “Looking at something?”

 I jumped again, not quite used to Janine sneaking up without a sound. “No, just thinking.”

 “About what?”

 “Well, first off, why would Erika attack Rainbow like that?”

 Janine stared out across the city, before finally settling her eyes on the front lines. “Why would the leader of the Elite Four burn down a city? Why would Bill and Mr. Fuji restrain Misty to Lavender town? Why are both sides using children as the advance forces? People want to know they have power, and people will act to demonstrate this power. Like it or not, Erika is probably terrified of losing power. First Team Rocket started to infringe upon her power. Then you show up. You would be symbolic of the resistance leadership helping with the battle. She wanted to demonstrate that she held control over her city, and not some kid from what she views as a new empire.”

 “But it’s not like that. It’s going to be different, with a new government, independent cities and-“

 “Really?”

 “Of course.”

 “Tell me, has anyone ever said that? In fact, if you paid more attention you would notice that nobody is talking about the future. No one likes to discuss what will happen. It’s because everyone wants power. Bill wants power, Blaine wants power, even Mr. Fuji at some subconscious level wants power. No one wants to split unity in a power struggle right now, but just wait. When this war is over, someone will take command, and history will simply repeat itself.”

 “I don’t want power.”

 She stared at me for a good, long moment, before replying. “Then we would be in the minority.”

 “One last question, why are you here?”

 “I assume you mean why am I here in Celadon, correct? Sabrina would be the leader of Saffron city. She foresaw this in more ways than one, and sent me over here as a means to help you keep Erika in check. Oh, and also so you had a training partner.”

 Her hair glistened in the moonlight, and we stared out at the world, reflecting on its future.

Chapter 19: Present

 I stayed up almost the entire night to make sure that I knew what was happening with Rainbow. It stayed stable, never really going down, but not very far up. When it finally did open its eyes in the morning I was relieved beyond words. It had a cute little sparkle in its eyes, and rubbed up against me for a moment before finally going back to sleep. Janine gave me some space in the morning, but it was time to train before too long.

 She had been assigned another room on the second floor of the Pokémon center, about three doors away from mine. She had asked me to bring Rainbow to her room at one o’clock to give her and Rainbow some time to prepare, and when it finally rolled around, I was ready to knock at her door.

 When she opened the door, she nodded, took Rainbow from my arms and set it down on her bed. Rainbow appeared somewhat confused by this, but wasn’t too uncomfortable with me around. Janine started her mini-training session.

 “Obviously, Rainbow is going to have to get much stronger. It would help if it could kill before it was killed, and an Eevee generally going to have trouble with that. Therefore, I propose that you evolve it.”

 I stood awkwardly, wholly unexpecting where Janine was going. “Well, I guess that we would have to get Rainbow to agree to it. Other than that, how would we even do it?”

 She sat down on the bed, and started petting Rainbow and asking it a few questions too softly for me to hear. Whatever it was, Rainbow listened for a while, and then started yipping enthusiastically at the idea.

 Janine looked back at me. “I think she agrees. Eevee has seven evolutions, but I only have the items for three of them, so he can pick. She sat down three stones onto the bed. One was a translucent blue that glowed vaguely like the Ocean south of Pallet at sunrise. The second was a yellow stone, almost crackling with built up energy stored within its confines. The third was red, and a much warmer shade than the others, conveying a fierce intensity without the direct power of the second. Rainbow looked between them carefully, but eventually walked over to stone number one.

 The room was consumed in a blaze of light, as the evolution sequence I had seen Ivy go through twice occurred. When the transformation was complete, a far different Pokémon stood in Rainbow’s place.

 He looked like he was more suited to the water than the land, with a body that appeared to have the consistency of water, and fins and a long, fish-like tail instead of his old fur. Janine and I gazed at it for a long moment, before Janine referred to it as a new Vaporeon, a water-type.

 There was training after that, with Janine teaching Rainbow new techniques and allowing it to test them on wild Pokémon. It learned how to summon a wave of water from nowhere, burrow beneath the surface of the earth, shoot beams of Ice, and bite opponents until they fainted. Over the course of the next few days, it went from the brink of death to a powerful force.

 “And there you have it. That would be my story, or at least up to now. There is still the attack on the Game Corner tomorrow, and perhaps more after that, but for now, that is where things stand.”

 The child gazed up at me one last time. He had so much admiration and hope in his eyes that it ripped my heart apart to watch him die. He sighed for one last time, and slipped away.

 His mother sat there, taking things in for a moment, and then turned up to me, and with a tear in her eye said “Thank You.”

 It was more than a story, and so much less. It was the truth and a chapter in the story of my life, but it was a mere paragraph in the story of this war. There were more installments to come, and the story was far from over. But it was a good story, one with all of the elements but one, the climax point where good triumphs. And it would be a shame to waste the time spent telling the story by not finishing it properly.

December 27, 2010

The Inferno