

TREESHROUD FOREST (EXTERIOR)

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

EXPLORER 1

Any luck?

EXPLORER 2

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

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

EXPLORER 1

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

EXPLORER 2

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

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

GROVYLE

TheTo think this little artifact could cause so much pain.

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

GROVYLE

They should know better.

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

GROVYLE

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

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

WIGGLYTUFF'S GUILD

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

MALACHI

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

LOUDRED

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

RUNE

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

LOUDRED

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

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

LOUDRED

Here we are! You remember the  
drill?

MALACHI

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

LOUDRED

Yep! Holler if you need any help.

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

MALACHI

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

RUNE

Uh-

MALACHI

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

RUNE

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

MALACHI

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

RUNE

You said yourself that wasn't  
common.

MALACHI

Fair point. Though speaking of  
your name-

RUNE

No.

Another footprint steps above.

MALACHI

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

The footprint looks like...  
Psyduck?

He comes to a realization.

MALACHI

Yohann?!

YOHANN

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

MALACHI

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

YOHANN

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

MALACHI

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

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

YOHANN

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

MALACHI

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

YOHANN

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

town.

Oh, who's this?

RUNE

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

YOHANN

Oh I'm so sorry. 1001 baby names?

MALACHI

Hey-

YOHANN

I go by Yohann, local tailor and fashion buff.

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

MAELSTROM

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

MALACHI

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

MAELSTROM

AND THAT WAS VERY FLATTERING!

Another footprint steps overhead.

MALACHI

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

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

RUNE

H-Huh?

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

MALACHI

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

Yohann, spare no expense.

YOHANN

Yessir!

YOHANN'S HUT

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

YOHANN

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

RUNE

Style?

YOHANN

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

RUNE

None. Currently.

Yohann grimaces.

YOHANN

Well perhaps we should keep you well rounded for now.

He starts thumbing through his fabrics.

YOHANN

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

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

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

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

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

YOHANN

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

I have just the things.

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

YOHANN

Can you hold still?

RUNE

What are you doing with that needle- GAAAH!

Her cry rattles the tent.

YOHANN

'Tis the price of beauty.

[Descriptor for accessories here]

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

RUNE

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

YOHANN

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

RUNE

Already way ahead of you. I have plans anyway.

MAROWAK DOJO

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

CHILDREN

The ice lady is back!

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

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

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

RUNE



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

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

DIELLE

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

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

RUNE

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

DIELLE

Oh this ol' thing? They like it.

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

DIELLE

Let's get you in before I melt!

RUNE

Is it really that hot?

DIELLE

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

Today you'll be training in the  
combat room.

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

INIGO

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

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

RUNE

Eep! Hey, I thought we were  
*training!*

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

INIGO

*This* is your training.

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

INIGO

W-What are you laughing at?!

DIELLE

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

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

Inigo interrupts her abruptly.

INIGO

The battle is starting now!

Show me what you've got!

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

INIGO

What are you doing? Use your  
moves!

RUNE

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

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

INIGO

What are you *doing*?!

RUNE

My *best*?!

INIGO

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

Rune looks nervous at the prospect.

RUNE

Fine!

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

INIGO

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

DIELLE

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

INIGO

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

DIELLE

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

She turns to Rune.

DIELLE

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

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

DIELLE

Tail parry!

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

DIELLE

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

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

DIELLE

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

RUNE

So the key to beating Inigo-!

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

INIGO

Oof-!

Rune has completed the training.

DIELLE

You did it! I knew you could do it!

INIGO

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

DIELLE

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

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

DOJO DORM

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

RUNE

... Where am I?

Dielle enters.

DIELLE

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

RUNE

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

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

DIELLE

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

RUNE

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

DIELLE

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

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

BEV

Got it!

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

DIELLE

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

Rune takes a bite.

RUNE

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

Dielle smiles.

DIELLE

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

Rune seems thoughtful thinking back on the training session.

RUNE

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

DIELLE

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

RUNE

Uh-

DIELLE

I'm not the best at battling, either.

RUNE

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

Dielle laughs.

DIELLE

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

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

RUNE

Then why not just try something different?

Dielle seems startled at the prospect.

DIELLE

H-huh?

RUNE

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

Dielle seems flushed.

DIELLE

I... Really want to see the world.

RUNE

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

DIELLE

Well yes, but-

RUNE

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

DIELLE

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

RUNE

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

Dielle smiles.

DIELLE

I guess so.

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



RUNE

Do you... want some?

DIELLE

YES

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

RUNE

Is this... Spicy milk??

DIELLE

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

RUNE

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

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

LOUDRED

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

MALACHI

Haha! I sure hope not!

They notice the group walk in.

KEATON

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

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

THE GUILDMASTER

Hi hi, congrats on your new

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

A burst of energy reveals exploration badges for everyone.

THE GUILDMASTER

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

Aaand...

KEATON

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

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

MALACHI

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

KEATON

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

MALACHI

We won't let you down!

WIGGLYTUFF'S GUILD (EXT.)

YOHANN

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

MAELSTROM

I DO!

MALACHI

It's um. Very flashy.

YOHANN

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

MALACHI (QUIETLY)

Amp plains, huh...?

YOHANN

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

MALACHI

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

YOHANN

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

MALACHI

How hard could that be?

Smash cut to them at the kecleon market.

Smash cut to them back at Yohann's hut.

MALACHI

How do they sell everything except  
cotton?!

YOHANN

You went to Kecleon Market didn't you.

RUNE

So we went to Kecleon Market,

YOHANN

Honestly Malachi, you're so  
predictable.

Rune ponders for a moment.

RUNE

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

MALACHI

Malachite falls? Yeah, why?

RUNE

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

YOHANN

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

MALACHI

We'll bring back a bunch for you  
then!

YOHANN

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

END OF CH. 4