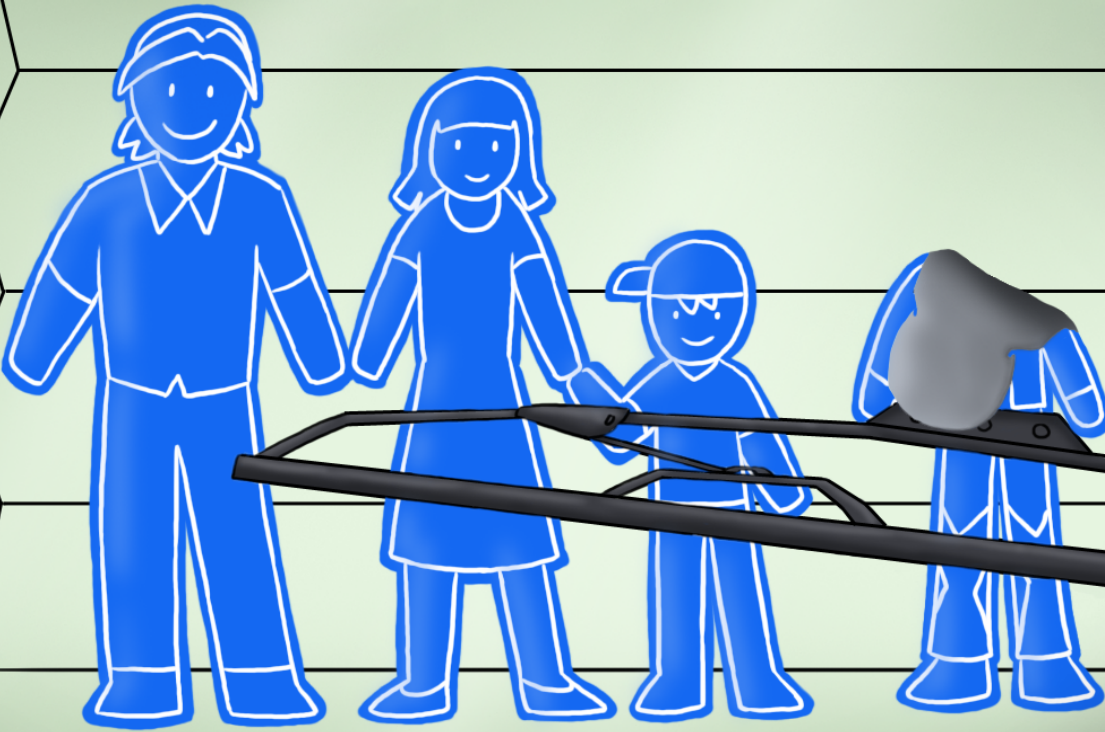


POKÉMON
REBIRTH

ULTIMATUM

Endgame Edition



EPISODE NINETEEN

Fissure

A couple of hundred metres round Jackell Park's circumference, a disturbance had been raised by a tall, rakishly-thin woman clothed in a long, white summer gown, with heeled sandals and a wide-brimmed hat to match. The recipient of this outburst happened to be one of the park wardens, who was currently squinting as a result of its sheer volume.

"You have to find my baby!" the woman exclaimed anxiously, grasping at locks of her shoulder-length cinnamon brown hair.

"Please calm down, Mrs. Nichols," the park warden exclaimed hurriedly. "Members of the police are out looking for your son, one of them is bound to find him soon enough."

"Yes Joanne," the wide-shouldered man next to her agreed calmly. "Worrying won't bring our Evan back to us any quicker."

"I've told him time and time again *not* to run off on his own, Gabe!" Joanne snapped, her fretting tone of voice quickly shifting into something more angered. "If he's trying to make me to use the tether, he's going the right way about it! I don't care how embarrassing he thinks it i-"

Her frustrated verbal expulsions were cut short as the sound of a farfetch'd's cries echoed around them. The pokémon responsible fluttered into view, as a boy ran in pursuit from behind some immaculately pruned bushes. Upon sight of his parents, he skidded to a halt and began to look very sheepish. In that split second, Joanne's angered countenance

brightened momentarily with relief. Before Evan could say anything, she had thrown her arms around him and clutched him tightly to her chest.

"Aww, moommm!" Evan complained as he wriggled in her grasp.

"Oh no you don't," Joanne snapped, returning to her original motives. "You've been very *very* bad, running off like that. I have enough to worry about right now without you adding to it."

"People are staring!" the boy protested.

Joanne lifted her head, about to say that she didn't care whether they *were* staring or not - and in fact they should mind their own business - when she noticed Errol and James in audience.

"If it's any consolation, your son wasn't making a nuisance of himself, ma'am," James spoke up, putting on his most respectful tone of voice. "But we helped him back to you, because we knew you would be troubled by his absence."

"Well we mostly got his farfetch'd ta thank," Errol added.

"How kind! I'm so grateful!" Joanne told them.

"Oh it was the least we could do," James insisted. His expression was a repressed discomfort - the main thing playing on his mind was getting out of the vicinity of the Nichols family as soon as possible.

"The man with the guitar plays it real good!" Evan told his parents.

"Is that so?" Gabe looked intrigued. "Would it be possible to show us?"

"Oh yes!" Joanne agreed. "That would be a refreshing change."

"Well we sort of need to be getting-" James began, only to be swiftly interrupted by his companion.

"Sure!" Errol grinned. James shot an annoyed glance at him.

"Errol!" he hissed through grit teeth. "We have other appointments, *remember?*"

"I know, but how often do I get dis kind of interest?" Errol pleaded. "We'll only be a couple more minutes. Promise."

He began tuning the strings that remained attached to his guitar, while James idled and grumbled under his breath nearby. Errol letting praises get to his head was only going to lead them both into a stickier situation.

Once the man had made relevant adjustments to the guitar, he lowered his head, closed his eyes and began to play. Unlike the energetic song from his last performance, this was a soft, chilled, almost wistful melody. Joanne and Gabe looked on with captivated faces, the former still with her arms around Evan while the boy appeared slightly disappointed at 'guitar guy's change of pace.

As Errol drew his song to a close, Joanne and Gabe erupted in applause. Glancing up proudly, Errol's eyes widened as he noticed the familiar forms of Caley, Rose, Denise and Mondo standing a short distance away. The third member of this group was looking understandably on edge. Just his luck that they would return from the

Tourist Information Office using this same path. He needed to leave before Denise was roped into something complicated.

"Wonderful!" Joanne exclaimed, while James grimaced and scolded Errol inwardly at the circumstances he had placed them in.

"Bravo! Bravo!" Gabe added. "Was that a song you made yourself?"

"Oh, yeah..." Errol replied distractedly, hoping the family didn't notice the group of figures that had paused in their walking, almost expectant. "All my work is improvised - I can't read music."

"It was so captivating...and relaxing," Joanne remarked. "And given the day we've had, relaxing is something we could all use right now." Errol and James searched for an opening to dismiss themselves from the conversation, but the woman wasn't about to give them one. "Our beloved daughter has caused us so much grief...yet here we are, having travelled all the way from Johto, fighting to redeem her name. And she probably doesn't even-"

"Mom, stop." a broken female voice was heard from nearby. "Please...I can't bear to hear any more..."

She hadn't intended to engage in conversation with her family - after all, it wasn't worth getting them involved in her dangerous pursuits. But the words Denise's mother had spoken were just a jab too hard at her

conscience. They didn't deserve to be left with the remains of her collateral damage, even if such damage had been instigated by Team Rocket's corrupt media reporters. As Joanne and Gabe looked up in puzzlement, the former confused as to how she'd been addressed, the young lady who had spoken to them reached a hand to her head. Ever so slightly, she lifted a clump of blue fringe, revealing a soft, more familiar brown hair underneath.

"Denise?" Gabe's eyes widened.

"Hi dad," Denise greeted him softly, lowering the fringe of her wig.

"Neesee!" Even beamed, running across the path and tackling his sister from the side. "Why are you wearing extra hair?"

Denise felt her muscles tense as she caught a glimpse of the expression in Joanne's eyes. It was the look of a woman who had just threaded several pieces of information together, and was none too happy with the concluding results.

"Don't tell me that we've come here in vain..." she began, her voice filled with chilled disappointment.

"Wh-what?" Denise stammered worriedly. Errol and James decided it best to join their companions waiting at a distance. As much as they longed to intervene, this was a matter between Denise and her family – better dealt amongst themselves.

"We spent fifteen of our prime years raising you, teaching you the morals of society, only to see you on 'Johto's Most Wanted!'" Joanne

snapped. "I thought it must be a mistake. Why would my smart, precious daughter turn to crime? I came here to defend your innocence, but it looks like there was nothing to defend."

"That's not true!" Denise spluttered, before faltering. "Well, not that I...wanted to, I..."

"So you *have* been breaking the law!" Joanne exclaimed, before her angered expression descended into upset. "Where did I go wrong...?"

"Hey wait a minute, just hear me out!" Denise protested, her voice cracking. But her mother had already drawn her own conclusions.

"What more is there to hear?" she demanded. "More heartbreak? More disappointment? Do you even realise how much grief you have caused this family? Evan wouldn't stop crying for days after you ran away to that engineering school!"

The hurt look in Evan's eyes was an indicator that he hadn't forgotten how he'd felt back then. And though he had convinced himself things were okay, his mother's words were starting to sway his decision on the matter.

"And then to refuse to speak to us!" Joanna continued. "Can you imagine how terrible that must feel to a parent to have one of their offspring block them from their lives?"

"B-block you?" Denise stammered, horrified. "I never-!"

"Joanne," Gabe said calmly, in his booming voice, grasping the woman's attention. "Joanne, take Evan - go and get him an ice cream. I shall deal with this."

It looked as if she was going to protest this decision, but instead Joanne uttered an extended huff, before turning around and guiding Evan away with her hand on his back. With his wife and son out of earshot, Gabe took Denise's quaking form aside - bending down to her level.

"Th-that's not what happened!" Denise sobbed. "That's lies! All lies! They wouldn't *let* me talk to you! They must have been-!"

"Denise..." Gabe spoke up, halting his daughter's bereft exclamations. "Did you really go to that engineering school that day?"

"I...I thought I had," Denise sighed. "Turned out it was only a recruiting front by Team Rocket."

"Team Rocket," Gabe clarified, with a serious expression. He required no elaboration on what this name entailed - he was aware it implied very dark things, and that is all he needed to know.

"Yes," Denise watched her father processing this information. "And once I'd signed up as part of the organization, it was impossible to leave. At least not without major consequences."

"Major consequences?" Gabe raised an eyebrow. "Such as what?"

"Such as turning me and my friends into some of the world's most wanted people," Denise pointed out. "Team Rocket is everywhere. In the

media, in business, the government, even in the Police force. They must have diverted any of yours and mom's efforts to get to me - made it look like I didn't want to speak to you both any more."

"I see..." Gabe lowered his head. His brow had furrowed quite considerably, with an underlying frustration and disgust for things Denise could not identify, but that her mind was insistent to make up possibilities for.

"Please, dad. I need you to believe me," Denise begged. "I won't deny that I did something stupid back then. I was angry with mom for trying to force me into a job she wanted me to do, but I shouldn't have been so reckless. And I can promise you that I never would have knowingly joined Team Rocket."

Father and daughter stood gazing at each other for some time. It was at this point that Denise's fractious mind was unable to stop speculation as to what Gabe happened to be thinking, and this forced tears back into her eyes. Yet, instead of harsh words or rejection, she felt two strong arms wrap themselves around her, and pull her close.

"I believe you, Denise," Gabe told her calmly. "But there is still the matter of your court case to be settled. While it is a sad fact there is corruption in our society, there are also good citizens too, and they need to know you are not the person Team Rocket is making you out to be."

"I-I don't know, dad," Denise said nervously. "There's a lot happening in my life right now and it's...it's kinda complicated..."

"Your mother and I have been put through a lot, these past few months," Gabe persisted, the sternness in his voice was a complete contrast to his garishly-coloured shirt. "We hired an attorney and travelled all the way from Johto to protest your innocence. The least you can do is testify your own actions."

"I guess," Denise bit her lip. She didn't have the heart to argue with her father, especially not after his forgiveness and surprisingly-accommodating spirit.

"That's my girl," Gabe patted Denise on the back.

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

"Why does she need to prove herself to *them* anyway?" Adam snorted, once the rest of the group returned to find Cory and himself twenty minutes later. He sounded more bitter than usual, on account of feeling overlooked. "Letting herself get pushed around like that. It's pathetic."

"It's got nothing to do with proving herself," James snorted, before looking somewhat wistful. "I have to admit, I'm a little envious of Neesee's family. Even her mother, with her sharp temper and knee-jerk reactions, had her heart in the right place. They really care for her. I can understand why Denise couldn't let them fight her corner alone."

"But we care for her!" Adam insisted, before falling silent at noticing the rest of the group's surprised expressions. He went red and began to look sullen again. "Well, don't we?"

"Sure we do," Mondo blinked, still trying to register the fact that Adam had made the statement at all. "That's why we haven't forced her to make a particular decision. Denise feels she needs to make peace with her family by testifying at her own court trial, the least we can do is accept that."

"That could take ages!" Adam spluttered. "Are we just going to leave without her?"

"I don't want to," Caley replied sadly. "But we may not have a choice. Time is running out for us to find where Team Rocket have relocated before they put the next phase of their plan into action. Especially if Denise's trial forces her to reveal those facts."

The group sought out the dealers of electronic components that the tourist information office had provided, and Mondo selected what he needed. Without Denise there to assemble the signal detection machine, the task now fell to him. And while the hardware side of engineering was not the man's forte, it wasn't going to stop him from putting in his best efforts.

By the time the components were gathered and a reasonably-sized meal had been eaten, it was early evening. Upon arriving at Mayni City's

local Voyage Inn Hotel, Caley received a pleasant surprise in the form of a contribution to the room fees from Errol and James. It was enough to allow three rooms to be booked - one for Caley, Adam and Cory, another for James, Errol and Mondo, and the last for Rose, as an act of courtesy.

Mondo immediately retired to his room to begin assembling the signal detection machine using the tools that Denise had entrusted him, while Rose, Caley and Adam took to their rooms in the hopes of getting a measure of sleep. James was about to exit the corridor when he noticed Errol idling behind him, almost expectantly. Even on the human face that James was still reminding himself belonged to his once-pokémon companion, the familiar hint of sprightly mischief was quite apparent.

"What are you up to?" James raised an eyebrow.

"Who, me?" Errol jokingly put on an innocent grin. "Oh, nothin'. But dat's da problem, ain't it? All dat night life t'be enjoying out dere, and I'm in here doing nothin'."

"We have lots of walking ahead of us tomorrow," James said matter-of-factly.

"All da more reason to have a little fun, while we still got da chance," Errol concluded. James faltered.

"Did you just say 'we'?"

"Of course! I wouldn't leave Jimmy-boy outta t'ings now, would I?" his companion beamed. Before James could properly get his mind around

this slightly twisted reasoning, he was grabbed by the arm and enthusiastically pulled down the corridor.

Mayni City had been brought to life with the rhythmic waves of popular music, bright neon lights and the various enticing aromas of hot cooked food being sold from stalls at points along the high street. It almost seemed like the scene had exploded into a mass of colour and sound upon acknowledging the setting sun - a cheerful sight to behold for the two men who passed amongst it.

Having visited a music shop in order to buy a replacement string for his guitar, Errol purchased two donuts from one of the street stalls and handed one to James, before heartily tucking into his own.

"Aaah, jus' the sorta atmosphere ta cheer us up and take our minds off t'ings for da moment," Errol remarked with his mouth full.

"I guess it is nice to relax after everything that's happened recently..." James remarked, his nervous expression easing a little.

"Yeah! You and me got some catchin' up ta do, James," Errol smiled at his friend. "A night on da tiles is just what we need. And we're gonna start by dropping in at dat place." He motioned towards a decorated set of windows further down the street. They belonged to a casual looking bar that was currently playing host to several hundred people.

"Just how much money did you keep from giving to Caley?" James frowned.

"Hey, don't look at me like dat," Errol held up his donut in one hand, and a note and two coins in the other. "Dis here's my last 12 Delcas, honest. But dat's where da magic is gonna happen." He smiled deviously, pulling a crumpled flyer from his pocket. "See, dat bar is offering free drink refills. An' who are we to ignore a good deal?"

"Can't argue with *that* logic," James chuckled.

Many visitors had already taken advantage of the 'The Meloia' bar's offer of multiple drinks, and the laid-back, vocal atmosphere surrounding the pair was a strong indication of that. Weaving through the noisy masses, Errol and James reached the bar and perched themselves upon two empty stools. A shapely barmaid in heavy make-up approached and eyed up the new arrivals with a sly smile.

"Hello boys...what can I get you two?"

"Give me a coupla 'Marticuni's, and hold da ice," Errol replied smoothly.

"I'll get right to it, handsome," the barmaid winked, and disappeared into the room behind. A volley of shouting arose from across the room, redirecting the men's attentions. There was a large group of figures in the corner cheering and yelling at a flat screen television.

"What're dat lot up to?" Errol raised an eyebrow.

"Oh they're just watching the late showing of today's Baccer game," one of the other barmaids shrugged. "Mayni Conquerors vs Darkiff United. Why don't you join them?"

"Nahh, sports ain't really my t'ing," Errol dismissed the idea, while protests over the referee's decision echoed around them. "Too much whoopin' and hollerin' over very little going on."

"You wouldn't know with how competitive he gets," James added, causing the barmaid to giggle. "They're really into that game though, huh."

"I'd say," Errol smirked. "Dey're as peppy about Baccer as Kantoans are about Pokémon League matches. Let's go find a less crazy spot, Jimmy."

<Well here you go,> the Lombre dressed in a smart suit grunted five minutes later, as it approached Errol and James' table with a selection of drinks atop the lilypad shaped formation on its head. The two men reached for their orders, placing the glasses upon the table. <Enjoy your liver failure.>

"*Someone* sure is in good spirits," Errol remarked sarcastically after the Lombre had left, before a smirk crossed his face. "Or at least *unda* good spirits."

"Heheheh!" James responded, as his companion picked up one of the icy blue-tinted drinks. "It feels good to be getting around without having assignments to be concerned over."

"Too right," Errol nodded cheerfully. "I sure don't see why our ex-Boss had us tailing da twoip for so long. I mean...*man* dat kid was dense! How many times were we able ta get away wit' absolutely minimal disguises? No wigs or nothing?"

"Quite a few," James chuckled, taking a gulp of the Marticuni and swallowing. He didn't drink often, but this beverage happened to be one of his personal favourites – pleasantly fruity with a sharp, menthol aftertaste. "I bet we could have stayed in uniform, painted a sign saying 'this is not Team Rocket' and it would have been just as effective."

There ensued laughter between the old friends. Then James' face fell as he recounted the events of that one day, when they were given a class A mech to initiate a challenging test. It was a test their young subject had been deeply unprepared for, and one that he was brutally punished over, as a result.

"As bratty as he was, I do feel pretty guilty for having taken his pokémon," James remarked.

"Well it's not like we wouldn't give 'em back now if we could, right?" Errol insisted.

"Even if we *did* have the pokémon, we have no idea where the kid is, remember?" James sighed. "No one does. He's one of the top cases on the Missing Persons Register."

"He really took dat loss hard, didn't he?" Errol bit his lip.

"We did rob him of several years of his life," James reminded him. "Some of his closest friends..." He trailed off as the duo fell into silence. None of these reminders were helping either of them feel any better about themselves.

An hour passed, and the dwelling continued. It seemed the one thought had snowballed into a list of all the mistakes both men had made, and neither one had been able to pull the other back toward an optimistic line of thought. Errol had, unbeknownst to himself, asked for refills to his glass once too often - now he was beginning to show the results. The inevitable port of call for such a trail of guilt was their missing partner and companion, and Errol was taking things rather hard by this time.

"She nevuh liked me really...dih she?" the man slurred despairingly, resting his head on one hand. "Nevuh...valued whaddi dih."

"That's not true, Errol," James looked awkward at his friend's inebriated state and the resulting loudness of his voice, despite the volume of the surrounding atmosphere. "Jessie just isn't good at showing that she cares. To *anyone*."

to find out where Team Rocket are and what they're doing, before it's too late.

And Caley had nodded in acknowledgement. Knowing that the young man heard these words had placated Denise to a degree. But it could only do so much. Now, sat at a restaurant table with the rest of her family, Denise felt more than a little awkward. There was a nagging sliver of guilt over having left without talking to Adam, even though she wasn't entirely sure whether he'd cared for her presence. She was aware that Rilly had not been out of his Pokéball in several hours, and this fact irked her. On top of that, with her wig and false eyebrows removed, Denise was certain that people around her were taking second glances - mostly in vague puzzlement, as if they were trying to place her face to a memory that wasn't quite vivid enough to clarify. She didn't wish to hang around long enough to discover what would happen if any of these people managed to recognize her.

"Denise, you look so worried, honey," Joanne insisted with concern, as her daughter prodded listlessly at the contents of her dinner plate. "What's wrong?"

"I just...don't feel comfortable without my disguise on, that's all," Denise mumbled. It wasn't 'all', by a long shot, but it was enough to answer the question.

"It's probably going to take some time getting used to," Gabe acknowledged. "Especially if you've been undercover for a while. But it's okay...you're safe now."

"You're with us!" Evan beamed agreeably, following a large gulp of mango juice.

That's just the problem, Denise thought. I'm not safe with you. And the longer you stay around me, the greater the chance you'll get caught up in whatever crazy things Team Rocket might try to take me back.

A loud trilling was heard from Gabe's jacket pocket. The man glanced apologetically at his family before reaching into the pocket, bringing out a cellphone and sliding it open.

"Gabe Nichols speaking," he announced, in a surprisingly brusque tone. "Could you make this quick? I'm in the middle of a family engagement."

"Ah'm sorry to disturb you at this time," the voice resounded from the earpiece of the phone. "But there's been a few...hitches with your daughter's court proceedings and...ah need to discuss them with you. In private."

"I understand," the sharpness in Gabe's voice had dissipated, but the stern edge still remained. "I will meet you outside The Raptmoor

with a free hand, his assistant looked on with an almost unsettling neutrality.

She was an intriguing figure in her own right. Her mint-coloured hair was fashioned into an angular bowl cut that reached the tip of her ears, while her eyes shimmered from an otherwise emotionless face - exacting, carefully judging all proceeding before them. This space age visage seemed quite out of place in a mundane suit ensemble, yet she wore it well, as if it had always been meant for her.

"Mr. Seigi," the assistant began, her voice soft, yet no more emphatic than her face had been. "This case seems to have perplexed you greatly."

"Oh...well..." Morterey glanced up from his cellphone, awkward at having been caught with his guard down. "It does have some...personal connotations, Nesyi."

"How is that possible?" Nesyi asked.

The truth was, something in that line-up of criminal photofits had indeed unsettled Morterey, and made him feel quite saddened. One of the faces belonged to a friend whom he had gone to school with, almost ten years ago. He couldn't believe it...he *refused* to believe that this person could have turned to such behaviour. After all, why would a promising and intelligent young man like him just throw it all away?

"Ah'd rather not speak about it," he responded, once a few moments had passed. "If it's all th' same to you."

"As you wish," Nesyi gave a tiny nod, before adjusting the subject.

"Was your conversation with Mr. Nichols successful?"

"He wants t' meet us outside The Raptmoor Restaurant," Morterey clarified. "And by my calculations, that's a good distance from here. It's best ah call a cab."

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

Caley could feel the soles of his bare feet pelting a cold, hard surface as he ran, choking back sobs. The tears brimming in his eyes made the dingily-lit scenery around him difficult to identify, and this was further exacerbated by its frustrating similarity. Every corridor, every staircase looked the same. Panic gripped at his chest - not at his apparent displacement, no, that didn't seem to matter. Something was missing....*someone* was missing, and he had to find them.

This fearful desire overrode every other sense within Caley. It denied the pains in his legs, the gnawing in his lungs, the notable lump in the back of his throat. He ran and ran, until the sparse lighting faded out entirely, and darkness crowded him - shadowy and suffocating. Amongst the indistinguishable black void, he picked out the face of a young woman. Her features were creased up in a mixture of fury and grief, her short cropped brown hair entangled in what looked like some kind of net

over her head. A wave of joy gushed through Caley, he leapt forward, but something tightly gripped his upper arms, preventing him from moving any closer.

Caley woefully stared upwards into the dark, begging to be let go. Yet the grip intensified, to an extent that a broken squeal was forced from his lips.

"Quiet."

He could not be quiet as the foreboding man's voice had demanded, instead resorting to forlorn whimpering. *Why? Why?* You're supposed to *love* her! *Why* don't you love her?

Then Caley noticed the machine. Somehow he had not seen it before this moment, but now, the presence of this monstrosity in front of him was all too real. Its segmented steel body was poised - almost hungrily - over the woman's helpless form, its funnel-like head bound to an unseen point above them by a myriad of differently coloured wires. Like an enormous arbok searching for an opportunity to strike, Caley knew deep inside him that this machine was dangerous. Incredibly dangerous.

An intense distress scratched madly within him, as further tears ran down Caley's cheeks - mirrored by the wetness upon the face of the woman ensnared before him. But he dared not struggle. The force of the

hands grasping his arms was near unbearable as it was, and he did not wish to find out what would happen if the grasping became tighter.

Another hand reached out from the darkness and placed itself upon the machine in which the woman was detained. Coldness trickled into Caley's body. He was certain this person was chuckling softly under their breath and the voice was clearly female. Another sob jerked his shoulders.

"Stop your foolish crying, boy," the voice remarked softly. The volume was chilling. "Emotion only makes you weak."

He didn't care. Why were they keeping her in that terrible thing? Why couldn't they let her go. Let *them* go. Why couldn't this bad person leave them both alone?

"I should have known this...*relationship* of yours was only going to cause trouble," the female voice continued. She didn't seem to be addressing Caley any more, rather the man who kept him still. "We strive for profit. *No one* relies upon another for emotional support here. He shall learn that, or he shall face these consequences."

Consequences?

The hand retracted from the machine, back into the darkness. It was then that electrical sparks flickered across the metal skeleton of the machine's body, coaxing its fearsome head with its gaping mouth towards

the woman below. Caley tried to cry out, but no sound escaped. His sight was marred with a gut-churning red haze, his ears filled with an agonized scream.

Caley flung his body into a sitting position with a harsh intake of breath. His first response was to glance round hurriedly, in a half-awake attempt to reorientate himself. The unpleasant surroundings were gone, replaced with the Voyage Inn hotel room that he had recalled walking into earlier that evening. The slightly lumpy mattress lay underneath him, supporting his shaking body with its disjointed springs. He tried to slow his breathing from the irregular panting it currently was, and turned his head to look toward where Adam had been sleeping. The youth was curled up in the corner of his bed with his arms wrapped tightly about Cyzel's neck, sobbing gently into the arcumese's fur. Cory-in-zecutynr-shape stood near the bed, paws placed on the edge and leaning over with an expression of deep concern.

It was his dream, wasn't it? This new telepathic voice caused Caley to look round. Kota was hovering a short distance away, his huge eyes focused sadly on the semi-conscious shuddering mass under the quilt. *I sensed the exact same anguish in both yours and Adam's minds, the augret told his human companion. You experienced his nightmare.*

I...did?

Caley sat there, his traumatized face reflecting horrified realisation. He couldn't seem to bring himself to speak, the emotion within was raw and glacial - a mixture of frustration and despair reverberating from the adolescent figure across the room, and being detected all too clearly by his psychic abilities.

All I can remember is this one sentence, he recalled, his mind voice soft. *Cold...spiteful...*

What was it? Kota asked, edging closer.

Emotion only makes you weak... Caley relayed in monotone. The voice was still repeating itself in his head, even now. Amongst the bitterness and anguish, things were starting to fall into place. The reason for every biting remark, every reflection of doubt, every attempt to push him away. He had just witnessed the moment that Adam's innocence - his whole world - was torn from him. And one of the accomplices to this sickening act had been none other than Adam's own father.

"How could they..." he seethed icily. "I didn't think it was possible for even Team Rocket members to be that vile." He fell silent again, realising that his conversation had slipped into audible sounds. Yet Adam did not respond, giving Caley reason to conclude that he was still asleep, albeit caught in the throes of his own mourning.

What was that machine? Kota inquired worriedly.

What does it matter? Caley frowned. His insides were churned with upset, frustration, the beginnings of doubt. *It stole Adam's mother away,*

and his father did absolutely nothing to stop it happening. No wonder Adam is the way he is. No wonder he doesn't trust me...

And here Caley was, having once again tapped into the youth's subconscious without intention, or his permission. Caley grimaced and swung his legs out from under the quilt, before sitting upon the edge of his bed. He needed to go and clear his mind.

"I wish I could fix what is broken," he murmured sadly. "But you can't just cover stuff like that with a plaster and pretend nothing ever happened. Maybe it's just not possible." The young man wandered towards the sliding door which led to the room's balcony. As he edged the door across a little, the glow from the outside reflected from the pokémon's large, aquamarine eyes while it floated above the crumpled quilt. "I'll be back in a few minutes - I just need some time alone to think."

Alright then, Caley...

As Caley edged out of the door, Cory looked from there towards Kota, who was rearranging the quilt into a creaseless formation over the bed using telekinesis.

<It must be hard for him,> they murmured, shaking their head.

<Considering how rare it is for humans to have powers like us, I expect so,> Kota nodded. <Especially now he can feel the emotions of his friends more keenly.>

Cyzel looked behind him to where Adam lay, a tortured expression upon his closed-eyed face. Tears brimmed under his sealed eyelids and snaked their way down both cheeks as his breath escaped in fitful sobs. Kota approached him, carefully placed his paws upon Adam's forehead and emitted sleepwaves, causing Adam's tensed body to grow more relaxed, his screwed up features to loosen.

<It isn't right to let him suffer like that,> Kota explained. <Especially when there is nothing any of us can do to bring his mother back. Sleep is the best prospect, for now.>

<I know,> Cyzel murmured, placing his head upon his paws on the edge of the bed as he fondly watched his vulnerable charge doze in a false sense of peace. <And it hurts me so to see him that way. It isn't the first time he has had that nightmare, though he hadn't had it since we left Team Rocket. I think...being with Caley and the others - humans that accepted him - was really doing Adam some good.> The arcumese chuckled faintly. <Even though it might not have seemed like it at times. I was beginning to think that maybe those horrible nightmares had finally left him alone.>

journey continued. As had the subject matter of the conversation. To hold a power that could consume him, were he to lose control of it...the very notion terrified Caley deeply. Yet here he was, with so much expectation and responsibility placed upon his shoulders - an apparent solution to the problems of the world, when all he had wanted to do was be a quiet observer of it.

Caley gazed down warily at the thick, black bracers around his wrists and turned his mind to other issues that Adam's dream had brought back up. Just how authentic *were* those words that had been read to him by Azima? Just how much of what he had been told could he actually believe? He shuddered slightly, noting his own growing level of distrust. This feeling was not one he felt at ease with, but something needed to be done in order to quell its bubbling upsurge, before it grew out of hand.

"What are you doing out here?"

Rose's voice was like a ponderous finger into the side of Caley's thought bubble. His head swerved to the right in alarm, to see the woman standing upon the balcony adjacent him. She was dressed in her coat, but her false eyebrows and wig had since been removed, leaving her natural golden hair to wave freely in the evening breeze.

"I had a nightmare," Caley spluttered, having been caught off guard. "Sort of. Well...there's a lot on my mind. Why are *you* still awake?"

"Guess I'm worried about Denise," Rose said. "Her leaving the group to deal with her family is putting us all at risk." Her serious face broke into a slight smile at this point. "And I won't lie...I'd kinda grown fond of her being around."

"She told me she'd try her best to get out of that situation," Caley murmured. "I hope she can."

Rose examined Caley's face thoughtfully for a moment.

"Having too much on your mind can be a big hindrance," Rose told her younger companion. "You really need to share some of that burden."

"Do you think prophecies are just stories written to keep people under control?" Caley blurted out.

"What?" Rose blinked. The complete u-turn in subject matter had come as quite the surprise.

"Minachi's decision to activate my psychic abilities, the strange energy phenomena that woke Kota up and Team Rocket tried to harness, this...task *I* have to perform," Caley exclaimed, his tone of voice becoming notably more frustrated as the sentence progressed. "All apparently linked to some words written long ago? The more I think about it, the more ridiculous it seems..."

"You're starting to sound like Adam," Rose pointed out.

"I...I know," Caley looked bereft, leaning into his hands. That time inside the youth's subconscious had been just a moment too long for him. "I need someone to set me straight, Rose."

"That's fair enough," the woman acknowledged. "When there is a lot of information, it can be a challenge deciphering what is genuine. And so-called 'prophecies' have been used to cause rifts in the past. But there are real ones, too."

"So how can we be sure the Sabai Prophecy is a real one?" Caley glanced up.

"By examining the source," Rose smiled. "Did you see the title of the book Azima read the Sabai Prophecy from?"

"I think it was called the 'Oreckamay'," Caley pondered.

"The Oo'rekimei!" Rose corrected with realisation.

"Yeah, that's it," Caley looked pleasantly surprised. "You've heard of it?"

"I've got a thing for history," Rose nodded. "And many of our world's historical accounts have been taken from volumes of the Oo'rekimei."

"What exactly is it?" Caley asked.

"It's a chronicle of Oci in the form of past events, future warnings and day to day guidance that has been penned for centuries," Rose explained. "The Oo'rekimei is quite a unique book, in that it is composed

of messages from the creator, delivered by the Lati, and even Mew herself."

"The creator..." Caley reflected.

"If the Sabai Prophecy was part of the Oo'rekimei, then it is a truth," Rose nodded. "You even pointed out stirring events that have happened as of late. Of course, if one does not believe that a creator of our world exists, then the Oo'rekimei becomes valueless."

"Adam doesn't seem to," Caley said. "Even Denise seemed sceptical."

"But do *you* believe?" Rose asked.

"I..." Caley faltered. "I'm not sure. So much injustice and suffering has happened in the world. Surely if a creator existed, it would have done something to prevent these things from happening."

"People can be dissuaded by the troubles human and pokémon kind have been through," Rose gave a nod. "They deduce there is no creator, since it does not save us from all calamity. But everything has its time. Its place. Its duty..."

Caley looked up at hearing Rose's voice trail off and become somewhat distant. His abilities were detecting something personal in that statement, but he dared not press further, in case he accidentally ventured into a personal area of Rose's memories.

"You seem to have a lot of faith," he remarked, instead.

"I studied with the Agrarian Seers once," Rose murmured, as if she had sensed Caley's intrigue. "Those were the men, women and pokémon entrusted with preserving the Oo'rekimei. They took an interest in me shortly after I found an articuno egg while out hiking in the Kantoan mountains with my parents. I was only seven at the time, but that experience..." the woman took a deep breath, as if recounting those feelings, "...it really made its mark. Nothing awes and humbles you quite so much as standing in the presence of a Guardian Pokémon, and those united with it."

"But if that was the case, why did you join Team Rocket?" Caley inquired in puzzlement. "They've only hurt and exploited pokémon."

"It's kind of awkward..." Rose trailed off. "As much as I tried to accept that Sapphire had to leave and become part of the great weather cycle, my young heart just couldn't let my articuno friend go. As I got older, I felt more disgruntled about the whole thing. I guess I lost track a little." The woman glanced down at this point, to see that Sia had padded through the partly open sliding door and was staring mournfully back at her. "I got into pokémon training with Sia as my partner - joined a gang that specialised in using status tactics to immobilise their opponents. Things got messy. Most of the gang ended up signing themselves into Team Rocket, and I just followed the crowd. It seemed like a good deal at the time."

"I see," Caley replied, though in honesty it was difficult for him to comprehend why anyone would make a decision like that.

place of energy and alertness. Officers swarmed to and fro, relaying messages on handheld communicators or studying bundles of printed notes. Operators sat at their desks with headphones placed over their ears, gathering information from callers and scribbling it onto whiteboards. Indeed, Mayni City Central Police Station was quite the hive of activity, and that's exactly how Chief Merton Poulter liked it.

There had been little in the way of anything untoward, at least not since warning of an unfamiliar group of terrorists had filtered down from the Guardsmen's Tattoan sector, some days ago. It had been noted that they were constantly on the move, and no one was entirely certain where they happened to be at this point in time. But Chief Poulter had no interest in effervescent targets. Naturally one had to be aware of such threats, but his city had its own matters of concern to deal with - matters far more tangible and intrusive. Chief Poulter glanced at the board displaying the photographs of Mayni City's criminals at large, and tutted to himself. Some of them had been particularly slippery customers.

A knock on the door of his office diverted the man's attention. Once the instruction to enter had been uttered, the door swung partly ajar - enough to allow the anxiously confused face of Chief Poulter's administrator to peer in.

"There's a Mr. 'Brendan Birch' here to see you sir," she said.

"I don't recall me having any appointments today," Chief Poulter raised an eyebrow.

"Well no..." the admin looked awkward. "But he does have something I'm pretty sure you'll want to see." She paused. "Someone, if I'm to be more precise."

The statement was just ambiguous enough to pique Chief Poulter's attention, and as the admin retreated back through the gap in his office door, he strode from behind his desk and followed her out into the room beyond. Standing patiently but expectantly in the centre of this room was a young man. He was tall, muscular and dressed in hard-wearing clothing which appeared to have seen its fair share of excitement. His somewhat shaggy, chin-length black hair was kept from his face with a green band, while a thick belt was strapped tightly about his waist - its large, round buckle housing six minimized Pokéballs.

"Here's your Tail dealer," Brendan announced gruffly, without even giving Chief Poulter a chance to inquire about his reason for being there. It was then that the Chief realised, the cumbersome article propped next to his associate's feet was not, in fact, a large bag. "Found him hiding out in an old Ranger lodge. There was some other contraband stashed away in there - a case of powdered donphan tusks...two crates of PMI unlocked Pokéballs...I took the lot, but they're outside in my truck."

Chief Poulter glanced from the face of Brendan's captive, back through the doorway of his office at the board of photographs. The man's face was bruised and his shirt had been sliced in several places, but there was no doubt about it - this was indeed one of the MCPD's most highly wanted criminals. Part of Chief Poulter was both relieved and overjoyed to

finally have the suspect within his grasp, but a larger, more prideful segment of himself had grown quite incensed at a passing citizen taking the law into his own hands.

"Run a check on Mr. Birch, Glenda," he instructed. "If you please."

Brendan did not flinch, or show signs of offence as Chief Poulter's admin began typing fervently at her computer keyboard. He was used to this kind of scrutiny by the Police, and he saw it simply as part of his line of work. After a few moments, the computer gave an affirmative beep.

"Brendan Thomas Birch," the admin read. "Son of Professor Easton Birch. 16 years old, Place of Birth : Littleroot Town, Hoenn, Registered Trainer as of 1995." She stopped, and moved backwards from her computer monitor with a look of surprise. "He appears to have a two year history of apprehending particularly difficult criminals outside of major towns and cities, and handing them in to the Police for a fee."

"A fee?" Chief Poulter eyed Brendan suspiciously. "Is that viable behaviour?"

"These suspects already have quite substantial rewards posted for their capture," the admin insisted. This piece of information seemed to calm the Chief to a degree.

"Well then," he said tersely. "Excellent work, Mr. Birch. This man has evaded our grasp for some time now."

"My team and I are especially familiar with the evasive types," Brendan allowed himself a slight smile, as two other officers grasped his

bound charge by the shoulders and led him away. "Now there's just that matter of credit to sort out. A guy's got to eat, you know."

As the elevator doors slid open, Brendan walked out into the lobby, a satisfied expression upon his face. The reward money for the Slowpoke Tail Dealer had been quite ample, enough to keep him and his pokémon team fed and accommodated for at least two weeks or so.

"Heh, the look on that Police Chief's face," he murmured in the direction of his belt buckle, though he knew none of his pokémon would hear. "The funniest one yet. Pity you guys weren't able to see it."

Brendan became aware of a more pronounced set of footsteps a short distance behind him, and immediately swung round to see a woman in regulation 'Officer Jenny' uniform approaching.

"So, you're the famous Mr. Birch, the Bounty Hunter with such a conflicting reputation around here," she said, in the typical voice that all female police members had.

"I'd rather be considered a 'Criminal Reclamation Specialist'," Brendan responded. "People tend to associate the term 'Bounty Hunter' with pokémon poaching..."

"Too true," the Officer Jenny remarked disapprovingly. "Nevertheless, you certainly sounded like the man for this job. Thing is,

I've managed to get hold of a strong lead on the Dusty Terrorists that you've no doubt been alerted over."

"What sort of a lead?" Brendan inquired, taking out his modified PokéNav and accessing the database of criminals at large.

"It turns out that a corrupt defence attorney has been keeping them under his wing, so to speak," the woman explained. "He is even trying to get them cleared of their crimes." At this point, she brought out her camera and showed Brendan an array of snapshots. Some were distant and partially obscured, while others were clearer in nature. All of them depicted a family of four engaged in conversation over their meals, surrounded by a restaurant atmosphere. Brendan's eyes narrowed as he examined the digital images against the ones on the database. Sure enough, the face of the youngest female suspect in the line up was a perfect match.

"So where are the others?" he asked.

"Presumably in Mayni City, still in hiding," the Officer Jenny shrugged. "I imagine the attorney is trying to clear their names one at a time. But there's no way it'd be possible to get to them with that attorney in the picture." She brought the sentence to a close with a photograph of Morterey which appeared to have been taken in Jackell Park.

"I see..." Brendan pondered extensively over this image.

"Of course, I can arrest *him* myself," the Officer Jenny continued. "But capturing the rest of the Dusty Terrorists is another matter for me entirely. For *you*, however..."

"Why don't you just ask your superiors to deal with it in force?" Brendan interrupted her. "I only work in areas the Police have little to no influence over."

"Oh that's been tried before," the Officer Jenny shook her head. "I've heard reports from officers in Scale Falls, in Nashgri City...every time they get within striking range, the terrorists have already fled. We're pretty sure they have some means of identifying members of the Police." She pointed at Brendan's PokéNav. "Something like that, only with lists of registered authorities instead of criminals."

"And you think I can do a more effective job because I'm not registered, right?" Brendan concluded.

"Got it in one," the Officer Jenny grinned. "They won't know you're there until it's too late."

"Understood," Brendan said, putting the modified PokéNav away. "Then I will help you arrest the Dusty Terrorists, and bring them in for questioning."

"The public and I thank you," the Officer Jenny smiled.

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

Morterey had barely managed to speak to Gabe about the claims backlog in court that had been preventing him from talking to the officials there, when a Police car had drawn up beside them and a stern-looking Officer Jenny had exited the driver's seat. Much to the alarm of the trio of figures standing outside the restaurant, she placed them all under arrest - Morterey for conspiring to manipulate the law, and Nesyi and Gabe for playing party to it. With little opportunity to protest, they were cuffed and directed into the back of the car before driven to Mayni City Central Police station. Now, sat in a moderately-sized cell and awaiting further response, Gabe gazed perplexedly at the wall and tried to work out what had just happened in the last ten minutes.

"Well...what an awkward turn of events," he remarked, after a lengthy silence. "I sure hope Joanne and the kids are alright."

"Hm..." Morterey responded distantly. His first reaction to the arrest had been quite vehement, but he had since dropped the offended veneer and had retreated into deep thought. "Somethin' isn't right about this."

"I am not quite comfortable with what I heard, Mr. Seigi," Nesyi spoke. It was the first time Gabe had heard the woman's voice, and its tone and resonance sent a faint chill down his spine.

"What was that?" Morterey glanced at his assistant.

"The officer who arrested us," Nesyi said. "Something about her vocal modulator was...incorrect."

"Looks like they're taking someone into custody," another deliberated.

"Three people, by the looks of it," yet another corrected. Before either Joanne or Evan could react, Denise was standing up from the table.

"We have to go," she said under her breath.

"What? Why?" Joanne began to look concerned.

"I have a bad feeling about what's going on outside," Denise whispered. "Dad went to meet that attorney out there, right?"

"You think they were attacked?" Joanne spluttered, to which Denise hushed her with arm gestures.

"No!" she hissed. "But we really can't stay here."

"But Gabriel-!" Joanne insisted.

"Dad's in a lot safer place than *I* will be if I get arrested," Denise urged frustratedly. "You can go see him later, but please! Help me get out of here first."

Reluctantly, Joanne agreed to Denise's panicked demands and the three of them left the restaurant, returning to the hotel that Denise's parents had been staying at. Evan had been surprisingly quiet the whole time, aware of the depth of what was happening around him. As the hotel room television relayed reports of Morterey, Nesyi and Gabe's arrests, Evan sat transfixed in horror and fear - his gaze switching from the

transient images on the screen to the more tangible form of his older sister, hunched miserably upon the edge of the king size bed.

"Just what exactly *did* you do while in Team Rocket, Denise?" Joanne asked. Her voice was soft, but cracking in upset. "I thought it had just been petty things - stealing pokémon or valuables. Don't tell me what they said in the news...is true..."

"I'm not a terrorist," Denise replied coldly. "I never set out to cause anyone any pain. But there was always going to be collateral damage after that Team Rocket base collapsed." She noticed the shocked expression upon her mother's face. "And we never made that happen! That massive explosion the media is constantly talking about - Team Rocket has been trying to pin the blame for their failed meddling on me and my friends this whole time. All we wanted to do was escape that horrid place. And I..." Denise looked guilt-stricken. "I wanted to free the pokémon that Team Rocket had kept for use in their experiments at the same time."

"Did you manage it?" Evan looked up, awestruck.

"More or less," Denise nodded. She didn't wish to go into detail, but this answer satisfied Evan enough. The misgiving in his eyes had dissipated, and he had edged closer to his sister - no longer feeling that she was a threat.

"So what *did* cause the explosion?" Joanne asked. "Do you know?"

"I..." Denise felt the words catch in her throat. She didn't want to lie to her mother any more, but she was aware that the more information she divulged, the greater risk she put upon both Joanne and Evan. "I do. Team Rocket tried to harness energy that was too powerful for them to control, and their attempts backfired. They managed to escape before the Dusty City base went up, and relocated somewhere else in Tatto. My friends and I had been searching for their new base, before I ran into you."

"Cooooo..." Evan murmured, thoroughly impressed. But Joanne was far from appreciative of the concept.

"That's not your responsibility, Denise!" she insisted, aghast.

"It is!" Denise said. "Well, more accurately, it's my friend Caley's responsibility. But it's my responsibility to support him through this - after all, it wouldn't be fair to leave him after he sacrificed so much to rescue me."

"Rescuuuue?" Evan started to grin. "You mean a damsel in distress, like in Super Thunder Bros.?" He descended into over-dramatic hand gestures. "'Save me from King Kamex, Flavio! Wetter is not better!'"

"Hush, Evan," Joanne scolded, before glancing back at Denise. "I don't understand - why is finding a Team Rocket base your friend's responsibility?"

"It's...complicated," Denise admitted. "But I do know this for sure. We can't talk to just anyone about it. Team Rocket agents are

everywhere - working as employees in stores and restaurants, in the media, the Police..." She froze in mid-sentence, her eyes wide. "Oh...oh no."

"What's wrong?" Joanne urged.

"Something tells me that dad's arrest, along with the attorney and his assistant, goes deeper than I'd like," Denise remarked, with a shudder. She could only hope that Caley and the others would be okay.

TO BE CONTINUED...

This eBook is not officially endorsed and is intended for
FREE DISTRIBUTION ONLY

Enjoy Pokémon Rebirth? Please support the Pokémon franchise by
purchasing licensed official products.

Read more tales from the deeper side at
www.pokemonrebirth.niftihalostudios.com

**Pokémon (c)1995-2015 Nintendo, The Pokémon Company, GAME FREAK Inc,
Creatures Inc.**

Rebirth (cc) 2001-15 Gemma V L Bright.