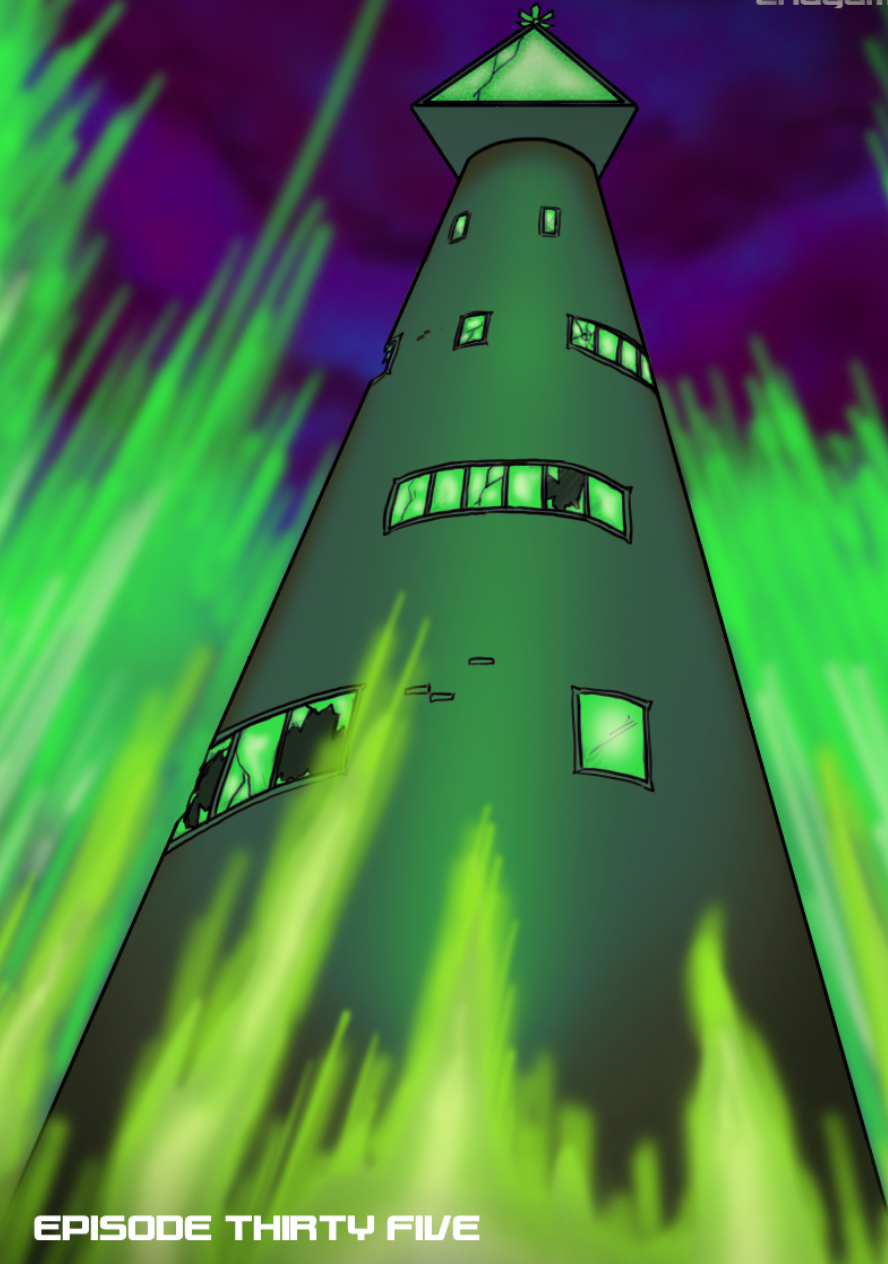


POKÉMON  
REBIRTH  
**ULTIMATUM**  
Endgame Edition



EPISODE THIRTY FIVE

**Land's Wrath**

**"FIRE!"**

That was his father's voice, alright. Adam grimaced in a mixture of fear and anger as that singular word cut through the silence, moments before the mountainside appeared to explode - beams of Aura, flame, water and electricity seared the air in one unified assault. The energy column travelled several hundred metres before making impact. But instead of destroying the tower, the energy slammed into a previously invisible dome surrounding it - electrical sparks jittering over the surface in criss-cross patterns and illuminating a multitude of hovering shapes in the process.

Adam couldn't help but be just a little impressed at the strength of the shield around Kemnon Tower, despite the fact it was going to make their entrance all the more difficult. He squinted up at the building, trying to make out the hovering crystalline shapes which he assumed had been at least partly responsible for the shield.

There was no angry response from his father at this apparent failure. It seemed this attack had not so much been to cause any damage, but more as a display of power - designed to put fear into those Team Rocket intended to overthrow. Whether it had succeeded or not, Adam was unsure, but it had certainly unsettled many of the trainers surrounding him. The youth could feel his heart pounding in his chest, the

reverberations of every beat coursing throughout his body. He tried desperately hard to quieten his rapid breathing.

Then the army charged. The gap between the ranks of hybrids and the trainers gathered in the valley rapidly diminished as the former thundered down the rock face. Yet, the trainers were frozen to the spot in a mixture of terror and indecision. A young man in a red shirt with a large rucksack strapped over his shoulders uttered a panicked yell, stunning some of the others in the group into action. A woman wearing a green headscarf tossed one of the Pokéballs from her belt forward, in tandem with several additional figures who appeared to have thought of the same thing. A crawdaunt, primeape, sudowoodo and a number of other pokémon appeared around the trainers, immediately surrounding themselves and the other humans and pokémon near them with blue-green disc like Protect shields.

Just as it seemed Team Rocket's army was about to make impact, they veered sharply to the right and continued onward - large clouds of dust kicked up from their hefty limbs as the ground shuddered in protest under their movement. While the hybrids kept their attentions firmly elsewhere, some of the accompanying human commanders turned to gaze at the watching crowd as they passed, wearing provoking sneers of enjoyment.

That was when Adam knew that they had indeed been aware of the trainers' presence the whole time. But they hadn't cared - they didn't consider the group cowering in the valley to be any threat whatsoever.

From the looks on their faces, the trainers themselves weren't feeling much of a threat either. They continued to stand, watching as Team Rocket's army stormed onward across the grassland towards Kemnon Tower with nothing to stop them.

A massive chunk of rock smashed heavily into the ground just metres in front of the army's frontmost troops, throwing a blast of dirt and shards into the air. Caley glanced up from behind the fading shields to see another swarm of darkened shapes approaching from the foot of the tower. As they drew closer, Caley picked out the defiant faces of men and women in black padded uniforms with red sashes, riding atop their pokémon to meet the approaching threat. Other figures in the same uniforms ran along the grass with pokémon at their sides. In their hands were devices with various elemental stones built into them. With barely a moment to take all this in, the two sides ploughed into one another in a flurry of limbs.

"Wait, are those Agrarian Seers?" James blinked in surprise.

"You got it," Cassidy nodded.

"I thought Seers were pacifists!" the man exclaimed.

"This isn't about fighting for glory, James," Rose told him. "This is about defending something very important. If the tower falls, Caley won't be able to contact Tajigyama."

"Ya gotta get to da tower, Caley," Errol insisted. "An' fast!"

Caley couldn't help but look somewhat upset over the thought of abandoning his friends.

"But what about you guys?" he asked.

"This is no time to be sentimental!" Jessie snapped. "Just worry about getting to the top of that thing, okay?"

"We'll be fine!" Denise urged while Adam raised an eyebrow at this exclamation. He wished he could share his companion's optimism.

With that, Caley turned to his aurentus companion, who was shifting uncomfortably - aware of what was about to be asked of him.

"Kota, can you teleport me?"

[*I don't know, Caley...*] Kota's psychic voice echoed out, causing some of the surrounding trainers to glance over their shoulders in surprise. [*I'm not sure if it's safe to-*]

"*Nothing's* safe right now!" Caley spluttered, panicking. "Can you do it or not?"

[*I...I'll try,*] Kota conceded. Placing his clawed hands on Caley's arms, the aurentus closed his eyes and initiated the necessary senses for teleportation.

There was a split-second thrust of the earth under Caley's feet, a familiar weightlessness, then the surrounding air was set aflame. It was exactly like the sensation Caley had experienced back in the Pokémon Center, only this time it was even more intense - grasping at his physical

body as well as his mind, temporarily stifling all his senses. He could feel Kota's claws still grasping his arms, but only just. The feeling of momentum, something usually alien in this transitional plane, had undoubtedly set upon them both. The world emerged in a blast of sound as Caley hit the dirt and tumbled across it, before coming to a panting standstill.

"Get up!" a concerned and hurried voice implored. Caley felt a hand pull on his right shoulder. Kota's grasp had vanished, but the disorientation in the young man's head was being stubborn about leaving him. He struggled to focus, and managed to make out one of the Seer soldiers crouching over him. Over them, something flickered and buzzed. "You gotta get up," the Seer echoed. "We can't hold this for long!"

Caley scrambled onto his hands and knees, longing for his sight to clear and silently cursing himself for forgetting about the psychic feedback that had prevented him from locating Kota an hour or so earlier. Undoubtedly this same feedback had hindered Kota's attempts at teleportation. He flinched - where was Kota? Where, in fact, were they?

"My auprentus..." he choked out.

[*I'm here,*] Kota's weakened psychic voice gave Caley a dull pain in his mind - a fitting recompense for his thoughtless actions. [*I'm sorry, I didn't manage to get you to the tower gate.*]

"It's not your fault," Caley insisted, blinking the last of his sight back into operation. "It's *my* fault for not remembering something is messing with our psychic abilities right now."

"Whatever energy is radiating from that army, and whatever Team Rocket did to create it..." the Seer told them morosely. "It has taken a heavy toll on the veins of the earth."

"Wait, that's the Aura Network, right?"

"Correct," the Seer nodded. "If we cannot complete the Generation Rite soon, the planet may become too damaged to heal."

A loud crackle mixed with a grunt of pain from overhead redirected the attentions of all three figures, and Caley finally took in his surroundings. Kota's misfired teleportation had landed them in the central portion of the battlefield, amidst the thick of the fighting. He had only been spared by the quick thinking of this Seer and her onix, the latter of which had formed a Protect shield over them in order to stave off collateral damage from the surrounding conflict. But the exhaustion was taking its toll.

The onix's groans of fatigue escalated into one of alarm as a nidoking hybrid slammed into the exterior of its shield, having been punched aside by a granbull hybrid. With a snap, the shield crumpled in the middle before shattering into pieces and dissolving. The Seer looked up with a sharp gasp and a partial wince, raising her weapon in a half

attempt to block whatever had broken her onix's shield. To her surprise, a blue tinted shield had taken its place.

"Goor~" the onix remarked thankfully, glancing down. The Seer traced the rock pokémon's gaze to Kota and Caley, both standing with their hands outstretched and looks of intense concentration on their faces.

"You're a Psychic Cho'moken wielder..." she spluttered.

"I'm the Ahnloka," Caley reiterated. It was the first time he had heard himself speak these words, and yet they had emerged from his mouth with unexpected certainty. Part of him was expecting the woman to burst out laughing for saying such things. But there was no hint of doubt in her eyes now, just reverence, and a hint of fear.

"Then I must not keep you," she said. "Charnock and I have to try stop these creatures as best we can."

"I know. Thanks," Caley smiled, before turning to Kota. "Looks like we're going to have to take what we learned battling Lavender and crank it up a few notches." Kota nodded, then Caley disengaged his portion of the shield, allowing the Seer and her onix to leave while he also took the Pokéballs from his belt. Tetor, Becks and Murdoch were released onto the field.

There was little time for the pokémon to take everything in. Bodies and attacks were flying everywhere, causing the three psychics to



temporarily overtaken by sandstorms. It wasn't long before the remaining fugitives discovered they had been separated from one another.

Adam winced, blinking furiously in an attempt to maintain his vision while trying not to panic over the chaos happening around him. Dark shapes passed into his line of vision; outlines of flying humanoid hybrids bearing expressions saturated with hollow intent. He had been separated from Cyzel once again, and this never helped him to stay calm.

James groaned and staggered to his feet, while Growlie and Chime attempted to keep back nearby collateral damage. Having been caught in a blast from a nearby tyrannitar hybrid, he had been thrown several metres - and it seemed the hybrid had not finished with him yet. James yelped and reeled back instinctively, caught unawares by the bright red chest markings which gave the creature's front the appearance of a fearsome open-mouthed face. The humanoid tyrannitar responded by throwing a clawed fist forward and slamming it into the ground, missing the man by inches.

"Growlie, Chime, we've got to make this count!" James cried. He knew he couldn't use offensive tactics, considering how the humanoid hybrid pokémon were even stronger than the hybrid species Adam and Denise trained. Somehow, James Adam and Denise had managed to stay in relatively close proximity to one another. While Growlie distracted the humanoid tyrannitar with bursts of Extremespeed. Chime and Rilly joined in the retaliation, the former slamming itself the creature's face while the latter soaked the ground under its feet in an attempt to slow it down.

Denise froze as the humanoid tyrannitar screeched, swinging its body from side to side in an attempt to knock out its assailants with the long spines from its shoulders and back. As valiant as the Growlithe's attempts at evasion had been, one connecting blow from the humanoid tyrannitar's lengthy tail was enough to deal plenty of damage. Growlie uttered a shrill wail of agony as he hit the dirt, causing James to yell in anguish and run over to his fallen pokémon.

The corners of Denise's eyes creased as she tried to fight back her upset. Even with the support of the Agrarian Seers, those fighting for Caley's cause were hopelessly outnumbered. How could they last until Caley did what he needed to do? What could a few of them accomplish against the hundreds of soldiers in Team Rocket's army?

Suddenly, Denise and Adam were hoisted swiftly and roughly into the air. Gasping for breath, Denise tried to make out what it was that had bound her so tightly and discovered it to be a massive red and white claw clamped around her waist. Another one also held Adam tightly, preventing escape. The owner of the claws, a humanoid scizor, uttered a grunt that could have been thought of as amusement, had the look in its eyes been something more alive and emotional.

She hated to admit it, but she wasn't sure there was much they could do at all.

Indeed the situation looked increasingly grim. Denise could only hope that her other friends were still alive, out there amongst the

ferocious crowd of hybrids. And if they were, how much better could they have possibly been faring? The army was almost at Kemnon Tower's boundary now. Chime and Rilly clashed with the humanoid tyrannitor, unable to hear their calls for help over the intense surrounding noise. As the crushing pressure on her chest intensified, Denise's eyelids began to flicker shut, a trickle of blood running from the corner of her mouth and down the side of her face. Maybe their efforts had been too little, too late.

Adam struggled with every ounce of his remaining energy, watching with growing despair as Denise's consciousness slipped away. His own suffering immediately wiped from the forefront of his mind, only to be replaced with a torturous memory from times past. A vision of someone he had cared for so deeply, being snatched away before his eyes without him being able to do a thing to stop it. First his mother, now Denise - if there was any measure of justice in this messed-up world, then this could not be allowed to happen!

And yet it was. Adam coughed a dark red spray, urging his end to come swiftly if it must and yet still trying to free himself with little success. The youth's hand brushed against something wedged firmly in his trouser pocket, causing him to flinch.

It was the only gift Denise had ever given him, but as precious an article it might have been, having it would mean nothing if the giver of that gift were to lose her life. Adam writhed in one last effort, causing the translucent, orange item to tumble from his pocket onto the grass below, a short distance from James. The man had been cradling Growlie in his

arms, trying to avoid further assault. Now, he ran over to the glittering object and knelt down to examine it.

"A...Fire Stone?"

Glancing instinctively at Adam for some note of approval, James uttered a harsh gasp as he saw the grave situation he and Denise were in. Initiative would have to be taken. The man immediately leant down toward Growlie, Fire Stone in one hand.

"Growlie?" he murmured sternly. "It's time for us to move on."

"Rrrowl," the growlithe responded, a sparkle of defiance in his eyes - he knew what had to be done, and was ready to accept. With that, James touched the Fire Stone to Growlie's body, which began to glow as a result of the elemental energy. Temporarily distracted and mildly disorientated by the light, the humanoid scizor opened its claws slightly, giving Adam and Denise a chance - if but a small one - to catch a breath. The light faded, and where James' growlithe had once been standing there now crouched an arcanine, re-invigorated from the Fire Stone's power and angrily baring its teeth at its target.

"Growlie, Flamethrower!" James yelled, pointing at the humanoid scizor.

The humanoid scizor screeched as a searing burst of flame tore across its arms, dropping Adam and Denise in the process. Despite his greatly-weakened state, Adam turned himself in midair, reaching out his

arms to catch Denise's limp body as she fell. The pair hit the ground, rolling a little way before coming to a stop.

"You'll back off if you know what's good for you!" James snarled at the humanoid scizor, eyes alight with a custodial passion. "No one hurts my friends and gets away with it!"

He trailed off, noticing Growlie looking over his shoulder worriedly. Chime and Rilly had dashed to Adam and Denise's aid, leaving the humanoid tyrannitar free to advance upon James and his arcanine companion. It appeared he was surrounded, and out of luck. Of course, James could have easily leapt aboard Growlie and used the pokémon's newly acquired speed to escape, but the man refused to abandon his friends. Even if it meant going down with them.

Having resigned himself to such a fate, James was thoroughly surprised when another fiery blast appeared out of nowhere and engulfed the humanoid scizor's head and upper body. Glancing round, the man's mouth dropped open as a blaziken dived into view with a smirk upon its face. The squealing of tyres and the roar of an engine soon followed as a motorbike ridden by two figures in long, white coats powered its way across the mountain ridge - leaping from a rocky ledge before hitting the ground and approaching James.

The rider leant back and revved the motorbike before sending the entire ensemble speeding toward the humanoid tyrannitar. Grasping on to their companion's shoulder with one hand, the passenger reached out

slightly with a hook tied to the end of a thick cable, latching on to the hybrid's arm in the process. Before the humanoid tyrannitar had a chance to react, the motorbike was already making repeated circles around it, wrapping it entirely in the cable. The creature toppled to the grass, temporarily immobilised.

"Perfect!" the motorbike's passenger thrust a fist into the air as the motorbike came to a standstill. The female voice sounded familiar.

"That was just like the swamp speeder scene in 'Cosmos Conflict!'" the rider added, in an equally recognizable male voice. James glanced up in dawning surprise.

"Kevin?"

The rider lifted the visor of his helmet, revealing a cheeky grin, bright green eyes and an equally vivid shock of messy red dyed hair. The passenger on the motorbike also lifted her visor, revealing themselves to be none other than Kevin's travelling companion Jenna.

"We heard you could use some help!" she called over the noise of the background fighting.

"Could we ever!" James exclaimed excitedly.

"Good thing someone called the cavalry then!" Kevin shouted.

For a moment, James thought he was referring to himself and Jenna. At least until he caught sight of a large shape out of the corner of his eye. An aircraft carrier similar to the design used by Team Rocket

coasted over from the west. No sooner had it been spotted, than it was set upon by Team Rocket helicopters and flying hybrids. The rear hatch opened wide, and a large group of human figures leapt out with gliders and some of their pokémon in tow.

Denise murmured weakly, before realising where she was. Adam had carefully propped up the girl's head by resting it upon his knee, having watched over her, alongside Cyzel and Rilly, until she had regained consciousness. Immediately Denise began to blush, causing Adam to flinch and do the same. He quickly saw to helping the figure sit upright, to which she gave him a deeply grateful smile.

"What happened?" she asked. "How did we ever get out of that thing's claws? I thought we were-"

"Goners, yeah," Adam agreed, before motioning in James' direction. Denise's mouth dropped open as she caught sight of the man's pokémon.

"Growlie evolved?" she spluttered. "But that's impossible! For that to happen, James would have needed to use a..." She trailed off, realising just what had happened. "Oh, Adam...you gave him the Fire Stone I bought you?" The boy nodded slowly and sadly, but this upset was rapidly broken as Denise threw her arms around him and hugged him tight. "That is the most selfless, wonderful thing you've ever done!" she squealed in tearful joy. "Thank you so much!"



Having tumbled some way down the mountainside, Butch staggered back to his feet, twitched his massive wings and attempted to get a decent grasp of the situation. As the arrival of the Guardsmen aircraft carrier brought Tatton Gym Leaders and agents on to the field, Butch thanked N internally for having delivered the news to the organization as he had promised. Now, Seers and Pokémon Trainers alike had their attentions firmly locked with those of the opposing side – throwing every attack possible in an attempt to prevent further advancement towards Kemnon Tower.

But it was proving a heavy challenge. The presence of the hybrid soldiers alone was enough, without the additional backup from Team Rocket air and land vehicles. Some of the former had already been brought down from the sky, but the latter were better reinforced and more stubborn in being halted. Butch nodded to himself - these mecha were the things he was going to work on bringing down first.

Before he had a chance to formulate some kind of strategy, a shadow ball whisked by him, missing his leg by inches. Glancing at the withered patch of grass where the energy orb had made contact, Butch swung around to see whom was responsible for the attack from behind. He didn't even have a chance to open his mouth before another shadow ball hit him in the face. He knew he had to keep his cool - untamed anger was hardly something that would help with straight thinking. But with temporarily-blurred eyesight as a result of the energy bombardment, Butch was finding it hard holding his temper under control.

"Now, Lerik!" came a forceful cry. Butch blinked as he realised the voice was coming from in front of him – it seemed that a passing trainer had mistaken his humanoid hybrid appearance and assumed him to be a member of the Team Rocket forces.

<Hey, whoa!> he exclaimed, forgetting his words would be undecipherable to most humans. <I'm with you guys! Save your attacks for those trying to DESTROY the tower, alright?>

Butch's eyesight cleared, presenting him with the spindly form of Azima Kenedith, accompanied by a liepard and a honchkrow. The pokémon were now wearing rather puzzled expressions.

"Lerik, what are you waiting for?" Azima spluttered. "This isn't a gym battle!"

<Ugh, I haven't got time for this,> Butch muttered, before turning in the direction of one of the nearest Team Rocket mecha. Azima raised an eyebrow at this unexpected response to her attack, only to have it raise even further as the humanoid druddigon clasped its muscled arms around the mecha's leg in an attempt to detach the offending appendage.

"Well this is an unexpected surprise," she blinked. "It looks like this beast soldier is fighting for our cause." Lerik nodded. "Excellent!" Azima concluded. She wasn't one to ponder the cause of an act of fortune - not that there was much time to in the thick of battle. While Butch held some considerable strength, he wasn't going to take down the hulking

bipedal transport alone. The aged woman looked firmly at her pokémon companions. "Lerik, Mayfear, Night Slash! Top of that machine's leg!"

Butch glanced up in shock as the liepard and honchcrow ploughed their glowing claws and wings into the joint which held the mecha's limb to the underside of the cockpit. There was a harsh screech of shearing metal, then the outer plating of the leg joint pulled free. With a loud yell, Azima then cast the vibrating blue orb of Aura she had been charging at the exposed servos and cables of the leg joint. It made impact with an explosion and a shower of sparks.

Noticing the resistance in the leg had ceased, Butch gave it one extra sharp tug, pulling the metal limb clean off and causing the rest of the mecha to crash to the ground. Moments later, the pilot attempted a getaway using a portable jet pack, only to be shot out of the sky with a shadow ball from Mayfear's beak.

The downed mecha had drawn a fair bit of attention from the surrounding hybrid soldiers, two of which had thundered over to confront the source of the damage. One of them, a creature plated in dull grey spiked armour, had been near unrecognizable as a slowbro except for its vaguely hippopotamidae facial features. The other was a humanoid manetric, its majestic yellow head crest now taller and sharper, extending down the entire length of its back. With a swipe of its red clawed hand, the manetric hybrid threw a bolt of electricity at Mayfear, which the honchcrow narrowly evaded.

<Don't you have attacks of your own?> Mayfear cawed to Butch.

<I...uh...I don't know,> Butch stammered awkwardly. <I've never tried to use any.>

<You must have!> Lerik joined in. <I can sense your light Aura from over here. Surely you can feel that inside of you, right?>

He'd not thought about it before, but now the liepard mentioned it, Butch *could* feel such an energy flowing through him. He tried to recall the kinds of attacks dragon pokémon used. Most of them he could remember involved shooting beams of elemental energy from the mouth. The concept of firing anything out of his mouth disturbed Butch a good deal - surely there was another alternative.

Butch uttered a strangled cry as the humanoid manetric's electrically charged fist slammed into his gut. Behind a wave of pain, the man-in-pokémon shape felt his own energy spike in retaliation. He willed it from the innermost parts of his body into his arms, his hands, the ends of his fingers. The claws of his fingers began to glow bright blue, and with a roar Butch swiped at the humanoid manetric - the blue glow creating streaks across the air as it made impact, one hand after the other. The manetric tumbled backward, temporarily disorientated.

<That's the way to do it!> Lerik cheered, as Butch glanced down at his hands in shock.

<Been holding back on us, eh?> Mayfear joked. Butch looked back at the honchcrow with a dawning grin of pride. But the triumph was



It seemed that Team Rocket had the same thing in mind. A beam of yellow light streaked past the edge of Errol's vision - straighter and more vivid than any of the scattered elemental attacks from the pokémon, Seers and hybrids. Errol glanced up just in time to see the beam make contact with a trainer's pokémon - a virizion - stunning the creature and causing it to topple sideways onto the grass. Before the trainer could process the situation, a red beam had been projected from the mecha's left claw, turning the virizion hit by it to energy and retracting the pokémon out of sight.

Errol swallowed hard, a feeling of dread idling within him. The feeling was not unlike the one he'd experienced earlier, after seeing the mechs for the first time since he himself had piloted one. From the perspective of the uninitiated, the mechs appeared to be wasting precious minutes - stealing pokémon away for the thrill of it. But Errol knew what the intention was. They were cutting down the amount of opposition.

A heavy impact to his side threw Errol under the feet of a nearby aggron hybrid who had been locking horns with a torterra's facial spikes. The man pulled his limbs close and managed to roll away just as the colossal tortoise pokémon was thrown onto its back. Struggling to his feet, Errol squinted through the billowing clouds of gritty sand and relocated Cory-in-chiverbel-form.

"Did you see that?" Cory whimpered, pointing a stubby arm at the nearest mecha. "It zapped up a scolipede like it was nothing! *Nothing!*"

"Don't lose it now, kid!" Errol insisted. "We can't afford ta panic!"

"But how can we stop a machine that steals pokémon like that?"

Cory looked upset.

"We gotta play 'em at deir own game," Errol began to grin. "And I just got an idea how ta do it."

Inside one of the mecha, a Team Rocket pilot cried out in alarm and frustration as the joysticks he'd been using to manoeuvre the vehicle wrenched themselves violently out of his hands. Flicking his head to one side in order to read the monitors for clues, the pilot squeaked amusingly as he discovered himself face to face with an unexpected passenger.

"Excuse me," Errol smirked. Moments later, the pilot was seen toppling out of the cockpit, yelling and flailing.

"Those were some tricky interfaces..." Cory remarked, as they hovered through the doorway Errol had left open, and shut it behind them with telekinesis.

"But ya dealt with 'em nicely," Errol smiled, before cracking his knuckles and shifting over to the controls. "Amazing what a little 'talking to' can achieve."

"Do you know how to steer this thing?" Cory inquired, watching Errol giving the buttons and joysticks a visual once-over.

"Do I know how to steer dis t'ing..." Errol laughed. "Kid, you're looking at someone with eight years mecha pilot experience under his belt. Now let's get to work."

\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*

As determined humans and their pokémon clashed against the seemingly-tireless forces of the humanoid hybrid army, a claydol soared through their midst as quickly as its large stone body could manage. A sixteen year old human male hung tightly to the claydol's back, eyeing the surrounding conflict with readiness. Behind them both, an auprentus, grumpig, alakazam and breloom kept pace - the first three by hovering also, the last by sprinting.

Their passage did not go unnoticed. The human commanders on the field had since been informed of this red-headed young man, the psychic Cho'moken wielder who posed a threat to the success of Team Rocket, and they weren't intending to let that happen any time soon. Tetor veered to the side as a humanoid garchomp swung its red-bladed arms into the claydol's path, throwing Caley off in the process. Almost instinctively, Caley surrounded himself in a bubble of Aura - moments before he made impact with the spiked chest of another humanoid garchomp. Disengaging the shield, Caley landed unsteadily upon his feet and channelled his Aura into a Force Palm attack. The Aura-formed hand

slammed into the second garchomp hybrid, the shock of the impact reverberating back to Caley's physical body like a throb from a pneumatic drill. It was enough to knock the creature off its feet, though it was quick to use its tail to rebound itself into a standing position.

*Caley, we must press on,* Tetor rumbled insistently.

The tower boundary was but a few metres away now, its massively thick iron doors standing immovably - battered by the driving rain. It was only at this close proximity that Caley got an impression of just how high the wall really was. Of course, this was to be expected - Caley seriously doubted a place as important as this would have cut corners when it came to security measures. But there were no Agrarian Seers to be seen, at least not counting the ones on the battlefield, and this both puzzled and worried him. Surely they were expecting his arrival. How could he possibly get inside without someone to let him through?

Glancing over his shoulder, Caley gulped as he caught sight of a number of hybrids which had broken away from any interference and were now charging after him. Flying types, previously grounded as a result of clashes with other trainers, were taking to the air once again in another attempt to breach the shield surrounding Kemnon Tower.

Caley held his breath, unsure whether he should cry out a warning or let things take their course. Then he spotted movement along the top of the wall. Seconds later a sphere of blue energy shot into the air and

made contact with the left wing of a nearby humanoid yanmega, sending it spiralling into pigeot and altaria hybrids that had been flying alongside. As the trio of creatures struggled to regain control of their flight, Caley squinted to try and make out whom had been responsible for the attack.

The man with cropped, dark hair lowered his hand with a satisfied expression, before uttering a loud and forceful order behind him. Suddenly, the peak of the wall was occupied with the forms of many robed figures and pokémon that stood in readiness alongside them. Every face bore a stern glare, muscles were tensed, limbs held aloft – Caley knew the Seers and their apprentices were ready to defend the sacred monument at all costs.

A second cry spurred everyone on the boundary into a noisy, energetic flurry of action. Aura spheres charged with bolts of lightning were cast into the hybrid army - toxic barbs and fireballs were pitched amongst the fray with vehemence. Caley watched in open-mouthed awe as one of the Seers lifted her arms – harnessing the surrounding raindrops into a threatening missile shape, which her accompanying jynx hardened with ice. As this frozen projectile smashed into one of the hybrid soldiers, Caley smiled to himself. Witnessing other humans with abilities like his own - gathered in the name of preserving what was right - gave the young man a measure of encouragement.

Slowly, the doors began to edge their way open, the gap between them widening just enough for Tetor and his pokémon companions to pass through. As the claydol hovered under the archway in the wall, some

of the younger Seers paused momentarily to wave at Caley with excited cries of "You can do it!" and "We believe in you!" before getting a stern reprimand for their distractedness. No sooner had Tetor, Kota, Murdoch, Kiko and Becks entered the tower grounds, any means of entry were hurriedly concealed, while a barrage of light and energy stunned the hybrids attempting to follow.

A short distance away, Jessie and Cassidy watched from behind Soluqua and Wobuffet's combined psychic shield, their hearts sinking as their chances of rejoining Caley vanished with an echoed metallic clang.

"Caley's on his own, now," Jessie sighed, watching the hybrid soldiers battering against it with frustrated cries.

"He's got his family's pokémon with him," Cassidy remarked. "He's not vulnerable. Besides, I'd rather we were kept from going after him, if it means those creatures won't be able to do the same either." The woman let her eyes drift away from Soluqua and scale the wall. "Everyone's having enough difficulty holding them back as it is..."

She trailed off into silence, her mouth dropping open as she continued to stare through the rain as it shifted to hail yet again - studying a certain point on the boundary's peak. Two people had grabbed Cassidy's attention - a man with sleek russet-coloured hair that grew down the sides of his face in two impressive-looking sideburns and a woman with dark green eyes and long, flowing golden yellow hair. Both

stood close to one another as they yelled instructions to their obedient, determined pokémon.

A Team Rocket Commander who had been scowling upon seeing the valiant efforts being put up by the Agrarian Seers, bellowed a dismaying instruction to the hybrids near him.

"Level that blasted wall this instant! Tunnel under it, tunnel through it, tear it to pieces if you have to! We *must* bring down that tower!"

Without hesitation, a wave of spike and muscle ploughed its way into the sturdy rock of the tower boundary, as a large number of hybrids attacked in unison. The Seers atop the wall had not been prepared for such a powerful onslaught. As blow after blow landed upon the seemingly-invulnerable structure by a multitude of clawed fists, hooves and blades, some of the Agrarian Seers refocused their attacks upon the humanoid pokémon responsible for the destruction. But there just wasn't enough of them, and the dwindling support for those who had been dissuading the flying hybrids gave some of the creatures a chance to escape assault altogether.

"Cover us, Jessie!" Cassidy yelled, before she and Soluqua ran off towards the tower wall.

"What are you *doing*?" Jessie spluttered. Her legs, which had decided to hesitate less than her brain, sprung into action in pursuit of

Cassidy – taking the rest of Jessie along with them. Wobbuffet struggled along behind, giving exclamations of protest as hailstones bounced off his rubbery skin.

Throwing her webbed hands outward, Soluqua took hold of a scizor hybrid and pulled it sharply away from the wall. A humanoid primeape followed – cast into the air like a discarded ragdoll before hitting the impressive horns of a stantler hybrid a short distance away. Jessie looked on in dawning realisation as both creatures sprawled in the soaked, hail-spattered mud below.

Cassidy and Soluqua were trying, in their own little way, to reduce the amount of hybrid soldiers attacking Kemnon Tower's boundary. Yet in the process, the woman and her golduck-vapoleon companion had put themselves in the midst of the chaos.

A humanoid drapion lunged at the duo, only to bounce off a yellow tinted barrier. Cassidy looked up to see Jessie and Wobbuffet standing nearby, the latter having engaged his Counter shield.

"Better late than never, I suppose," Cassidy remarked, as Soluqua pulled a humanoid donphan away.

"Reinforce the wall!" one of the Seers shouted to their comrades from the other side. "Earth and Ice types down here on the double!"

With the majority of trainers occupied in conflicts of their own, the situation was looking increasingly grim. Jessie worriedly noted the tiny cracks beginning to snake up the wall's surface. It wasn't going to be able to take much more of this abuse.

A humanoid steelix - a creature with a long, metallic tail and a body covered in crystalline formations - emitted a harrowing cry before slamming itself into the wall's rocky surface with all its strength. Cassidy yelled in horror as the portion of wall the humanoid steelix had made impact with rapidly crumbled. Those atop it tumbled downward toward the heaving mass of hybrids forcing their way past. The golden-haired woman was falling also, her hands having failed to grasp those of the russet-haired man next to her.

Sensing Cassidy's anguish, Soluqua ran toward the descending people in a bid to catch some of them from the air using her psychic power. Cassidy dashed recklessly after Soluqua, but a sideways swipe by a passing humanoid khangaskhan knocked them both aside.

A large winged shadow leapt into view - vaulting from the shoulders of a rhyperior hybrid before stretching out its arms under the falling woman. She was grasped from the air, and her saviour opened its wings to slow its descent, before landing somewhat clumsily upon a mound of rubble - rolling over onto the grass below.

"Amandaaa!" the russet-haired man called in anguish, having missed the rescue amongst the clouds of debris and stampeding

brainwashed hybrids. Butch sat up and slowly opened his wings from where he'd wrapped them around himself and his charge in order to cushion the fall. He gazed down at Amanda with a relieved expression, tinged with pain at the sting of the hail. But the relief wasn't mutual – upon discovering exactly what it was that had her in its claws, the woman opened her mouth and uttered a bloodcurdling scream.

"Mom, it's okay!" Cassidy spluttered as she ran towards them, dodging passing figures as she went. "He's with us!"

"Wait a second," Jessie blinked. "Has my hearing been damaged by all this noise or did she just say 'mom' to that Seer lady?"

Soluqua nodded, while Wobbuffet looked on, equally surprised as his trainer. But Cassidy was no longer concerned about what Jessie may have been thinking. As the robed woman was helped to her feet, Cassidy threw both arms around her with exclamations of joy and thankfulness. Amanda pulled back for a second to examine the face of the one who'd embraced her so suddenly.

"Cassidy? Is that you?" she blinked.

"Yes, mom," came the soft, slightly guilty reply. "I...came back." She then flinched, remembering the situation they were currently in. "Caley's in danger!"

"Caley?" Amanda released her arms from around her daughter and glanced at the figures surrounding her with a questioning expression.



moments previously. He knew the feeling was not his own and yet, it did not concern him this time. During these trying circumstances, any help maintaining a positive spirit over what he was about to do was greatly appreciated.

If Caley had the time to do so, he may have stopped to admire the beauty of the surrounding scenery. The gravel path Tetor was following wound between lush green trees, with stone carvings placed in the shelter of their leafy branches. These carvings were inscribed with delicate markings, their tapered components spinning furiously on long, thin wires as the claydol and his pokémon companions flew by.

The young man felt himself lurch forward slightly as Tetor drew to a halt in the middle of the path. For a second, Caley puzzled as to the reason for this unexpected stop - then it hit him. His senses had detected a culmination of darkness, more intent on him than the chaotically stumbling presences that amassed upon the field. It shattered the previously acquired bravery, sending a chill through Caley's body. It was then that he realised - the humanoid hybrid soldiers had managed to enter the courtyard. And not only were they behind him, they were also approaching him head on.

Caley could not see the hybrids just yet, but the knowledge of their presence and no sign of an entrance to the tower was making him very anxious indeed. He swallowed nervously and glanced around, unsure of whether to continue or go back, when there was a rustle in the leaves above his head. While his recently-alerted psychic abilities detected no

threat, the rest of him tensed defensively - causing Murdoch, Kiko, Becks and Kota to do the same.

A robed male human figure with ocean blue hair descended from the branches and landed soundlessly in front of the group before glancing up. His crimson-tinted eyes met with Caley's and the young man flinched slightly in response. While they were not glazed over like those of the hybrids he had seen, there was something about them that - though trusting and kindly - appeared odd and somewhat hard to pinpoint. Yet the manner of dress greatly resembled the non battle garb of the Agrarian Seers, leading Caley to conclude this man was one of the resident students.

"Hello," he spoke up. "My name is Caley, and I need to get to the tower's peak to help with the Generation Rite. Do you know how to get into the-"

The man held up a hand, prompting Caley to fall into silence. He then turned and waved the same hand beckoningly over his shoulder, before exiting to the left, between the trees.

As he listened to the sounds of battle, remarkably dulled behind the tower's shield, Caley's mind began to wander. He hoped that his travelling companions - both human and pokémon - were making it out there on the field and not doing anything unnecessarily reckless, given the circumstances. The young man found himself overcome with guilt at

the thought of reckless actions, and his own panicked orders for Kota to teleport him despite the unstable environment.

"I'm sorry I blew up at you back there, Kota," Caley sighed.

[*It's okay. You're under a lot of pressure,*] Kota replied with admirable calmness.

"But I wasn't thinking straight," Caley insisted upsetedly. "I could have put us in a worse situation."

[*All things considered, I think you're holding yourself together well,*] Kiko pointed out. This observance was met with a rise of agreement from the rest of the pokémon.

"Thanks guys," the young man smiled, before turning back in the direction of their Agrarian Seer guide. "So...where is the tower entrance anyway?"

There was no reply. Realisation dawned on Caley that the mysterious blue-haired figure hadn't actually spoken since they'd met, and perhaps he was incapable of doing so.

"I sure hope we won't have to use any Warp Tiles," Caley remarked in unsettled tones. The Seer guide could not help but smirk to himself, but since Caley was following him and not the other way around, this reaction went unnoticed.

Pausing by a small bridge, the unidentified Seer glanced over his shoulder to make sure Caley had caught up, before turning to face the

clean, white patch of wall in front of him. Caley took this moment to peer over the side of the bridge at the rushing water below – the channel was far too narrow to serve as any protection, so Caley assumed it to be a means of keeping the gardens and those living within the tower sufficiently supplied with water. But where was it coming from? And where could it possibly go? If this wasn't confusing enough, the bridge itself appeared to lead to nowhere.

As Caley stood there wondering whether to ask his muted guide what happened next, the Seer raised his hands toward the wall. For a split second, Caley and his pokémon companions saw an odd flicker of light cross the man's back, branching out in two separate directions into mid-air. Then part of the wall began to open. It was far from how Caley expected an entryway to be revealed to him, almost as if the very stone itself was dissolving into thin air, particle by particle. Hurriedly, the Seer ushered his charge through the small gap before quickly sealing it behind them.

The relaxing sound of gushing water was the first thing to grace Caley's senses as he entered. Glancing up, the young man's eyes widened as, at last, he saw the illustrious splendour of Kemnon Tower for himself. It had seemed like forever that he had been waiting to reach this very spot, but here he was, staring into the unfathomable heights of the tower's inner structure without a word to utter over how awesome it all

was. A massive central pillar reached from the painstakingly-set mosaic floor straight into the air. Water cascaded down the sides of the pillar, reaching ground level before being carried out of sight through a multitude of tiny channels integrated with the mosaic tiles. Caley puzzled as to the source of this water, before the Seer grasped his wrist and pulled the young man toward an elevator built into the pillar's surface - re-affirming him of more important matters.

While the elevator was a considerable size, it was still not roomy enough to accommodate the bulk of a claydol's form, and as a result Tetor was forced to return to his Pokéball for the time being.

Half a minute later, the group reached the upper floors of Kemnon Tower. Here, the elevator's track ceased, leaving the long-established spiral staircase as the only means of ascent. As Caley released Tetor back into the open, he found himself gazing upon tall, ornate shelves crammed full of books. Caley admired these elevated anthologies of knowledge while the Seer raced ahead - listening sadly to the airborne creatures outside. The conflict showed no signs of ceasing, and he could tell the side he backed was losing strength.

Another round of explosions and energy blasts sent a shudder through the tower's foundations. Time was running out.

The following level presented an area with rows of chairs and a lecture platform at its forefront. Given the arrangement of this furniture

and the bold diagrams upon the walls, Caley surmised this room was used primarily for teaching. Despite the ferociousness of the outside assault, most of the articles within the tower had remained in one piece.

Caley swallowed hard as he ran past the classroom – every capable Agrarian Seer student was out there fighting to give him this opportunity. Multitudes of trainers had gathered at Alia Summit to assist them. He couldn't mess up.

A murky shroud swept over Caley and his pokémon companions as they ascended further. The stairwell was now pitch black, save for the intermittent flashes of energy that managed to permeate the tiny cracks in the tower wall. Out of the corner of his right eye, Caley spotted another, fainter glow. Tentatively approaching a small glass panel in a nearby doorway, Caley peered through it, into the area beyond. Rows upon rows of differently-coloured lights shone back at him through the darkness. As his sight grew more accustomed, Caley realised they were in fact the glowing eyes of absol statues - each standing to attention on a pedestal, in poses that displayed whole-hearted guardianship.

*I feel many tormented souls here, Tetor remarked, their deep voice hollow and unsettled. Volatile souls. Each of those statues appears to contain a living being.*

"What *kind* of living being?" Caley blinked, finding this situation quite bizarre. What purpose could those carvings possibly have, all kept together in one room?



pathway were now indistinguishable from one another, having been churned up by a number of heavy feet. Broken pieces of sculptures were littered everywhere, and the sandstorm from outside was blasting through areas where the wall had collapsed.

"Looks like a whole unit got in after that kid," Jessie grimaced, while Amanda glanced with a heavy expression at the state of the surroundings.

"Let's hope that Luthor found him first," she remarked.

"Who?" Cassidy blinked.

"Luthor is one of the Elite Guard's attendants," Amanda told her.

"The Elite Guard..." Jessie processed this title. "Rose spoke about them earlier! They're the last challengers for trainers to battle in the Totto Expedition, aren't they?"

"Indeed they are," Amanda nodded. "But that is only half of their job. They are also entrusted with keeping watch over the sacred artefacts at Kemnon Tower's peak. And right now, they are waiting for Caley to initiate the Generation Rite. The rest of us focused on keeping these unwanted visitors out. Seems we had underestimated the force of Team Rocket's army, though."

Cassidy sighed. She and the others had been aware it was going to be harsh, but even this level of power was unprecedented.

"In any case, the best action we can take is keep things standing long enough for Caley to do what he came here for," she said at last. "And that includes ourselves."

The conflict had been generating a massive amount of debris, but nothing had prepared Errol and Cory for a human being slamming into the reinforced glass of the mecha's windscreen. It took a moment for the man and his pokémon companion to focus, by which point they realised the person that had hit their vehicle was none other than James. Hurriedly, they dragged James' bruised and dirt-stricken body inside the mecha cockpit. Whatever had caused the impact had knocked him temporarily unconscious.

"Alright kid, I'm gonna need you to access da mech's scanners," Errol informed Cory sternly. "See if you can locate da others."

"Okay," Cory nodded. The zecutylnr-in-human-form placed their hands on the mecha's dashboard, and the screens lit up with an array of information. The visuals were somewhat glitchy, dictating a measure of interference. Fuzzy snapshots of Caley, Adam, Denise, Jessie, Rose, Mondo, Butch, Cassidy and their accompanying pokémon flickered past, one after another - captured images from Cory's own memory being utilised by the system.

James began to stir. Noticing the surroundings, he flinched into a state of semi alertness, only to see Errol and breathe a heavy sigh of relief.

"Takin' a blast off wit'out da rest of us, eh Jimmy?" Errol joked.

"How on Oci..." James trailed off, rubbing the back of his neck and glancing around the mecha cockpit.

"Oh ya mean dis ol' t'ing?" Errol clarified. "Helps to have an experienced hacker on board."

The dashboard emitted a succession of beeps, generating a crude map of the landscape with multiple red dots.

"Rose, Tate and Sia are on the field," Cory reported. "They seem to be battling alongside some of the Gym Leaders. Denise, Chime, Growlie, Cyzel and Adam are near the tower wall. As for everyone else...I can't see them."

"Do you think they're-" James grimaced, fearing the worst.

"No. I'd still be able to see them even if they *were* dead," Cory told him bluntly. "At least if they were dead out here on the field. I can only assume they made it inside the tower grounds."

"Then we need to help out the others," James insisted.

"I'm with you on dat, James," Errol nodded. "But we can't help Rose an' Tate *and* Adam an' Denise. Dey're too far apart from each other!"

"True," James looked downcast. "Let's get to Adam and Denise. Rose and Tate are in strong company."

"I'm picking up a direct communication signal from one of the other mecha," Cory informed.

"We're gettin' hailed," Errol stated with morbid acceptance.

"We can't answer that!" James spluttered. "If we do, they'll know this mech's been hijacked for sure!"

"And dey'll get suspicious if we *don't* reply!" Errol cried. The machine staggered to one side as a projectile exploded against its surface.

"Something tells me they already made up their minds!" James yelled, as warning lights started flashing inside the cockpit. "I think we better get out of here!"

The trio leapt from the mecha, seconds before it burst into a colourful array of sparks and metal components. Surrounded with a barrier generated by Cory-in-auprentus-form, they landed heavily amongst the clashing soldiers. Following a single bounce, Cory disengaged the shield and brought Errol and James to their feet using telekinesis, where they immediately began running for the tower. Cory pursued them by hovering - deflecting stray blows and attacks. Such was the chaos, the trio passed by relatively unnoticed.

Cory was the first to pick out Denise and Adam's shapes near the tower wall. Adam was clinging fearfully to Cyzel as the arcumese ducked and dodged the turmoil of limbs and energy - searching for a break in the wall to pass through into the garden beyond. Growlie kept close behind with Denise holding Chime astride his back, Rilly having been returned to his Pokéball in order to keep him with the group. They dashed swiftly through a partly-sealed opening, which James, Errol and Cory managed to follow through moments before the Agrarian Seers and their pokémon associates surrounding the wall closed the remaining gap with liberal applications of ice and rock.

But it was a futile endeavour. No sooner that that hole had been repaired, a humanoid steelix rammed its way through another portion of the wall nearby, scattering debris. With an upward sweep of its muscular arms, the creature lifted a solid barrier amongst the group. Cyzel was thrust aside as the rising wall of earth caught him a glancing blow - throwing Adam from the arcumese's back in the process. The two figures lay there in the churned up mud, covered in gashes and filth, the sounds of remorseless fighting ringing in their ears. They had been separated from the others, yet Adam was too weak to call their names. He'd never be heard anyway.

Forms of bloodstained human and pokémon were strewn along the base of the tower wall, having been toppled from their perches in their determination to preserve what was left of that boundary. Part of Adam wanted to run over and check whether they were still alive, but he

remained immobile - a mixture of fear at the possibility of discovering they were not, and sheer helplessness at the entire situation. His watery eyes saw only the damage of a tumultuous battle and his heart, having forgotten his own existence for just a moment, crumpled in despair at witnessing something so wrong, so pointless.

He couldn't fight any more. More than that, he didn't *want* to.

\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*

Darius Mayhew expected to have felt triumphant at the things he saw. He thought he should have been thankful, even proud to have been one of those leading an army of the most powerful fighting entities known to mankind. But as the man strode firmly around the tower perimeter, watching these entities tearing into vigilant human and pokémon opposition without a single thought for their actions, he felt nothing but confusion.

For years, his morals had been forcibly smothered by duty and a wilful desire to prove his father wrong. To prove that he could make something of himself. And what *had* he made of himself? Nothing but an object of fear and hatred, even to his own son. To think he was even a *part* of such carnage... Darius swallowed hard as unsettling emotions began to clutch at his gut. The pressing voice of his conscience was louder now, angrier, harder to ignore.

A strangled cry caused Darius to stop in his tracks and glance around. Nothing posed any physical danger to him upon the field, as a Team Rocket Elite operative and army officer he was fully equipped with the toughest shield generator on the market. But what Darius saw in that moment was enough to shatter whatever remained of the barricade holding back his sense of righteousness. There, locked in the tight grasp of a humanoid glalie's claw, was the son he thought he'd lost. Nearby, the arcumese Darius had given to his son to train was lying helpless upon the ground - trapped inside a thickening icy cocoon, its eyes barely open.

"Stop!" Darius yelled, almost tripping over the remnants of leftover stone in his frantic attempts to get closer to the humanoid glalie. The ashen-skinned creature glanced over its shoulder, its red eyes flaring behind the blue of its mask-like outer shell, but did not loosen its grip - it was at this point the man realised he needed to calm down and regain control of himself. All soldier programming had been designed not only to ignore commands from anyone other than Team Rocket army leaders, but also to override orders from said leaders that would constitute an act of mercy. Such orders were easy to detect from a panicked tone of voice such as the one Darius had used previously.

"Listen to me, HS-362!" the man reiterated, this time in a more forceful tone. "Release that boy immediately!"

But the damage had already been done. No longer trusting the authenticity of Darius' instruction, the humanoid glalie opened its sizeable black rutted jaw and uttered a loud screech before unleashing a blast of

ice at its perceived threat. Darius threw himself to one side, the frozen energy coursing over his head in the process. It seemed a more direct method of preventing further harm to Adam would be in order. Not that the man was comfortable with the Plan B he had in mind – it had been a good few years since he'd put his soccer skills to use.

Praying that his accuracy was still as good as he remembered it, Darius dematerialized his shield, picked up a chunk of debris in one gloved hand and hurriedly stood up before tossing the item towards his right foot. The resulting kick gave the debris enough force to fly straight at the hybrid's face, ricocheting off the creature's forehead horn and causing it to release its human cargo. No sooner had the adolescent's violently-coughing body hit the ground, than Darius gave an almighty shout.

"Adam, **RUN!**"

Adam staggered blearily to his feet, aware that someone had yelled at him, but unable to make out whom it was that had done so. Despite the voice triggering memories in his mind, they were as blurred and indistinct as the boy's vision. Darius cursed under his breath while his son retrieved his pokémon and hobbled down the path - longing to go with him to make sure he would survive, yet annoyed with himself for sealing his own fate. The humanoid glalie wasn't about to wait for attentions to be returned to it, however. Darius cried out in alarm as the

creature hit his lower limbs with another blast of ice, freezing the man to the spot.

So this was how it was going to end. Darius forced himself to keep a grasp on some shred of determination as the hybrid creature advanced on him, but that determination was fading fast. He knew he only had himself to blame for the situation he was in. It was everyone for themselves in Team Rocket – none of the commanding officers would even think of rebelling against their own organization to rescue him from his own fate. Why *would* they? With the death of a 'comrade', there would be more glory and accolades to fall to them. And who amongst the resistance would possibly want to rescue someone who had helped command the hybrid army in the first place?

"HEY! Get over here, ya walkin' hot tub!"

Darius' eyes widened as he heard the sound of a man's voice - distant, raised and laced with a thick Kantoan accent. The owner of the voice ran into view with an unidentified violet pokémon at his side, chased angrily by a humanoid camerupt. The violet pokémon floated higher into the air, drawing the camerupt hybrid's attention as the latter prepared a searing hot blast of flame. Just as the creature unleashed the flamethrower, the violet pokémon darted aside, leaving the fiery plume to continue its course. The humanoid glalie uttered a screech as its upper body was enveloped in superheated glow. It then charged at the

humanoid camerupt, thrusting the creature back at one of the parts of the wall still standing.

Noting the two hybrids were distracted, Errol and Cory hastily approached Darius. The man glanced up in shock as the pokémon which was once an aurentus began to glow bright white, shifting to a quadrupedal form. Cory, now a growlithe, blew a light flame from their mouth - enough to melt the ice surrounding Darius' legs without burning him.

"I don't..." he began, a little shakily.

"Don't understand why we're helpin' ya?" Errol finished the sentence. "We noticed your little act back dere, savin' Adam. You seem to have had a change o' heart about da whole woild domination thing."

"We hope you're not going to prove us otherwise," Cory frowned. The sound of a human language being uttered from the growlithe's muzzle caused Darius to go rigid. Errol chuckled at this response, before he turned to leave.

"Everyone deserves a second chance, right?" Errol called with a grin. "Make us proud, okay?"

"Don't be such a lousy dad this time!" Cory chipped in. The two figures dashed off without hesitation.

*It seems I've been given one last chance, Darius thought to himself as he ran back through the tower grounds. I never set out to do these things, but pride got in the way of what was most important in my life. This time, I'm not going to make that mistake. For Janice, for Adam... and all those wanting some justice in the world.*

\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*

It was only at this point, as Caley continued to follow his silent companion higher into the tower, that he noticed something unusual about the Seer's movements. While the edges of the robe he wore flapped and waved with his hasty ascent, his legs barely seemed to move and his feet glided over every passing step. Caley came to the conclusion that the man was a psychic Cho'moken user just like himself, and silently wished he knew how to use telekinesis to scale a staircase - just as Kota, Tetor, Kiko and Murdoch did.

*This man...* Murdoch frowned at his pokémon companions, his mindvoice at a whisper. *He is not what he seems.*

*Is he dangerous?* Kota eyed the alakazam.

*I do not think so,* Murdoch shook his head. *But I am going by Aura senses alone. He would notice if I tried looking into his mind.*

*It's not exactly polite anyway,* Kiko remarked. Tetor gave a rumble of agreement, though he couldn't help wonder whether politeness counted for much in the midst of a battleground.

A throbbing, prickly aura surrounded Caley, his pokémon companions and their guide as they reached the next floor of Kemnon Tower. The young man winced, turning his head to seek out the origin of a loud, ethereal humming. The tower's main central pillar had branched out into several smaller supporting beams here, and held snugly amongst the axis of these beams was a radiant, blue orb. This artefact was about the size of a beach ball and its pulsing energies within gave the appearance of it almost being alive somehow. But something appeared wrong. The energy pulses were sharp and erratic - arcing their way from the core of the orb around its spherical surface. The Seer froze before Caley, an expression of horror overcoming his pained features. Silently but firmly, he pointed towards Caley then waved his left arm towards the continuing staircase.

"You want me to keep going?" Caley deduced. The Seer nodded, before waving in the direction of the staircase even more urgently. Caley hesitated for a moment, leading the Seer to reach out and give the young man a gentle push, until Caley's feet remembered what they were supposed to be doing and started walking. Whatever the Seer wished to do, he didn't want Caley and his pokémon to be present for it. Not that they really had any spare time to observe anyway. Yet even so, Caley

couldn't help but pause halfway up the staircase, before the lower floor was blotted out of sight by the floor above.

The Seer approached the crystal with his arms lifted, and as he did so, the man's entire body rose steadily into the air. While Caley watched in awe, the flicker of light he had seen pass across the Seer's back earlier happened again - this time rising in its intensity. Two long, thin blue wings emerged from the Seer's shoulder blades as the shimmering light passed over his entire body, encompassing his human features. The glow faded to reveal a long-necked birdlike pokémon with tiny feet hidden amongst its bushy blue tail feathers, a short pair of forearms and red-coloured triangle upon its chest.

This unidentified creature plunged their arms forward, catching a bolt of energy projected from the orb while uttering a loud, high-pitched cry. The creature's face scrunched into a mixture of pain and determination as the energy surrounded them. Caley's eyes widened in horror, feeling himself compelled to run back down the stairs and assist, but he had been told to continue on. Besides that, the young man wasn't even sure what his previously human-shaped guide was doing, or even what the unstable-looking sphere of energy happened to be. He tried to console himself with the knowledge that the Seer had to have lived here for some time, and also knew the answers to both those questions.

*[Go! All of you!]*

The desperate mindvoice had not been from any of his pokémon - it appeared that the creature had realised he was being watched. Reluctantly, Caley pulled his gaze away and ascended the remainder of the staircase, in pursuit of Kota, Kiko, Murdoch, Becks and Teter.

\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*~\*\*~\*\*\*

"The shield is weakening! They've broken through the outer boundary!" came the anxious exclamation from a passing Seer to Caley's companions as they brushed themselves down. Despite the small triumph of regrouping, they had lost the precious minutes they'd so badly required to catch up with their friend.

"But how?" Amanda looked bereft. "That shield is maintained by an Ignicite core at the tower's peak. The only way it can be disabled is from the *inside*!"

"Judging from da electrical feedback I was seeing, looks like it's dealing wit' some kinda power overload," Errol said.

"At any rate, it's not good news," Rose concluded. "If Kemnon's shield fails, there'll be very little we can do to keep those hybrids from flying into the tower."

"In which case, we need to get up there and take out those airborne hybrids!" Jessie announced firmly. Cassidy and Amanda stared at her in shock.

"It would be at great risk to your lives," the latter insisted.

"Nothing *this* trio hasn't experienced before," James grinned. "We laugh in the face of danger!"

"Yeah, shortly before danger gives us a good slap in da mug," Errol remarked, side-eyeing his companion.

"And how do you all expect us to get up there, huh?" Cassidy inquired. Jessie and James exchanged glances, their mouths open slightly in an attempt to respond to this question. But they had no answer between them, and slumped in defeat.

A sudden alteration in wind strength caused everyone to duck instinctively. One of the Team Rocket aircraft had lowered itself in dangerously close proximity to the tower base.

"Get in!" Darius yelled over the noise of the aircraft's whipping blades. "You want to catch up with that kid, right? I can take some of you there!"

"Yeah, right!" Adam shouted back. "Do we look stupid?"

"Hold on, you guys," Errol spoke up, noticing the suspicious glowers on many of the group's faces. "We don't have dat many options here. Besides, I t'ink ya dad's bein' genuine, Adam."

"Wh-what?" Adam looked at Errol like he'd just gone crazy.

"He saved you from a glalie hybrid earlier," Cory exclaimed.

"Bringing this aircraft down here is putting him at risk, he wouldn't go to all this trouble just to double cross us."

Soluqua nodded in agreement. She could sense a great deal of guilt and regret from Darius, but nothing malicious or harbouring ulterior motive.

"Look, do you want to get up the tower fast or not?" Darius asked, a mixture of frustration and anxiety in his voice. "I can't stay here for long before the other commanders realise something's fishy and shoot me out of the sky!"

That statement was enough. With a boost from Soluqua's telekinesis, Rose and Sia leapt into the open bay door of the aircraft. Denise and Rilly followed.

"Two more, that's all!" Darius bellowed.

The others exchanged awkward glances. Jessie and James looked at each other for a moment, before giving a unified nod and stepping away from the aircraft - Wobbuffet and Growlie doing the same shortly after. Errol noticed this action and reversed a couple of steps until he was standing beside his long-term companions. Mondo placed a hand upon Cory's shoulder and stepped back also, leading the zecutylnr-in-human-form to do the same. After a short hesitation, Butch and Cassidy resigned themselves to staying on the ground.



down his forehead. Surely he was at the top now – if he wasn't, then chances at succeeding would be even slimmer than they were before. It was hard not to get discouraged.

"At last, you have arrived," came a voice from somewhere above him. Caley and his pokémon looked up in surprise to see a wide-shouldered man in his early fifties, standing a little further ahead on the staircase, wearing a welcoming smile. The man bore a shock of cinnamon coloured hair with golden flecks, which splayed outward in several directions like the petals of an opening flower bud. He was dressed in trousers, boots and a deep red long-sleeved shirt emblazoned with a dark image that resembled a boat. In his hand he clasped a staff with a rectangular lantern at its tip - inside the lantern burned a small but vivid flame.

"You spoke..." Caley blinked as he approached. This caused the man to chuckle heartily.

"That surprised you?" he inquired, before realising the reason for Caley's astonishment. "But of course, Luthor brought you here."

"So that was his name..." Caley acknowledged. "Is he a pokémon? I've never seen anything like him before."

"Yes. The Lati are pokémon of the most sacred order, usually they keep to their own portion of the universe," came the warm reply as the man turned and began striding back up the stairs from where he had come. Caley and his pokémon companions followed. "But if any do visit

here, they most always keep out of the sight of humans. You are privileged to have seen Luthor's latios form."

The man pushed open a tall, wooden door before walking through it, prompting Caley and his pokémon companions to enter also. Caley's hands had been shaking violently with his nervousness not long before reaching this point, but as he passed into the room, those feelings of worry began to melt away. He now stood at the edge of a huge pyramid shaped-structure, with walls composed of a glass-like substance. Caley wasn't entirely sure whether it *was* glass, since the surface of it sparkled and shimmered in a way he'd never seen a normal window do before. Round the edges of this two hundred metre square room, ornate lamps hung from metallic stands, bathing the area in a gentle glow. Somehow, the light and sound from the outside world could neither be seen nor heard here.

Poised near one of the windows, watching the battle persist outside with a serious expression, was a woman in her late thirties with long yellow hair, tied into a braid that reached her lower back. Near the end of this braid was a silver clasp set with a red and blue panel. The woman was dressed in the same red uniform as the man who had led Caley to the room was wearing. Next to her stood another, younger looking woman with crimson hair, dressed in a light brown robe. Upon realising a group of figures had entered the room, the two figures turned

from the window - the furrowed brow of the yellow-haired woman softening a little into an expression of gratitude.

"My name's Merto Audera," the man told Caley. "I am a member of Kemnon Tower's Elite Guard. This is Tezura Eress."

"The other member," the woman smiled, as she approached. "And this is my assistant, Rosu."

Caley was lost for words. To be in the presence of the Elite Guard, a duo of Agrarian Seers unlike any other in Kemnon Tower, was something that he had anticipated for a long time. Never in his wildest dreams could the young man have expected to be meeting them under such circumstances. A month ago, everything seemed peaceful, idyllic, carefree, and that was how Caley had been also. He was a somewhat different person now - tempered by the events he had seen and experienced - a little more cautious, stern, resolved.

"It...it is an honour to meet you," he choked out at last, removing his glasses and placing them in his jacket pocket.

"The feeling is mutual, I'm sure," Merto insisted. "The feet of a Nexus have not graced this room for centuries, especially not those of Ahnloka."

Caley shifted awkwardly from one side to the other. He still bore those acquired titles with hesitancy and doubt. Even now, after all he had been through, the young man did not feel equal to the revered figures

that stood before him. But this didn't mean he wasn't going to back away from what had been asked of him.

"What do you need me to do?" he inquired softly. Tezura directed his attention to the centre of the room. Here, a marble statue of a humanoid creature with long, flowing hair was placed. Thin, wing-like protrusions spanned their way behind the creature's body - each set with glittering violet stones along their outer edges. Caley moved forward, captivated by the beauty of such articles. The creature's form was familiar, not unlike one of the images Caley had seen painted on the wall at Coalef Repository, in the hierarchy of legendary pokémon. Clashed between this creature's hands was a beautiful crystal in the same shade as the statue's décor, almost two feet in height.

Letting his gaze fall to the bottom of the statue, Caley noticed a small placard covered in text:

*Arceus - The first conduit. Let us not forget its past nobilities in bringing life energy to our world.*

"Stand upon that platform before the statue," Tezura explained. "Reach into yourself, and activate your psychic Cho'moken. Then the Generation Rite shall begin."

Caley longed to ask many questions. Why was this carving of Arceus bipedal and not the four-legged equine beast he had seen in all of his school textbooks? What was meant by 'the first conduit', by bringing life energy to Oci? And most pressingly of all, what had been the purpose



The creature was caught a glancing blow across its wings, diverting its course slightly to the right. Glancing up in surprise, the veteran trainer caught sight of Rose and Sia leaning slightly out of the open door of the aircraft. Rose smiled and gave a thumbs up, which the trainer returned with a thankful grin. Then it was back to battle and, in the case of the aircraft, back to attempting ascent.

"What is your friend going to do?" Darius inquired with a distant air to his voice, his focus remaining on the scene through the helicopter windshield.

"Try and contact a being with the power to stop these armies," Rose explained.

"Hmmm...well I hope there is still one Team Rocket hasn't sealed away," Darius remarked.

"It would have been impossible for Team Rocket to interfere with this being," Rose smiled.

"Good," Darius replied, his expression unchanging. "Because this has got out of hand."

"Pity you didn't realise that earlier," Adam snorted from the rear seat of the craft.

"It wouldn't have made a difference," Darius mumbled.

"How can you say that?!" Adam exploded. "Mum would have been *alive*, that would have been the difference!"

"Would she?" Darius snapped in return. "*Would* she? You were too young to understand what was at stake, Adam!"

"I was old enough to understand you were standing there doing *nothing!*" Adam yelled.

"And you think I wanted to?" Darius retorted at equal volume. "Don't you realise the pain I felt, watching that horrible machine at work? Knowing that any protest would have been the end for me too, that you would be left an orphan?"

Adam opened his mouth, his gut churning with fury and sadness and a number of other emotions he couldn't put his finger on. His initial response was to say that for all the good Darius had done, he may as well have been an orphan. But he caught the look in Cyzel's eyes as the arcumese gazed at him, and for the first time the youth could remember, he paused. And he thought. And he fell silent.

The emotion still remained, but Adam had not leapt to deliver his first reaction as he had done so many times before. Darius may not have been able to grasp what his son had been through, but neither could Adam comprehend exactly what Darius had suffered either. And it wasn't true that Darius had *completely* neglected him - he had allowed Cyzel to be with Adam, after all. In a way, Cyzel was the thread that had tied Adam and his father together all this time.

Adam reached distractedly for Cyzel's Pokéball, only to curse loudly and wrench his hand back in alarm as the article seared his fingers.

Glancing down, Adam yelled as he found himself looking at a sphere glowing white hot - this elevated temperature rapidly dissolving through his belt.

The acrid smell of burnt leather filled the aircraft as Cyzel's Pokéball dropped to the metal-plated floor and rolled across it. Rilly squealed, waving his flippers at his Pokéball on Denise's person, which had also begun to glow. Ripping her belt free and tossing it out of the open aircraft hatch, Denise looked at Rose anxiously, as Rilly doused the flames on his trainer's clothing.

Then a bolt of electricity snapped at Darius from the aircraft dashboard. Red lights began to flash as several indicator dials in front of the man steadily climbed towards danger levels.

"What's happening?" Adam exclaimed, unable to keep the fear from his voice, while Rose held Sia's Pokéball aloft, encased in ice which the scorching heat was already rapidly melting through.

"Some kind of energy overload!" Darius cried. "I don't know where it's coming from, but it's making this aircraft dangerously unstable!"

Denise looked out of the window to see one of the Team Rocket craft nearby - its black outer shell emitting smoke and white sparks. As the blades drew to a standstill, the pilot was seen leaping from the doorway and engaging their jetpack in order to escape.

The sky was filled with hundreds of tiny lights, descending steadily towards earth. At first, Denise couldn't work out exactly what these

curious lights happened to be. Yet as she continued to stare in horror, she witnessed one of the nearby trainers struggle to release a shuckle from an iridescent Pokéball, before throwing the article away.

These bizarre electronic malfunctions hadn't just happened to them. They were happening to everyone.

"We have to go!" Denise cried.

"How?" Adam responded at similar volume. "We jump out at this height and we're all gonna die!"

"Check under the seats!" Darius urged. "There could be stuff we can use to help."

Rose glanced back and forth across the sky from her vantage point at the helicopter door, pressing her mind for a solution. Adam was right – there was no way they could make it without something to slow or cushion their fall.

"Get over here!" a male voice was heard from somewhere outside the helicopter. The veteran upon his swallow had returned – his call had not been to Rose, but over his shoulder at other skyborne trainers.

"These people need help!"

But no one responded – they were too occupied with the falling debris or the continuing fighting to be of any use. The veteran glanced back at Rose, his eyes full of worry. Then a rush of air crossed the swallow's left hand side. Expecting an attack, the veteran saw a youth dressed in flight leathers, sat astride a salamence.

"Alyth!" Rose exclaimed in a mixture of surprise and joy. The girl eyed her in puzzlement – without the wig, Rose's identity as a visitor to her Gym was obscured. Regardless of the confusion, Alyth wasn't about to waste time with conversation. She waved an arm towards herself and the dragonite flying alongside her, prompting Rose to look back into the helicopter at her companions.

Denise and Adam had been watching this development intently, and quickly dashed to the side of the aircraft with Rilly and Cyzel, while Darius struggled to keep everything steady. With expert control, the salamence manoeuvred itself as close to the helicopter door as possible. Taking a breath, Adam leapt – landing haphazardly upon his chest over the salamence's back. Denise followed, and with her two young passengers astride, Alyth pulled away to allow her dragonite companion to draw closer.

<You're next,> Cyzel told Rilly, as the dragonite tilted to one side to allow for a passenger upon his back.

<Wh-What?> Rilly stammered.

<Just go!> the arcumese urged, giving his companion a firm shove. Rilly thumped across the dragonite's shoulders before quickly whirling round and nervously clasping his flippers around the light type pokémon's neck.

"Come on!" Rose shouted in Darius' direction. The man locked the steering column in some vague hope that it would keep the helicopter

straight long enough for Rose, Cyzel and himself to evacuate it, and left the driver's seat – moments before Rose jumped from the helicopter and towards the dragonite's waiting grasp.

The helicopter tipped sharply, causing Darius to stumble and Cyzel to be flung in reverse. He threw his front paws out with claws extended and grabbed the edge of the doorway, as the aircraft's descent increased in velocity.

Looking up in alarm, the arcumese saw the darkened shadow of a swellow's underbelly coming towards him – claws spread wide. The swellow latched onto Cyzel's front legs and dragged the pokémon free of the helicopter.

<Saw you were having a bit o' trouble!> the swellow yelled over the whirling gusts. Cyzel could barely feel the large avian's grip on his upper body, as he watched the helicopter plummeting towards the ground below.

<My friend's dad is still inside!> he exclaimed desperately.

<What?> the swellow looked aghast, glancing from left to right for a solution. Alyth's salamence had been struggling to maintain its position in the air nearby – its passengers jostling worriedly in an attempt to see the outcome of the ailing helicopter. <Take this pokémon from me!> the swellow screeched in the dragon's direction, causing its trainer to flinch in alarm. <NOW!>



conscious responses kicked in and he remembered to form a barrier around himself. A pigeon hybrid flung its body from the cloud of debris, swatting Rosu aside with its blue-tipped wings and diving for Tezura, uttering a bloodthirsty screech. Tezura reached over her shoulder with one hand, palm open. An arc of electricity coursed from the grey device tied to her hair, up into her outstretched fingers. The woman swung round and, with a sharp yell, thrust the amplified thunderbolt across the room at the humanoid pigeon. Nearby, Merto ducked and dodged the violent stabs of a beedrill hybrid's spear-like arms - manipulating the flame from the staff in his hand into vivid fiery blasts.

Had it been any other time, Caley would have been awestruck with the discovery of Tezura and Merto's Cho'moken abilities. But as it stood, he was struck with entirely different emotions - those of fear, confusion and, surprisingly to himself, anger at something so important being disrupted.

A humanoid absol swooped in on blanched wings like a portent of death, but a blast of light type energy caught the creature a glancing blow on the side of the face. Shielding his eyes from the dusty swirl, Caley looked up to see the female Seer had vanished, and in her place was a white-headed Lati with a blue triangular chest-marking surrounded by red feathers. Luthor was now also present in the room, also in his pokémon form. A humanoid metagross swiped for Luthor with two of its four bulky upper limbs, causing the pokémon to nimbly swung aside and open his jaw, crimson eyes backlit by a vivid aura. White dots of energy

began to form in front of the latios' mouth, turning to purple as they culminated into a sphere. The sphere erupted forward into a beam, making impact with the humanoid metagross and throwing it back through the hole in the tower wall. But its deterrence was momentary, flying back towards the tower with other hybrids in pursuit.

"You must start the rite *now*, Caley!" Tezura yelled, without taking her eyes off the approaching throng. This sudden, forceful tone from a person who had been talking calmly just moments before, was enough to spur Caley into action.

Hybrid soldiers which overheard Tezura's insistent shout, tensed themselves with volatile growling – processing the name of this fleeing young man, aligning it with the image data that had been previously fed into their minds. It took but a second for them to conclude that here was the primary threat to Team Rocket's success.

Caley's panicked dash for the platform was swiftly cut short, as another humanoid metagross slammed itself into his path and roared intimidatingly. Before he had a chance to react, the humanoid metagross was shoved away by Tetor who plunged his rock-like body into the hybrid's side like a battering ram.

Catching his breath and giving silent thanks to the claydol for their assistance, Caley proceeded into a run – only to stumble backwards as a humanoid scizor dived for him. One of the creature's open claws grazed Caley's arm, tearing through the fabric of his jacket. Caley swung round

just in time to see Becks leap into the air with a shrill cry – pouncing upon the humanoid scizor with claws shrouded in Aura.

To Caley, the distance between himself and the Generation Rite platform seemed insurmountably large at this point. Hybrid after hybrid tried to put a stop to his advancement, only to be intercepted by the pokémon who had accompanied him.

Murdoch, adept in manipulating opponents' strengths against them, had been at a disadvantage with some of his abilities suppressed by the environment. Instead, he turned to using himself to lure hybrid soldiers into the path of his team-mates. Kiko attacked with vigour – flinging gritty shards at her opponents and pounding them with both feet. Despite the edge the hybrids displayed, the four veteran pokémon battled valiantly – their bodies wracked with cuts and bruises, perspiration streaming down their cheeks. Even Kota, the least experienced of Caley's pokémon companions, fought with everything he'd learned.

Rosu and Luthor had repositioned themselves either side of the platform and the statue erected over it - trying their utmost to keep the ensemble in tact by blocking those who attempted to break it apart. Caley glanced from the surrounding chaos, to the platform he was just a few steps away from – wrestling with an urge to fight alongside the others. But they'd been putting their all into keeping the hybrids away from him – to allow him access to the one place he was needed most.

The young man stumbled across to the platform and lowered his head, shutting his eyes and trying to force the terrifying sounds of the conflict around him from his mind in order to access his psychic Cho'moken. The tower was shaking now, every vibration feeling more unstable than the last.

### ***Caley!***

Jolted from his attempted focus, Caley opened his eyes just in time to see Kiko throw herself in front of him, as a shaft of white hot energy launched across the room in his direction. The grumpig engaged her Protect shield which the energy struck with ferocity. For a split second, Caley found himself caught in a window of Deja Vu - a flashback to that moment Kiko had tried to shield him from Tamesis' negatic, just weeks earlier. The expression of stress and desperation on Kiko's face was very much the same, the Protect shield beginning to shudder and crack with the energy's force.

But this time, he wasn't powerless to do something about it.

As the shield splintered under the pressure of the blast, Kiko braced herself for the inevitable pain of impact. But nothing happened. Her vision was suddenly awash with a semi-transparent blue. Glancing sideways, Kiko's mouth fell open at seeing Caley, his teeth grit with

exertion, wrestling the remaining might of the energy blast as it scattered its way across a large blade of Aura projected from his hands.

A stray shot reflected from the Aura blade and glanced the top of the Arceus statue, breaking the hands from the statue's wrists. The crystal the statue had been holding was thrown into the air, landing heavily on the floor a few metres away. Gasping in horror at seeing the relinquished crystal, Caley left the platform and attempted to weave through the tangle of bodies in order to reach it.

Then the floor vanished.

The whole room lurched sideways, structurally weakened by the ferocity of the conflict – its pyramid-shaped roof wresting itself from its supports and casting those under it into the night sky. Some of the hybrids were able to regain flight and escaped unharmed, while others were caught in the roof's descent – ensnared under the translucent glass.

Amongst the bitter wind, Caley discovered himself to be falling, the violet crystal just metres away from him. Urging his Aura back into action, the young man formed a hand from energy and reached out, grasping at the crystal before drawing it back and clutching it protectively to his chest. With the tower pinnacle now decimated by the hybrids, Caley was at a loss as to what to do next. All he could think about was protecting the crystal which now lay in his arms. Maybe if he was strong enough, he could form a shield and cushion some of the blow. But would

it honestly make any difference from this height? And what of the others?

Where were his father's pokémon, where were Kiko...

...and Kota?

All of these pokémon had tried to engage their telekinesis in order to slow their descent and that of those near them, but had come up against resistance. A deep, menacing resistance, like the very earth itself was denying them access to this power. Kota recalled this sensation from when he had attempted to teleport with Caley, and was quick to cease what he was doing. It was impossible to see his human companion amongst the falling rubble and harsh gales.

As Merto and Tezura fell, Luthor and Rosu flew down to them - reaching out their arms in unison, in order to deliver their associates from a certain fate.

"Go to the Ahnloka's aid!" Tezura shouted insistently, over the swirling wind. "He needs to finish the Generation Rite, or there will be no hope!"

"Kuuu!" Rosu cried fearfully.

"If we must go, then it shall be a worthy sacrifice!" Merto urged.

"Kruuu-kuuu!" Luthor told his associate, who nodded with a sad expression, and the two Lati soared away at speed. Flying amongst the cloud of debris, they sought out a large, pearlescent fan-shaped artefact that was toppling with the pyramid's other remains. Grasping the item in unison, the pokémon drew themselves together side by side, swooped

downward under Caley's falling body and caught the young man and his jewelled cargo from the air before rising back upward.

"What are you doing?" Caley spluttered, glancing down at the combined bodies of the Latias and Latios beneath him. "What about the others?"

*Please, resume the rite, young Ahnloka,* Rosu spoke, her mindvoice soft and caressing.

"But how?" Caley down in disbelief that the Lati were asking such things of him while he was being held in midair. "Those creatures smashed the room apart!"

*You have Jirachi, we have the Incandium blade,* Luthor explained hurriedly. *That is all we need.*

"Jirachi...?"

He had not stopped to examine the surface of the crystal before, yet - as Caley tilted it slightly to the left - he caught a fleeting glimpse of something within. A tiny figure with a star-shaped head crest decorated in green tassels was encased behind the translucent surface, caught in a state of suspended animation.

Caley felt a deep warmth through the crystal's surface, a living glow that surged into his hands, up his arms and through the rest of his body. He closed his eyes - somehow, suspended in mid-air amongst the



Denise, Rose, Adam, Darius and their pokémon had barely reached solid ground, when they witnessed the horrifying sight unfolding overhead. One moment, the pyramid-shaped formation of Kemnon Tower's peak was standing, the next, it had been thrust from the pinnacle of the building - torn from its vantage point and reduced to pieces amongst a merciless cloud of humanoid hybrid pokémon. Momentarily, a bright blue sphere had hung in the air like a tiny star before winking into nothingness - leaving the remains of the structure to fall for what seemed like a gut-churningly long time before hitting the earth with a series of loud, scattered thuds.

All at once, the hybrids upon the battlefield halted their attacks - reaching up their clawed hands to grasp at their heads in pain. Airborne trainers riding atop their pokémon had glanced around them in shock, as the soldiers they had previously clashed with became rigid - toppling out of the sky as if shot, wailing and roaring.

While the remaining Team Rocket commanders stood aghast, some attempting to bellow further orders at their afflicted soldiers, many of the trainers and Seers dashed over to the wreckage of the tower pinnacle in order to look for survivors. With no access to telekinesis, combat and earth type pokémon were instead ushered in to help dislodge the rubble.

Paying little attention to the dangerous environment and her battered limbs begging for reprieve, Denise half-ran, half-staggered over to the scene of most activity - with her accomplices close behind. An onix

and two machokes heaved a particularly large slab of concrete aside, to reveal Merto, Tezura and Becks huddled together in a crater, surrounded by Kota, Kiko, Tetor and Murdoch. The lattermost of these pokémon was grasping a cracked opalescent sphere, the size of a beach ball, between his feet.

"Thank you. All of you," Tezura smiled weakly at the psychic pokémon embracing her. "Without your barriers and the extra strength from the Ignicite orb, we surely would have perished."

"Where's Caley?" Denise blurted out, causing a number of the Seer students who had been helping Tezura and Merto from the hole to look at her – offended she wasn't more concerned for the Elites' welfare.

"We asked Rosu and Luthor to help him continue his duty," Merto began, releasing his grip from a student's shoulder as he got to his feet. "Height is an important factor for the Generation Rite, we hoped that if they remained aloft, creating that link would still be possible."

"But...something unforeseen..." Tezura concluded brokenly. Both Elite Guard members gazed mournfully into the turbulent empty sky, prompting Kota and his pokémon companions to do the same. No more had to be said.

"Bu-but he can't be gone..." Adam stammered, staring at the ground as his shoulders began to shake. All the times that he'd forced himself not to cry gathered inside of his chest, no longer able to be

contained. Falling to his knees, the youth pummelled the ground repeatedly with one fist while his tears spattered against the trampled grass. "He *can't* be gone! This isn't fair!"

Darius stood by, unsure of how to react. He was admittedly surprised at his son's emotional reaction to this missing friend, and awkward as to how to respond to it. His flustered contemplation was halted as Denise knelt down next to Adam – gently putting her arms around his shoulders and resting her head against his back. Adam did not attempt to push Denise away – instead, they both remained crouched upon the grass, sobbing quietly.

"The Veins of the Earth are overflowing," Azima remarked gravely, casting a glance at the hybrid soldiers, still frozen in their own private worlds of suffering. "It is trying to shed its excess Aura by any means necessary."

"But *why* is it overflowing?" Darius exclaimed, his voice a mixture of anxiety and frustration.

"Each of these... *monstrosities* is resonating an incredible amount of Aura," Azima told him, her eyebrows arched condemningly. "The Veins of the Earth are receptive to the Aura generated from outside sources. By creating such an unnatural hybrid, in such large numbers, Team Rocket has caused a massive imbalance."

"Like trying to run a high current through a low voltage device..." Mondo grimaced from where he had been standing in audience. Next to

him, Jessie, James and Errol looked at one another in anguish, the pieces slotting together in their minds. The Pokéballs overheating, the helicopters and mechas malfunctioning, the unstable shield projector, and now, what seemed like a backlash within the implants used to control the minds of Team Rocket's humanoid hybrids. All surrounding technology – were it modern or archaic – had been incapable of handling the planet's attempts to restore the Aura Network's balance.

The very actions that the organization had taken in order to create their army, with its tenfold strength and endurance, were now the actions destroying it. But more unsettling than that, had it also been the same overwhelming energy that caused the Generation Rite to fail?

Adam slowly retracted his fist as a conclusive shudder reverberated through the earth, forcing cracks into existence beneath those standing there. Vivid green energy burst forth from these cracks like geysers, sending trainers, Seers and Team Rocket operatives alike scrambling fearfully towards some measure of safety. But safety was a diminishing commodity here.

Instead, those whom Caley had once given new hope clustered together for support and tried desperately to keep a grasp on it – viewing the unfolding atrocity with watery eyes, and mouths open in soundless grief. The remains of Kemnon Tower began to lilt to one side as the earth opened up around it, spewing forth supercharged Aura in a gigantic ring. None of them wanted to believe what they were seeing was really true.

Somehow, each of the travellers felt they were to blame. Why hadn't they done more to help?

In the end, what more *could* have been done to help?

**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](http://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.**