

SIDETRACKED

Ghosts
don't pee,
stupid.

A Submas AU Zine

FOREWARD

One of the great things about fandom has always been its ability to inspire. Fans will take the characters and story that they love, and make something new with it! And when your source material is as open-ended as the story of our favorite waylaid train brothers, it only becomes all the more boundless. From crossovers to role-swaps to completely new retellings, the years since the release of *Pokemon Legends: Arceus* have sparked many an AU.

This zine is a celebration of that. It was created to give a SUPER BRAVO to a few of the verrry impressive AUs created by Submas fans. The amount of thought and effort that was put into these stories, and those like them, simply out of love, is incredible!

So on behalf of the conductors of this zine, we thank the contributors who crafted the 25 wonderful art and writing pieces you're about to encounter; and all of those who have supported, interacted with, and lifted up everyone who has shared their creations!

All aboard!





Faeries After Work



Written by: Bluegamergirl11

Sundays were always busy.

And that was a good thing! Weekends were always jam packed with battles, far more than any other time of the week. It made Emmet always look forward to the week's end, where he could spend his time at his job partaking in his *true* passion... instead of the mundane paperwork he was subjected to the rest of the week.

But there was certainly such a thing as being *too* busy.

Winter holiday season always fell into that category. Swarms of last minute shoppers and vacationing travelers overflowed Gear Station's halls, all bustling to and fro, trying to reach their destination as quickly and efficiently as possible. Of course, overcrowding couldn't just be the *only* problem, as there was something about the holidays that seemed to bring out the worst in people. Add that holiday tension and stress to the sheer mass of people... and you were left with an accident waiting to happen. Or, to be more precise, a whole lot of accidents. And with every accident came a boatload of paperwork, adding on top of each other, one after the other, until...

Emmet checked his watch.

2:47 AM.

"Hurry uuuuup." Ingo groaned, slumping onto Emmet's back and transferring his weight. He was lighter than he was supposed to be.

"Not in the hall." Emmet hissed back, desperately trying to find the key to their apartment through his blurry vision. "Wait until we get inside."

That earned him a grumble, but thankfully Ingo stayed as he was, allowing Emmet to locate the correct key and let them inside.

Emmet let out a sigh of relief as he entered the apartment, an invisible weight (that wasn't Ingo) seeming to drop off his shoulders. Still, he couldn't rest quite yet. No matter how much he wanted to run to his room and pass out on his bed, there was still a myriad of chores that needed to be completed before he could sleep.

Groaning at the thought, Emmet began to remove his coat and hat, hanging them up on their hooks while Ingo locked the door. The two of them still hadn't eaten dinner, and neither had the pokémon. He could technically put off his night shower for the morning if he really wanted, but the day had left him sweaty and grimy. He wasn't sure if he wanted to sleep like that. At least it was Ingo's turn to feed their beasties.

Loosening his tie and kicking off his shoes, Emmet turned to his twin to remind him of his chores- Only to find his brother gone.

Emmet blinked, staring in confusion at the air where his twin once stood- before glancing down, noticing the pile of clothes on the floor. More specifically, the clothes his brother had been wearing just a moment before.

"Really?" He asked the lump of laundry, a bit of exasperation seeping into his tone. "You couldn't have hung up your coat first?"

The clothes shifted, and silver eyes peeked out from under the black subway hat. They looked sleepy.

'Unfortunately not.' The voice in Emmet's head responded. *'The strain of my transformation is far too much for me to handle at the moment. I could not delay it for even a second longer.'*

"Liar." Crouching down, Emmet snatched his twin's hat off the pile, revealing the dark void swimming in his dress shirt. "You have plenty of magic left."

It was true; Ingo couldn't hide that from Emmet even if he tried- their connection wouldn't allow it. He was just being lazy.

'Noooooooooooo.' The pile of clothing shifted, his brother hiding his face in the fabric. *'I am far too fatigued! I could not possibly take another step!'*

"Do you intend to sleep here then?" Emmet asked, mildly bemused. "All alone? On the floor?"

His twin gasped in mock offense.

'You would abandon me here? Leave me destitute and forsaken?!'

"Hmmm." Emmet pretended to consider it for a moment, "....Yup! I would!"

Springing to his feet, Emmet pretended to walk away, only getting a few steps before turning back towards his twin. The poor sap was stuck swimming in his work clothes, attempting to break free.

Emmet took pity on him.

"Honestly!" He chided his faerie twin, striding over and helping him escape the confines of his tie. "*Must I pick up after you? I am tired as well, you know!*"

'That is unnecessary,' Ingo assured him, as Emmet finally freed him from his work shirt. *'As I fully intend to pick up after myself.'*

"When?"

'.....tomorrow.'

Shaking his head and sighing, Emmet slung his brother over his shoulder and picked up the laundry. Haphazardly, he threw the black coat on its hook, and kicked the shoes in the general direction of their destination.

'I mean it!' Ingo insisted mentally, as Emmet marched to the laundry room. *'I really would have hung it up tomorrow.'*

"After it had been on the floor all night." Emmet countered, throwing his brother's shirt and socks into the laundry basket, "And one of the pokémon had made a nest of it. Probably Piñata. Did you want to go to work covered in feathers?"

'.....We have a lint roller for a reason.'

Ignoring his brother's grumbles, Emmet attempted to free his twin's pokéballs from his belt... before giving up and throwing the dress pants on top of the couch, belt, balls, and all. Getting them off would just be too much work.

"Time to disembark!" He called out to the pokémon on both of their belts. "We have reached our home station! Time to rest and refuel!"

The sound and sight of eleven pokéballs popping open was always a lot, but at three in the morning after a long day at work? Absolutely headache inducing. Didn't help that the darlings were obviously a bit hyper after being cooped up for so long.

"Ingo." Emmet poked the inky mass dozing on his shoulder, causing silver eyes to blink blearily open.

"We can switch chores. Will you make dinner?"

'I do not need to eat.'

"Yes, but *I* do." He poked his brother harder. "There are leftovers in the fridge. I am doing you a favor. Feeding the pokémon is harder. You know this."

'Fiiiiiiiiine.'

Dramatically, Ingo slid off of Emmet's back and onto the floor with a sad thwack, laying on the kitchen tile like some kind of beached octillery. Eventually though, his form shifted and wobbled, stretching upwards into the form of a very sleepy looking man. Or, at least, the shadow of one. He couldn't be bothered to color himself, apparently.

Leaving his brother to his task, Emmet began his much more arduous one- feeding their pokémon.

"Tiny? Where is your- No Goldie, this is not for you. You would not like this. Tiny can you- PIÑATA! GET OFF THE TABLE! BAD BIRD!"

The diverse spread of diets and sheer number of mouths to feed always made meal times a complex song and dance- but it was one Emmet knew the steps to well. Still, he would really have preferred if he wasn't put in charge of it two days in a row.

Once he was positive everyone was eating peacefully and *not* stealing other's food, he was finally able to return for his own meal. Leftover casserole, reheated and plated, ready for him to eat. Notably, there was only one serving of said casserole.

"Where is *your* food?" Emmet asked, as he picked his brother up from the chair he was laying on. He slipped the sleepy fae around his shoulders.

"Too much work." Ingo grunted out mentally. *"Not worth the trouble."*

"....sure"

Honestly, Emmet was far too tired to hold a proper conversation, much less argue with his twin over something like that. He still tried to feed Ingo a couple of bites of his dinner of course, (like the good brother he was) but his twin wasn't particularly receptive to it. In fact, by the time Emmet had finished, Ingo had completely passed out, dozing solidly around his neck.

For a moment, Emmet considered just straight up joining him in sleep, ignoring the rest of his bedtime routine, but....

"Ingo. I am going to take a shower." Emmet poked his brother lightly, trying to stir him awake. It didn't work "Ingo? Shower?"

Ingo remained stubbornly asleep, so Emmet did the only reasonable thing he could. He marched to his room and tossed his brother onto the bed. Ingo made a surprised squeak when he hit the bedspread- before blinking a bit and passing out exactly where he had landed. Dork.

Rolling his eyes, Emmet made quick work of the rest of his nightly chores, banging out his shower, teeth brushing, and dressing in record time. Getting the pokémon to bed was a little less quick, but the little beasties were at least tired enough to not fight him on it.

And then, finally, bedtime.

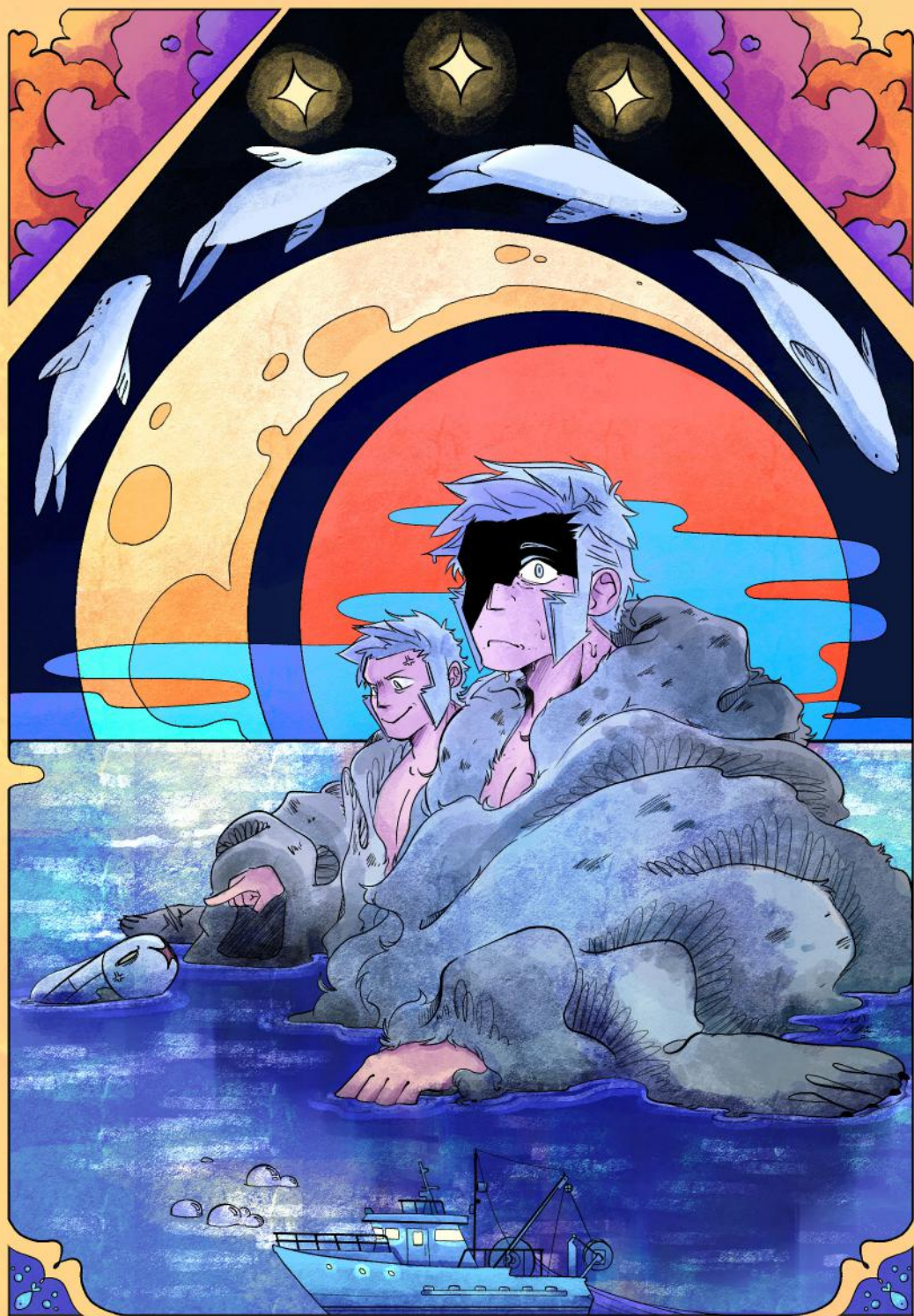
Flipping off the light switch, Emmet slunk over to his bed and face planted on the bedspread- which had the added effect of bouncing his brother slightly. *'Stooooooooop iiiit.'*

Emmet chuckled, his smile fond as he picked himself back up and crawled to the head of the bed. Pulling back the covers, he settled into them slightly, before picking up his brother, slipping them both under. Ingo grunted a bit as the two of them readjusted around each other, their limbs tangling together as they got comfortable. Eventually, they both settled, and Emmet could finally close his eyes and sleep, drifting off into unconsciousness.

"Goodnight Ingo." He whispered to his brother,

kissing him on the forehead, and earning himself a grunt. "I love you."

And with that, he dozed off, joining his twin in the realm of dreams.





Unscheduled Departures

Written by: **Lunawoona11**

Emmet had just barely managed to avoid getting caught up in the heavy downpour that was currently beating on the windows of the building. He allowed himself a moment to let his eyes adjust to the unlit apartment before he began to shrug off his coat and hat, taking care to avoid straining muscles stiff from long hours at the station.

He'd already decided against turning the lights on during the short elevator ride up to their floor, after a quick glance at his Xtransceiver confirmed just how late he had been arriving home. It meant having to semi-stumble around in the dark on his way to his room, but it was either that or risk waking up the whole house, and that was hardly a fair contest.

Ordinarily, neither he nor Ingo worked any graveyard shifts down at Gear Station, after all, none of the battle lines ran that late— despite Emmet having previously spent a collective five hours of his life trying to convince Ingo that running the Battle Subway at 3:00 AM was a great idea, matched only by the collective five hours of his life Ingo had spent listing all the reasons that was a terrible idea.

With one of them being on indefinite leave for the

time being and the other staying home in sympathy, Emmet had had every intention of spending the day working through the paperwork that had been slowly constructing itself into a miniature Castelia City on their dining table, which had gradually been overtaken and morphed into a makeshift workspace over the last two weeks, a slow shift which went largely unnoticed by its perpetrator, until Ingo had pointed it out while trying and failing to find any space set down his plate last Thursday night.

It had not been something he had intentionally put off, it was simply something that naturally fell to the wayside as Emmet focused instead on keeping his brother company and helping to ensure he achieved a steady recovery, with there being a long road ahead of him before his physical condition could match his prior level.

Although, the jury was still out on how he was faring on both fronts– Ingo seemed to be as dispirited as he had been when they left the hospital, something the clawing ache in his chest was delighted to remind him of every chance it got.

With multiple deadlines fast approaching however, it was no longer something Emmet could ignore. So he had taken it as a challenge, vowing that he would be done with the whole pile by the afternoon.

That was, until one of the night conductors had suddenly called in sick, and with none of the other senior depot agents available to fill in for them, Emmet had reluctantly decided to take on the

shift himself, hoping to keep everything with Gear Station running smoothly and without issue. The last thing Emmet wanted to give Ingo was yet another calamity to be concerned with when he was already submerged in a sea of them, even if Emmet was hesitant to leave him stuck at home by himself.

Emmet had offered to call Elesa; they both knew she'd be more than happy to stay over for the night. When her obligations as a model and the Nimbasa gym leader could no longer be put off in favor of visiting an injured friend in the hospital, she had made them both promise to call her if they needed anything after Ingo was discharged, but Ingo had declined Emmet's suggestion.

He said he wouldn't want to trouble her any more than necessary and he could manage by himself for one night. When that didn't fully convince Emmet, Ingo had assured him that he was on track, and that he would endeavor to remain that way.

Of course, the unspoken factor that neither of them dared to acknowledge, as if it was a phantom that only became real the moment they spoke of it, was that whether Emmet or Elesa or anyone was there or not would make verrrry little difference as to whether Ingo remained on track or not.

Emmet's hand met the bumpy surface of a wall. Using it as a guide, he began the trek towards his room, where he could promptly collapse for the next few hours before his body clock inevitably went off and he had to contend with future-Emmet's problems.

His passage through the hallway came to a very gradual halt as he noticed a familiar dim and sterile light just barely seeping out from underneath the door to Ingo's room, and almost unconsciously he found himself lingering outside it.

The muffled sounds of pen scratching against paper gave him clearance to release a breath he hadn't even realized he was holding. It would not be the first time Emmet would be met with an empty room, and as much as either of them were loath to admit it, it probably would not be the last. Though it was not long before that short burst of relief was promptly replaced with something quickly approaching irritation as the implications of that noise sunk in.

"You are still awake."

Whatever pause in Ingo's writing occurred in response was barely noticeable, Emmet probably would not have heard if he had not been actively listening for it.

"That would seem to be the case, wouldn't it," was all Ingo had to say for himself after being gifted several moments to come up with practically anything better. As if he'd simply pulled an earthquake during a multi-battle, and was not currently straining his stitches working far too late into the night. Emmet crossed his arms, tapping his foot against the floor as he tried his best to hold onto what little remained of his composure, which

considering all that has happened and is happening and will happen was probably hanging on by a thread.

"It is four in the morning."

The muffled pen strokes became more sharp, as the hand responsible assumedly began to press down harder on the paper.

"Another astute observation, Emmet."

Aaaand just like that Ingo had chosen to take a hacksaw to that thread.

"Oh for Dragon's sake," Emmet cursed, before swinging the door open with all the subtlety of a bouffalant in a porcelain shop. His gaze was quickly met than just as quickly shunned by an equally exasperated Ingo, who was trying his damndest to otherwise completely ignore his intrusion in favour of the mountain of pilfered paperwork he'd stacked on his desk.

"*This*. Cannot continue, Ingo."

With it being abundantly clear Emmet wasn't going to let this go, Ingo set his pen down on the desk and grudgingly whipped himself around in his chair, his raised hackles and the hands slowly curling against his thighs betraying his otherwise neutral expression.

"And what pray tell, exactly *is* this?"

"This," Emmet gestured widely in his direction, stepping out of the doorway and further into the room. "You cannot afford to be pushing yourself like this. You need to be taking as much time as you can to recover."

In their line of work, you verrrry rarely have the luxury of being careless in heeding instructions, and they most certainly could not falter in that diligence now. Especially not when their current predicament left them so in the dark that it was unclear whether Ingo would even be able to remain here long enough to heal before disappearing again.

It left them in the dark with a lot of things.

It left them in the dark when Ingo had reappeared one afternoon last month at Gear Station, horrifyingly close to bleeding out and terrified out of his mind, with a large wound he had no memory of even receiving.

The rest had blurred by agonisingly slow. Emmet had tried his best not to think about it, even now as he wore his spare uniform, an unpleasant reminder of how his original had completely soaked in his brother's blood.

He had yet to be successful in this endeavor.

As they had come to expect over the last year, no answers could be found for any of the questions that clouded their minds after the worst was over.

Even the doctors couldn't be sure what had caused such grievous injuries; some of them proposed it could have possibly been a pokemon attack, but the precise scarring did not match any living species of pokemon and those that were the closest were incapable of causing a wound that large or that deep.

All that they could know for sure was that wherever Ingo kept disappearing to, it was somewhere dangerous, and it was then for the first time it really hit them that it was somewhere Ingo might not come back from one day.

Ingo's hand twitched as he visibly fought against the urge to bring a hand to the area where Emmet knew the most severe stitching was hidden under layers of clothing.

"I'm perfectly aware of my own need for maintenance," Ingo managed through gritted teeth, "But I know for a fact these forms need to be done within schedule, and you would have run out of steam trying to do so all on your own."

"So your solution was to exhaust yourself on my behalf?" Emmets shot back, pointing accusingly at Ingo. "I hardly see how that is helpful."

"I have not gone excessively against the Doctor's directions," Ingo snapped, his voice filling up more and more of the surrounding space as it grew more and more agitated, "And unlike you, I know my own limitations."

"Do you?" Emmet questioned sharply, the words scraping against the ache in his chest like flint against steel. And as the two stared each other down with an uncharacteristic heat flaring behind their eyes, Emmet braced for the powder keg to ignite.

Until Ingo sighed. His posture immediately went slack in defeat as all his fight deserted him, leaving only a bone-weary exhaustion that had become a sadly familiar sight over the last year, clinging to both of them even as they tried to achieve some level of normalcy that was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

Emmet hated it, hated how easily Ingo had given up, hated fighting with him like this at all, hated how a part of him would have kept fighting just to get a glimpse of the drive this situation was stealing from Ingo day by day.

.....Hated himself for even having that last thought.

"Forgive me, I'm not trying to be difficult about this." Ingo slowly brought a hand to his face, his now obscured gaze softening and slowly drifting back towards his desk. "I know you are only worried for me, you all are."

His own movements now weighed down by remorse. Emmet began to approach Ingo gingerly, softly tilting his head after several moments, silently urging for Ingo to continue.

"There's so much in my life I've found myself unable to control since gaining this affliction, so much that has slipped from my grasp at a moment's notice, I just—" Ingo cut himself off, trying and failing to smooth out the trembling that had taken hold of his usually powerful voice. "*I need this*, I need something *I can do*."

Ingo did not elaborate any further, but he didn't have to. Emmet understood.

Of course he understood.

It was roughly a month into this ordeal that the decision had been made to close the Single Battle Line down until further notice. At the time, it had been a difficult but short term solution to what they had hoped would be a temporary problem, that it wouldn't be long before they found the answer to Ingo's condition, but it was simply not safe to keep the line running while there was a chance Ingo would disappear in the midst of a battle.

The single battle line has been closed for a verrry long time now.

It was just another disheartening example of the many things that get taken for granted that Ingo can not because of his circumstances.

Like being able to go to sleep without worrying whether he will wake to find he has lost two weeks, like not being too scared to try and cook anything

because he might disappear with the stove on and burn the whole apartment down.

Like not being terrified of disappearing for good one day.

Emmet knew that fear all too well.

"Hey," Emmet spoke finally, unwilling to stand by as both of them derailed, crouching slightly in front of Ingo to gently take Ingo's wrist and pull it away from his face. Ingo let the hand fall slack in between them in his hold. "Hey, look at me."

Ingo slowly began to draw his eyes up to meet identical ones.

"I—"

And it was then that within an instant the world was ripped out from around them.

The shift wasn't violent and it wasn't subtle. They were simply in Ingo's room one second and in the next Emmet's eyes were being forced shut by frigid winds. It buffeted painfully against his exposed skin as he frantically fought to stay standing on ground that now had far too much give, his grip on Ingo the only thing keeping both of them upright.

His ears rang against the howling gale force that filled their new surroundings, and Emmet had to fight against the instinct to cover them as they reeled from being suddenly subjected to a

cacophony of sound. He braced his free arm in front of his face in an attempt to stop any more small cuts from forming, slowly prying his eyes back open.

A hazy shroud enveloped everything in their vicinity, and in the dim light all Emmet could make out was an alarming lack of anything. Encircling them on all sides was nothing but a blizzardous wasteland, blanketed with layers of heavy snow that showed no signs of letting up, devoid of any structures or anything else aside from startling shadows that slunk and slithered far off in the distance which was the only sign there was that they were not alone out here.

He scrambled to take hold of his scattered thoughts, desperate to find some explanation within them, until one puzzle piece finally slotted forcefully into place, the impact of it sending shockwaves across his mind.

Is this where Ingo goes when he disappears?

As Emmet struggled under the weight of that possibility, he finally turned his gaze back towards Ingo.

Even through the blinding snow, the vacant look he was met with pierced right through him more cuttingly than any frostbite.

"Ingo?" he spoke weakly, unable to utter anything above a whisper. His voice was quickly lost to the wind as a thick slimy dread began to pool in his

stomach.

"You..." Ingo blinked rapidly, an emotion Emmet for once wasn't able to place filling his eyes.

"I-I know you."

He said like it was a question and not a fact, like he was only starting to believe it was true as he was saying it.

And Emmet could only stand there with his mouth agape as that pooling dread rose to swallow him up completely. Even if he had the chance to come up for air, he still wouldn't be able to speak past the vice pressing tighter and tighter against his throat. Because how on earth was he supposed to respond to that, how could Ingo even say that! Of course he knew him!

He is Emmet! He-

He's back in their apartment. He's holding onto nothing.

He remained frozen in place for who knows how long, reaching for air, because despite the whiplash he knew he should be feeling from being abruptly exposed to the steady warmth of their home all Emmet could feel was *Cold. Cold. Cold-*

Then he was dropping to his knees, putting up no resistance for once against the ugly wretched sobs that began tearing their way through his throat. The

stray thought that at least no one was around to hear them immediately made him break further, his face crumbling as he pulled his arms closer to his body and wailed in anguish.

Because he'd come back alone, because whatever had figured out he didn't belong in that place also believed that Ingo *did*.

Because despite his best efforts, Emmet could not hold onto him, and were he not in the process of falling to pieces, he might have realised that Ingo had been trying to hold onto him just as tight.



The TREWYN SHOW







The Man in Black

Written by: Ray

The tavern was crowded and lively that evening. A group of ten travelers sat at a table off to a corner of the building, having drinks and a lively conversation among each other.

The conversations seemed to be based around the travelers' origins and plans for the future as they discussed the differences in customs and culture between the places they came from. The back and forth soon switched to Emmet when Partitio's curiosity got the best of him and he asked:

"Say, Emmet, do ya remember anythin' 'bout your home yet?"

The man hummed in thought, bringing a hand to his chin in thought.

"Something does come to mind. I vaguely remember a... large machine. It reminds me of that... 'Steam Tank' we fought."

Partitio's eyes widened in interest, this sounded like it could be a really good deal.

"But... They're different. The model is more compact, smooth. It is more box-like, and it has several... cars to it."

Now that he spoke of the devices, information about them flowed into his mind like an endless stream cascading down now that the dam gate had been opened.

"They do not fuel in steam, like the one we saw. No, they... they power on..." he hesitated for a second. What was it again?

The answer suddenly came to him in a flash, standing up in excitement as he slammed his hands onto the table, making glasses clink as they shook with the force. "Electricity! Pokémon!"

Though Emmet's sudden outburst had taken by surprise many of the tavern's inhabitants, especially those in the same traveling party that was bantering the evening away as per usual, it certainly helped liven up Partitio's spirit as the scent of commerce of this specific tale of the mysterious man was luring him into something he knew was going to be *wild*. He whistled in excitement at the idea, egging Emmet on to keep on speaking more about what he recalled, eager to learn more about the mysterious intricacies of the trains in Emmet's home.

"You said they fuel on Pokémon? That is a fairly interesting statement. Do you recall how exactly that worked?" Osvald chimed in, curious himself about the science behind this.

"Ah, yes, the trains... They run on a place called 'The Battle Subway'. I work there, yup. I am a Subway Boss." he smiled proudly as he stated his occupation. "The Battle Subway is a place where

Pokémon trainers come to test their skill. They sign up with Pokémon of their choosing. Following some rules, of course. They come on board and battle as the train travels its line, with the final station being a Subway Boss, like me. Trains fuel on the energy created when Pokémon battle in them, depending on the model. They also run with electric power, which can also be provided by Pokémon. Eelektross, for example, can provide power to the Subway, yup.” The eel Pokémon let out a proud cry at the mention of her abilities, Emmet glancing at her and smiling widely as he basked in the shared feeling. After all, *he* was the boss, he helped run that place, both in hierarchy and infrastructure.

“Trains that run on power from Pokémon battles have built-in generators that will collect the residual energy of Pokémon moves in one way or another and convert that to power. That way dangerous moves can be beneficial for the trains.” Emmet elaborated a bit further. “Electric power systems can be found throughout the entirety of the Subway itself. It makes stations work, too.”

Partitio, who had been listening, couldn’t quite catch onto all the finicky details this all entailed, since he was far from an expert, but it definitely sounded like they’d struck gold there.

“That sounds interestin’, ya sayin’ the trains over there work with the power of the Pokémon dukin’ it out and also with the same power as Osvald’s lightning spells?” Emmet nodded in confirmation, quite eager to continue on explaining the minor

details of how the trains were built and which parts went into it all when... it struck him that Solistia hadn't even moved on from steam-powered locomotives. And that Partitio likely wanted to take some experience out of this and apply it to his newfound business venture.

"Right. If you want to use the idea here... We need to work on other things." Emmet added. "Electric power systems are not the same as a steam engine."

"Hmm, it does seem the concepts of your workplace are... fairly advanced." Osvald noted. "Your vague descriptions sounded fairly innovative. I'd like to know more about the inner workings of it..."

"...But it's something too complex for everyone else. I'm aware." Emmet finished Osvald's train of thought.

For a bit, everything was silent as everyone got busy with their drinks, some processing Emmet's descriptions of his workplace, others more concerned with their own problems, such as Ochette entertaining herself a bit with jerky, since the talk about machinery sounded quite complex. Then, Emmet's face suddenly lit up, eyes shining with excitement.

"Oh! I remembered also... a man. I can't make out many details, but... it seems he looks like me. Except he is more formal, serious-looking. But, the word 'Bravo!' being yelled verrrry loudly comes to

mind... We would work together, battling. It was fun. I wonder what he's doing now..."

Footsteps echoed inside of the Wayward Cave's tunnels as the dark-clothed man guided the strange masked green-haired man and the young recruits of the Survey Corps across the Highlands, toward their destination near Mount Coronet.

"I recall, faintly, that I had a partner once. A precious one. Its name escapes me, but I remember that it wielded flames with mastery. If only it were here, I'm sure it would light the way, luring us onward..." he mused as he walked, adjusting his hat by moving the visor with his hand.

The two younger members of the Survey Corps exchanged a glance of wonder at what Pokémon it could be, as it didn't sound like any Pokémon they had studied themselves.

The taller green-haired man let out a long dragged out hum of thought as he pondered about it. It somehow... sounded somewhat familiar. A hazy image of a young smiling man yelling out something enthusiastically as a long weird teal noodle and something that let out flames accompanied him. He remembered hazily, yet fondly; as though that had been a challenging battle he was rather happy about.

Earlier that day Ingo had utterly rejected his... very sudden advance, as he'd impulsively proposed since he looked vaguely familiar; now, he could kind of

vouch that yes, the man of his memories seemed oddly familiar to the man walking them through, and yet... something was off about it. Why would the man in his memories smile so often and yet the Warden smile so little?

"If that is a matter of your concern, I can quickly put your worries at ease, dear." he suddenly replied, an idea coming to mind.

He held out his palm and, for a second, something sparked off of it. For a moment, nothing exactly happened and then flames erupted, but vanished as quickly as they had appeared.

His lips turned into a thin line, an air of disappointment coming about him.

His company, however, was quite puzzled about what that had been. There was no Pokémon capable of doing that stunt next to the green-haired man so whatever could have caused... Was it then... merit of the eccentric masked man?

"How...?" Rei mused aloud, voicing the thoughts of the group.

"Well, of course, that is..." the reply died mid-sentence as the horned man realized... he did not know the answer.

He had gathered a vague notion thus far of who he'd been before landing in Hisui, but he seemed to still have a few things still eluding him.

"That is...?" Akari continued, hoping they'd get an answer.

"...I don't... know." he admitted, face going beet red in embarrassment.

Silence reigned in the dark cave before Ingo cleared his throat and mumbled something about continuing to guide the way as they resumed their walking. Maybe to politely save his company from further mortification.

Whatever the reason behind that was, he certainly earned a fairly passionate grateful response in the man's mind.

At some point, the warden stopped in his tracks again. This time, he was looking at an alpha Crobat that was flying about relatively closeby.

"Please forgive the unscheduled stop." he began as the people he guided caught up and stopped behind him. "I detect an alpha Crobat to our right. Under normal circumst-"

He was suddenly cut off by the noise of someone dashing off *right* in the Crobat's direction. As he turned around to check who of his passengers had dashed off, he saw the two younger Survey Corps members wide-eyed and looking over in the direction of the bat, where their companion had freed a pair of wings from underneath the Survey Corps uniform and was now readying... to attack said alpha Crobat.

"What the- Sir, that is too dangerous an endeavor, please-" Ingo yelled out before getting cut off again, this time by the man yelling back.

"Fear not, leave this task to the mighty Masked Satan, I shall make a safe path for the kids and you, dear!"

"Wh- Huh!? That is too dangerous, I plead you return post-haste, we can take a detour and arrive safely without compromising anyone's safety!" It seemed as though the Warden was... being put through quite a test of character, as Satan's impulsive choice of fighting against the alpha Crobat was putting him through considerable distress.

Whatever the cause, the horned man obediently returned to the crowd after making sure he distracted the Crobat by distracting it with a Pokémon of his own, a Pikachu he'd named Carbuncle, as he dashed away despite having just tried to wrestle it, retrieving Carbuncle with his Poké Ball.

After a small pause to process what had just happened, the man clad in black continued guiding the way through a detour of the cave, trying to ignore the fact that Satan had just gone back with the oddly biggest grin on his face. Whatever had caused him to...? Though, as he thought about the grin something else came to mind.

"I'm starting to recall a man who looked... like me.

We'd battle and discuss Pokémon, I think... The words "I like winning more than anything else" flashed through my mind just now..."

Satan hummed in thought at Ingo's musings. Something about it felt somewhat... familiar. He wondered if that man could have actually been the one he also vaguely remembered.

"Well," he started, chuckling somewhat smugly. "If you want to jog your mind a bit more I wouldn't mind battling you."

He held out his Poké Ball as if to prove that he was actually being serious about this thought.

"Oh-" Ingo cleared his throat. "Um... Much appreciated, though I cannot quite picture how that would be of any particular help..."

Rei and Akari, who had been mostly silent throughout the exchange (as they had partially been feeling as though they were third wheeling a very strange dynamic to begin with), looked over at Ingo's distant look as he thought about this man in a mix of awe and wonder, wondering who exactly this could be... and whether they'd ever be reunited.

"I cannot help but wonder, if he truly existed... what he might be doing right now..."

A group of anime-style characters are gathered in a dark, possibly underground, setting. In the upper center, a character with long green hair and a yellow mask looks down. To their left, a character with long white hair and a black hat looks towards the center. In the lower left, a character with white hair and a black headband is seen from the side, looking towards the center. In the lower right, a character with a large blue and yellow headpiece looks towards the center. In the background, several other characters are visible, including one with a beard and a red headband. A large white speech bubble is in the center of the image.

I wonder....
How the man
in
Black/White
Is doing
now...





The Beach Episode

Written by: DigitalPen

When Ingo and Emmet arrived at the villa in Undella town, there was already someone there. She was a woman, dressed in a black coat which was unsuitable for the seaside summer, and while Ingo and Emmet were unpacking themselves from the rental car, she was packing her own things into another one.

"Hello!" said Emmet. He slammed the driver's side door while Ingo stared from the passenger's seat. "Are you Caitlin's friend?"

The woman nodded. "Cynthia. And you are...?"

"Emmet. And this is Ingo."

Ingo was already feeling the dull press of annoyance from the lengthy car trip as he unfolded from his seat like origami. Meeting a new person was the opposite of what he needed to feel better. He nodded back, tersely, with what he knew was a scowl on his face. Her hair and her eyes...she did not look like someone Ingo wanted to know.

"Caitlin mentioned you were coming. I hope you enjoy the place. It's my favorite spot to relax away from home."

"I hope so, too. We could use some relaxation. Do

you know Caitlin from Sinnoh? We met her through the league here."

Sinnoh. That was what Ingo felt so keyed up about. The woman—Cynthia if he wanted to use her name—definitely had the look of a Hisuian. A Sinnohan, rather. He imagined her in blue. Yes, Ginkgo Guild, for sure. The reminder was a slap in the face.

"Yes," Cynthia confirmed. "Have either of you been before? You look kind of like..."

Talking about that was the last thing Ingo wanted to do, so he hefted the nearer suitcase and went straight through the beach house's front door. There was a placard on it in the shape of a magikarp. Ingo needed a distraction and fast.

Behind him, Emmet was saying something to try and cover for him. Not that Ingo cared much about being impolite. Ghosts didn't need to be polite. Dead people didn't need to be polite.

"He's been having a hard time since..." Emmet said.

Eugh. Ingo dragged the suitcase away, into the ocean-themed décor of the fancy villa.

Ingo sighed sharply and sweated under the hot sun. Emmet had scheduled their trip for the stickiest week of the summer. Ingo was consigned to suffer.

He was unused to the heat. Ingo had come from cold stone and snow and freezing death, and his return to Unova left him melting, uncomfortably alive.

Ingo was laden with a plastic cooler and a blue umbrella, so he had no hands free to shade the glare off his eyes.

"There's a spot!" Emmet pointed with all the energy of a boltund on the scent, using the one arm he had slung through the hole of his inner tube. He had inflated it back at the villa, instead of waiting until they didn't have to carry it any longer, which would have been more convenient.

The part of the beach that he indicated was the same as the rest. White sand. No shade. And no hiding from the dozens of other people who were also settled under their canopies in their little beach camps.

Ingo set the cooler down and cracked his spine back into shape. He tried to figure out if there was some way to angle the umbrella to block both the oppressive sun and the view from every member of the public. The calculus didn't really work out.

So, Ingo dug a halfhearted hole which Excadrill was quick to jump out and help with. That was nice. It was easier to watch and then jam the spiked umbrella pole in, once it was deep enough.

Excadrill chirped approval and rubbed himself against Ingo's calves. Oh no. Pokemon sweat. Emmet had set up the chairs.

"There. One for me and one for you," he said. They sat on each side of the umbrella's ring of tolerability with the cooler between them. "Thank you, buddy," Emmet told Excadrill, then reached to scratch under the edge of his little helmet.

Ingo picked a seat, and he sat. It was official: he was at the beach. He leaned the chair back as far as it would go.

The sound of the waves was constant white noise. Ingo drew a parallel to wind currents spiraling around Hisuian rock formations. He continued to sit.

"Sunscreen." Emmet passed the bottle to Ingo. Already, the surface had that tacky, slimy feeling on it. Residue.

Eugh.

"I know," said Emmet. "But you will feel worse if you burn. Put it on."

It was difficult to argue with Emmet when he had reason on his side, so Ingo sighed and put it on. He continued to suffer.

Around the perimeter of their sandy real estate, multiple members of Ingo and Emmet's pokemon team were enjoying the day. Excadrill and Haxorus

joined forces to excavate defensive fortifications in the sand. Eelektross had darted for the water first thing, and it splashed in irrepressible joy. But Ingo's partner, Chandelure, hung overhead, tucked under the tallest part of the umbrella. She was sitting quietly, just as Ingo was.

Could he derive some vicarious happiness from his pokemon? It didn't feel totally bad to watch Crustle slowly arrange grains of sand into a nest.

Emmet interrupted him. "Water? Snack? I have a magazine and a radio, if you want."

The sour smell of sunscreen was thick in Ingo's nose. His brother could really imitate a mother ursaring. "I'm fine," Ingo grunted.

So, Emmet got up from the shade and started directing the moat construction with aplomb. He could probably get Excadrill to carve crenellations. Ingo watched and simmered in the heat.

When his task was complete, Emmet tossed the plastic shovel aside with a satisfied smile. "Okay! Break time." And he pulled Excadrill up into his seat with him. With a happy pokemon in his lap, he rummaged through the cooler.

Ingo turned his head back to the waves and tried to make his mind quiet down.

The attempt was an abject failure. Emmet thrust a piece of fruit and a bottled sports drink at him.

"Here."

"I'm fine," Ingo told him. "Not hungry."

"You haven't eaten yet, today."

Ingo hated the way he tried to be sympathetic. The way he paid attention like that. Nobody had paid attention in Hisui. There hadn't been anything to pay attention to, just a ghost.

When Ingo didn't take the food, Emmet leaned precariously to drop it into his lap. Excadrill made a low-pitched huff as he was squished a bit.

Ingo opened his mouth to protest—he couldn't just eat out in the open in front of people, and not when his stomach was so unwilling, affected by the heat as he was. Emmet's rebuttal was to switch the radio on and turn the dial up most of the way.

That didn't help. Maybe it felt good to Emmet, but the way the sudden noise washed over him made Ingo's abdomen clench. A nebulous tension put his head into a vise. Human voices echoed from the airwaves and into his skull, and Ingo was transported back to his very first moments in Unova, when he had appeared in Gear Station.

The sound of hundreds of people and their pokemon and trains and music and phones had hurt physically somewhere in Ingo's chest. The crush of humanity had pressed against him on all sides, a sudden coffin of claustrophobia after hardly stepping into a

building for years. In Hisui, Ingo had been spared sensory overload, at least.

Already, Ingo's heart was going hard and uncomfortable under his ribs. Why did he have to be a living person?

He stood up from the chair into the harsh sun and walked away from their beach camp, toward the edge of the shore where the sand was damp and compact. He would take his leave.

Without looking back, Ingo trudged along the beach.

He returned an hour later, maybe two, to an Emmet who was looking very unimpressed and a Chandelure who bobbed close to his shoulder affectionately.

"I'm going to put a tracker on you or something," Emmet said with a folded posture. "Are you tired?"

Ingo could answer that one. "Yes." In the interim, the terrible sick feeling had been replaced by a more bearable prickling heat, and even that had been buried a little under a sandcastle made of lethargy. Ingo dropped into the open beach chair.

Wordlessly, Emmet offered the sports drink again. Ingo accepted it, too exhausted to put up a fight, and grumbled when the headache that had been killing him coincidentally eased right after he

finished it.

Ingo managed dinner that evening by moving to a private room away from Emmet and eating standing up. Yes, Emmet was probably disappointed that he couldn't eat at the table like a normal human person, but Ingo figured he was owed some grace because it was Emmet's idea to drag him out to a stranger's beach house.

"Caitlin is not a stranger," Emmet had said more than once. "She is a friend of Elesa's and Elesa is a friend of ours."

"Elesa's not my friend," Ingo had answered every time. "And you've only known her for like a year."

It was after they had both finished eating that Emmet approached him again. He had a look on his face that suggested contrition, but Ingo was unsure what he was even pretending to be sorry for. The fake pity would have incensed him in the days following his return from Hisui, but in the present, Ingo weathered it stoically. Extremely stoically. He was not annoyed.

"I have something for you," said Emmet.

Ingo hoped it wasn't more food that he was expected to eat. Or another person to meet and make a bad impression on. But he didn't leave when Emmet sat in the other wicker armchair next to the

plastic plant.

"It is from Cynthia."

"I don't know if I want anything Cynthia has for me." Something about her put him on edge even more than most people did. Ingo had quite strictly avoided her until she had completely packed up and left the villa the day before. It was the way she looked and also the way she spoke. She'd even had the same accent as everyone in Hisui.

"I will tell you what it is, and you can decide. It is a photograph."

Ingo shrugged. That depended on what was in the photograph, didn't it?

"It is a copy of a historical photo. One from the Hisuian era." Emmet must have seen how Ingo immediately jolted with tension. He continued. "It is a picture of you. I think you would want to have it."

Ingo's first reaction was outright refusal. "Absolutely not," he said. He drew his feet up into the seat with him and hugged around his folded knees until he could feel the stretch in his back muscles. Why would he want to look at himself in Hisui? But Emmet had said he would want to see it. In what context had the picture been taken? Ingo surely couldn't remember. "But what else is in it?"

"You look happy in this one," he said.

Ingo? Looking happy? "Let me see," he said.

"You said you didn't—"

"I don't want to keep it, just see it," Ingo explained.
"Let me see what it is."

"Okay." Emmet held the photo out to him by one corner. "Cynthia said she has the original, and plenty of copies besides. So, we can get another if you want one."

Ingo didn't know how he felt about that. An unsettled seasick feeling rocked the chair he was curled in. He took hold of the photograph and flipped it over.

There he was on the other side. And, standing right next to him, there was Zisu.

Oh. Zisu.

She looked ecstatic. She was in her element, in her home, standing between the tall upright posts of the gate to the training grounds under a brilliant sky. It was more accurate to say that he was standing next to her instead of the other way round. Zisu, in her solid dependability, took up most of the middle of the frame, and Ingo hunched in her shadow, a skewed three-quarter profile.

Ingo worried that the bland fish dinner from earlier would make a repeat performance. In the photograph he looked every inch the ghost,

shredded and ephemeral. He looked like a stiff breeze would have knocked him over, and glimpses of the training field behind him were visible through the holes in his coat. And yet, something about Ingo in the photo looked all right.

Okay, maybe it was just that Weird Basculin's cloudy tail was pressed against him to where it disappeared out of frame. Or maybe it had been tolerably warm that day. Ingo looked comfortable. Tired but content.

Damn. If there had been one good thing in Hisui, it was Zisu. He really had enjoyed spending time with her, hadn't he? Impossible, but true. The proof was in front of him, but it was so difficult to remember.

"Ah," Ingo sighed. He wished she was still there, that he could speak with her, hear how she was doing. "It's Zisu. I miss her."

"I can ask Cynthia if there's anything else," said Emmet. "Maybe she has more pictures, or letters or something."

It wouldn't be the same as having a friend in the flesh. And Ingo was loath to ask a favor from Cynthia: her very presence put him on edge. But Zisu had made him feel human when everyone else had called him a ghost. She would've been glad to comfort him from beyond her own grave. She wouldn't have wanted him to rot away from the inside out.

"Maybe later," Ingo said. "When we get back home." He stretched out of the chair to return the photo to Emmet. Ingo would want to look at it later, but in the meantime, he worried that keeping it nearby would corrupt it somehow.

Emmet took it back and tucked the picture away between the folds of his wallet.

The following day had a breeze that stole the edge from the boiling heat of before, and a bank of clouds over the ocean that Emmet identified as an offshore storm cell. Chandelure hummed a tune of sweet relief that the sky was more overcast, and Ingo almost joined her. It was an improvement.

"I'm not making you eat but I have a drink for you," said Emmet after they had relaxed somewhat. He pulled some out of the cooler. They were the ones that came in foil pouches.

Ingo accepted his silently and jabbed the straw into the side. Right over his head, Chandelure drifted lower, eyes trained on the shiny silver foil.

She cooed curiously at it.

"You want one?" Emmet asked her. She wiggled in answer, and he took another out of the cooler. "Here. For you."

Emmet stuck the straw through and set the pouch

up on its flat bottom side so that it stuck up where she could get to it.

Chandelure hummed and bounced before touching her face against the straw, clearly happy to be included.

"You know she can't actually drink that," Ingo said.

Emmet put his sunglasses on and sent him a satisfied smile. "You will have to finish it for her, then."

An hour later, with two drink pouches drained and a handful of nuts in him, Ingo went down to the water to say hello to the rest of his team. Excadrill, clever boy that he was, had carved out a pile of wet sand into a squarish shape which he was still adding details to. He was using Crustle's napping form as a model.

Haxorus was laid out, letting the waves lap against the wall she made with her scaled flank. Every so often, a stronger surge swamped her head in seawater, and she would snort bubbles and shake her head up over the surface. She tossed droplets that sprinkled over the rest of them, Garbodor who screeched and dodged the surf and Klinklang who diligently kept off the sand which could stick in its gears.

Ingo sat directly on the wet ground so he could lean against Haxorus. The waves swept up to lick against his legs, and he scooped a handful of sodden gray

sand up between his palms. When he twisted at the waist, he could let it drizzle out and onto the scales of Haxorus's tail. It left a line of blobby drips behind.

Haxorus lifted her head to watch Ingo deface her armor. She made a low noise, and he stopped. She made it again and he resumed, only for the next wave to wash the sand off again. Haxorus wriggled and poked Ingo with one foreleg. He pet her back and left a sandy handprint.

"Okay, yes. We're both dirty," Ingo said. Chandelure and Klinklang hovered out of reach. "Bathtime?" he asked. That was a word that all their pokemon knew.

Haxorus stood in anticipation. She was the only one in his half dozen who liked bath time, so she alone followed him into the water.

It wasn't the same as a bath with the hose at the local park, nor as a fancy grooming session at a salon. The ocean water was dark, salty, and cold.

Ingo hopped a little when the water lifted higher than the band of his shorts. Haxorus crouched under the surface so only her face and her burnished tusk blades were visible.

One deep breath in, and Ingo submerged himself. The cold shock ran through him, and when Ingo stood up again, he felt each hair along his arms raise in an army of goosebumps. Did ghosts get those? Maybe he would ask later.

Ingo swam further out, right to the edge of his reach, where he could tread water inches away from a standable depth. A few feet behind, Haxorus stood with her shoulders out of the water, amusing herself by snapping her jaws closed on bits of sea foam that lingered after each wave.

A cloud passed over the sun and Ingo turned to see his Chandelure creeping closer to him over the water. She scooted up and over the crest of each swell, eyes trained on the sea. When Ingo experimentally splashed in her direction, those eyes went wide, and she jolted up further in the air without a sound.

"Sorry, baby, no splashing," Ingo said to her. "Come here." He motioned with his hand.

Chandelure hesitated before dropping within reach.

"You're very brave," Ingo pronounced solemnly. He stretched up as far as he could and slapped a wet hand against her glass.

Chandelure produced a sound that Ingo could only describe as a whine and scrunched her eyes shut, but she didn't abandon him.

After Chandelure had fallen silent, the sea felt calmer, less energetic. Which was why it wasn't so surprising when a translucent blue jellicent wandered up to them. The jellicent made a noise that was maybe supposed to be a song, but the only

sound that filtered above the surface was a drumlike bwub bwub and a moaning cry.

"Did you get pushed in to shore by the storm?" Ingo asked.

The jellicent, predictably, did not answer. It drifted into a battle posture and Chandelure swooped low.

Now that got Ingo's engine running. With a battle underway he didn't have to think about everything that was screwed up in his life. Instead, he could devote his energy to comparing the pokemon's stats—Chandelure had about ten levels up on the jellicent—and figuring out his strategy.

It wasn't an intricate strategy: hit the jellicent until it fainted. Ingo considered Chandelure's double type disadvantage. She seemed eager to fight, but Ingo checked that Haxorus could swap in, just in case. Eelektross was swimming nearby, somewhere under the water, ready to swipe the battle out from under him, he just knew it.

"Shadow ball," he called.

They won the fight mere minutes later. Chandelure wobbled from the last water pulse she had taken, which had left a puddle sloshing around inside the glass bowl of her body, but she floated victorious. The only loss was a little of her pride.

From the sand, Emmet was waving his arms in congratulations and motioning excitedly to the ice

cream vendor pushing a little wheeled cart up the beach. He looked like he might knock the nearest umbrella down.

Ingo swam back to Haxorus, where he could stand upon the ocean floor and catch his breath. It felt alright. He wasn't unhappy with the win. He wasn't even unhappy with the day. He would go back to the chairs in a little while, eat a snack, and take the rest of it as it came. It was fine. And he would be fine.



INGO...

TODAY IS
THE DAY.

I AM
TURNING
TWENTY-
SEVEN.

YOU WOULD HAVE, TOO.



NO
MATTER
HOW MANY
YEARS
IT'S
BEEN...

IT NEVER
GETS ANY
EASIER.



IF YOU WERE STILL HERE,
WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

WOULD WE STILL BE ON THE SAME TRACK OF LIFE
TOGETHER, HEADED TO A SIMILAR DESTINATION?



I SUPPOSE IT ISN'T TOO
HEALTHY TO DWELL ON.

I TRY
NOT TO.



INSTEAD, I KEEP
MYSELF BUSY ON
THIS DAY -
CARVING LIKE
THIS.



I HOPE THAT I
AM AT LEAST
HONORING YOU
WELL THIS WAY.
KEEPING YOUR
MEMORY ALIVE.
HOWEVER SMALL
THIS IS...



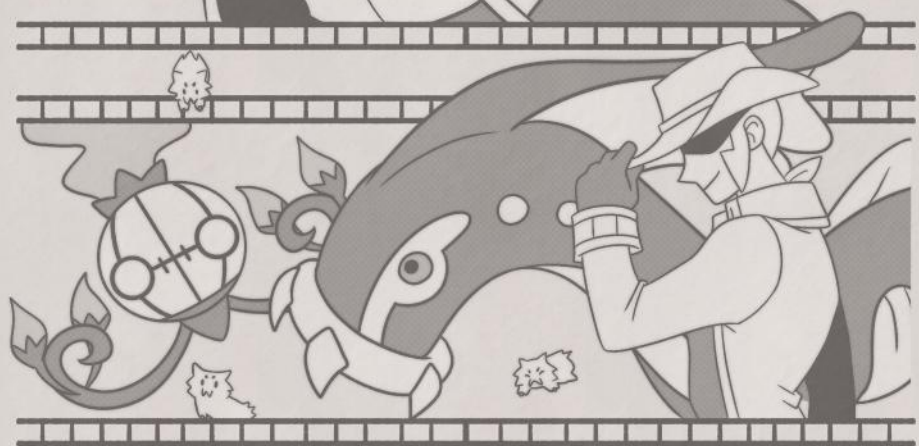
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, INGO.

I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN NEXT YEAR. -EMMET





SIDE TRACKED



Deja-Vù

Written by: Random

He was verrry glad he had not been the one to accompany AkaRei to the Highlands when they were tasked with quelling Lord Electrode.

Not because he did not enjoy the kid's company (he did), or because he wanted to stay cooped up in Jubilife (he did not), or because he wasn't interested in visiting this specific environment (he would not have been under other circumstances, but he had been forced to stay in the village with verrry little battling competition for *ages* and he would take *whatever* change of pace, scenery and opponents he got); but now that he was actually escorting both child and professor to the mountain camp it had become apparent incredibly quickly that his bad leg was no longer built to trudge around places this steep.

Emmet gave a groaning hum as he compressed his pained knee between his palms in an attempt at alleviating the burning sensation eating away at his joint. The soothing salve he'd applied on it worked very slowly, and the bandages he'd wrapped himself in to make sure the concoction didn't get absorbed by the fabric of his pants instead had started digging into his skin in a terribly annoying way.

If it had been up to him to guide and look after AkaRei on their first venture to the mountain, he would have done a disastrously poor job.

Luckily the local Pearl Clan warden had seen to that... and now the Pokémon he watched over, Sneasler, had taken it upon herself to accompany the kid around. He'd already thanked her; hopefully he'd manage to express his thanks to her caretaker soon, too.

Terusho was a few feet away, fiddling with the professor's portable camera to try and get a good shot of the Alpha Carnivine prowling the shores of the little lake the camp sat next to without having to move anywhere closer to that rustling beast, shuddering lightly each time a deep, foreboding hiss left the enormous jaws; their concentration was such that when they did register a movement in the corner of their eye they almost jumped, throwing both the delicate photographic equipment and themselves into the nearby water.

"Safety check!" Emmet hollered at the sight: "Please remain behind the yellow line."

The kid hurried away from the river bank as instructed: "Is something wrong?" they were quick to ask as he hissed while properly pulling himself upright.

"Nope! I am Emmet. I am fine! Just bored."

"And your leg—"

"Still hurts. But! Better than earlier. I will go on a walk."

Terusho made some kind of doubtful grimace: "Isn't that the opposite of what you would need in your conditions?"

"Perhaps," the Security Corps member conceded with one of his usual sharp smiles a little skewed from the pain: "But sitting is not helping. It makes my knee hurt. Badly. I will go on a walk to feel better."

"This isn't exactly the most pleasant environment for that sort of thing..."

"I have my Wyrdeer! She will help if I'm in a pickle."

"And what about – oh, well, I mean, the Pokémon aren't a problem for you."

"Nope."

"But still–"

A finger pointed right at their nose: "I am Emmet! I am verry bored. You will not stop me. Unless you beat me in a Pokémon battle!"

The kid stuck out their tongue in dismay: "No way! You'd tear through me in no time!"

"Heh heh. I know."

Terusho blew a raspberry at him.

Emmet snickered again, waving goodbye: "Follow the rules! I will be around."

"Wait - wait just a second," the professor's apprentice insisted at the last minute. The man huffed loudly, but they paid him no mind; opening the large chest AkaRei kept all their foraged ingredients in, they rummaged through the near endless pile of berries and pebbles and whatnot until they pulled out something like a well carved cane with a triumphant cry, hurrying to hand it over to him with evident pride: "I wasn't part of the Construction Corps for nothing, you know."

The man's eyes seemed to shine. He took the tool from much younger hands carefully, handling the polished wood as though it were crystal: it looked as though it was ready to slip through his fingers like a wet Barboach, but he found his grip on it steady and secure when he punted it on the ground. His wrist wasn't used to it yet, but he could figure out a more comfortable way to hold it with just a little trial and error.

"You made this?"

"Of course!" they grinned. "I know the Commander insisted you shouldn't do much beyond basic Security duties, but I figured it couldn't have hurt to make you something that could let you get around a little easier."

Emmet replied with a wide smile of his own: "Bravo!" he said (the word tasted weird in his mouth), "It's verrry good! Thank you! It'll be of *much* help. Yup, yup!"

Terusho laughed, flustered.

The Security Corps member adjusted his grip and straightened up; with a little "Safety check!" he punted the cane firmly in the ground, leaning on it heavily to test how much weight he could take off of his injured leg and which way was best to hold the handle to reduce any possible discomfort, finding himself plenty satisfied on both ends.

He marched around the camp a little to get used to his new arrangement, quickly settling into a fairly easy rhythm after a bit of stumbling. He couldn't go *that* fast – he did still have a busted leg, after all – but it was leagues above what he'd had going on before.

His cheeks started to hurt from how wide he was smiling.

"Fits you like a glove!" Terusho noted.

"Yup!" he replied loudly, beaming straight at them, face bright enough to thoroughly light up even the darkest cave.

He marched all the way to them, circled around them, speed-walked across the full perimeter of

the camp; then he sat down with Terusho's help to regain his breath a moment, as the adrenalin rush provided by his new mobility had perhaps gotten him a little drunk with power and he'd gone all in way too quickly.

+++

The Highlands were surprisingly pretty when one's thoughts weren't completely overwhelmed with handling pain.

The cane's thumps weren't quite as satisfying a sound as they could have been (he couldn't place why), but they marked the steady rhythm of his gait rather well as he wandered idly, taking his time.

His free arm swung in a wide angle to balance him better as Emmet strode across every patch of even vaguely planer terrain he could find, Luxray prowling relaxed at his side to deter any mischievous beasts from jumping him under the assumption that he'd be easy prey; the rocky ground held steady under his feet, which he found much more preferable to the sandy shores of the Coastlands or the wet mud of the Mirelands, though he still longed for the soft terrain that characterized the western regions of Hisui. His soul wept at the prospect of having to trudge through the perennial snow of the Iceands in his uniform's sandals – but he would do it! For AkaRei. Safety first, for young passengers especially.

Even if he had to freeze his toes.

A soft ache had him twist his face into an annoyed grimace. The bandages around his knee had long been changed and loosened so that they wouldn't pinch his skin as he walked, but after proceeding on this track at a steady gait for the better part of two hours they had started to itch again.

A thorough safety check was in order: returning Luxray to her Pokéball to let her rest after making her walk around for so long with him, he decided to sit down on the bridge right before Bolderoll Ravine (which he was *not* going to climb - loitering around might have been deathly boring but he was still very aware of his limits, and a steep path like that certainly was one) so that he could take care of his plight away from the claws of easily angered Skuntanks, Sneasles and Gravelers.

The cool water in which he dipped his fingers was a welcome respite. His large Security Corps hat had shielded his face and neck from the sun very effectively, but the heavy Bibarel fur that lined his uniform had slowly grown suffocatingly warm even despite the breeze... Unfastening his obi so that the jacket could hang open and passing his humid fingertips along the artery of his neck provoked an immediate soothing effect that had him sighing in relief, and despite the powerful chill that rattled his spine his feet were also very grateful to meet the stream after so much exercise. He carefully pulled the bandages off his knee to let it breathe as well: the painful throbbing feeling ensnaring it began to lessen as he massaged it in the cool air until it finally quieted down into a vague, forgettable

discomfort.

Emmet nodded, satisfied.

Safety check passed with flying colors!

Legs dangling from the bridge, Emmet laid down on the warmed bricks to enjoy the weather.

"ATTENTION, PASSENGER!" a voice rang out through the whole mountain at that moment, causing his eyes to snap open from the mild heart attack that ensued.

Not raising his head, he turned it left and right in search of whoever had called out to him: a dark blot with a much lighter spot in its middle waved at him from one of the small outcroppings near the waterfall to catch his attention.

"PLEASE DO NOT SIT AT THE EDGE OF THE PLATFORM! REMAIN BEHIND THE YELLOW LINE!" the blot shouted again. "DESPITE ITS INNOCUOUS APPEARANCE, THE STREAM COULD STILL DRAG YOU AWAY!"

He replied by raising one arm to show off as clear a thumbs up as he could, trying to convey that he had understood; when he got a similar gesture in return he proceeded to pull his healthy leg back up and used it to steady himself better as he leveraged its less fortunate twin out of the water as well, visibly struggling as the stone bricks threatened to reopen old wounds that just wouldn't scarify.

"HAVE YOU BEEN INJURED?" the blot hollered another time. Emmet wished it would stop doing that. As much as he appreciated the wild Pokémon scrambling away from the noise, he also enjoyed not being deaf. "HOLD STEADY! I WILL BE WITH YOU IN A MOMENT TO HELP YOU RETURN TO YOUR STATION SAFELY!"

"Nope!" he shouted back, though the blot had already begun scaling the cliff down towards it. He hissed: the sun was hurting his eyes, but his knee flaring up without warning (possibly from the stress this entire Thing he was caught up in now) demanded too much attention to let him pick his hat back up first. "I am Emmet. I am a member of the Security Corps. I am fine. I have already run my safety checks. My leg just hurts. It does that! It's all old injuries. Nothing to be worried about."

"IT'S STILL NOT SAFE FOR YOU TO BE UNACCOMPANIED!" the blot – who, now that he had made his way onto horizontal ground and was coming closer, was much more clearly a man – replied.

"I am Emmet. I am not unaccompanied. I have my Pokémon and my walking aid."

The subsequent insistent shouting he was expecting as he stood back up with the cane's help did not come. That struck him as strange: something about that powerful voice gave him the nagging feeling that his interlocutor wouldn't have backed down so

readily, especially not when it came to safety. He looked up to check if the other man was indeed still there.

Some sort of funhouse mirror answered his gaze.

His mouth was held slightly open in pure bafflement, his eyes wide. His sideburns looked to have been bleached by almost constant exposure to sunlight, and so did the small beard jutting out of his chin like a spike.

Emmet resisted the urge to check if he hadn't shaved, frozen in place, lips flat, an uneasy feeling stirring in his chest.

"It's you," the man said in an almost sleep-talking tone.

He wore a long dark coat, dirty and ragged; something was terribly familiar about it, about the hat and pants and shoes that accompanied it. The pale pink of the Pearl Clan's tunic looked utterly out of place. Through a frayed sleeve he could have glimpsed the shape of a large bracelet, likely made of wood, colored in purple and yellow, if his eyes hadn't been glued to the white ones staring into his own.

"I am Emmet," he repeated.

"Yes," the man nodded, still in that strange dream-like state: "Yes, of course you are. Of course. Of course!"

He made a motion to come closer, raising his arms towards him as if to catch him in them.

Emmet took a step back.

The man pulled back as well.

"It's you," he repeated.

"Yup. I am Emmet." his voice and body were completely stiff. The strange feeling in his ribcage was starting to hurt. "I do not know you."

"Of course you do," the man replied, baffled: "Of course you do. I'm Ingo."

No response.

"My name is Ingo. We are a two-cart train, aren't we? We're... Ah," and he squeezed his head between his hands, as if it were a tough berry refusing to be juiced, "We are a two-cart train, we are - we are-!"

"I am Emmet. I am a member of the Security Corps. Who are you?"

"My name is Ingo! I am the warden of Lady Sneasler, and you're - you're- you're the man who looks like me!"

He took a step forward again, not backing away when Emmet distanced himself once more.

"You're the man who looks like me - we used to talk, and discuss Pokémon, and battle..."

"I don't know you."

"You like winning more than anything else."

Emmet tensed.

This had to be some kind of trick.

A Ghost toying with him while the sun was still high in the sky.

"Isn't that right? Isn't that something you've told me?"

"I don't know you."

"Of course you do! Of course... We are- we are... Oh, Almighty Sinnoh—"

"I am Emmet. I am not from Hisui."

"Neither am I!"

"No. You are a warden."

"I was welcomed into the clan!"

"Who are you?"

"I am Ingo!" a sudden flash brightened the man's eyes. "Your brother!"

Ah.

Ah.

"My brother is dead." Emmet replied sharply. The hand gripping the cane trembled slightly. "He drowned."

Ingo looked at him now with wonder.

"That can't be right," he muttered as if talking about the answer to a math problem, "I'm right here, aren't I."

"My brother drowned," Emmet insisted: "He drowned. We were on a ship. It sunk. Our coats were too heavy. I was found. He wasn't. He drowned. He drowned. Miss Zisu said so. He must have drowned. He must have. My brother drowned. He drowned. He drowned."

Ingo shook his head gently, reaching out to him again: "I am right here. How can I have drowned if I'm here?"

"Ghost."

"It's not night yet, so it can't be that. Emmet—"

"You're not my brother. My brother drowned. He drowned. He... He..."

A knot closed off his throat.

While he was busy rambling denials upon denials Ingo's gaze had fallen on the round blue and white charm that adorned Emmet's neck, the last thing he had left from his past life; a sudden realization had struck him, and he'd taken off his hat in a haste to show it to the other man better.

Front and center, sitting on a rusty band right above the bill, was an exact copy of the symbol.

Same design, same colors, same material: a perfect match.

Emmet stared at it.

A powerful sense of vertigo seized him. His mouth opened wide: "Ah," he only managed to caw out.

His arms were shaking so fiercely that his cane was rattling against the bricks. He looked up again, searching for the eyes so perfectly identical to his own: Ingo replied with a wide, hopeful gaze.

"Ah," he repeated. He felt tears struggle out of his eyelids. "Ah."

Ingo hugged him.

After a moment, Emmet hugged him back.

"Ah. Ah ah." he coughed. A smile crept across his face as he dug it into the familiar dirty fabric,

sinking into the shoulder holding him upright: "Ah ah! Ah! Ah ah!"

Laughter spilled out of him in short bursts while he squeezed the other in his arms, being squeezed back just as hard; they pulled apart only for a moment, to look at each other now that they were so close, and his stunted chuckles just kept falling out of his mouth, and Ingo just hugged him tighter and tighter, and his legs shook more and more terribly as the feeling in his chest burst out like a flame.

He found himself sitting on the brick bridge, still safe and sound in his brother's arms, neither about to let go anytime sooner.

"My brother, my brother, you were my *brother* – of course, of course!" he heard Ingo chastise himself as they rocked in place: "I can't believe I could ever forget that... Oh, Emmet, Emmet, my poor little baby brother Emmet, thinking me dead... You're a much stronger man than I am, I don't believe I would've survived such a thought. Almighty Sinnoh, how did we manage to never meet *once* in three entire years?"

"Three?" Emmet asked with a very small voice, because he was feeling so hard that he couldn't have managed anything louder.

"Isn't that how long we've been here? You said we arrived together, right? On a shipwreck?"

"Yes - I think. It probably was. A shipwreck. But a year and a half ago."

Ingo stilled and furrowed his brows: "A year and a half.." he mouthed, running some quick calculations to make sure he'd understood correctly; then he gasped: "But I arrived in Hisui much earlier - you must have found a lead on my disappearance in the meantime! You must have come looking for me and that's how you washed ashore!"

"And got my leg messed up." then he raised a hand and squashed his brother's nose against it: "You prick."

"Excuse you!"

Emmet laughed again, feeling knuckles playfully digging into the side of his head.

It took them a while to come down from the slew of overwhelming relief and joy and other less describable emotions enough to finally stand up again and make their way back to the mountain camp (very, very slowly, so that Emmet's leg would not strain too much and they could chew one another's ear off about everything that had happened to them) - a while, and a discrete amount of disgustingly loud cheek-kissing, because at some point their arms were becoming sore from all the hugging but they still weren't done annoyingly letting each other know just how glad they were to be alive together in ways words couldn't quite convey.

Along the way, Ingo suddenly stopped: "Oh Sinnoh," he realized with a suffering groan: "AkaRei had literally told me about you."

"They did?"

"They said I looked a lot like their usual chaperone."

"And it didn't raise suspicion?"

"No! They are eight! I assumed it was just because of the sideburns!"

Emmet opened his mouth to make fun of him; then, remembering how immediately he'd fit in with his coworkers in terms of how to style facial hair, he shut it for a moment, and agreed: "Verrry understandable."

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"Miss Zisu!"

The towering woman turned to the open door of the dojo. What sliver of sky she could see was tinged with a deep orange, almost falling into the darker blues of the night.

The Survey Corps were back already? She'd grown accustomed to longer absences, what with the kid's tendency to wander into every nook and cranny of each region until they had no more places to explore. Maybe they'd already gotten rather busy

on their first visit, and now they had very little to actually see in the Highlands.

Setting the last Grit pebbles, gravels, rocks and dusts away, she went out to greet the most battle-savvy member of her corps and likely force him to pass by Peselle for a check-up on his leg, no matter how many safety checks he performed himself.

It was then nothing short of surprising to see him walk up to the training grounds with a pep in his step, a cane in one hand, and an arm wrapped around the neck of a dark clothed man sporting his foreign good luck charm on his hat – and most bafflingly of all, a perfect replica of his own face.

Emmet waved at her with a wide grin brighter than a Strong Style Hyperbeam; his doppelganger gave only a small smile, but it matched the other's intensity perfectly.

"I found my brother!"





Childhood Days

Written by: Blue

"Okay," Ingo said, petting Hydreigon's nose. "Please be good? Don't scare our friend. You like her, but you're suspicious of everyone."

The dragon stared into Ingo's eyes, unblinking, pupils visible at this close distance. Emmet's hands reached over to ruffle her stiff fringe that framed her face like a goth sunflora.

"Yes! Verry good. Elesa is staying over. Did you know?"

Hydreigon crooned as Drayden, washing the dishes, laughed. "You've only told the pokemon a hundred times, boys."

"Well, we're excited!" said Ingo, face unchanged but voice indignant in a way only young children could really manage.

"Yup yup! It is the first time anyone is sleeping over. I am Emmet. I am excited!"

Setting aside a plate and grabbing the next item from the sink, Drayden smiled to himself. He was happy the twins finally had a good enough friend that they got to have sleepovers, even if he was a little too nervous to let *them* stay over anyone

else's house. What if they had a medical problem, or someone there was mean to them, or...

The more logical part of Drayden's brain said he was overreacting, but the other, louder part of his brain said that he had good cause to be. He'd never had to deal with this before; he was a first-time single parent and his sons were growing up, slowly but surely. If tonight went well, and it should, then he'd consider letting the twins stay over Elesa's house. They'd happily been friends for almost two years, at this point, without anything more than petty childhood squabbles.

"Before she gets here, do either of you have anything you're worried about?" Best to cover all the bases, just in case.

Emmet tilted his head, looking a little confused.

"Why would we be worried?"

"Yeah," Ingo said, nodding. "We're at home. She's visited us here before! She likes all the pokemon. She's just going to be staying the night."

"She is older than us. She won't get homesick," Emmet added confidently.

That was true, and Drayden knew this not because Elesa was older, but because when speaking to her grandparents about sleepover arrangements, he'd asked what to do if she got homesick and they'd assured him this was far from her first sleepover.

She was outgoing and extroverted enough that she'd never gotten homesick before.

"She could maybe get regular sick," Ingo noted. "But I don't think we're really worried about that. That sorta just sometimes... Happens."

"Alright," Drayden said, nodding with a smile that reached his eyes. "If you think of anything, just let me know. Now, finish picking up your room while you wait. There's still some Brix on the floor, don't think I wouldn't notice."

Ingo and Emmet looked at each other in cartoonish synchronicity, crestfallen, before Ingo sighed and Emmet pouted and they went to finish the task they'd been putting off. Those bricks and various pieces had to be *sorted*, they couldn't just put them away all mixed up, and they simply didn't *feel* like doing something as mundane as sorting toys when they were so excited.

When the twins entered their room, grumbling under their breaths, their two vanillites floated over from their hangout in the corner of the room, tiny warbling cries sounding happy as they each bonked the cheek of their respective trainer. How could the boys stay grumpy for long when the goofy faces of their first pokemon were staring back at them?

"Okay!" Emmet said, unable to keep his smile away for long. "We will cheer up! You are verry cold!"

Ingo was giggling, more tolerant of his icy pokemon

snuggling against his neck. "Thank you for the help."

"You can't help for this part, though," Emmet said, mouth set in a grim line again. "You don't have hands."

Still, the two pokemon orbited their heads as they meticulously made sure their Brix were put away to both their own liking and their uncle's. Once the task was started, it wasn't so bad, and it went quicker when they were focused.

"Okay, done," said Ingo, sounding satisfied as Emmet closed the plastic bin.

"Good," said Emmet with a nod.

They still had roughly twenty minutes before Elesä arrived, so Ingo piloted them to the bathroom to check the mirror and make sure they looked alright.

"She has seen us before. Even when we are messy." Emmet was a little confused, but he also liked looking his best, so he rubbed some of the wrinkles out of his shirt. "We look fine. Normal."

"Okay," said Ingo. "I just wanted to make sure."

"... You are a little nervous. Aren't you?"

Despite his lack of most facial expressions, Ingo looked sheepish. "You could tell?"

"I am Emmet. I can always tell."

"I don't really even know why," said Ingo. "It's stupid."

"Yeah, feelings can be stupid. But you know what's *not* gonna be stupid? This sleepover. With our best friend."

Ingo's eyes turned up at the corners. "You're smart, Emmet. When did you get smart? We're always together and I didn't notice."

"Well, maybe it was... Hey!" The teasing finally sunk in and Ingo laughed at Emmet's expression. "Mean. I reassured you, too. I am Emmet and I am the good twin."

Before Ingo could answer, the doorbell chimed, closely followed by a cacophony of dragons, determined to shout over whatever guest dared grace their doorstep. Apparently, they didn't have twenty minutes. Apparently, Elesa was here now.

The boys looked at one another, and nearly tripped in their haste to leave the bathroom and get downstairs. Their gait was quicker than normal, but wobbly; the two were unable to run, not practiced enough to coordinate the high-speed movements that were needed.

"Ingo! Emmet! Elesa is here!" called Drayden, able to be heard now that his dragons had quieted.

"We're coming!" hollered Ingo in response. Emmet

didn't bother responding, knowing his quieter voice would be lost. He just focused on making sure they didn't fall over; Ingo could be loud for them both.

Still, once they reached the end of the stairs they almost unbalanced and Drayden had to place a large hand on Emmet's shoulder to keep them from toppling over.

"Not so fast boys, especially on the stairs."

They hadn't really been going fast; the issue had more so been two minds operating one set of legs rather than speed, but that didn't matter. What *did* matter was Elesa standing in the doorway, holding a bright yellow duffle bag, tailed by her timid blitzle.

"Hi guys!" she said, face lighting up at the sight of them. Very carefully passing her bag to Blitzle, who held it in his mouth by the strap, she moved inside to hug each of her friends in turn. Aside from Drayden, no one could easily hug both of them at once. She made sure that Emmet wanted a hug at all before wrapping her arms around him.

"Hi Elesa!" they said in unison. Ingo continued, saying "welcome! We're happy you could come!"

"I'm happy I could come too." Blitzle moved into the foyer, and Drayden closed the door behind them.

"You three can sleep in the living room, if you'd like," Drayden said, taking Elesa's bag from her pokemon. "Boys, I'll get the spare mattress pad for

you so your back doesn't hurt from sleeping on the floor."

"Thanks, Dad," they both said as they led the way to the living room to drop off their things, where Flygon and Altaria were napping. The rest of the dragons were elsewhere in the house or yard. The children only had one pokemon each, so they could easily fit into the bedroom, which is where they headed next.

"Hi, Vanillites One and Two!" Elesa called cheerily, and both little dessert-shaped pokemon went to see her.

"They like you," Emmet commented happily.

"I'm glad," she said, patting each of them gently, then sticking her fingers under her arms to warm them up. "What's the plan for tonight?"

The boys looked at each other. "Well," Ingo started. "Since you know more about sleepovers than us, how do they usually go?"

"Yeah you just mentioned. Games and stuff," said Emmet. "No details. We would like details, yup yup."

Elesa giggled. "Well... It's different with different people. But usually there's a movie. Sometimes two! Board games or video games, scary stories after dark... Junk food and snacks! Did your dad buy anything like that?"

"We have chips, popcorn, and ice cream," declared Ingo proudly.

"With a pizza promised for dinner," chimed in Emmet.

Elesa grinned. "Perfect! I know some kids have pokemon battle practice or training. But I think they're a little older than us. I wanna try anyways, but... I don't wanna get your dad angry."

"Yeah, and our vanillites are still really little," said Ingo worriedly. "I don't want them to be hurt."

"I don't even know if they're gonna want to battle. They seem shy," said Emmet. "When we're older, we should build battle teams. Yup. These two can be our buddies instead!"

Elesa was a little surprised by that. Emmet, who was obsessed with battling and becoming a 'verrry powerful trainer' one day, wasn't going to train his very first pokemon? As she watched him interact with the small ice-cream-shaped creature, though, she understood.

"Yeah, that sounds good," she said aloud, smiling. "You can always find some rowdier pokemon on your journey!"

"That still doesn't answer the question of how we should start this sleepover," Ingo said, tapping his chin.

The trio discussed the merits of their options. It was deemed to be too early for movies, and it wasn't time for dinner yet. The scary stories and word games Elesa promised to share with them were better saved for after dark, she said, which made sense. Outdoor games were brought up as a possible option, but many the twins weren't capable of playing, and the ones they *could* play meant that they'd be a team and Elesa didn't have a partner. Eventually, though, they came to a consensus:

"Videogames!" they cheered.

"And snacks!" Emmet added. "Very important."

They ended up sitting on the couch together playing a racing game that Elesa handily beat them at nine times out of ten. Over the course of their time playing, though, the twins slowly got better, especially Emmet. After they got bored of that game, they chose a more cooperative title, where they had to work together to solve puzzles and defeat enemies. All of the kids were on more equal footing with this game, especially because the twins had played it, but Elesa had not.

Each of them had their strengths and weaknesses and covered each other. They were not professionals, by any means, but they worked well together. Each of them found it very satisfying.

"Alright, time for dinner!" Emmet declared, eventually, after a few hours of games.

Elesa looked at him curiously. "How can you tell?"

"We eat at the same time every day," Emmet explained. "So it's dinnertime."

"We have a routine," Ingo added. "Follow us!"

Indeed, when the three children walked downstairs, Drayden was setting up a pizza on the table with three plates and some napkins. In the kitchen behind him crowded his dragons, waiting for their dinner. Blitzle and the vanillites had followed their trainers downstairs as well.

"Okay, so first we gotta feed our pokemon," Ingo explained. "There should be some herbivore food in the cabinet." He and Emmet walked over to the freezer to get two bowls of ice cubes. "It takes Dad way longer to do this than us."

"Yeah, I bet." Elesa had been over the house many times before in the two years she'd known the twins, but even so, the sight of all those draconic eyes staring at her made her heart race a little. She *knew* they wouldn't harm her, but the sheer size difference and flashing fangs and glinting talons were enough to make her feel a bit like a buneary. And not the wild kind that could kick your butt.

Haxorus and Druddigon were rugged and sharp, with blades and thorns and clever eyes. Flygon was fast, both at darting around in the air and running on the ground. Salamance was vast and winged, not even really fitting in the kitchen aside from his head.

Altaria... Well, Altaria wasn't exactly scary to look at, but she had a look in her eye that was smarter than it had any right to be. Hydreigon was a beast of legend, destructive and powerful and untameable... Or at least, those were the outward appearances of the dragons at first glance. Elesa, however, was a very brave girl, and paid attention long enough to look past that. As she filled a borrowed bowl with grain pellets and got some fresh carrots for Blitzle, she saw the true nature of the Dragon Master's team.

They were *needy*. All of them, even Salamance from his place in the more dragon-sized room beyond the kitchen, chirped and crooned like a flock of birds, nudging at their trainer as he prepared chunks of meat and portions of seafood along with kibble and special vitamin powders. As soon as the man had their meals ready, they followed him into the other room and the kitchen was much quieter.

Setting Blitzle's bowl down, Elesa finally sat at the table to eat her own dinner. "Your dad's pokemon are funny. They look so powerful, but they sound like a bunch of pidoves."

Emmet laughed, while Ingo swallowed his mouthful of pizza and spoke. "They really do! Dragons aren't very scary, they just can look like they are."

"Part of the fun of dragons, I think," said Ingo. "I would love to have a haxorus on my team one day!"

"How about you, Emmet?" Elesa asked.

"I like dragons. But I like bugs more," Emmet stated. "I am not sure what pokemon will make up my battle team. But they will probably all be verrry competitive!"

"Oh, I bet. Me, I wanna have mostly electric types. They're my favorites!"

Their conversation continued as they ate, gradually shifting to what they hoped to accomplish on their journeys, and their eventual goals. The twins, once they were old enough, hoped to work in the subway and do pokemon battling on the side. Anything near trains was an option, though. Elesa was torn between fashion and something more pokemon-related, but like her grandparents told her, she had plenty of time to think about it.

"Alright," she said finally, once they'd all put their dishes into the sink and tidied up a little. "What movie do we want to watch?"

"Let's go see the collection." They walked into the living room, and the boys opened a drawer full of DVDs.

"We got these from our parents," Emmet said.

"Our birth parents," added Ingo. "Lots of good movies in here, like the Pyroar King."

"And a Bug Type's Life! And we also have Thomas as well. We got that after we came to live with Drayden

though.”

“Thomas is a TV show, not a movie!”

“*I know*, I just wanted to mention it! Because it is our favorite!”

Elesa peered into the drawer while the twins bickered, reading the titles carefully. She’d seen a lot of them before, and began to toss out suggestions. James and the Giant Peach Berry? No, they’d watched it last weekend. Legend of the Twin Princes? No, that one made them both feel anxious. Galaxy Tactics? Maybe, it could go in the pile of movies to vote on.

In the end, the top three picks were Galaxy Tactics, the Little Mermaid, and One Hundred and One Drowses. Because Elesa was visiting, they gave her the final say, and she chose the Little Mermaid.

“It’s my favorite movie of all time,” she told them as they got comfortable on the couch with the vat of popcorn Drayden had dropped off. “It’ll be nice to watch it with you two.”

“We didn’t know that,” Ingo said. “I’m surprised we haven’t watched it with you yet!”

“Me too!” she said, laughing.

As the movie progressed, Elesa said “Ariel reminds me of me. She wants to be a human, I wanted to be a girl.”

"And just like her, you did it!" Ingo said with a small smile.

"We're kinda like her too. We also don't fit in where we are," Emmet said matter-of-factly. "Also. Legs are hard sometimes."

The second half of that statement was so funny that Elesa had to laugh, and soon all three of them were. Despite Emmet's somewhat depressing observation about fitting in, the rest of the movie passed happily. There was enough popcorn for all three of them, plus the occasional piece fed to their pokemon.

"Alright, we gotta get ready for bed, and then I can teach you some sleepover games," Elesa stated, pointing at them with her toothbrush before she got up to go to the bathroom. The twins looked at each other, then patiently waited their turn. Once they were cleaned up for the night, they got their sleeping bags, shaking them out onto the floor. Emmet and Ingo's was almost twice as wide as a regular one, and they laid it over the mattress topper Drayden had mentioned earlier.

As Emmet was reaching to fix a corner, there was a squawk from the doorway, causing everyone to look up.

"Hydreigon!" Emmet said happily. "Are you coming to say goodnight?"

Her fur fluffed up and she crooned at them, entering the room fully. Settling in front of the boys, she began to lick their faces and foreheads, mussing their hair.

"Thank you," said Emmet, muffled by the faceful of dragon, as Ingo laughed from the tickly tongue and fur.

"We cleaned ourselves! We promise!" Ingo said between giggles. She must've thought they did an alright job, because the preening didn't last very long. Wrapping her three necks around the boys, she snuggled them close, and they hugged her. Chirping what could only be interpreted as a 'goodnight,' she stood again and trotted out of the room, claws clicking on the floor.

Elesa laughed as the boys fixed their hair. "Oh my Dragons, your mom is a pokemon."

"She sees us as a zweilous," Ingo said, wiping his face on his shirt. "She's really sweet and protective. Whenever we've felt we can't talk to people, she's the best to hug." Emmet nodded along.

"That's really sweet," Elesa replied, flicking off the lights.

Soon, everyone was cozy in their sleeping bags. Elesa had a little plush emolga, and the twins had an eeektross and an axew. Blitzle was lying next to his trainer, chin resting on her leg, and the two vanillite were floating over the table, already asleep

and leaning on one another.

"Okay," Elesa said, flicking on a flashlight, holding it under her chin. "Are you two ready?"

"Yes!" Ingo stated, and Emmet nodded happily.

"Okay. This one is called Truth or Rather. Normally it's Truth or *Dare*, but dares involve getting up and stuff and I don't wanna. So. Here's how you play." Dares would *also* be rather difficult for the twins, but that was left unsaid.

The rules were extremely simple; someone would ask someone else if they'd rather tell a truth, or choose between two options in a 'would you rather' question. Then the answers would be discussed, laughed about, or teased as was customary.

"Alright, truth or rather, Emmet!" asked Elesa.

"Rather!"

"Would you rather have your favorite pokemon as a partner but never be able to have any others, or have as many teammates as you wanted but never have your favorite?"

"Second option," Emmet said immediately. "I am Emmet. I want to battle! Battling with one pokemon is verrry unwise! I will admire eelectross from a distance, yup. If it means I can have a good strong team."

"Makes sense," Elesa said, nodding. "Now you ask Ingo or I!"

Emmet turned to look at his twin. "Hi Ingo."

"Hi Emmet."

"Truth or rather?"

"Truth."

Emmet tapped his chin before smiling. "Did you drool on my shoulder last night when we slept, or was it *really* Hydreigon in the middle of the night?"

Ingo turned red, and Elesa cracked up. "It was an accident!" he said over the sound of laughter from the other two.

"Emmet understands the spirit of this game," said Elesa once she caught her breath. "Embarrassing one another!"

"Well okay, Emmet, truth or rather?" Ingo huffed, though it was mostly for show.

"Truth," replied Emmet, throwing his twin a bone.

"Why do you not like sweets very much?" Ingo asked after a moment.

It took Emmet a moment to think. "I am not sure. They just feel sticky. And the sugar hurts my stomach sometimes. Which then hurts yours. And

it's just... Not my favorite, is all."

The three children went back and forth asking questions. Some of them were meant to poke fun, and some were genuine curiosity. Elesa learned that they had ticklish ribs, a fact she'd remember for the future, and the twins learned that Elesa was afraid of the dark outside at night.

"Alright," Elesa said, yawning. "I think I'm awake enough for one more question." She looked between the two of them; they looked just as sleepy as she did. "Ingo. Truth or rather?"

"Truth," came his tired voice.

"Hmmm.... Give me one nice compliment." It was a silly trick, but it would still be nice to hear.

"You're very funny and friendly," Ingo started. "And sure of your tracks. You aren't afraid of much, especially not other people, and you're respectful. You're a really great friend, Elesa. You're like our sister, really, because you're so special!"

Emmet nodded. "Yup! That is right!"

"Sister?" Elesa was surprised, feeling more awake than she had a moment ago. "Isn't 'best friend' still a really good and important thing?"

"Of course," Emmet said, before pausing. "Ingo will explain better than me."

"We're siblings who can't be apart. So being a sibling is the most important thing we can think of!"

"That's really, really sweet, guys," Elesa whispered, smiling. The poor relationship she had with her parents had dashed any chance she'd had at having a younger sibling. Honestly, she could have one already and she'd never really be able to know. "You don't know what that means to me."

"It is alright." Emmet reached out and patted her hand lightly. "We are just happy that we made you happy."

"Goodnight, you guys," Elesa said, snuggling into her sleeping bag. The twins echoed the words back to her, and then it was quiet. Distantly, the snoring of dragons (and one Dragon Master) was ever-present, as was the quiet noise of the air conditioning, but aside from that, there were no sounds.

In the morning, the trio would be awoken by Drayden, who already had a stack of pancakes on the table. They'd watch cartoons as they ate, then go on a walk outside, before Elesa had to go home. It would be a morning full of laughs and fun, but first, the three children slept, dreaming of future sleepovers to come.



First Repair

Written by: Wayward Station

A small group of wild murkrow gradually awoke from where they were gathered, perched on pipes and nestled behind broken panels.

Somewhere outside the dim and dilapidated room, something was disturbing the quiet ambience that hung throughout the dead megastructure. Something far away, but quickly approaching.

Two somethings. And they sounded like they were panicking.

A sudden clang as the metal door at the far end of the room bent, then gave way when the rusted lock broke. The startled murkrow dispersed through the air in a squawking flurry, escaping into vents and the open ceiling as a man and a girl burst into the dark room.

"You were right, it's here!" Ingo called back to Akari. He looked down at the heavily damaged core held securely in his arms. "We found one of the repair stations, Emmet; we can fix you! You'll be fine!"

"Oh, verr-ry good..." If a synthetic voice could croak, the core's certainly did as the light in his cracked ocular lens flickered. Something inside beeped again, blinking red through the internal machinery.

Seeing Emmet in this state made the anger bubble up inside Ingo. RKS had always struck him as bizarrely vitriolic and emotive for what was supposed to be an inorganic AI testing system, but the program had never done something like this before.

Several hours back, after completing a test together, Akari and himself had stepped into the lift that had been waiting for them at the end, expecting to be taken right to the next testing chamber. However, once those doors had closed and the lift began to move, RKS had joined them, telling them it had a surprise waiting for them in the next chamber. A reward for their testing efforts.

"A deserving repayment, I think," Its synthetic voice had buzzed through the lift's decaying speaker system, much more calm than it had been for the last few hours. *"For your recent change in attitudes."*

Ingo had known something was very wrong. Akari had recently been getting smart with the program, deflecting its thinly-veiled insults back at it with playful yet brash mockery, and even damaging some of the chambers' surveillance equipment with their shared portal gun. And he knew RKS had not been happy at all with his resulting newfound, if not still wary, optimism. In fact, it had been more aggravated and hostile than he'd ever seen it in all his months of isolated testing.

"Catch. You would not want this to hit the floor," was all it had said once the lift had stopped and the doors had opened. A nearby chute had clanged as something travelled down through it, and he had left Akari in the lift to try and catch whatever RKS had sent down.

Ingo had not understood when what looked like pure junk had fallen into his waiting arms. A busted Personality Core from what he had been able to infer when he'd turned it over, barely held together while loose parts had clattered around his feet.

"Watching you and your testing partner bond over your increasingly disorderly behaviors gave me a great opportunity to think about how I could give you what you wanted most." The voice had droned on as he'd inspected the core, puzzled. The core's ocular lens had moved to look back up at him, unsteady and choppy as something creaked inside, resisting. The eye had dilated once it met his gaze and focused, a somewhat startling reaction that had caught Ingo off guard.

"Ingo-?" The way it buzzed his name made the feeling worse.

"What is this?" Ingo had broken eye contact to stare up into the decaying layers of ceiling above, unable to hide the morbid confusion in his voice.

RKS had sounded delighted. *"You said you wanted your brother back, didn't you?"*

Ingo shook the recollection away.

"We're going to fix you Emmet." Repeating himself, he hugged the core tighter in his arms as he hurried further into the room, like he was the only thing holding it all together.

This was a CRC – a Core Repair Center. After finally breaking out of RKS' testing chamber circuit and blindly running around for hours through the decaying facility's multi-leveled innards in search of one, Akari had spotted it. Ingo was thankful they had found one, but he was barely familiar with how these centers worked.

A quick sweep around the dark room revealed many things; shattered glass, pipes, and rubble from the crumbling ceiling littered the floor, and what looked to be dilapidated lounge furniture populated the room. But in the back, a large production apparatus was built into the wall with screens, control panels, and windowed chambers. Surely, that was the repair station.

"Over here!" Ingo alerted Akari. Approaching one of the terminals and turning it on, he carefully placed his brother into what appeared to be the diagnostics chamber. "This should be quick, Emmet-"

The dark room illuminated as the apparatus slowly woke up, and the system eventually closed the chamber, preparing to evaluate Emmet's damages.

While overwhelmingly grateful that the machine still

worked, Ingo's heart ached as the terminal screen gradually filled with red, line after line of damages being evaluated and reported. Akari gasped.

Snapped handles. Cracked lens. Busted casing. Exposed wiring. Fractured internal flashlight. Crushed sensors. Failing hydraulic articulators. Severed sensation simulators. Broken ventilation fan. Unresponsive orientation system...

The list had no end. Only a lengthening body of damages that cut deeper into Ingo with each new line that pushed the text further up, making room for itself at the bottom of the screen.

Things were undeniably damaged at first glance, but he had no idea it was this extensive. Could Emmet feel all of this? Did it hurt? How was he even still functioning?

Where was his *real body*?

Lingering on the thoughts, boiling resentment bubbled up again in the pit of his stomach before the aching agony spilled out from his chest and drowned it. Ingo rubbed at his eyes with the heel of his palm as they blurred, wet.

RKS had taken his own brother, someone who had done nothing to it, and forcefully crammed him into a damaged, dying machine. All for what? Because it was angry that together, he and Akari were not as subservient, broken-spirited, and malleable as he had once been on his own?

The screen blinked a harsh orange as the evaluation finished. At the bottom of the screen sat a report, summarizing the damage. In big, bold letters, a priority action was flashing.

POWER CELL FAILURE. DELIVER CORE TO REPAIR STATION.

Ingo backread the diagnostics above. The self-sustaining battery was both practically drained, and unable to recharge... the evaluation reported it was severely bloated. That must have been the blinking red warning indicator that kept beeping inside him, and why Emmet was so slow and unresponsive. He was running on nothing.

Ingo didn't know much about machinery. But he knew that above all else, they had to get that swelled power cell out of him and replace it before it exploded inside of him. When it came down to it, they could fix the rest later. But they had to fix this now.

"Emmet, it's your battery-" Ingo left the screen to return to his brother, motionless in the evaluation chamber as it opened again. He picked the core up carefully, as if just moving him too fast would cause the power cell to combust. "You need a new battery, it's about to burst."

"That... sounds about right-" Emmet slopped out like vomit. "I have the worst pressure behind my, um, face? Or, my... eye?" He sounded confused, unable

to recognize what part of him was what. "I don't know--"

"We can fix that, right?" Akari came up beside Ingo as he moved Emmet over to the repair bay window.

"I'm unsure," Placing Emmet into the repair receptacle, Ingo's frown pulled when he returned to the screens and control panels. There was a prompt on one of the screens now.

Akari watched his disposition worsen as he read it, the screen's light reflecting in his worried eyes. "What's wrong?"

"It can't... fix everything." Ingo summarized, still reading. "It wants me to confirm its choices before it starts."

Akari checked the terminal screen to see the repair machine was displaying the list of evaluated damages, and it had pre-selected the priority repairs. Battery, hydraulics, orientation system, and wiring. Every other problem had been greyed out, with a big red warning text at the bottom.

"*"Material availability limit reached'..."* Akari read it outloud. "But it's ok, isn't it? Fixing the battery is what's most important, right?"

"...Right." Ingo repeated, delayed. She was correct, the battery was what mattered most right now. They could have more chances to fix everything else later. This, however, was their only chance to take care of

this battery.

"Emmet," Ingo called to his brother, swallowing down another bubble of stress-induced nausea. "We're about to start the procedure. You're still doing ok, right? Are you-"

"I'm sorry Ingo. But I'm... verr-ry tired." The synthetic voice stuttered as something faltered inside, creaking when Emmet's bent hydraulics struggled to turn his ocular lens. It was his battery. The terminal showed it was at 2%.

"Just- just rest, Emmet." Ingo urged him. Emmet sounded like he wasn't even there anymore. "You'll be fine. When this is done, you'll feel so much better."

"...I trust you." He sounded like he wanted to say so much more, but just couldn't.

And with that, Ingo tapped the confirmation button. The receptacle window slid up, separating the two as Emmet was moved further back into the chamber. Quiet humming began as the repair apparatus powered on, bathing the chamber in a sterile blue from the overhead lights as it positioned Emmet and got to work.

The terminal screen blinked blue, and the interface switched to a countdown.

09:38:02:65. Nine and a half hours.

With the procedure now in progress, there was nothing more Ingo could do besides stare into the chamber and watch. He heaved a great shaky sigh and sat down on a pile of rubble behind him, nerves thoroughly frayed. Threading his fingers together, he watched vacantly as the machine handled Emmet on the other side of the glass. He didn't notice Akari sit down beside him.

It was being gentle, at least. Delicate arms from above were manipulating him with small, precise movements as various instruments carefully dismantled the dented casing to reach the internal machinery. Removing the shell exposed the scrambled components inside, a tangled mess of severed cables and parts warped out of shape. Ingo could see the bloated power cell crammed behind the central processing unit in the center, pressurized and crushing everything else around it.

The sight filled Ingo with a queasy upset as if he was watching surgery being performed on a person, but the machine pressed on with its task, unbothered. Thin articulated segments were pulling the spaghettified cords aside in bunches as another set of arms lowered towards the battery, slow and exact movements-

"...ry, Ingo."

Static was suddenly buzzing loudly in his ears. Ingo didn't realize Akari had been talking to him. Or that he had, at some point, leaned so far forward to watch. Blinking the haze away, he turned his head

to face her, but she was still staring ahead into the chamber. "Hm?"

"I said I'm really sorry, Ingo."

There was unexpectedly a lot of guilt festering in that sentence, guilt that Ingo felt had no place to be there. She wasn't expressing sympathy for the simple fact that this happened, it was something else. "What for?"

"He's only like this because I kept... messing around and *making it mad*. I'm so sorry, I wanted to apologize so much sooner, but I didn't know when to--"

"No, do not blame yourself for this, Akari." Ingo interrupted her before she could get any further. "It's not your fault this happened to him. You didn't know it would do something like this." Maybe at some point, he would have blamed her. Back before he had met her, when he was more bitter and resentful. But not now. If he hadn't known RKS was capable of doing something like this in all his months of interacting with it; how could he have expected her to know any better? He hoped she didn't think he'd been mad at her all this time. "I didn't know either; I do not blame you for this. And I know Emmet would not either."

While he could still see the guilt in her eyes, the teen met his gaze with a small, trying smile, grateful for the understanding. They returned to watching the mechanical arms work quietly together before

she eventually spoke up again.

"So, Emmet... he um, wasn't a core before this, was he?"

"No, he was not." Ingo suspected she was well aware of that by now. When he'd talked about Emmet with her, he'd never explicitly told her he was human (because he didn't think he'd ever have to clarify that yes, his own brother was indeed a human just like him), but it wouldn't have been hard for her to figure it out with how RKS had acted back at the lift. Though he also recognized she was likely just trying to keep a conversation going between them. His eyes shifted back to the procedure happening behind the glass – he could see a machine off to the side printing... something. Was it synthesizing a new battery? "I don't even know how RKS managed to do this to him."

Genuinely, how *did it*? This was definitely Emmet. But as far as Ingo was aware, personality cores did not contain actual people.

...Or maybe they did. After all, what did he know? In all his time here at ArcCapture Science Laboratories, he had simply been a testing participant. And more than half of that time had been spent asleep in cryogenic storage.

"Well if RKS could put him into a core, there should be a way for us to put him back into his own body, right?"

If Akari had one thing about her that Ingo wished he could have more himself, it was her optimism. "I am... not sure. But, I would like to find out. We would have to actually locate his body first. It may still be in the testing participant storage repository, which is, unfortunately, down at the very bottom of this entire facility."

That's what RKS had told him at least, during its many proud sessions of regaling to him just how far he really was from his brother, and everyone else still asleep in this facility. The program could have been lying to him, of course; it had before about other things. But it had always seemed a little too amused by it, a little too proud for it to be made up.

But what if Emmet's body wasn't actually down there? Or what if it had been at one point, but RKS had destroyed it, either out of necessity to do whatever this apparent transfer required, or just *out of spite*? Hands clasped, Ingo began to tap his thumbs together.

"Though again, that's assuming it's still down there, and that whatever... *machine* put him into that core could take him back out. And then we'd have to hope said machine is down there too-" Ingo bit the inside of his cheek as he continued. If it was, would they even be able to figure out how to use it? He was sure RKS would never let them even if by some miracle they did.

"And *then* we'd need to... RKS would have to somehow be-" Out of stress, Ingo's eyes drifted

back to Emmet without meaning to. Two arms were holding the bloated battery outside the core now. Sickeningly, it was still blinking red. Three other arms were carefully disconnecting the last remaining corroded cables that kept it attached, coated with battery leakage. Perhaps he was attributing innards to machinery when he shouldn't be, but the sight added to the terror roiling inside and developed into nausea. Ingo slumped forward into his hands and made a sound halfway between a gag and a groan of defeat, giving up the conversation entirely.

What a hopeless, impossible mess. Who was he to think they could jump over all of these hurdles, get all of these variables right and-

Something squeezing firmly around his middle startled him out of his spiral. Jumping slightly, Ingo looked down to find Akari had wrapped her arms around him.

"...Sorry, it's just, it feels like you really need a hug." Maybe his expression scared her into thinking she did the wrong thing; she sounded apologetic as she turned her head down against his shoulder. "Or something. All of this just sucks, really bad. I think it's terrible that you have to go through all of this, and Emmet too. But... I'm sure he's going to be fine, you made it in time."

Maybe it was because this was the first physical gesture of kindness he'd ever received since waking up in this testing hell, all those months back. Maybe it was the reassurance that he did good. Or maybe it

was just the simple recognition that really, he didn't deserve all of this. But it stirred something in his chest that welled up and made his vision blur, wet. Ingo sniffed and took a deep breath as he hugged her back. "...Thank you, Akari."

They fell into a comfortable quiet like that, Akari watching the procedure through the window, and Ingo staring down at the floor. After a while, the teen yawned against him.

"Sorry, I'm a little tired," She finally leaned away from him, but it made Ingo realize something. For the first time in a long time, he couldn't feel his heart racing inside his chest, and his mind, it was... quieter, slower.

The vapor wasn't up here, was it?

They could sleep.

After months... *he* could finally sleep.

There was a couch over in the corner; dusty and dilapidated, its broken frame left it bent and technically rendered only half of it usable. But it was better than the hard floor.

"Over here," Ingo got up and led Akari over to it, brushing the generous layer of grime off of the cushions. "It's going to be a while. Rest here while we wait, see if you can get some sleep until then."

"But you said we wouldn't be able to--"

"Adrenal vapor is not pumped outside of the testing chambers." Ingo could not keep the gratification out of his voice. "We'll be able to."

Akari sat down, sinking back into the fabric as she set their portal gun down at the foot of the couch. "What about you?"

"I'll be fine." Soft cushions would make no difference from the hard flooring when he was this thoroughly exhausted. He may wake up to a stiff neck or aching back, but better him than the kid. "After months in those testing chambers, I'm used to floors. Besides... I'd like to keep an eye on Emmet."

Akari didn't quite seem like she believed his former statement, but wouldn't dare invalidate the latter. She shifted after a moment of contemplation, moving to curl up against the armrest. But as she did, she removed one of the worn cushions from the other side and handed it to him. "Ok, just make sure you rest too."

"Believe me, I will. Thank you." Ingo accepted the cushion and trudged over to the repair bay's window. Backing up against the wall and sliding down into a seated position, he glanced over into the chamber at his right. The overhead lights inside were still shining a clean, soft blue through the glass and into the dark room. And Emmet was still there, unresponsive but safe as the quiet mechanical arms meticulously untangled and repaired the internal wiring.

Nine more hours. Ingo watched the number slowly go down on the repair terminal. Nine hours until the battery was fully synthesized, and Emmet's repairs were completed. Nine hours until they'd have to get moving again.

But for now, they had nine hours to sleep.

Ingo placed his cushion on the floor to use as a pillow, ripped-side down, and moved to lie down beneath the chamber's window. He settled onto his back and clasped his hands over his belly, but thought better of it when he found himself obsessively staring into the window above. He turned onto his side instead, staring out into the dark room with a sideways view.

Akari was still in the corner, already appearing to be asleep from where she lay curled up on the couch. And a weak blue glow stretched across the semi-sleek floor from the repair bay window above him, only obstructed by the shadow of the machine inside. Ingo watched the projected silhouette of its form moving on the floor, its many arms still delicately fixing what it could while cords and wiring were pulled and snipped.

Ingo finally let himself close his eyes. He was unaware he'd drifted off within minutes, giving in to what his exhausted, overworked, and worn down body had been longing for for almost a year.

"Core restoration procedure complete."

Ingo grimaced, heavy eyes shut tight as the synthetic voice dredged his consciousness up from the depths of a thick, disorientated sleep that was reluctant to let him go.

He gradually became aware of a stiffness in his spine. At some point, he'd moved to lie on his back again, as he found himself blinking up at the decaying ceiling through the darkness... that's right, they were in the CRC, and had been waiting for Emmet-

"Ingo! Look! *Look!*"

At Akari's voice bursting with excitement, something surprisingly heavy was dropped into his lap, knocking both the wind and the sedated haze out of him. Ingo jolted upright with a choke, only to find himself staring back down at one big bright robotic eye. He couldn't make out much else in the darkness, his vision still adjusting.

"Ingo!" A familiar voice, overflowing with love and joy and life. "You were right, I am feeling much, much better now; I knew I could trust you, yup!"

It was Emmet.

The stark difference was almost startling as Ingo gradually took in the core before him. He was so much more lively now, with excited, smooth

movements that no longer creaked or resisted. His voice was so much stronger, and even the lifeless ocular aperture behind the still-cracked lens seemed so... happy. It was especially hard not to interpret it as such with his lower lid raised like he couldn't contain a massive smile.

His shell was still dented and scuffed, his handles were still snapped off, and his artificial vision was still fractured. But he was nothing like the dying, barely-responsive husk he had tried so desperately to keep from falling apart nine hours earlier. Now he was okay, he was safe, and he was with Ingo again. And RKS could not take this away from him.

It had tried so hard to, and it had almost succeeded.

But it didn't.

"Emmet-" Ingo sobbed, unable to stop the tears. He hugged him tightly against his chest, no longer having to refrain or be careful, and curled forward. "Emmet, I'm-" He had so much he wanted to say, so much he wanted to ask. But didn't know how to get any of it out through the tears, so he just resigned to weeping. Emmet let him, and Akari patted his shoulder, empathetic.



They had so much ahead of them. They were going to have to leave this dark, deteriorating room eventually, and keep going further into the depths of the facility. But for now, all that mattered was that Ingo had Emmet back, and they all wanted to just stay in that moment a little longer.





Transformice

TCR
KKT

Transformice
Continental
Railways

Ruminating Over Sootfoot Root Soup

Written by: EVTrainingUniversity

With the ease of just a single mouse click, the video featured at the top of the frequently visited recipe blog played.

It started with a soft, and undoubtedly royalty-free, musical accompaniment. As always, the video took care to show a montage of the two hands working across a white marbled countertop with a wooden cutting board situated in the middle. Toward the left of the screen, a worn out but clearly well loved handbound book sits off to the side. Tabs of paper stuck out from the sides, bent at the corners, and stained brown by tea.

For those who were dedicated fans of the blog, they understood the significance it played on the owner's history. And newcomers would eventually find out as soon as they scrolled through the pages upon pages of stories connected to each recipe uploaded.

The camera—with a particular attention toward details—captured perfectly the long healed cuts and

the various other scars along the outer sides of the fingers. They remained immaculately clean, albeit with slightly chipped nails and cuticles, as they guided the viewer through the preliminary prep-work needed for each video.

And, despite their weathered and calloused state, the hands steadily followed through the precise motions of rhythmic chopping in today's video. The old-fashioned cutting knife had symbols carved into the handle, ones that often had a historian or two do a slight double take before assuring themselves that it was merely an imitation of an olden Pearl-style cooking tool.

First an onion was diced. Medium in size and just the single one, as the ingredients list that faded in revealed. Skipping the typical display of precision and skill often found on cooking channels that were produced by professional chefs, each cut was confident but amateur.

The charm in such a simple action was the exact appeal this blog garnered, as fans appreciated the casual and domestic nature to each step.

Transitioning to a new scene, those same hands peeled four sootfoot roots before cutting them into even sized cubes. Interestingly, the ingredients list referred to them as smoke potatoes—a bonus pop-up linked to a post that claimed it was a recipe for *Smoke Bombs*. Confused viewers would question why on Earth the owner of the blog knew how to make them, and if he could even legally share such

a thing, whereas veteran fans would chuckle at the expectation of an amusing anecdote prefacing the ‘recipe’.

Regardless, the montage went by quickly so that they could get to the meat of the video—no pardon necessary for the pun.

The music faded until it was barely noticeable and the hands returned to a stationary position above the countertop. A voice-over with an accent of an indeterminate origin, began to narrate the rest of the video—to the trained ear, it sounded much like an older dialect often found in Sinnoh period pieces. The owner openly talked about his experience as a non-native speaker in past installments, leading most fans to speculate that he learned how to speak Sinno through watching chanbara films. If they knew the truth, they wouldn’t believe how close and yet so far they were on the subject. Every video featured subtitles. And while they were accurately timed and proof-read, they seemed to fail in capturing just how loud and bright his voice sounded. But, accessibility was very important to both the blog owner and his editor so they purposefully remained unaltered at all times.

He started:

Hello and welcome back, passengers. As you know, I am the Warden and you have arrived at your destination—my kitchen. Today, we have on the schedule a recipe that is very dear to me: Sootfoot Root Soup.

With his left hand, the blog owner picked up the cook book. Flipping past the cover, he briefly revealed a handwritten note scrawled in script that went by too quickly for even the most dedicated of the viewers to read. Inked illustrations lined the interior pages, detailing an approximation for what each recipe would look like in the end.

The Warden—having now introduced himself to the audience, both return and new—stopped on the page labeled Smoke Potato Soup. The handwriting on that particular page tapered at the end of each character, a sign of shaky hands commonly seen in elders.

As always, thanks must be given before we delve in. My blog would simply not be possible without the love and instructions bequeathed to me by my friends.

I give thanks to those who left this cookbook in my care and my online pen pal, CitrusPieCrustle, who has loaned his editing skills to assist me with the finer aspects of creating this video.

You may occasionally see his witty comments at the bottom of the screen!

witty? lol

Now, let us proceed!

The scene switched to an overhead shot of a large cooking pot on one of two burners on a gas

stove. The Warden dropped three tablespoons of butter in with a satisfying sizzle. As it melted, he brought over the cutting board with the diced onion to slide it into the pot.

The original recipe called for thin slices of Swinub belly, but I have found in recent years that it is no longer to my liking. However, if you do enjoy bacon in your meals I have added the variant recipe in the video description below.

bacon. yum

The Warden fried the onions until they were browned. He then proceeded to bring out a jar of minced garlic on screen and scooped out a dollop. His spoon clinked against the rim of the pot as he swiped the garlic down into the cookware.

I apologize but Beni never quite specified how much garlic to add.

But if I have learned anything about modern cooking, then it is that garlic is one of those things that you measure with your gut and not specified units.

*verry true actually! double the garlic,
double the fun i say*

Once fragrant, add in about $\frac{1}{4}$ of flour to make a slight roux.

A new set of ingredients faded into view once more off to the side. They remained on screen for

the duration of each addition to the pot—calling for four cups of unsalted chicken broth, Torchic broth, two cups of Moomoo milk, and just under a cup of heavy cream.

When they faded out, they were replaced with a new set of ingredients—one teaspoon of salt, pepper, and chili powder—although this new set was mixed together into a bowl and promptly dumped into the simmering soup.

The Warden mixed all the ingredients together thoroughly with a wooden cooking spoon. Pulling his hands out of frame, they returned in a new cut with the previously cubed sootfoot tubers. Using his cutting knife, he pushed them into the pot before covering it entirely.

Now, we shall keep this covered until it comes to a simmer.

It is important that we take notice to stir every so often so that the smoke potatoes don't stick together.

In any other video, the wait time between the pot coming to a simmer would have been edited out, but not this blog. In the time between steps, the Warden chuckled and spoke:

It's funny, in hindsight, how clear it was that Beni was no mere cook.

I often gathered and traded Sootfoot Root with him in exchange for spices, believing it to be for his potato mochi.

Not so! Well, not entirely. He did indeed use about, hm, perhaps two-thirds of his Sootfoot stock for his dinner orders. But the other third was to develop Smoke Bombs.

Had any of us an inkling to his night-time proclivities, it would have been obvious that he was a fierce shinobi assassin from how much of it he needed on a weekly basis.

???

dont look at me idk either

He continued for some time, reminiscing on this mysterious Beni and how he found the elder misguided but loyal. His voice was heavy with untold tragedy, one that he would not—or perhaps could not—elaborate on. A hurt too soon, a hurt too far away.

Eventually, the Warden lifted the glass cover and tested to see if the potatoes were fork tender yet. Upon confirmation that they were, he spooned out half of the potatoes to set off to the side. A note on the bottom of the screen explained that he intended to mash them far more thoroughly than the ones in the pot.

Mashing the potatoes occurred mostly off-screen except for the brief awkward affair of the camera angle and the downward motion coming together for unflattering footage of the Warden's rolled up sleeves. The cut clearly was an executive decision on the part of CitrusPieCrustle who commented:

*face reveal when?
make filming easier on your poor,
poor editor.
lol im teasing*

The next scene shows the Warden pouring in a splash of milk. Just like with the garlic, no precise measurement was provided with only a simple explanation that one should only add as much milk in response to the preferred thickness of their soup. And now, the last few steps.

Once you add 8 oz of sour cream, stirred into the mixture, the last remaining ingredient is adding as much shredded cheddar cheese as your heart desires.

With that, we are done! While this particular recipe relies more on preference and taste than I normally share with you, it reminds me that change is often a lesson learned over time.

What you prefer in the beginning might adapt over time as you welcome new flavors into your world. Taste buds—growing and adapting like we often do ourselves.

Perhaps this is why Beni left the recipe up to interpretation... Ah!

My apologies I did not mean to lose myself in my ruminations.

Please! Enjoy this recipe, and depart safely on your cooking journey!

enjoy!

The video closes out with a return of the soft,

open domain music as the credits give their dues to all those who worked together to make the video possible.

As always, the video ends with a heart-felt, "Thank you, to my friends long since passed who wished for nothing more than for me to have a good meal."

Mods

Dungeons & Dragon Types

By: fraymotiif - Host

In a fantasy world of magic and monsters, paladin brothers Ingo and Emmet are torn apart by a magical rift. Emmet must rely on the help of a shady sorcerer to find his brother somewhere across the planes and bring him home.

Page 102

[Dungeons & Dragon Types](#)

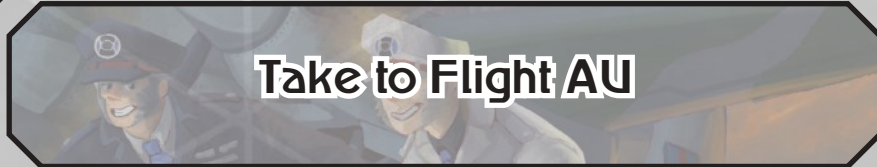
Conjoined/"ABYS" AU

By: Blue - Head Mod

Ingo and Emmet are not only identical twins, but conjoined. While their life is very different, they're still the same Subway Masters we know and love! However, circumstances will test them in ways they never thought possible, and they'll have get through many obstacles to have their happy ending.

Pages 83 - 101

[Always By Your Side](#)



By: Cardinal Crossing - Formatting Mod

During a Rainbow Rocket takeover, a devastating plane crash separates two twin pilots. One twin is left in Kalos with no memory of his past self, and the other is stuck in Johto. With their trusty De Havilland Mosquito in flames and torn to pieces, how will they get home and reunite with each other?

Page 41

[Take to Flight](#)

Contributors



Lament AU

By: Cecilioque

It has been a long time since Ingo has gone missing. Emmet finds himself directionless and discouraged as he adjusts to life without his brother. Through a series of events he must come to terms with what has happened and learn how to lose.

Page 3

[Lament](#)



Neko Atsume AU

By: Tangential-hooligan

Nyabori and Katdari are twin train conductor cats! Set some food out and they might make a stop in your yard soon!

Page 4

[Neko Atsume](#)

Faeries After Work

By: Bluegamergirl11

Emmet was born an only child. He was unwanted, unloved, and oh so lonely.

Ingo was a changeling. Something about him was wrong though, and he didn't end up replacing a human child like he was supposed to.

By a strange twist of fate, the two met when they were young and quickly became inseparable.

Pages 5 - 12

[Faeries After Work](#)



Selkie AU

By: acatpiestuff

Somehow, two seals have entered the pokemon world. The fishermen don't know how they got here, the pokemon don't know how they got here, hell, even Arceus doesn't know how they got here. Ingo and Emmet are selkies, and they've just found a whole lot more ocean. But... where the hell are they?

Page 13



Wandering Spirit AU

By: SapphireClaw

In which Ingo dies in Hisui, but Giratina brings him back as a corporeal ghost. It can't send him forward through time, though, so he's gotta wander around and wait 300 years for the timeline to catch up. (He's still a month late, much to Emmet's dismay)

Page 14

[Wandering Spirit](#)



Universal Split Custody AU

By: Lunawoona11

An incident involving a wormhole leaves Ingo blipping back and forth from Hisui to his own time and place. These blips happen at random and can be spaced out anywhere between a week to a month. Also, his memories don't carry over from both places, so he has no memories of Unova while in Hisui (like canon) and no memories of Hisui while in Unova

Pages 15 - 27



The Trewyn Show AU

By: QuietMakesGlark

Ingo works as a streetcar driver in New Celestica. With his Hisuian Sneasel, Little Miss, at his side, life is perfect. But he can't shake the persistent feeling that something is off. Emmet, a world away, watches in horror as his brother who's been missing for five years is unknowingly the star of a new TV show.

Page 28

[The Trewyn Show](#)



Whisperer AU

By: Raynavan

Sans memory, Ingo works to find his place among the Pokémon of the coronet highlands as he quickly learns to hide his face and voice from the humans living in the area. But with the rift splitting the sky open and spreading madness though the land, Ingo is forced to interact with the people who pushed him away.

Page 29



Grubmas AU

By: Samdragon57

Ingo and Emmet are bug-like aliens who crash on earth and get adopted by Drayden. While they can mimic a human form well enough, they grow to learn a balance between their adoptive world and the world they originated from.

Page 30

[Grubmas](#)

The Man in Black AU

By: Ray

In pursuit of his brother, Emmet winds up in an unknown location without memories and meets a crew of colorful and strange travelers. As it turns out, he's in a land in a different space-time to his.

Emmet will have to recover his memories from reuniting with his lost Pokémon while Ingo deals with an eccentric horned stranger, a space-time rift and his own amnesia.

Pages 31 - 40



Warden Swap AU

By: snakeeyesdraws

In a cruel twist of fate, Emmet suffers Ingo's fate of being mysteriously sent back in time to Hisui with no memory while Ingo remains in Unova, unaware of his brother's whereabouts. Emmet is taken in by Diamond Clan and attempts to adjust to their lifestyle, but he is haunted by the distant memory of a man who looks like him...

Page 42



"Ghost" Ingo AU

By: DigitalPen

There's a ghost in the highlands, a man who never passed on. Everybody in Hisui knows this, including Ingo, the ghost himself. When it comes time for him to leave, he'll have a lot to learn about the life that he can't remember.

Pages 43 - 59

["Ghost" Ingo](#)



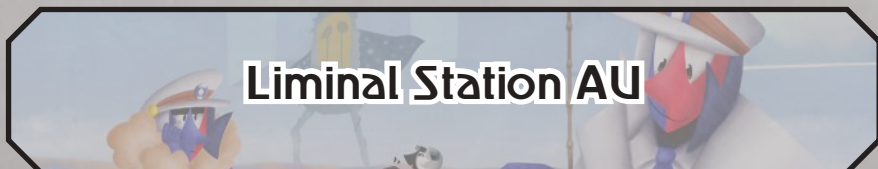
Dystopian AU

By: Esprei

After successfully subjugating Arceus and taking its power for himself, Volo has succeeded in creating a new world. Now a self-proclaimed emperor, he rules over what is now known as Upper and Lower Unova; the former a prosperous, flourishing city, the latter a run-down town starving for resources.

Page 60

[Dystopian](#)



Liminal Station AU

By: LVencat

A surreal, digital world combining Joel Guerra's 3NA with the Pokémon universe.

Page 61

[Liminal Station](#)



Cowboy Submas AU

By: Caramel Caracal

Rather than being sent to the past, Ingo is flung forward in time. Hisuian Wardens are now modern day gym leaders, who attempt to help Ingo find his way home. Unova has really changed for the poor cowpoke...

Page 62

[Cowboy Submas](#)



Everybody Gets Eebie Deebied AU

By: Random

A subway boss, a super model, a second subway boss and some other guy are thrown into Hisui from the future. Their reunion would be legendary - if they could just remember who they're looking for! Maybe a similarly misplaced 8-year-old could somehow help...

Pages 63 - 79

[Everybody Gets Eebie Deebied](#)



Under the City Streets

By: Coramatus

Cast to the strange land of the Unknown, Emmet is determined to bring his wayward brother Ingo back home. Even if said brother is now an axe-wielding manic who calls himself the “Woodsman” and seems convinced his real brother is a lantern. It’s going to take everything Emmet has to pull himself and Ingo back onto the tracks home, once and for all.

Page 81

[Under the City Streets](#)



Schrödinger’s Cat AU

By: RWyvern

Displaced through space and time and haunted by memories of lost family, Ingo Trevithick trades away his sanity for an eldritch god that promises to guide him home by any means necessary — even if it leaves him neither dead or alive.

Page 82

[Schrödinger’s Cat](#)

Portal AU

By: Wayward Station

After being subjected to months of solitary testing by Arcapture Science Laboratories' RKS system, a weary Ingo finally breaks free of the cycle once he meets Akari, his optimistic new testing partner. Determined to reunite with his brother and all escape the facility together, Ingo is horrified to find RKS has crammed Emmet into a personality core.

Pages 83 - 101

Placeholder AU

By: Blaiddraws

One day, Emmet wakes up on a strange mountain, wearing strange clothes from a life he does not recall, haunted by a strange specter.

Page 122

[Placeholder](#)

Armageddon's Toll AU

By: Sioster_71

They are only two amongst the thousands of unique mice that their land is home to. But will their civilisation survive when faced with the primaeval force of the Anvil God?

Page 123

Recipe Lore AU

By: EVTrainingUniversity

Respected and talented man that he was, Warden

Ingo only seemed to falter in one regard—cooking. Knowing that he was soon to depart to his rightful time period, the people of Hisui gathered together to gift him a cookbook. Now, he runs a cooking blog that Emmet unknowingly happens to be a big fan of.

Pages 124 - 132

