

Chapter Thirty-Three: A Learning Experience

5:24 P.M. June 18, Friday, 106 PH (Post Hoopa Event)

Events: The start of the 2nd week in the Joint Kanto and Johto Indigo Summer League Preliminaries. 3rd day of the Round Robin Summer Indigo Cup. Four days after Ho-Oh's Viridian appearance, healing everyone. Hyper Contest happening after Rhea and the girls' opening act.

Nova darted to the left as purplish energy surrounded Jewlya; using [Detect](#), she sensed the places Ralts would next attack. Powerful Psychic [bolts](#) flew from around the Ralts' aura, yet not one touched her.

A giggle slid through Nova's throat as she maneuvered around waves that arced from Jewlya; dodging them was effortless.

This is in the bag, Rhea!

The crowd cheers filled Nova's breast as she dashed between the strikes, finding an opening to get within range of the tiny creature. Nova did a flip in the air, doing an aerial spin between two darts of energy, directing her gathered force at the ground with a wicked smirk.

Her glowing brown paws touched the earth, causing a small section of the stage floor to illuminate with the same hue before small, wet mud clumps were sent spraying toward the surprised Ralts.

Nova swiveled to see the damage and look of disgust on her opponent's face, only to be met by five Jewlya, and all of them were mud-free. Her expression was a little different than what she'd expected, too. "Wha ... How'd you dodge that?!"

The Ralts' glaring red eyes could be seen ever so slightly from behind her thick green bangs, causing Nova to jump left, predicting another attack, but the green-haired Pokemon only gave her a dirty look. *Boos* were heard across the stadium.

Jewlya's tone became snooty as she folded her arms across her chest, tilting her head to the audience. "This is a Contest, Nova, not a mud brawl, and I suspect you had no other thought than simply making me dirty—not creating beauty, but degrading it."

Nova's ears fell back, Rhea confirming her opponent's chiding remarks. "*Shoot ... Umm, Nova, I think that was the wrong play. We need to make something dazzling.*"

"... Sorry," Nova mumbled.

Her opponent just shook her head with a sad puff of air. "This is why I hate Rookie Contests," she grumbled.

Nova caught her shimmering white eyes as Jewlya tilted her head again.

Cautiously darting back, she felt the Ralt's intense stare following her every movement. "It will be over soon," she mumbled. "I hoped to make this more flashy, but you're too new for this kind of scene to provide a good show."

Nova's nose creased with Mya screaming in her head. "*Forgot about all those people; just win! Take her out!*"

Rhea was more helpful. "*She just used [Trace](#), Nova! She's copied one of your abilities; she has [Run Away](#) or [Adaptability](#)!*"

A small smile lifted Jewlya's lips. "Huh—you really do have two abilities; well, this is going to be interesting—which should I use first?"

Nova dashed forward, [black](#) energy gathered around her mouth to form four fangs as she jumped at the small Pokemon, but she had targeted one of her illusions, taking a bit out of the concrete and sending fragments flying across the area.

She went after another one, just trying to keep momentum as Rhea looked some things up, but somehow Jewlya sidestepped every attack with an elegant twist to her movements.

Nova followed Jewlya across the stage with the commentator's words following them, but she was too focused to pay them any mind; it was becoming more and more apparent that the Ralts wasn't just faster than her, but it was like she could predict what she'd do.

A red glow illuminated Nova's back feet as she pursued the last clone, but Jewlya was so slippery, performing odd, flexible maneuvers to get to her sides or above her, and every time, the Ralts' soft hand slid across Nova's fur. It was infuriating!

"Hmm—you really do have nice hair," Jewlya whispered, "and a lot of Moves, but you're just throwing them around, hoping to hit me, which isn't going to happen. Heh, I was expecting a lot more from you from what Aeldee said."

"*What are you doing?!*" Mya moaned; Nova's [Double Kick](#) dispersed as it failed to land. "*Everyone's laughing at you!*"

I'm trying! Nova cried. *She's too wiggly!*

"Nova, try this..."

Following Rhea's advice on instinct, Nova ran straight for the Ralts, building up energy for a *Tail Whip* since the Ralts was far stronger than her by raw Stats.

Jewlya shot out more bolts of purple energy, but these were far larger than the previous one, now enhanced by Adaptability; there were no more doubles.

Just as planned, Nova dropped the attack and used [Protect](#), instantly creating a bluish shell that absorbed every hit; she was going to use it to smash into Jewlya.

A slight glimpse of Jewlya's amused red eyes peeked out beneath her green hair as she performed a graceful twist, sidestep her yet again, but this was just what Rhea had planned for.

Warmth bloomed in Nova's heart as she remembered all the good moments' Rhea and she shared over the week, cuddling next to her Trainer's legs in her sleeping bag, being held in her arms, and learning the human written language to understand her texts.

A significant amount of Rhea's energy filled her, and a [bright golden](#) radiance exploded across the stage as Nova jumped into the sky, strength filling every fiber of her body. Cycling beams of orange and yellow orbited her shimmering aura as Nova literally flew through the air, speed dramatically increased.

Jewlya was far too slow to avoid an attack like this; her movements were laughable. "Let's see you dodge this!" She laughed.

"*You've got her!*" Rhea and Mya cheered, and the crowd had quieted down to see the flashy Move.

Just before Nova struck, a bluish shell surrounded Jewlya's body, causing Rhea and Nova's heart to plummet; of course, she'd have Protect.

Nova slammed into the barrier, pushing as hard as she could, but the smiling Ralts just shook her head and hand at her, saying, "No, no, no..."

An explosion detonated from the point of contact, sending a shower of energy around a five-foot area and cracking the concrete base of the stage as Nova shot back, flipping in the air to land on her feet.

Did I do it? Did I break past it? It was so strong...

Nova's hope failed her. In shock, she saw red glowing eyes through the haze; Jewlya was giggling to herself, shadowy-like wisps coating her outstretched hand as she broke through the dust, casually closing the distance. "Did you actually think I didn't have *Protect*?" She asked.

"*Detect! Detect!*" Rhea shouted, but it was too late, the black force solidified around Jewlya's frame, and Nova was locked in place, unable to even speak.

R-Rhea! I-I can't move! Nova cried.

"It's [Disable](#); it will only last a second, but we can't use Veevee Volley again!"

"You couldn't beat me if you had weeks to prepare," Jewlya lilted, walking up to run her left hand down Nova's face, which was already tearing up. "How sad—and don't think for a moment you would have won against Rina or Whimsy; you're talented, sure, but your tactics and grace are atrocious."

Disable faded, and Nova swiftly pulled in energy to bite her, but as Jewlya's eyes turned [purple](#), her consciousness faded. "Just close your eyes—there ... Go to sleep; it'll all be over soon."

Nova's mind drifted; sounds, tastes, and the entire world around her blurred into one hazy mess. Rhea's concerned voice faded into oblivion, and when the fog cleared, all she could feel was pain.

It was like what Tera described; she'd never experienced anything like this before, though.

R-Rhea? Nova mumbled, eyes cracking open to see herself in darkness ... Jewlya and Aeldee were standing in the center of the stage, bright lights on him with the roar of the audience filtering back into Nova's fuzzy brain. *W-What happened...*

Rhea's sad explanation was numb to Nova's mind as she watched the match highlights on one of the giant screens above, the announcer commentating.

Her Veevee Volley was shown first. "... Even though Nova had a rough start with that out-of-place Mud-Slap, she managed to come back with a dazzling show of an attack that I've never seen before, and that's saying something! It was devastating! However, Jewlya easily defended against the glamorous Move with Protect and swiftly took complete control over the Contest!"

Nova could hardly believe what she was watching; the last thing she remembered was the Jewlya's shining red eyes, mixed with purple—but the more the recording played, the more pain she felt in her heart with Mya's harsh words.

"In spectacular fashion, like the heroes of legends, Nova exploded with unknown power, hurdling toward her opponent, but—at the last second, when everyone thought it was the end of Jewlya, she created a protective barrier to defend against the attack, and Nova couldn't power through!"

"This is no happy ending, folks, but the showmanship of a villainess as she slowly emerges from within the midst of the heroine's legendary attack, unscathed, and locks her into a vice, disabling her most powerful Move, but she doesn't stop there..."

Nova's long ears were pulled back in confused horror as she laid on her side in misery, forced to watch herself stiffen on video and bow to Jewlya, eyes mirroring the Ralts' light purple glow.

"Our heroine's mind is bought under the spell of her most fearsome adversary before performing a dramatic circular waltz, splitting into several visual clones and sending waves of [musical notes](#) at our heroine until she is left battered and defeated ... Jewlya, the villain in this act, blowing her a kiss before walking away, victorious!"

R-Rhea... Nova mumbled, tears leaking out of her eyes as she watched the highlight play again. *I ... I don't remember...*

"You lost..." Mya mumbled in agitation. *"I just ... we had to watch you get totally owned..."*

I don't remember! Nova cried. *I don't ... I just ... she looked at me, and then ... then I ... I was in pain...*

"Nova, it's alright!" Rhea hurried to her fallen form as the barriers fell, lifting Nova into her arms.

Mya huffed. *"Alright? We lost ... it's not alright. We're not losers ... Well, I guess Nova is now."*

"Stop being mean!" Rhea chided. *"Nova really tried; we were just really out of our league—Aeldee's Battle Rank is 1072 ... We're 616, and she's Bronze Six with five badges, one Encrusted! She is really, really strong..."*

"Yeah, but she didn't look that strong," Mya huffed. *"I could have taken her."*

Nova was curled up in Rhea's arms, listening as she cried. *I'm s-sorry, Rhea ... I ... I really am...*

She cut off as Rhea touched a sore spot; Jewlya's attacks had blown right through her defensive matrix and even hurt her a bit past the second.

Rhea sighed, walking to an exit area that would take them to a place below the stage to have Nova treated; Jewlya was stealing the spotlight anyways, and the girl only had good things to say about Nova and her—of course, Rhea expected it was all show, and Nova agreed.

"How are you feeling?"

It ... I'm fine, Nova mumbled, sniffing back her tears while trying to be strong. *I just want you to hold me...*

Rhea's arms tightened around her, and even if it hurt, it helped comfort her tender heart. She caught Gables giving her a concerned look with Mallory; they'd just searched their own opponent because they were next, and it was probably just as bad as Rhea explained to them. They were up against Rina, the [Smoochum](#).

The votes were cast without them, but that was the furthest thing from Rhea and Nova's mind. Rhea was worried about her. On the other hand, Nova was stuck on another angle; she'd lost, Mya wasn't wrong, they were supposed to win, they were the best, and yet she lost.

Nova passively watched the bright hallway walls pass under the stage as Rhea took her for treatment; her loving Trainer made every excuse for her that she could think of.

"... We can't actually get challenged from people at their level out in the world; it was only allowed because of the Contest Rules, and it won't affect our Battle Rank since it's not an official League match. It was just good practice! We know that we need to work on a lot of stuff, which is good; you make mistakes to learn how to not make them again."

Mya released a low hum. *"Better to not make the mistakes at all and just win."*

Nova didn't want to make things worse by bringing up that Mya may have won, but Rhea was hospitalized, and they were almost taken away from her because of it.

"Yeah, but we can't beat everyone..." Rhea mumbled after interpreting Mya's rebuttal.

"Why not? No one can beat me, and Nova's supposed to be like me—so, no one should be able to beat her."

"Could you beat Franky?" Rhea was getting a little frustrated by her tone.

"Uh ... no," Mya mumbled.

"Zelri?"

“Not yet...”

“Exactly,” Rhea sighed, swapping her attention back to Nova as they got to the hired nurse, and Mya continued to sulk. *“She’s just going to help you for a minute, and then we can go over it!”*

Okay...

Nova let Rhea return her to her pokeball; the device the person put it into filled Nova with strength, but her mind was in an entirely different place than Mya or Rhea’s.

She wasn’t stupid. Purrfection and Giovanni’s concerns flashed across her brain, and what Rhea said might be well and true, but—she was supposed to be ranked even higher than Jewlya—she was supposed to fight even stronger Pokemon and win.

Jewlya hadn’t even been taking their fight seriously; this was a Contest, meant to show how good of a performance you could give, and not an actual Battle Match. The Ralts played with her the entire time; it was like watching Mya fighting Sunny and the others—not close to a challenge. She wasn’t even able to evolve because Jewlya took control of her mind.

... Rhea. Nova whispered, still healing inside her pokeball.

Rhea and Mya paused their agitated back and forth.

“Is something wrong?”

... I think I need to learn how to fight better. I’m strong—even Jewlya said that—but, umm ... I need to figure out what to do in a fight.

Mya’s snort told her that she thought her reasoning was stupid, but Nova ignored her; Mya would always think of herself as the strongest—that was just Mya.

Nova had discovered that strength wasn’t everything, and watching the replay of herself getting utterly beaten while oblivious to the fact forced that fact to sink in. She knew she wasn’t weak—she just had a lot to learn.

Through her connection to Rhea, Nova heard the crowd roar with excitement as Mallory’s battle started. It soon faded back into the back of Nova’s mind.

Mya was still stubbornly refusing to think that anyone could defeat her and that Nova had a lot to work on.

Nova wasn’t particularly upset with Mya since she knew where she was coming from and knew her buddy wasn’t doing it to hurt her; in fact, this was Mya’s way of trying to help her—odd as that may seem, but the connection she had to the Mawile told her that much.

Another issue was that after seeing how elegant and practiced Jewlya was—no, her teammates, too—Nova couldn’t deny that she deserved to lose that match.

Rhea’s argument with Mya soon became tainted with worry. It suddenly struck their Trainer how terrible their exit looked to the audience; most people would say they’d run away.

Mya didn’t think so since she doesn’t run away, so whoever thought that would be stupid and wrong, but Mya missed many things when it came to Rhea; it wasn’t really her fault, though—at least, Nova didn’t think so. She just had a different way of thinking about stuff.

It only took a few minutes for Nova to be fully recovered, and by that time, the victor was crowned for Mallory’s match—she lost.

The pair stayed on stage to receive their short applause and hearts before coming downstairs to join them. It was Poppy versus Whimsy next.

Nova exited her pokeball, Mya already sitting on one of the waiting room couches across from Rhea, now wondering if she actually could beat Lyra’s beyond god-like Porygon-Z.

Give it up, Rhea, Nova groaned, hopping onto her Trainer’s lap. *Mya won’t believe us until she has her first loss.*

“Nope! Never gonna happen!” Mya grinned. *“I’m better than everyone we’ve seen; you saw what Rhea and I did to that Nidorino! She doubts us too much. Watch, the next match I’m in, I’m going to crush them!”*

Rhea straightened her dress to give Nova space to get onto her lap. *“I’m just saying, guys ... We can’t take this loss too seriously. Yes, it was embarrassing, but it’s fine! Those girls and their Pokemon are way above where we’re at; we should learn from them.”*

“Heh, even their attitudes?” Mya asked with a slight smirk.

Rhea’s eyebrow lifted while petting Nova. *“If you’re saying what I think you’re saying, then you can’t talk when it comes to battles; you trash talk anyone who’s your opponent.”*

“Cause I’m better,” Mya shrugged, her large second mouth shifting to follow Mallory and Gables as they came in. *“Yo, Gables—What happened, man?”*

His left arm was frozen, but he was wearing a pained smile; Nova could sense his defensive matrix had been obliterated.

The shiny Froakie shook his head with a low sigh. *“That girl’s a terror; she knew like every Move I had ... between [Confusion](#), [Copycat](#)—yeah, she stole my camo, girl! I mean, really?! Then the [Lick](#)...”* He shuddered, *“And blanketing everything with snow—yeah, I ain’t gonna lie—I saw six hands all up [slappin’](#) my face at the end!”*

“Weak,” Mya moaned.

Nova returned Gables’s pained grin. *“No, I get it, Gables—They’re so much tougher than anyone we’ve fought—even Alaric, that Glameow I beat.”*

“Is what it is,” Gables shrugged, glaring down at his frozen hand before returning to his pokeball to get healed. *“Yeah, I’m out.”*

Nova’s focus moved to Mallory as she walked over to join them, releasing a low grunt while plopping into the seat beside Mya, throwing her hair behind the couch. *“For real, what is up with us being in the same bracket as those Jinxes?”*

Rhea’s lips pulled together. *“You know, I could probably see those three having no problems beating the Low Silver-tier Nidorino we fought in Viridian Forest.”*

“Gah,” Mallory scratched her temple with agitation. *“The most vexing part is how arrogant those prima-donnas are! Sure, they’re pretty good, but not *that* good. Once the spotlight hits them, they’re all hearts and rainbows ... They aren’t real at all...”* She huffed.

It was the first time Nova had really seen Mallory get upset.

Everyone’s gaze lifted to the ceiling as Jay’s match was called; of course, Whimsy was the victor.

Jay came into the room with a scowl not soon after, and Poppy joined Gables in the healing unit. *“Okay, [Sing](#) is Mukin’ busted ... and she just spams it like she’s in a Pokeband. Oh, you get a hit in? [Heal Pulse](#). Trying to dodge? [Gravity](#)—you’re not dodging now! Use [Acupressure](#) after buying some time to hopefully get something to help? Oh, she was just playing with you, Copycat to rub things in ... and, of course, it’s Speed she gets. That fake smile telling me how good we are ... gah, kill me!”*

Rhea’s stomach shook with laughter, pressing against Nova’s body. *“Seriously, though—did you check their Battle Ranking, Jay?”*

“Eh ... What’s that again?” She asked with a forced smile, trying not to fiddle with her hair.

Mallory leaned back, shaking her head. *“Yeah, they’re like Bronze Six, and we’re Bronze One. They should be going after their sixth badge, not beating up beginners in Rookie Contests, but that shows where their heart is ... not real competition.”*

“Bronze Six...” Jay mumbled. “I think I heard something about that with the new Alolan League? I don’t know,” she moaned, glaring at her lap. “Contests really look fun on the outside—I mean, it would have probably felt a lot cooler fighting one of you, but—yeah ... maybe another time,” she grinned.

Nova kept listening as Rhea gently stroked her fur; she was feeling a lot better now. The loss was a massive shock to her system; it came completely out of nowhere, and not even being able to do anything while under Hypnosis made her pity Amber’s victims.

Gables and Poppy soon came out of their own pokeballs to join them, and Mya struck up a conversation with an amused Gables as he asked her probing questions about what she’d do in his situation. Mya got a bit flustered near the end, asking Rhea a few questions that had her glowing with pride again as their Trainer privately tutored her—unknowingly helping the Mawile win an argument.

Without Rhea, Mya would have been stumped by Gables, but she still thought of herself as the reigning champ.

Amira joined them not too long after, and the Rookie Contest came to a close, forcing them to get up from their warm, comfy chairs to trudge back up to be presented to the throng.

They learned that it had been a Triple-Threat Match where all three victors had been pitted against each other since they had an uneven number of contestants for the finale.

Whimsy was knocked out first; Rhea thought primarily because of her healing, and her teammates didn’t want to deal with that, leaving Rina and Jewlya to battle it out. Jewlya won but took a decent chunk of damage.

Rhea wasn’t all that interested in dissecting the match at the moment, though.

Jay, Mallory, and Rhea went back on stage, Pokemon fully restored to health. The crowd was surprisingly warm to them, considering how badly they’d been beaten. Nova figured it was mainly because this was literally their first Contest; most people weren’t really expecting much from them in the first place.

The final score was a bit different than Nova expected.

In an 8,000 seat stadium, the judges got 2,400 hearts to spread among the contestants, and the last addition would be their Showcase Stage score.

Score - Audience + Judge + Showcase = Total

1st: Jewlya - 2653 + 350 + 232 = **3,235**

2nd: Whimsy - 2,658 + 400 + 147 = **3,205**

3rd: Rina - 2,345 + 475 + 296 = **3,116**

4th: Nova - 81 + 475 + 41 = **597**

5th: Poppy - 135 + 350 + 37 = **522**

6th: Gables - 125 + 325 + 45 = **495**

Nova discovered she’d done insanely good with the Judges—way more than she thought she would, considering her Mud-Slap blunder and battle performance.

The three girls gave them smiles and waves before disappearing into the halls without going to the dressing room to strip down. Nova figured they were going to watch the Super Contest since one of the contestants was her brother.

As for their party, they didn’t stick around for the Super Contest; it just wasn’t all that appealing after having suffered such a humiliating defeat.

Nova was with everyone else, expecting it to be more even, having other contestants that had no clue what they were doing—that hadn't been the case.

Returning to their rented room, Nova snuggled up on Rhea's lap to go over their recorded footage in detail with the others, trying to figure out what they could have done to improve their performance. There were a lot of options, but it would have been a hard match.

Of course, Mya was just as helpful as always—with her, it was all aggression, pure and raw, which wasn't something Nova could emulate.

The biggest problem Rhea saw was Jewlya's Trace Ability, which copied Nova's Adaptability, and made all of her Psychic and Fairy-Type Moves hit for an incredible amount of damage; in fact, Jewlya was so unaccustomed to the power boost that she'd hurt Nova beyond knocking her out by accident, which was the reason for her lower Judge Score.

When the Judges came out with their reasoning, Rhea's shining grace was the Showcase, where she'd demonstrated a high-tier performance; at least, according to the experts. They'd been impressed by her being able to work unstable Moves into her act, which brightened Nova's day.

To end the bitter day, Rhea, Amira, Mallory, and Jay all bought small packs of ice cream and sat around talking about bands, the cutest Pokemon, and learning more about Alola's unique variants.

Nova and her friends tried coming up with their own drama, which was fun! Although, in the end, they wound up watching a Drama-Style Super Contest—of course, only for research purposes! It did take up most of the night, but Nova and Mya had to translate for some of the human parts to the others. It couldn't be helped.

It was more enjoyable than winning a stupid Contest, and before Jay left, Nova got to show off, evolving into Glaceon! Jay was starstruck by the private transformation performance that made the Eevee feel special.

When 9:30 P.M. came around, they said their goodbyes to Jay and got ready for bed; it was to Dark City, and beyond it to Pewter City tomorrow!