

TREESHROUD FOREST (EXTERIOR)

Rain beats down on a group of explorers camping outside of a forest. Their tone shows concern- for they are camped directly next to a large, sepia bubble that stretches across the forest.

EXPLORER 1

Any luck?

EXPLORER 2

What can we do? We can walk through freely, but it looks like pokemon caught by the initial blast have remained frozen. Like statues.

The camera pans over to one such pokemon- a Gardevoir frozen in fear as she looks behind her to escape a threat that has long since claimed her.

EXPLORER 1

Can we get them to budge? Maybe if we can take them outside the bubble...

EXPLORER 2

Trying to move anything caught in the blast is a lost cause. We should focus our efforts on finding an artifact that can...

Their conversation fades out as we close in on the claws of the perpetrator, clutching a Time Gear.

GROVYLE

To think this little artifact could cause so much pain.

He holds it up, looking at the team through the center of the gear. He sighs.

GROVYLE

They should know better.

He puts the time gear away in his bag, gently bumping a pokeball fixed to the side as he does. He reaches for a heart locket, brushing a raindrop off of it.

GROVYLE

Once someone is trapped in time,
there's no escape.

You knew that better than anyone,
didn't you. Naomi?

WIGGLYTUFF'S GUILD

The chapter opens with the team traveling in an underground tunnel led by a flickering torch light.

MALACHI

This is...! Not what I had in mind
for our "first job".

LOUDRED

Trust me, nobody likes footprint
sentry as their "first job".
Imagine if it were your job all
the time!

RUNE

I was under the impression that
guild work involved more important
things like rescuing and exploring
and stuff with the vetting
process.

LOUDRED

Oh c'mon, all guild work is
important! The footprint sentry is
imperative for demographic
information for the types of folk
who visit our guild- it helps us
decide which areas need our help
so we can allot teams and
resources to help them.

They arrive at the sentry outpost, which has light filtering down from above.

LOUDRED

Here we are! You remember the
drill?

MALACHI

Identify the footprints above, and
write them down in the tally?

LOUDRED

Yep! Holler if you need any help.

He strolls away, and the pair settle down. Almost
immediately, a footprint hangs overhead.

MALACHI

Oh, someone's here already! Mark
this one down as Ditto.

RUNE

Uh-

MALACHI

Do you need help spelling it? It's
[D-i] [The spelling is via
Galarian typeface)

RUNE

I... Don't know how to write.

MALACHI

What? But didn't you write your
name in the beach cave?

RUNE

You said yourself that wasn't
common.

MALACHI

Fair point. Though speaking of
your name-

RUNE

No.

Another footprint steps above.

MALACHI

Someone else is here already?! Uh,
here I'll just... Do both.

The footprint looks like...
Psyduck?

He comes to a realization.

MALACHI

Yohann?!

YOHANN

Oh, greetings, Mal. What are you
doing all the way down there?

MALACHI

Oh y'know, guild work. I finally
got endorsed in a team!

YOHANN

Huh. I really didn't think you
would pull it off. Congratulations
are in order. Stay put. I'll be
down in a moment.

MALACHI

Oh you don't- I don't think you're
allowed-

Suddenly, the Psyduck is upon them, and he lets out a
startled screech when he sees the state of Malachi's scarf.

YOHANN

GAAAH, I knew it! Do you know how
long I had to spin those pecha
fibers to get the textile that
plush??

MALACHI

Who let you down here? Who even
told you about the scarf?

YOHANN

Sweetheart, I know about *all*
fashion transgressions in this

town.

Oh, who's this?

RUNE

You can call me Rune. It's
Malachi's nickname for me.

YOHANN

Oh I'm so sorry. 1001 baby names?

MALACHI

Hey-

YOHANN

I go by Yohann, local tailor and
fashion buff.

As for *you*, mister. Do you think
shredded rags are suitable for
Maelstrom?

MAELSTROM

YES, MY CHAMPION! HOW DARE YOU
DRESS ME IN TORN GARB!

MALACHI

You're not allowed to complain
right now, I named the team after
you!

MAELSTROM

AND THAT WAS VERY FLATTERING!

Another footprint steps overhead.

MALACHI

Ugh, I don't have time for this
conversation.

Wait, I have an idea. Rune, since
you can't write, how about you
take the day off to get fitted for
exploration gear while Yohann
repairs Maelstrom's outfit?

RUNE

H-Huh?

Yohann seems very excited about this. Malachi hands him a small sack of Poke and starts shooin' them out.

MALACHI

Inigo wanted to train with you anyway today, right? Go get your accessories, and then see how they hold up in combat!

Yohann, spare no expense.

YOHANN

Yessir!

YOHANN'S HUT

The duo exit the guild, and arrive at a lavish tent decorated with intricate tapestries. They enter, and Yohann gets to work.

YOHANN

Now, what style are you after? Please, don't be shy. Malachi's pockets are weirdly bottomless.

RUNE

Style?

YOHANN

Sigh, I should have figured. Let's start easier- what are you like in combat? Main technique?

RUNE

None. Currently.

Yohann grimaces.

YOHANN

Well perhaps we should keep you well rounded for now.

He starts thumbing through his fabrics.

YOHANN

You're an ice-type variation of Vulpix, yes? Long range elemental attacks will serve you well, but aura cloth should be a good match while you're trying to figure out your strengths. A general boost, and it has the fun little aura gimmick thanks to the Lucario fibers embedded into the fabric.

Alright, the process is actually simple. Relax. Calm yourself... And now press your paw gently to the bow.

Oh oh, don't lift up until I tell you to! Let's try again.

That's right, stay perfectly still... Take a deep breath... And now exhale... Feel the energy flow from you to the fibers...

The cloth shines brightly, before fading and revealing a steely sheen.

YOHANN

A sterling silver? Well color me surprised, I thought you'd be an uplifting pink.

I have just the things.

We enter a montage of Yohann selecting outfit pieces for Rune, including earrings and various accessories. He assembles them in a flurry, and slicks her hair back out of her eyes. Then, holding a piercing needle, he asks,

YOHANN

Can you hold still?

RUNE

What are you doing with that needle- GAAAH!

Her cry rattles the tent.

YOHANN

'Tis the price of beauty.

[Descriptor for accessories here]

And now, you look far less like a
mangy, sparkly mutt.

RUNE

Hey, I try grooming my coat...
Sometimes. It's a work in
progress.

YOHANN

Malachi's repairs are bound to
take much longer. At this rate
I'll probably spin something new
for him. So if you could make
yourself, ah... Scarce?

RUNE

Already way ahead of you. I have
plans anyway.

MAROWAK DOJO

Rune makes her way over to the dojo, the summer heat
beating down on her. She arrives near the entrance, when
she's trampled by a small herd of children.

CHILDREN

The ice lady is back!

Your fur is so COLD, it's like-
like- a rock at night!

Ice vulpix, can you make some
snow? Just a little? Pleeese?

Rune seems self conscious at the last request, but tries to
play it off.

RUNE

Sorry, I'm not an ice machine,
buddy.

Dielle approaches, holding a broom to shoo the children
away.

DIELLE

Hey, let her be you goobers! Ms.
Rune is a customer today, you
better treat her as such!

Sorry, I've been telling them not
to swarm you especially after
rescuing Pax yesterday and
knocking you out, but I swear they
don't listen to a word I-

RUNE

Um, it's alright. I didn't take
you for the type to swat kids with
a broom.

DIELLE

Oh this ol' thing? They like it.

She jabs it at one of the lingering kids, who squeals and
runs away. The duo start to walk inside.

DIELLE

Let's get you in before I melt!

RUNE

Is it really that hot?

DIELLE

Don't tell me you can't feel it!
It must be the hottest day of the
year. I can't wait for fall to
come...

Today you'll be training in the
combat room.

The pair enter, and Dielle shuffles off to the side while
Rune approaches. Inigo is seated in the center of the room.

INIGO

Wit is a valuable skill to have,
but it cannot outmatch raw power.
Pokemon are made to fight, and to
deny your skill is to reject your
status as a pokemon. Will you use
your gift?

He spins around, a Poison Sting attack letting loose from
his tail, Rune dodging it clumsily.

RUNE
Eep! Hey, I thought we were
training!

Inigo hits her with a low sweep, knocking her off balance.
He stands over her.

INIGO
This is your training.

He hops away and the battle begins... Until Dielle bursts
out laughing from the sidelines. Inigo is flushed.

INIGO
W-What are you laughing at?!

DIELLE
You nerd, that speech is almost
word for word from [fantasy book
here]!

What was the main character's name
again? Indigo-?

Inigo interrupts her abruptly.

INIGO
The battle is starting now!

Show me what you've got!

Rune starts the battle by trying to perform a directionless
tackle, which Inigo easily dodges.

INIGO
What are you doing? Use your
moves!

RUNE
I-I will, I'm just trying
something first!

Inigo shoots a poison sting, grazing Rune as she attempts to go in for a bite, missing again. Inigo charges in with a headbutt, which Rune meets with a tackle, leaving them both dazed.

INIGO
What are you *doing*?!

RUNE
My *best*?!

INIGO
Well we're not leaving until you
either use an elemental attack or
knock me down.

Rune looks nervous at the prospect.

RUNE
Fine!

She continues trying to knock him down, and almost gets pinned by a tail smack- that is, until Dielle snatches her out of the way.

INIGO
Hey, we're kinda in the middle of
something here!

DIELLE
How is she supposed to learn if
you just throw her in?

INIGO
Well she's not gonna learn if
you're battling *for* her, either.

DIELLE
I promise not to land any hits for
her- just trust me on this.

She turns to Rune.

DIELLE

I've got your back! Just follow my lead.

The battle resumes. Inigo comes in with his tail again.

DIELLE

Tail parry!

She demonstrates, and Rune follows suit, successfully parrying his attack.

DIELLE

Good! Keep an eye on how he shifts his body with each attack, it'll help you make split second decisions.

Inigo swings from a distance, letting loose another Poison Sting. Rune stumbles a little as she ducks, but successfully manages to get out of the way.

DIELLE

I can't physically coach you on triggering elemental moves, but the key is to *feel* their intent. Your feint attack, as a dark-type move, came from a place of deceit. You wanted to catch Drowzee off guard- and your aura adapted to a dark-type energy to match that. Without the intent, it would have been a normal tackle.

RUNE

So the key to beating Inigo-!

He throws another attack at her, and she attempts to dodge clumsily. She falls down, and Inigo takes to opportunity to try pinning her for good- When she suddenly sweeps his feet and knocks him down.

INIGO

Oof-!

Rune has completed the training.

DIELLE

You did it! I knew you could do it!

INIGO

Not bad. You're now on the same skill level as most children.

DIELLE

Hey, give her a break! Not everyone grew up surrounded by punching bags.

While they're bickering, Rune suddenly passes out from poisoning. We see Dielle and Inigo going to help her up, as we fade into the next scene.

DOJO DORM

When Rune comes to, she finds she's in a bed alone.

RUNE

... Where am I?

Dielle enters.

DIELLE

Oh, you're up! Are you well enough to walk? I wanna take you out to eat as an apology for Inigo... Poisoning you.

RUNE

Sure. I'm no stranger to bouncing back up after fainting.

Rune nods, gets up, and they stroll to the local cafe together. Once seated, they place their orders with a Spinda.

DIELLE

Do you like anything blended with Pecha? I don't want to order on your behalf, but it'll help ease the poison out of your system.

RUNE

I can't really remember what berries exist, if I'm being honest. I just know that they'll grow if I put them in the ground.

DIELLE

Fair enough! Could we get a honey pecha special for her, and a chople berry cream for me?

Bev's face contorts at Dielle's order, but seems chipper walking away.

BEV

Got it!

They teeter away, and Dielle turns her attention back to Rune.

DIELLE

Inigo should have known better than to use poison sting for your first match, that can really suck the life out of you.

Rune takes a bite.

RUNE

... Thanks for helping me back there. And um, now.

Dielle smiles.

DIELLE

I'm glad to! Inigo's training methods sometimes are a bit... Unorthodox.

Rune seems thoughtful thinking back on the training session.

RUNE

... Is it true that most children can already use elemental moves?

DIELLE

W-well-! I guess it's not *common* for someone to not know basic moves into adulthood, but... Can I tell you a secret?

RUNE

Uh-

DIELLE

I'm not the best at battling, either.

RUNE

Huh? What do you mean, if you didn't guide me back there, Inigo would have creamed me!

Dielle laughs.

DIELLE

It's not that I don't know how! How *couldn't* I, I live in a dojo! But what I know how to do in my head, and what my body is physically capable of performing are two very different things.

When I was born, my parents both had very high expectations of me. My mother wanted me to carry on the family line. My father wanted me to fit in. When it turned out I couldn't meet *either* of their expectations, it was too much for them to handle. I thought that living with Moxie would change that... But it doesn't. It follows me wherever I go.

RUNE

Then why not just try something different?

Dielle seems startled at the prospect.

DIELLE

H-huh?

RUNE

Stop living up to everyone else's expectations! Be who you want to be! Dielle, what do *you* want?

Dielle seems flushed.

DIELLE

I... Really want to see the world.

RUNE

Well?? You can join Team Maelstrom then, Wigglytuff already personally invited you!

DIELLE

Well yes, but-

RUNE

What's stopping you? Does Inigo's mom need the help that bad?

DIELLE

I don't know, I think so? But besides that... what if I'm not good at it? I'm good at taking care of kids, but not-

RUNE

Then let's just try it for a day? Just one mission, to see how you feel. She can definitely find someone to cover you for a day, right?

Dielle smiles.

DIELLE

I guess so.

Their drinks arrive, with Bev nearly spilling them. They start drinking, and Rune notices Dielle eyeing the honey pecha special.

RUNE

Do you... want some?

DIELLE

YES

She takes a sip, and pushes her drink towards Rune. She eyes it and takes a sip, her eyes immediately going wide.

RUNE

Is this... Spicy milk??

DIELLE

So what if it is?? Yours just tastes like glorified water.

RUNE

That's not fair, you're a cat, you can't taste sweet things!

They continue to bicker as the scene fades out, and we transition to the duo gathering Inigo and Yohann respectively before trekking to the guild together. When they arrive, Malachi is just finishing up his shift, Loudred reporting to Chatot.

LOUDRED

He was just about perfect! We might have a new sentry on our hands!

MALACHI

Haha! I sure hope not!

They notice the group walk in.

KEATON

Ah good, you've all assembled. We may as well get you all registered while you're here. Come with me.

They enter the Guildmaster's chambers, where Wigglytuff is waiting with yet another perfect apple.

THE GUILDMASTER

Hi hi, congrats on your new

teammates! We're so happy to have
you be part of our guild! By the
powers bestowed in me, I now
announce you as part of Team
Maelstrom! YOOM-TAH!

A burst of energy reveals exploration badges for everyone.

THE GUILDMASTER

Your badges have been calibrated
to your home base! To teleport
there, you'll need to physically
touch your badge with the intent
to leave the dungeon.

Aaand...

KEATON

And, we also have assembled you
here to assign your first mission.

Malachite Falls, the next
settlement over, has recently been
experiencing a strange illness
overtaking the town. We suspect
it's related to a contaminant in
the water supply. We need your
team to go there and collect water
samples.

MALACHI

Wait... You mean a real, honest to
god exploration?!

KEATON

... I suppose if you consider
water samples an exploration, then
yes.

MALACHI

We won't let you down!

WIGGLYTUFF'S GUILD (EXT.)

YOHANN

And here's the piece you
commissioned. I wanted to give
Maelstrom a more *regal* look,
because she deserves it.

MAELSTROM

I DO!

MALACHI

It's um. Very flashy.

YOHANN

You bet it is! This is a flash
scarf, woven with straw fibers
straight from amp plains. Your
attack power and stamina should
improve.

MALACHI (QUIETLY)

Amp plains, huh...?

YOHANN

And your little Vulpix friend I
outfitted with nevermelt earrings
and an aura bow to keep her tails
out of the way. Not a bad job, if
I say so myself.

MALACHI

Hey, you don't suppose we could
get some accessories for our new
teammates, do you?

YOHANN

Hmm... I suppose I could. But you
have to supply the material, I'm
out of generic fibers like cotton,
and my next shipment isn't for
some weeks.

MALACHI

How hard could that be?

Smash cut to them at the kecleon market.

Smash cut to them back at Yohann's hut.

MALACHI

How do they sell everything except
cotton?!

YOHANN

You went to Kecleon Market didn't you.

RUNE

So we went to Kecleon Market,

YOHANN

Honestly Malachi, you're so
predictable.

Rune ponders for a moment.

RUNE

Hey, we're going to a waterfall
town tomorrow, aren't we?

MALACHI

Malachite falls? Yeah, why?

RUNE

Cattails grow next to big bodies
of water. Would those fluffy seeds
work like cotton?

YOHANN

You know, that's not a bad idea.
Beats waiting weeks for my next
shipment. Though I haven't worked
with them before, I'd like to see
them in person.

MALACHI

We'll bring back a bunch for you
then!

YOHANN

Oh, maybe you didn't hear me. I
said *in person*. I want an escort
mission.

END OF CH. 4