

BATTLE FOR THE BAND

BIONIC
METEORSAURUS

HYPERSPACE



TW// Parental Abuse & Neglect

Part One - From Dusk Till Dawn

The band barrelled out of the Hyperspace Hole - with Mylo even tripping over his tail as he ran, the same would have definitely occurred for Frankie... if they had limbs to trip over. The ghost drifted down beside their partner as he began to stand, however, just as Mylo was able to find his footing, the duo heard a loud whistle coming from the westward side of the portal's entrance. The couple's heads quickly turned to follow the source of the whistling, with the noise itself emanating from blue Espurr who, for once, seemed surprisingly enthusiastic to be doing his job - said whistling was eventually cut off with a jolt by his sister, who lightly tapped her clipboard on his head as if to insinuate that he had gone on too long.

"CONGRATULATIONS!!! YOU MADE IT!!!" yelled Merriweather cheerfully as Hoopa began to clap, the entire tournament staff by her side... as well as fifteen other teams seemingly standing out of the way of the portal's exit. Frankie was quick to notice this - as they then realised that themselves and Mylo were the last to make it back in time.

"O-oh my, you're poisoned!" Dora spoke up with concern for Mylo "D-did you inhale the m-mist?" She began to scuttle over.

"I'm fine, I'm fine. You should see the other guy..." Mylo laughed before choking on his words, his legs giving way as he dropped to one knee.

"¡Estúpido!" Proclaimed Frankie, annoyed with Mylo's lack of candidness, as they began to float down beside him once more - then spoke again in a softer tone. "It wasn't the fog, it was another Pokémon."

"I got hit with a Salandit's smog, nothing crazy, pretty freakin' dizzy though." He laughed once more - this time with a less confident, but more truthful tone.

"D-drink this." Dora passed Mylo a cup filled with a blend of Pecha and Citrus berries, with a touch of cinnamon. "Y-you should be feeling better in n-no time!" Spoke the timid spider. With just one sip, a flood of energy rushed back into the ape's body as he jumped back up to his feet.

“WOAH! That stuff is amazing! Thanks Doc!” Mylo looked down at Dora with a wide grin.

“Y-you’re welcome... haha” Dora still had yet to fully warm up to Mylo’s excitable personality, causing her to very nearly freeze up at this moment - scurrying backward before she could do so, retaining her stare and an awkward smile toward the monkey as she did.

“Welp!” bellowed Gran in a cheerful tone “Now’ve seen who’s through, I better get a move on with tonight’s supp’r - suns already settin’!” The Granbull’s southern drawl helped bring a sense of calm back into the duo - his particular method of articulation reminded Mylo of paternal relatives who used to visit before his fathers passing and their families eventual move to Oregon.

As the elderly canine began to make his way back to his tent to prepare the camp’s meals, Dora and Blue Espurr began tending to the competitors who were unable to make it back before Bionic Meteorsaurus, ensuring none of them were too harmed by the harsh toxins of the swamp. While this took place - Merriweather, Hoopa, and Green Espurr approached the band.

“So - if we could just check your stones so we can verify the order of teams going into round two, that’d be greaaaat” Green Espurr spoke without glancing up at the team as she jotted down notes on her clipboard.

“Stones...? ¡Ayos Mio! The stones! Mylo please tell me you still have them!” Frankie asked frantically

Mylo began to quickly pat the sides of his legs as the tournament staff stared at him in confusion. “...Oh yeah... No pockets...” He laughed nervously in an attempt to play off his mistake as a joke before remembering he has the stones clutched in the hand on his tail. By this point, he had been holding onto the stones so tightly that his tails end had almost turned completely numb. Mylo revealed the palm of his hand to show two white stones - the first was the stone placed by tournament staff which the duo found in one of the swamps craters, however, the second stone was quite different. Upon first glance, this stone was easily mistaken for a matching pair of the first - though from this close, it was clear to see that this stone was far from ordinary, it was in fact a gemstone.

The couple had already realised this fact before exiting the portal back to basecamp; though with a quick glance shared between the pair, they silently agreed to keep quiet and prayed the staff would be none the wiser - a prayer that would quickly go unanswered.

"This... isn't the right pebble?" questioned Merriwether "I helped Blue paint them myself... With Gran's help, I mean, no thumbs haha" Merri tried to laugh it off, however, she seemed visibly quite upset.

While all of this was taking place, Hoopa floated quietly - staring deeply into the gemstone

"Rules clearly stated you must pass through the hyperspace hole with both of your team's assigned stones - this..." Green looked up from her clipboard to glance at the gemstone before looking back down at her papers. "This pearl is by no means the correct stone".

"I'm sorry you two... but-" before Merri could finish her sentence, she was abruptly cut off by Hoopa as it quickly floated between the staff and the band. It took the pearl into its hand before holding it up to its eye as it began to turn it in the sunlight as if to check its authenticity. After pausing a moment, Hoopa looked toward Merr with a heartfelt smile before holding it's thumb up in approval.

"Wait? So does that mean?" Merri excitedly questioned her teammate, as it responded with a nod of its head and a much warmer and more authentic smile. "OMG YOU GUYS ARE THROUGH!!!" Merri began bouncing up and down ecstatically, inviting the couple to join in with an excited gesture. Mylo, of course, accepted this invite with literal open arms. However, as happy as Frankie was that they had made it one step closer to getting home; for some reason they were unable to shake a strange tingling in the back of their head - that sound, the opening of a Hyperspace hole... They'd heard it a few times by this point, but for some reason this time, it made Frankie feel as if they were forgetting something important. Just before this train of thought was able to really start bothering the ghost, they felt their physical form distort slightly; similar to the feeling of one's hair blowing in the wind - this distortion came from Mylo's tail in an attempt to catch their partner's attention.

"Dude!!! Snap out of it man we did it!!!" Mylo continued his excited hops into the air, with Merri's now shifting to a joyful tapping of her paws against the ground in rhythm. "You ain't gotta worry anymore see! We're totally gonna do this!" Mylo stopped jumping as his voice began to calm slightly - meeting his boyfriend at eye level. "We're gonna get home, we're gonna get you back to your family... I'll get back to my m..." Mylo's tone began to travel to a much more sombre note, before spiking back up to his excitable self - though just like his newly unlocked moveset, this too was a Façade. "...I'll get back to that stew and dumplings Titus promised! It's seriously the best I've ever tasted!" As Mylo continued to rattle off about Frankie's dad's cooking, Dora & Blue approached the rest of the tournament staff from behind.

"Everyone's back and accounted for" Spoke Blue Espurr while waving to his sister.

"Some in a b-better state than others b-but, thanks to the cinna-berry juice, everyone's starting to feel b-better" added Dora with her usual semi-anxious tone.

"As long as everyone really is ok!" Merri turned from the couple and began darting her head around to look past the rest of the staff, ensuring she got at least a glimpse of every participant to confirm that they were all indeed back in one piece. While she did this, Green began checking her clipboard once more - now seemingly going down a list, ticking and crossing out certain sections.

"Well, now that's settled" with one final tick of her list, Green telepathically unclipped the page from her clipboard before ally switching with Blue to position herself in front of the small canine - waving the list in front of Merriweather's face to catch her attention.

"OOOH WAIT! IS IT TIME???" Merri's head stopped darting around and was now completely focused on the list in front of her.

"Yep, I've finalised the round two matchups so if you could just get everybody's attention we can-" Green was suddenly cut off by Merriweather's very hyper voice.

"COMPETING TEAMS, GATHER ROUND!!!" Merri's voice projected across the entire campground, loud enough to make a 'boombursting' Noivern jealous. "It's super sad that every team can't win the tournament... I'm so sorry to all the runner's up, I'm sure you all gave it your all. But, to everyone who did make it back in time, **CONGRATULATIONS!!!**" While Merriweather yelled, Frankie watched the faces of the losing competitors closely; They were almost in the exact same position, they could never let that happen again. At the same time - Hoopa's eye's were also darting from team to team, as if to assess their mental state after clearing the last trial.

"We know you're probably all tired after the first round of the tournament, however, to keep the tournament going at the correct pace, we're having to fast track the forthcoming round" Green Espurr paused as the crowd of competitors began to murmur and grew concerned - Mariposa kissed her teeth, Zephyr growled and drew his claws, Robert's eyes rolled as he let out a sigh, but Frankie - Frankie froze in shock. Unbothered by the decision's backlash, Green continued. "We understand that this situation is not ideal, however, it's the decision that is necessary - as such; we'll be announcing the rules of round two imminently, so listen up".

With that, the staff began explaining the rules of the round, the power of the infinity crystals, the web spun by Dora, and of course - the fact that this would no longer be a free-for-all. The teams would now be tasked with eliminating *each other*.

"We know this news might be kinda scary for some of you, but just try to think of it as like - a fun game or contest" Merri tried her best to reassure the competitors.

Blue, truly believing he was being helpful, also chimed in, "yeah don't let it get to you head, else you might end up, well," Blue Espurr then whistled the the sound of something falling as he slowed one of his paws flop into the other - signifying a competitor falling onto a web.

Merri paused after that slightly awkward display before getting back to the task at hand. "Anyway, now we're onto the fun part, the actual match-ups! So listen closely!"

As Merriweather began to list off the different match-ups, Mylo and Frankie's minds were in two very different places. Mylo, in a way, was somewhat excited at the opportunity to figure out the rest of his moveset. His Façade attack was clearly quite powerful under the right circumstances, so he wondered if he had anything else up his proverbial sleeve that would pack a similar punch. Thanks to his knowledge of type match-ups, he knew there were certain members of the roster he very much did not want to face like the Sawk he briefly spoke to before - but in the same vein, he knew an easy fight against someone like Frolic would never give him a chance to figure out what kind of abilities he had locked away. This was in a complete contrast to Frankie's mindset, with 'Kyūryō' being one of the teams they were praying to be matched up against more than any other. They knew nothing about type match-ups; but they knew more than anything that, especially in the body Frankie was in, their chances to get home against any other opponents would be extremely slim.

One by one, each team name was rattled off by the small fox...

"Team Rapture will be facing... Team Soul!"

"Team Fangria will be facing... Team Steampunk!"

"Team Steel Wind will be facing... Team Kyūryō!"

“...fuck...” the word passively slipped out of Frankie’s mouth. In this moment, The ghost began to dissociate almost completely - the noise of the crowd reacting to each match-up and the match-up listings themselves now all faded away into a blur. This was at least, until a familiar set of words found their way into Frankie’s ears.

“Bionic Meteorsaurus will be facing... Team Lucky Foot!”

In that moment, Frankies demeanour completely changed as they quickly whipped their head around to see Robert already staring back at them - no doubt already constructing a battle strategy in his head. Behind him stood Alex the Raboot, who was seemingly attempting to put up a demeanour of bravery - though Frankie could see there was more to it behind his eyes.

“Dude, this is perfect!” Mylo spoke in a quiet but excited tone as to not distract the rest of the teams from hearing their match-up. “A Raboot is like, right on our level! Granted the Lopunny might be a bit more than we bargained for but it might not even be able to touch you! This could be great!”

“And what if he can? How the hell are we supposed to knock someone his size off stage?” Frankie rebutted

“...Pray for a Final Smash ball?” Joked Mylo in an attempt to clear the tension

Frankie was quick to snap back “Mylo, I’m serious. If he has a move that can touch me, we’re done. How are we supposed to get past this?”

“Look I know these ga- ” Mylo cut himself off before he spoke the forbidden word “I know... how Pokémon battling works better than anyone here - hell I’ve practically got Naoto Mizobuchi’s 2019 Worlds win memorised... I’ll think of something...” The monkey looked sincerely into his partner’s eyes “We’re getting you home... I promise”.

As the matchups drew to a close and the sun had set upon the campsite. Bionic Meteorsaurus returned to their tent and were attempting to devise any kind of strategy to overcome the challenge that had been presented toward them. Mylo sat uncharacteristically calm as his tail ticked back and forth like a metronome - Frankie, however, was pacing back and forth quickly; the uncertainty of what they would do if Robert was able to hit them weighed heavy on their

mind. It wasn't fair - this whole time the universe had banned them from touching their boyfriend solely on the merit of them becoming different types, and now a Pokémon of that same type may suddenly be able to hit them with Frankie seemingly having no way of hitting them back outside of hurling a few heavy chains the rabbit's way. The cruelty of the situation would have been completely overwhelming in the ghost's mind if not for the overpowering worry that they would never get to see their sister or their family again - they mustn't linger on the irony of the situation, they couldn't; they **needed** to figure out a strategy - and fast. Thankfully for Frankie's sanity, this train of thought was cut off by their purple partner - though the following statement was not about to be as comforting as the ghost would have hoped.

"Nope. I'm stumped" Mylo hopped up upon his tail "I've literally gone over like, all the lore I know in my head but I seriously can't figure out what that word means."

"¿Qué?" Frankie interjected in confusion.

"Merri said something in the announcement and its for real thrown me off..." The Aipom then launched himself upward, grabbing hold of one of the tent's structural beams with his tail as he began to dangle upside down - believing that making blood rush to his head will help him think harder. He rubbed his chin with a perplexed expression as he involuntarily swang side to side.

Seeing Mylo's silly display actually managed to take Frankie's mind off of their worries for a moment, they lovingly chuckled before floating upside down in front of Mylo to mirror what he was doing. "And that thing is..." they spoke while mimicking Mylo's side to side sway.

"Ok so... history lesson. 2013, Pokémon X & Y release with like the best gimmick ever, Mega Evolution! Think like going Super Saiyan from Dragon Ball Z but instead of like the whole cast eventually being able to do it, only like 5 Pokémon get it... and like 4 of those are Charizard and Mewtwo." While he spoke, Mylo ruffled his head fur in an attempt to make it look like Super Saiyan hair. "Then like 3 years later, Sun and Moon drop, and now not only are Mega's back but now everyone also gets these super powerful Z moves! Which are like the Kamehameha from... well from Dragon Ball Z again I guess." Once again Mylo acted out his speech, this time charging up a Ki-blast and firing it at Frankie, swinging back while he did so and jumping back down to the floor. "THEEEEN in 2019 they released the '*bri*'ish' games, Sword and Shield, where they kinda threw all those gimmicks into a blender and mixed it into a curry... and that curry then makes you like... a Kaiju that can also do the Kamehameha... Unless you're Charizard because then

you also get "another" super special form and like Ok sure I get why people complain but Charizard is cool you know it's on the box art for a reason and I just really think pao~"

Mylo was now trailing very far from the point he was trying to make, and could have gone on a lot longer if not for the small 'Embargo' chain that was lightly flung towards his face, abruptly cutting off his ramble.

"You're losing me monkey boy" Frankie floated down to be at his eye level, still upside down. "Was there a point to this info dump? Like, it's cool if not but, this *probably* isn't the best time."

"Right, sorry. The only thing harder to find here than the portal out of this world is a Ritalin refill... anyway what was I saying?" Mylo paused, he had genuinely forgotten. "RIGHT the gimmick stuff!" He began fiddling with his necklace to help him stay on track. "So like, I know about Mega Evolution, Z-Moves, Dynamaxing, and hell I even know about the 'Burst Heart' crystal thingies from that one Pokémon Manga... So what the fuck is a Terastal Orb?"

"Wait, huh? Something in Pokémon that *you* don't know about? Now I'm certain this is all a dream" Frankie joked, however their expression suddenly turned serious "but wait how is that even possible? These are *games*" they made sure to whisper the forbidden word. "How could there be something here that you've not played with before?"

"I mean like, I guess it could be some gen 9 stuff but the leaks that I saw about that made *0 sense*. They seriously said shit like the box legendary was also your bicycle" Mylo scoffed at the outlandish idea. "Though if those games are aboutta be revealed... the content would technically exist in some Japanese board room... So it's not impossible?"

Frankie rebuffed the idea "If there was new stuff here though wouldn't you have like, freaked the fuck out about it? I barely know anything past what, gen 2? I've got no idea what's new and what's old."

Mylo's voice found itself in a sombre tone as he squatted down, still looking up at his partner. "To be honest, the first night we were here I was way more focused on if you were ok than anything else; then we were plunged straight into that swamp, after that I was busy tryna figure out if the Sawk or Sentret would be a fairer fight for us than seeing if there were any new Pokémon here that I didn't recognise... I guess I've not really had the chance to process much of anything till now." He paused, looking back at him he saw the person he had come to love over the past five years - maybe not their face, but their soul. In Mylo's mind, he knew all of this was kind of his mess to clean up; he was the one who fell off that bridge first after all. He desperately searched for something to say to spark some kind of hope into the situation, but the words escaped him. So, he did what he did best when he was with Frankie, be himself.

"But you know what!" He leapt up from his squat, landing in a power pose. "This just means there could be a ton of cool stuff here that I've never seen before! *Not to mention a ton of info I could probably leak to some game journalists for a pretty penny when we get back!* So I'ma head out there and see if I can't find someone to tell me what the hell a 'Terribilisation' Orb is or whatever!"

Mylo walked to the tent's entrance, though his enthusiasm was in part a Façade to inspire confidence into the situation, there was also a part of him that was ecstatic at the opportunity to find some potential gen 9 spoilers hanging around. He turned to Frankie before leaving to offer them an idea to help take their mind off of things further.

"And hey, while I do this, why not head out to the training area and see if you can't figure out any cool new moves these bodies could be hiding! Shuppet usually get some pretty dope stuff! I used one in my first Emerald Nuzlocke and lemmie tell ya, that thing **carried** me through Mt. Pyre. Woulda been my team's MVP too if Tate & Liza didn't-" Realising he was about to info dump his way into saying his Shuppet died in an important double battle - Mylo, for once, held his tongue. "You know what, doesn't matter! Moral of the story is you're really cool! And you can probably do some cool shit! Soooo go figure that out!"

The monkey quickly stepped out of the tent before he talked himself into any more trouble, not before delivering Frankie their band's signature hand signal (👉->👈) with a cheesy grin as they followed behind him before they eventually went their separate ways.

As Mylo began to walk around the camp, he began to realise a slight flaw to his plan to gather information - it was already way past sundown. He did at one point attempt to approach a Zangoose who was seemingly training by continuously slashing at a tree on the camp's outskirts, however, any attempt at communication went very much unreciprocated; ending with said Zangoose singeing the tree with a frustrated 'Fire Punch' before walking away to restart his training on a new perennial plant. After that, Mylo would then notice the Sawk he ran into in the swamp speaking with a Charmeleon. He was tempted to approach him about the Terastalisation Orb as he seemed much friendlier than the Pokémon he had just ran into, but the Fire - Fighting duo seemed quite preoccupied with each other's company, as such, he decided to leave them be.

The little monkey was starting to feel slightly hopeless, there truly didn't seem to be anyone around who could help him - even the staff team had seemingly called it a night; this was until he began to pick up a familiar scent, he couldn't quite place it but, it made his stomach grumble like nothing had since he arrived. It hadn't crossed Mylo's mind till now, but both himself and his

boyfriend had missed the camp's post round supper due to going back to their tent to brainstorm - issue was, now he'd noticed that fact, Mylo was *starving*. Thankfully, it wouldn't take him too long to figure out where the smell was coming from, as along with the amazing aroma, a bright warm glow seemed to be emanating from the camp's catering tent.

"Well hey, if someones cooking in there, I can take out two Spearow with one 'Stone-edge' - get some info & *something to eat*" Mylo spoke to himself, sad Frankie wasn't around to groan at his terrible pun.

With his brain and his belly now set on finding a joint solution, Mylo walked into the catering tent. As he entered the tent, he saw a set of three large dining tables with an assortment of seating arrangements to fit all kinds of Pokémon species. Each table was set with lightly stained white table cloths that had clearly seen a lot of use over the years. To the right side of the tent, a radio jukebox was quietly humming a tune not dissimilar to the 'Pokémon March' from the HeartGold & SoulSilver 'PokéGear'. As his eyes followed the direction of the tables, he saw the back of Gran the Granbull who was leant over an oven top stove; stirring away at a large, well loved, metal cooking pot. Almost immediately, Mylo was hit with a wave of immense flavour that was now even more recognisable than before - with a deep inhale, Mylo realised what he could smell was...

"Stew and dumplings?" Mylo asked out loud in a mixture of surprise and confusion.

"**Gah?!**" Gran jumped back and yelled out as the back of his head smacked against the stove's extractor fan. The old dog turned to see Mylo very unconvincingly hiding himself behind one of the dining chairs. "You can c'mon out. Barks helluva lot worse than my bite these days - n'even that's start'na go! **Haha!**" Gran's laugh bellowed though the tent, leaving Mylo to wonder if it'd woken up the entire camp.

Mylo leant out from behind the chair with an awkward grin. "Sorry for the scare gramps." laughing nervously as he spoke.

"You'r'all good pup. In fact, it was perfect timin'!" The large pink canine swang his body around while holding the metal pot, careful not to let any of its contents spill. "Merri said she wanted to try stew'n'dumplings after someone brought it up earlier today - n'I'm guessin', by your reaction, that someone's you!" Gran began pouring the stew into a carved wooden bowl with a ladle before placing the bowl down at the end of one of the long dining tables - he then walked back over toward the oven before pulling out two freshly made dumplings, placing them down beside the stew. "I'm usually the first to taste-test any new dish I make - it's why my Citrus berry juice

tastes so good, that cinnamon really takes the edge off. But you know what, sumn tells me you'sa bit more qualified here! **Haha!**" with a hearty laugh the Granbull gestured toward the mini feast, inviting the monkey to sit and eat - an invite that was quickly acted upon.

With haste, Mylo sat at the end of the table - barely making a sound before diving into the meal set before him. In fact, Mylo had seemingly moved so fast that it had left an afterimage where he once stood.

"Double Team? You don't say, I knew that for a spell!" Gran chuckled, he was impressed that Mylo seemingly pulled the move off with such little effort - unbeknownst to him of course, Mylo had absolutely no idea he had just done such a thing, with the Aipom looking up from his bowl of food as he heard Gran speak.

"Dlwoublwe Tlweam?!" Mylo quickly exclaimed with a mouth full of food, quite literally choking on his words.

"Slow down pup." Gran spoke calmly as he patted Mylo's back. "You always do everythin' this fast?"

Mylo coughed with slight embarrassment as the afterimage began to fade "Sorry haha, just excited. This is all still super new to me... Not sorry for how quick I'm eating this though! This is so freakin' good!" He picked up a dumpling and quickly tore at it with his teeth, then swallowed without chewing - leading to him coughing once more.

"**Haha!** You know stockpile too? Lemmie grab you some water before I got'sta call Dora in here to stop ya faintin'" Gran slowly walked over to the sink and began filling up a mug to bring Mylo.

In that moment, the boy stopped eating for a second and looked back toward the Granbull who had catered to him from the moment he stepped into the tent. A wave of comforting warmth washed over him akin to something he hadn't felt in a very long time; Mylo wasn't sure if it was just the stew in his stomach or something more - but for the first time in quite a while he felt truly calm. As he noticed Gran begin to turn around, he quickly went back to his meal so as to not worry the old man that there was something wrong with his recipe.

Gran placed the mug of water in front of Mylo, then sat down beside him. "You're one of them humans right? Not too many of your folks round these parts. I tell you what, the look on Merri's

face when she told me she got to use the ‘human greetin’ we’d practised! That kinda things what keeps ya goin!’” He lent back in his chair with a smile. “Betcha itchin’ to get home though huh?” He turned his head to look towards Mylo, who’s expression dropped slightly at the question.

“Uh, yeah, sure! I mean if I don’t get back to Bay City then how am I ever gonna eat those stew and d-” Mylo paused as he looked down at the half finished bowl in front of him; a bowl that, other than helping Frankie, contained his sole reason for wanting to return home. He froze completely, as the warmth he has once felt now returned to the chilling cold he had come to know - for in this moment all of the thoughts and feelings Mylo had been blocking out since the moment he stood up from Frankie’s bed came rushing back; thoughts of his father, and worse, thoughts of his mother. Her words began spiralling around in his head like a vortex, consuming any and all rational thought - *“Why would you hang around with that... person, why are you letting Frankie corrupt my little boy, why would you wear those clothes - they’re not for boys like you, why would you pretend I treat you so poorly, why would you leave me all alone, **WHY WON’T YOU ANSWER ME!**”*

“You don’t gotta give me an answer if you don’t want to” Gran looked Mylo in the eyes as he spoke calmly - completely snapping Mylo out of his mindset.

“...I... Don’t?” Mylo shook his head to pull himself together “I mean duh I know I don’t *have to*! But of course I am! Me and Frankie promised we’d take their sister to her dance practice - and you do **not** want to see Tanice throw a tantrum, trust me!” Mylo laughed the situation off in an attempt to reestablish his bravado before he began finishing off his food.

“Gotta say I am curious about why you’re walkin’ round this late ‘n’ not restin’ up for tomorrow?” The dog stood and turned to grab himself a portion of food as it had clearly passed the taste test.

“Owh Rwright!” Mylo swallowed the last of his stew “That’s literally the whole reason I’m here! We gotta fight that bunny duo tomorrow and I’ve no clue what the heck a ‘Terawhatever’ Orb is.” He began to down the last of his water.

Gran poured himself out a hefty serving of stew before putting it back on the stove to simmer overnight. “Course! You two’re fightin’ Lucky Foot right? It’s gotta be weird fightin’ another human I’d bet!” He opened the oven to grab himself some dumplings of his own. “Anyway, You said you wanna know what a Tera Orb is?”

...

“Pup?” The Granbull turned around to see Mylo’s empty bowl spinning in place as two afterimages of the Aipom slowly faded out of view; one was pouncing up out his seat, while the other was swiftly running out the tent’s entrance.

While Mylo was away searching for someone to answer his question,
Frankie made their way to the training grounds in an attempt to see what other parts
of their moveset were waiting to be discovered.

Frankie floated around the campgrounds in sombre thought, though their downtime with Mylo did somewhat boost their spirits - the dire task at hand still weighed heavy on their mind. The ghost wasn’t entirely sure where the training area even was, but they believed they remembered seeing it while on their way to get stitched up after first tumbling into this world. The spectre continued to drift through the camp until a sound practically forced their body to come to a complete halt. That sound. That familiar sound. There it was again. The sound they heard back in the swamp before finding Bionic Meteorsaurus’ first pebble - they had to figure out what it was. As Frankie moved toward the sound’s location, they couldn’t help but feel as if they were doing something they shouldn’t; it was the same feeling they’d get when skipping class with Mylo in highschool. Frankie was about to approach the medical tent before, in the corner of their eye, they noticed the source of the noise. They turned to see Green and Blue Espurr using their psychic abilities to lift grey stone bricks twice their size and placing them into a formation that Frankie could not yet decipher. Above the two felines hovered Hoopa who appeared to be holding... The pearl Frankie and their boyfriend had mistakenly brought back to the camp? Frankie noticed the beginnings of some kind of construction when they were originally brought to this part of camp by Dora after arriving, but what on earth was being built here? Was it a statue to honour the tournament? An effigy of some kind? And why was Hoopa seemingly so fixated on this crystal? Many questions circled in Frankie’s mind, none of which were likely to get an answer right now. The Shuppet watched as Hoopa suddenly veered toward an indent in one of the stone bricks the Espurr’s had placed - it held the pearl up to the indent in the brick and shook its head in displeasure; then this expression suddenly came to an abrupt end, as if the genie had noticed something problematic. Its head quickly snapped around in Frankie’s direction - though it saw nothing; with haste, Hoopa then used its working ring to teleport to the exact location Frankie once stood, as it began to look around in confusion and suspicion - and once again, it saw nothing. A confused expression fell over Hoopa’s face with a tilt of its head as it used its ring to teleport the pearl away to an undisclosed location before turning around and slowly making its way back to the construction site.

Now far past Dora's medicine tent in the opposite direction from which they had come, Frankie emerged from the ground slowly while breathing heavily. Unknown to them, their body had acted on its own and activated a new part of their moveset - 'Shadow Sneak'. This being said, considering the situation at hand, they paid little mind to this - nor were they really all too conscious of what just occurred. For a moment, Frankie considered going back to the tent and waiting for Mylo to return; but they knew if they were caught on the way back, they'd look even more suspicious. They weren't even fully sure that what they had seen was anything to be suspicious of in the first place; "*Sure it was strange, but I'd act odd too if I felt like I was being watched*" Frankie thought to themselves. With all of this in mind, they came to the conclusion to keep moving toward the training grounds - they'd fill Mylo in on what happened later.

The Shuppet finally arrived at the training ground. The training area was far from the most advanced grounds they had seen, especially in comparison to the gyms in the human world, but it was certainly enough for any Pokémon here to make do and work up a sweat. The location consisted of rock piles large enough to give Jericho something to lift, or alternatively for someone like Stag to split in two. Targets had also been placed in a lined formation to allow anyone to hone the accuracy of their 'Focus Blasts' or 'Poison Stings'. To the right of the targets saw a group of coarsely formed training dummies with the faces of different Pokémon species sketched upon them (presumably by Merriweather). Finally, a crudely drawn circular running track created a perimeter around the training area so Pokémon like Kuroku can keep up their cardio.

Looking across the grounds, Frankie noticed what appeared to be flames embering off into the night sky. "I seriously can't get a second of alone time tonight huh?" Frankie asked themselves sarcastically as they moved in closer, only to realise that the fire they saw sparking into the wind had originated from the feet of the Raboot they had been tasked to fight, as it amateurly kicked away at a training dummy. Thankfully, Mylo had briefed Frankie on the species names of their opponents while they brainstormed back in their tent. The Raboot's teammate could be seen standing behind them, as he yelled out commands to his younger companion with every hit that landed upon the dummy.

"Again!" Robert shouted - Alex following suit with an 'Ember' kick to what would be the dummy's leg.

"Higher!" He shouted once more - now with Alex barely reaching the dummy's torso.

"Again!" Rob commanded a third time - with Alex's ember hitting in roughly the same spot as it had prior.

"I know I said I wanted training but... This isn't exactly what I had in mind" Alex spoke in panting breaths as he fell back and sat on the ground.

"And I didn't think we'd need you to harness your fire so soon. If you want to be a real warrior by tomorrow, we've got a long way to go" Robert began to retort before noticing Frankie attempting to float out of view. "-oh, it looks like we've got a spy." Robert pointed toward Frankie to shift Alex's attention towards the ghost; with Alex, upon noticing his opponent, jumping back to his feet and backed off slightly so he stood in line with his team mate.

"Um... Hi?" Alex asked timidly, he had hoped he wouldn't have to speak to either member of Bionic Meteorsaurus till they were already on the Sky Islands.

Frankie floated closer to confront the two rabbits. "Uh... Hey, and I'm uh... Not a spy. Just tryina mind my business and train before tomorrow like you guys."

"Yeah, your gawking at our practice really looked like minding your own business." Rob stepped up and in between Frankie and Alex. "Good thing we've already decided on a sure fire strategy to win tomorrow. Wouldn't want you to get spoiled on how you're gonna lose" Robert spoke with a fearless tone, even if this statement was a complete front. He had hoped to give Alex a great deal more lessons in fighting before he'd be pitted against another member of the roster directly.

"We... have?" Alex spoke up in earnest, not wanting to have forgotten any key battle details.

"Haha! See? Neither one of us are gonna let a single part of our strategy slip" the Lopunny lightly nudged his elbow behind himself and into Alex in the hopes he'd get the memo.

Frankie spoke up in frustration as to try and halt this idea of them spying on their opponents from escalating further. "Oh my *god* dude, get out your own ass, seriously. How would I have even known you two would be here tonight? I just wanted to get ready for tomorrow, got it?! That's all." Frankie's voice raised in anger, but they soon felt a rush of anxiety as their adrenaline began to die down as they noticed the sheer size difference between themselves and Robert. They may have started out on the wrong foot, but this could quite possibly be their one and only chance to speak to Lucky Foot before they go head to head tomorrow. They had to attempt to find some kind of common ground, or at least reason with them somewhat before the battle. Frankie understood they needed whatever advantage they could get in this fight - and

with that in mind, they realised their best option here may be to simply lay everything bare. Frankie cleared their head, took a deep breath, and decided to tell the rabbits everything.

“Look okay. I know everyone here wants to win the tournament. But I need you guys to understand something. This is way more to me and Mylo than just some ticket to a cool new world. It’s...” Frankie took a pause, and another deep breath, they’d already committed this far, they had to say it. They looked down and continued talking. “My name... Is Frankie... Me and Mylo... *We’re humans*. Like, the people from the place you’re all trying to get to? I don’t know how or why but my stupid boyfriend fell off a stupid bridge and when I jumped down after him we both ended up... here... In our world you guys, Pokémon, aren’t even like... real... It’s complicated. I know this probably sounds crazy but it’s true. I have a human Mom and Dad waiting for me, not to mention the most amazing sister in the whole world... I need to get back more than anything... So what I’m asking is... **Please forfeit the round!**” With their plea of desperation over, the ghost looked up at the Raboot and Lopunny - but their expressions were far from the looks of shock that Frankie had expected. Alex’s expression was one of slight confusion, though accented with compassionate eyes. Robert on the other hand stayed mostly stern, with a hint of intrigue and... excitement?

“...Your Mom is waiting for you too?” Spoke Alex softly - Frankie’s mind almost rejecting these words completely. “*Why would he say it like that? How could your Mom be waiting for you if you’re trying to get to my world?*” Thought Frankie, though before their mind could come to the logical conclusion, Robert decided to speak up too.

“Are you really that selfish? Did you seriously think you guys were the only humans that came here? You really didn’t take a second to consider you weren’t the only ones?” Roberts’ words cut deep, just as intended, he knew he’d do whatever it takes to win - even if that meant crushing someone’s spirit.

Frankie floated motionless, completely unable to respond. They were in shock.

“Look I’m sorry but, *all you’ve done* is made my resolve even stronger. A world where Pokémon are barely real? All my life I’ve studied human relics but this? This I’ve gotta see.” Robert began to walk past Frankie, activating a small amount of his Fairy-Type energy as he did as to nudge past the phantom with a light ‘Play Rough’ - now on top of the recent revelation, yet another of Frankie’s fears had been confirmed; The Lopunny *can* hit them. “Come on Alex, we’ll finish our training in private.” Rob stopped and turned his head back toward his opponent “And hey Frankie? Don’t worry, after all this, maybe you can help me unlock some human ruins when Alex is busy.”

"I'm... Sorry" whispered Alex as he walked past Frankie's paralysed self, quickly speeding up to catch up to his partner. "D-don't you think that was a little harsh? You're not normally that... mean." He looked up at his partner, not wanting to annoy him.

Robert looked down toward Alex to reassure him and put a hand on his shoulder as they walked. "We gotta get you home right?" The Lopunny was unsure how sincere his reassurance toward his partner was at that moment. While he had truly come to care for Alex, especially after the swamp, the Raboot's role in his plan hadn't changed. He needed a tool to both get into the ruins and to get to the human world, and he was gonna do that through whatever means necessary. "So tell me? What'd the Shuppet mean by 'barely real?'" This was the last thing Frankie heard Robert say as Lucky Foot walked back to their tent.

So there Frankie stood.

There Frankie watched.

And listened.

And waited, paralysed by shock. Until they heard the one voice that could help them.

"DUDE!... DUDE! FRANKIE! DUDE?!" Mylo ran up behind them, in complete disregard of anything else around him.

"DUDE THERE'S..." Mylo sprinted in front of Frankie as they slowly turned to face him.

"...mi cielo, there's..." Frankie spoke in unison with their boyfriend.

"THERE'S OTHER HUMANS HERE?!"

"There's other humans here..."

The band delivered the bad news in tandem.

Though for different reasons, this revelation caused both bandmates to feel overwhelmed with guilt.

In Frankie's subconscious, their mind latched onto a word Robert had used; and it was cutting through them like a sharp knife. "Selfish". The teams that didn't make it last round, we're any of them human? Alex, he said his Mom was waiting for him. How was it fair for Frankie to get home to their family, only to lock Alex away from ever seeing his again. It's not like the thought hadn't crossed their mind that other humans may be here, why else would Merri have been practising a greeting specifically for Humans - they were by no means a surprise when they fell through the portal. Frankie supposed they simply blocked the thought away as a method of coping with the situation. But they couldn't do that anymore.

For Mylo, he quite honestly had never even considered the possibility. In truth, a part of him has been enjoying this experience - he felt like a chosen one in a grand adventure story. But what Gran told him snapped him far out of that fantasy. Not to mention the realisation he had nothing waiting for him when he got back, if it wasn't for Frankie, he'd have no reason to return to the human world. How could he then rob another human of their chance to get back to their family, the people that love them - the kinds of people that Mylo, outside of Frankie, truly did not believe he had. However, just like Mylo had so many times before, he needed to cast that thought aside. Frankie needs to get back home, Frankie needs his support, Frankie needs Mylo - and Mylo needs Frankie.

"...So what now?" Frankie choked on their words as they looked deep into Mylo's eyes. "I... need to get back. I..."

"I know." replied Mylo sincerely. "This is gonna be a lot harder than we thought." Mylo lifted his arms up to cradle Frankie's face in his hands. He knew he couldn't, but that wouldn't stop him from trying. He held his hands against Frankie's cheeks, his hands passing through their spectral skin - he could not feel them there, but he had to be there for them.

Frankie continued to look into Mylo's eyes as they desperately attempted to perceive his display of affection, but the strain came to no avail. "Tanice is waiting for us..." As the words left

Frankie's mouth; a teardrop escaped their eye, gently falling down the side of Frankie's face... and onto the palm of Mylo's hand.

To most people, this would have been perceived as the universe playing a cruel joke on the couple - the one sensation the band had been given permission to share was a bead of sadness that washed away just as fast as it made contact with Mylo's paw. But Mylo wasn't like most people, and that's exactly what Frankie saw in him. Somehow, somehow, Mylo was able to use this gesture from the universe as strength to carry on fighting. For their entire stay in this world, the one rule the couple was forced to obey was that they can never touch - yet here and now, in a way only a lovable idiot could construe it - they had just broken this world's one rule. For the first time since their arrival, Frankie and Mylo had shared a touch.

"You're right." Mylo's voice carried a powerful conviction "She is, just like everyone else's family is waiting for them" Mylo removed his hands from Frankie's cheeks, taking the hand upon which the tear had fallen and clutched his jade necklace tightly. "But that's not our fault. We didn't choose for you to get ripped away from your family, nor did anyone else." Mylo ran towards one of the training dummies and knelt upon its left shoulder "That was up to that freaky Hoopa! And when we win this thing, I'm gonna make that thing tell me it's stupid reason - then force it to find a way to get everyone back to their real homes! No matter what!" With his declaration, Mylo scrunched his tail into a fist and swung it around, slamming it straight into the right side of the dummy's face. The monkey jumped down, his eyes locking back into Frankie's as he approached his partner. "But to do that, and to make *sure* we get back home. We have to win this thing first... So, are you with me?"

Mylo paused to give Frankie a chance to process both their thoughts and what Mylo had proposed. Frankie looked down, closed their eyes. shook their head and took a deep breath in through their nose before opening their eyes and letting the breathing out in unison - this was something Frankie would often do to ground themselves after something emotional. With a slight smile to Mylo, Frankie began to speak.

"...L-let's get this show on the road!" with a snuffle, Frankie was back. They may not have the hands to do their hand sign right now, but Mylo knew exactly what that phrase meant.

"If I can ask? How'd you even find out?" Mylo questioned his partner.

"Lucky Foot were here, training." They tilted their head towards the charred dummy Alex had been training on. "The Raboot... Alex... He's like us. And the Lopunny, it knows a move that can

hit me.” Frankie’s worries attempted to creep back in as they spoke, but with Mylo by their side, they were able to push them away.

“Then I guess we gotta win this thing for Alex too!” Mylo returned to his power pose once more, hands on his hips, now more determined than ever. “We’ll figure something out for the Lopunny, we’ve faced way tougher on earth! I’mma send that rabbit back all the way to the medic tent and leave him asking *‘What’s up Doc?’*” He was very proud of that pun.

Frankie wasn’t, and gave a look of loving disappointment before remembering the whole reason Mylo left their tent in the first place. “Oh my god! Maybe we could use the ‘Terawhosawatsit ball’ crystals against him! Did you find out what it does?”

“Oh that I uh... You know, super funny story, you see the thing is...”

Mylo would go on to explain the not very funny story that he left Gran’s tent without ever finding out what a ‘Tera Orb’ was. So after Frankie spent a moment chasing their boyfriend and hurling ‘Embargo’ chains at him, the two would come to the conclusion that it’s far too late to ask someone about it now - and they would instead attempt to make a plan using the wide knowledge that Mylo *did* have at his disposal. With the way Frankie described what they had seen (in a way, proving Lucky Foot’s concerns of a spy to be true), Mylo was able to decipher that the Lopunny was likely using ‘Play Rough’; though this was a scarily powerful move, he was reassured to hear it would not be super effective against either of them. As for what Frankie saw of Alex, Mylo decided he had to have either been using ‘Ember’ or ‘Flame Charge’ - though ‘Ember’ was definitely the preferred outcome. That being said, if Alex was not yet confident in using ‘Flame Charge’; the difference between the two moves would likely be negligible. Though it was getting late, the duo still decided trying to get some form of training would be useful; even if they were unable to go for long. Nevertheless, before they started, Mylo would have to raise something with his partner.

“There’s one last thing I’ve gotta say - about the infinity crystals” Mylo waved for Frankie’s attention as they flung chains towards the different targets. “The Lopunny, it’s one of the Pokémon with a Mega Evolution. If that dude has a Fighting Type move, I’m already in serious trouble as a normal type... But if he Mega Evolves, he’s gonna become a Normal/Fighting type - that means, if he hits me, I’m almost definitely going down in one shot. I’ll try to deal with him before then, but if he does transform, I’m gonna need you to take over for me... I don’t really stand a chance” Mylo laughed the last part of his sentence off as if he wasn’t deeply concerned Frankie may have to end up taking on this fight 1 V 2 if the hare’s powerful form change proved too much for him.

“So he’ll only be able to hit me with one move?” Frankie responded with a question. They want to do what they can to protect their boyfriend, but they still don’t fully grasp just how this will all potentially play out.

“I hope so!” Spoke Mylo optimistically. “But we’re not exactly playing ‘open team sheet’ here so... Not really sure what to expect till we get there. It’s not all bad though! They did say these crystals will power up any Pokémon, regardless of species right? I like, assume that means the crystal will give us whatever best suits our bodies or whatever - I doubt we can choose. BUUUUT!!! The Shuppet line *does* get a Mega Evolution!... Not in the state you’re in now but, who knows what might happen? We might end up with Mega Frankie out there! Plus, wanna know the best part?” He ran in front of Frankie in between ‘Embargo’ shots “You might get hands again!” Mylo stood there performing ‘jazz hands’ with all at his disposal, the tail hand sticking up from behind his head. As unsettling to look at as it may have been, it made Frankie laugh - and that’s exactly what he was looking for.

With that, the band began to kick their training into real gear! After a few attempts to replicate a similar scenario of using food as a motivator - Mylo was quite quickly able to get a grasp on using Double Team. Though the thought of dealing with multiple Mylo’s shook Frankie to the bone, seeing how quickly he was able to move around did remind the ghost that they had accidentally used a movement ability of their own earlier too! Once Frankie explained what they thought the move did and Mylo, over-excitedly, tried to have his boyfriend use ‘Phantom Force’, though he did soon realise that Frankie was more likely to be talking about ‘Shadow Sneak’... So after begging them to try and use ‘Phantom Force’ one last time, they began attempting to get ‘Shadow Sneak’ to activate. Frankie knew they didn’t have time to fully explain why they felt the need to hide, so instead, they admitted that something around camp had shocked them. This was without a doubt the worst mistake they could have made; causing Mylo to spend the rest of the night hiding behind the different training equipment before jumping out at his partner and screaming that he was about to “Bite them like they did in ‘87”. It wouldn’t be till sunrise that they were able to have Frankie activate the move somewhat consistently, meaning they had run out of time to figure out if there were any other moves hidden away inside them. Even still, the band both felt that the evening had been a success. This was far from the first night before something important that they had spent goofing off, and in a way, it was exactly what the couple needed to raise their spirits back up before the encroaching task ahead.

Part Two - Battle For The Band

As the sun's rays began to illuminate the campgrounds on the dawn of the second round, the couple somehow managed to find their way back to their tent before members of the roster began to rise. Though they had managed to get some form of sleep, it had only really amounted to around four hours at best - Their spirits may have been raised from their night spent training, but their energy levels would not be so lucky.

"LAST CALL FOR BREAKFAST!!! COME GET IT GUYS!!!" Merriweather's 'Hyper Voice' reverberated through the campsite louder than the speakers at an EDM festival. This was far from the first wake-up call the band had received that morning, with each of the previous catapulting them awake before laying back down - as if turning their alarm to snooze for another few minutes of relaxation. That being said, even if they wished they could do the same this time - both bandmates knew that they probably shouldn't try to go into their battle on an empty stomach; as such, they reluctantly awoke.

"Cuhhhhhgh..." Frankie groaned like an undead extra on the set of *The Walking Dead*.

"Couhhhhh..." Mylo awoke with a similar desperate call.

"...Coffee....."

"Coffeeeeeeeeee"

The couple called out for their saviour as they both rolled out of bed.

After a slower start than a newly switched in Regigigas, and Mylo lethargically tying his team bandana around his tail - the two made their way to Gran's catering tent. As they entered, they smelt an aromatic mix of freshly ground coffee and a breakfast buffet. The smell of food was enough to kick the Aipom's energy back into gear, as he quickly dashed toward the serving station to grab his fill; the same can't be said for Frankie, who sluggishly crept towards the pot of coffee... and halted in front of it as they realised they would need help to pour themselves a drink.

"Need a hand?" a tired and monotone voice hit Frankie's ears from behind; the Ghost turning to find its source. Green Espurr stood behind them with a mug in each hand.

Frankie gasped as their memories of the construction they saw the night prior flashed in their mind; quickly attempting to regain their composure as they realised neither Espurr or Hoopa had noticed them snooping around.

“Ah! Oh! Um! Hi! Uh... Yes! Yeah.. yeah! I don’t have any after all, hands I mean. Aha...” They usually let Mylo handle defusing a situation like this with comedy. However, due in part because Green had no idea why they were acting so strange; and the fact she was way too tired from a night of not only construction, but also logistically planning out the further tournament rounds - she very much did not have the energy to question Frankie’s display.

“Yeah that’s... why I asked.” The cat floated the mugs out of her hands and brought them beside the coffee pot - lifting the pot with her same psychic abilities and pouring the liquid into both mugs. She finished her display off by placing a metal straw into each of the mugs, then placing Frankie’s back down on the drinks stand while floating her own back into her hand. She was about to speak again before being cut off by Mylo loudly announcing Himself behind her, holding two large plates of food for himself and his partner.

“SOW SWORRWY OWH MY GWOD!” He apologised to his partner profusely while speaking through multiple slices of toast. “I’VWE GWOT...” He swallowed his food. “I’ve got that for you!” He grabbed Frankie’s mug with his tail. “Let’s go sit down before this gets cold!”

The phantom & ape pairing walked over to one of the only dining tables with room for them left to sit on. The only issue was, this table also sat the two rabbits that Frankie had become all too familiar with the night before. As they ate their breakfast, the band began to feel a tangible miasma of anxiety begin to settle across the mess hall, not just from their table - but from every member of the roster. Would this be what it was like for the rest of the tournament? Every team watching over their shoulder, desperately watching their opponents every move? - only time would tell. But for now, they tried their best to enjoy their food. Between mouthfuls of Pewter Crunchies, Mylo began to call out to the members of Lucky Foot. He hadn’t been fully briefed on exactly what Rob had to say to Frankie the night before, but knowing they had spoken, he wanted to take the time to introduce himself.

“Hey! Lopunny dude! Over here!” He stood on his chair as he waved his tail in Robert’s direction; Mylo was never the best at reading the overall energy of the room.

With a groan, Rob reluctantly responded “What? Looking to get even more info out of us?”

“Actually yeah!” Mylo’s response caught Robert off guard. “Frankie told me Alex’s name, but what do we call you? No hard feelings today, yeah?”

“Mylo, I don’t think this is the best id-” Frankie’s attempt to stop the interaction was cut short by the Lopunny’s response.

“You don’t need to know my name - and don’t try to get ‘buddy buddy’ with us now, not after I caught your floating fiance creeping around the camp last night trying to spy on us.” Robert pointed his half eaten Poffin toward Frankie before bringing it in for another bite. Hoopa’s ears perked up at his words.

“I already told you I wasn’t spying you freak! And you can be rude to me all you want, but don’t you dare talk to him like that!” Frankie floated across the table and hovered face to face with Robert. Their size difference was a lot less intimidating while he was sat at the table.

“Woah wait, what’s going on?” Mylo asked in shock.

“Rob, I don’t think we should do this here...” Alex murmured under his breath.

“Finally decided to move huh?” Mocked Robert. “You know what, I take back my offer. Somehow your hyperactive boyfriend over there seems like he’d be way less of a hassle to unlock some ruins for me.” Robert’s plan to get inside Frankie’s head had now shifted from crushing their spirit to blinding them with anger.

“Dude, what’s he even talking about?” Mylo questioned once more, now standing up from his seat.

“Well **‘Rob’**, good luck even trying to *get* to any ruins after we’re done with you!” The rabbit’s plan had worked, Frankie was furious. In an attempt to try and intimidate him, Frankie drifted through Rob’s chest - reappearing behind him.

“D-don’t talk to him like that!” Alex timidly spoke up, now also standing up from his chair, he didn’t expect to be in conflict with either Frankie or Mylo so soon.

Robert stood and turned to face Frankie, not one to be disrespected. He towered over the Shuppet before Frankie flew up to meet him at eye level. They stood nose to nose. Their argument had now become a spectacle for the entire tent. Within seconds of Robert standing, Ray and King nodded toward one another and rushed over to Rob; The soon to be rivals came together to pull him away from Frankie. Jericho did the same, not wanting this conflict to spread to their table and injure Rosie in any way. Standing up and pinching at the back of Frankie's cloth as to not let the Ghost proceed any further.

Before anyone could say anything more, a loud whistle came from the direction of where the tournament staff had been sitting - Blue was once again tasked to blow it, this time, in an attempt to grab the bickering quartet's attention.

"Let's save the fightin' for the round ahead, and **NOT** in my kitchen, hey Gents?" Gran laughed, though his tone was much more serious and stern than the roster had heard it prior.

"Yeah, *'let's'*" Robert spoke while staring the Shuppet dead in the eye, this had clearly become more than just a battle to decide the rounds winner to both himself and Frankie. This fight was personal.

The eerie calm began to settle once more over the catering tent; team Steampunk agreeing to switch seats with Lucky Foot while everyone finished off the rest of their meal. With tensions high and reality setting in, Merriweather proclaimed it was time for everyone to meet at the camp's entrance for the round's opening announcement. Once all competitors and staff were gathered, Merri's speech began.

"Hi everyone! It's great to see you all! Now I know today's kinda scary for a lot of you - but I promise, no matter what happens, we'll look after everyone once the round comes to a close!" Even with the fox's child-like innocence, they knew just as well as everyone else that this round was a daunting one. Thankfully, Merri's energy was enough to bring at least some sense of peace towards members of the tournament.

With a smile and a nod, Merri signalled for the portal to the first island to be opened. Hoopa threw its working ring into the air as it began to rapidly expand - Blue Espurr making the sound of a celebratory trumpet with his mouth as it widened. As humorous as the noise was, that wasn't the one Frankie was focused on. The Portal. That was the sound they've kept on hearing. They finally managed to piece it together. They knew it probably wasn't best to give Mylo something to distract him before the fight; but Frankie swore to himself that, once they won this round, they would fill Mylo in on both the noise of the portal and the construction they saw the night prior.

“One thing that’s super important for you guys to remember!” Merri raised her voice once more “I can’t stop you... but... PLEASE DON’T USE MORE THAN ONE CRYSTAL PER PERSON!” Her sudden yell caught the focus of everyone who wasn’t paying full attention. “I know it might seem like a way to get an easy win, but it’s really dangerous to absorb more than one of the infinity crystals energy per battle! Things like Mega Evolution can already be super stressful on your body, and that’s with the right keystone. But this is *pure infinity energy*! It’s strong enough to do anything! Even revive a dead Pokémon! So one more time, please, PLEASE, be careful!” Merriweather looked like she was about to cry at just the thought of a competitor being injured to such a degree. Once finished, Gran and Dora walked over to comfort the small Zorua - with Hoopa turning around midway though her speech, appearing to peer through its portal’s entrance at the crystals in question.

“Now, with all the preparation out the way.” Green’s voice projected across the roster as she reached into her ‘Magic Room’ - pulling out her trusty clipboard as she began to check her notes. “Could... Team Rapture and Team Soul please step through the portal.”

Just like that, the round had officially begun. Two by Two the teams began to enter the portal to their specific island; the Hyperspace Hole closing behind them before reopening to a new, unoccupied, Infinity Isle. Unlike the first time the teams were listed off for this challenge, both bandmates’ minds were roughly in the same place. They were driven, determined, they may not yet know their full movesets, nor do they know what plans Lucky Foot had been able to prepare - but they knew they had to win, and for them, that was enough. The only difference between them being the level of anger Frankie felt towards Robert. Obviously the plan was for Mylo to start the bout against him, but Frankie had almost become hopeful of the chance to knock him off the island himself.

“Next! Team Lucky Foot and Bio... B- You know what, you know who you are. Step forward!” Green Espurr called for both duo’s as their battlefield materialised in the ring in front of them.

Before their eyes, Bionic Meteorsaurus saw a rugged and rocky terrain coated with a sheet of tough grass. Strewn across the landscape was the occasional tree or large piece of shrubbery - though they lacked in importance to the large spiked crystals that fractured out the ground as if they had burst through the island surface through pure force of willpower.

The two teams began to step up and through the portal. Frankie and Robert stepped up first, as if in a race to prove their strength over the other. They were followed close behind by their teammates. Mylo had yet to really have a moment to speak with Alex, instead offering an awkward smile while mouthing the words “Good Luck” as if to give off some kind of positive

impression, even if the wish of luck wasn't one made in complete earnest - he was here to win at the end of the day. Alex responded by scratching the back of his head before mouthing the words "You too" back to Mylo, though he did so more because it felt like a necessary part of the interaction rather than anything else.

Both teams started on opposite sides of the island, though it was decently big in comparison to the camp ground - each pair knew it would quickly feel a lot smaller once they had begun. While the last few teams made their way to their respective sky isles, both Lucky Foot and Bionic Meteorsaurus took this as an opportunity to speak one last time before the fight commenced.

To the islands east, Alex raised his concerns with Robert.

"Do... you think we can do this?" Alex spoke with hesitancy, both figuratively and literally looking up to Robert. They had managed to get a decent amount of training in both before and after running into Frankie, but the Raboot still worried he would be weighing the team down.

"Are you kidding? We've got this! Two basic Pokémon like them? I could do this on my own if I had to!" Responded Robert with confidence.

"Oh... Right..." Alex had hoped the response would have been more of a vote of confidence toward his ability. Though this still did ease his worries somewhat.

Noticing Alex's mood shift from scared to sombre, Robert continued his point "But I uh... Don't have to! You're a quick learner, especially for a human, just remember what I taught you and you'll do fine." Pep talks weren't exactly the Lopunny's strong suit, but he knew Alex needed some form of acclamation as to not become a liability early on from doubting himself.

To the west of the island, Mylo and Frankie were equally as locked in conversation.

"Hey dude, are you... Ok?" Mylo questioned his partner out of loving concern.

"Huh? Say what now?" Frankie darted around in confusion, they were completely lost in thought at both the situation stakes and wanting to settle things with Robert.

"I don't know what went down last night but you and that Rob guy... Thanks for standing up for me this morning but, I guess I just need to know like... Are you good? Like, *good* good?" Mylo stood on his tail to match Frankie's eye level.

"Good? Of course I'm good! Why wouldn't I be! I get to beat the shit out of that dumb Easter mascot piece of-"

"Dude!" Mylo cut Frankie off before they could finish their thought. "I'm never the serious one, so you gotta realise how important this is, ok?! Just like, don't lose sight of why we're here is all, what's at stake, and like, I know how you can get. Don't let him in your head ok?" Mylo's eyes softened to a caring gaze.

"OF COURSE I KNOW THE..." Frankie took a breath "I know... I know what's at stake here. But you're right... Sorry for exploding, I just... Ugh that stupid duracell rabbit looking mother *ffff*.... Fine, yeah he's in my head. I'll... I'll try to cool off before we start. Thank you for checking in on me... I love you"

"I love you too dude! Now, let's show these guys just how strong the reigning Bay City Talent Show champions are!" Mylo readied himself with a smile, prepping himself like a runner in an olympic sprint.

"We've.... Literally only entered that once... and we came last... but nice try" Frankie let out a sigh, followed by a light laugh as they also readied themselves for what was about to come. The time for talking was over, and the battle was about to begin.

As each team geared up for what was about to take place, The staff team also prepared themselves for the round ahead, they had to be sure they could reach someone as soon as possible if they were too heavily injured. With all the contestants and hosts in place, Merri activated her 'Hyper Voice' one last time.

"Okay everyone! Good luck, have fun! And without further ado... **START!!!**"

Without missing a beat, just as the permission to fight left the Zorua's lips, Robert pounced forward with Alex on his back. Mylo and Frankie hadn't even noticed the Raboot climb onto his teammate - and they had even less time to react as Robert grabbed his arm, flinging him toward

Mylo. This was clearly a co-ordinated part of their strategy; Mylo taking on Robert might have been what the band had planned, but that didn't mean Lucky Foot had the same idea in mind.

"GAAH!" Alex flew through the air as he tumbled in between Mylo and Frankie, barely making it to his feet. "I told you I couldn't land it!" The Raboot spoke, trying to catch his balance as the couple watched him in confusion.

"You didn't need to... you just needed to divert their attention!" Alex's display had given Robert just enough time to acquire a full speed run up before crashing into Frankie, Fairy-Type energy flowing through his body as he concentrated on 'Playing Rough'. He used this same energy to grab hold of the repaired seam in Frankie's cloth - harnessing the momentum from his run up in order to hurl Frankie's body a decent distance away from their boyfriend, splitting the band apart for the time being.

"FRANKIE!" Mylo yelled as he watched his partner plummet to the ground. Seeing this sparked a flame under the Aipom as he began a charge toward Robert. "YOU PIECE OF-"

Mylo's tirade was cut short as Alex 'Tackled' him onto the ground. "S-sorry!" Spoke the Raboot as it pinned him to the ground.

"DON'T APOLOGISE TO HIM! KNOCK HIM OUT!" Commanded Rob as he began to rush towards Frankie.

"Get. The Hell. Off. Me!" Mylo struggled greatly to stand, eventually managing to shake Alex off by leveraging his tail between the two as to force the rabbit upwards. "I am **SO** never picking Scorbunny again!" Mylo jumped up to his feet. "You're a person right? A human, like us? I don't know what the hell that guy's deal is with 'ruins' or whatever - but it's clear as day he's using you man!" While he spoke, Mylo stood with his hands up to signal for a time out of sorts.

Alex stayed still for a moment, he was on edge, but he was willing to hear Mylo out.

"That Rob guy is gonna toss you aside as soon as you're no longer useful. I bet he won't even let you through the portal home if you guys win this whole thing! But if you forfeit, I promise we're gonna do everything we can to get all the humans home! Now, you have to get out of my way dude. I'm serious" Mylo's arms lowered, he was ready to fight again if he had to.

Alex took a moment to respond, then replied with a single sentence. "Is... Your mom waiting for you too?"

If not for the adrenaline pumping through Mylo's body, the question would have stumped him completely. Even still, he could not find it inside himself to lie about the truth. "She's... It's complicated. But I have my reasons to get back, and I'm doing that whether you're with us or against us!" The Aipom prepared himself for a fight.

"Well mine is! And you're wrong about Rob! He's saved me in the swamp, and he's gonna get me home... and I'm gonna help him too! I can't let him down now!" With a proclamation of resolve, Alex charged toward Mylo. Seeing this, Mylo did the same; he wanted more than anything to check on Frankie, but it was clear he would need to deal with this first.

Across the island, Frankie steadily rose in a desperate attempt to recalibrate themselves after what they had just endured. Though they could still just about make out Mylo and Alex, the Lopunny's right arm had launched them decently far, with them now situated on the outskirts of a small wooded area. As they raised their guard, Robert slowly approached - cracking his neck and both his knuckles as he did so.

"I always did prefer one on one, hope you don't mind" Rob joked toward the ghost, clearly feeling his advantage.

Frankie nervously joked back in response. "You know? I kinda hoped I'd get to kick your ass myself, it's my lucky day."

"Hm, sure is" Robert let out a small laugh before returning to his serious demeanour as he raced forward at Frankie. The energy of his 'Play Rough' attack flowed through him as he delivered a swift and decisive kick into Frankie's jaw, sending the Shuppet even further back into the woods.

"You know" Rob turned toward Alex's and Mylo's battle before attempting to refocus onto his target. "It's definitely Mylo's lucky day. If you hadn't caught my attention, one 'Close Combat' from me would have taken him out of the contest by now - especially if he's over there struggling with the kid."

Unbeknownst to Robert, him turning around for a moment to gloat gave Frankie just enough time to sink into the floor - they had been able to activate their 'Shadow Sneak' once more. Now

with some kind of advantage over the towering hare, Frankie began to move through the trees as quietly as they could; though this was made somewhat difficult by the low level shrubbery rustling as they slid through the floor.

Rob carried on deeper into the woods as the sun's rays were slowly shielded by the ever growing mass of leaves above. Thanks to their species' extra sensitive ears, they were able to pick up some sense of where Frankie was moving to - though not fully accurate, it was enough to keep him on the phantom's trail.

"Don't make this harder on yourself, there's no point hiding. If you don't want to fight just go throw yourself off the edge... you're wasting my **TIME!**" As Robert spoke the final word of his sentence, he shot toward the tree he suspected Frankie to be behind with a 'Close Combat' - striking it down in one blow from his powerful legs. Rob knew that even if Frankie was behind the tree that his Fighting-Type attacks wouldn't affect them; but it was never meant to affect them physically. Robert was sending a message to prove just how out of Frankie's depth he truly was.

Thankfully, the Shuppet was able to narrowly avoid the tree falling down, their full location still a mystery to Robert. As scary as this was, an act of frustration like that did prove one thing to Frankie, their plan was working. Right under the Lopunny's nose, Frankie had been leading them into a trap. As Rob was led deeper and deeper into the forest, The Puppet Pokémon had been slowly weaving a web of their insidious chains between each tree they passed - the shadows cast down from branches above working as a perfect cover for their tricky plan.

"This is really starting to annoy me now!" Rob lunged at another tree where he believed Frankie to be hiding, this time though, using 'Play Rough' to ensure damage if he made contact. His fist slammed into the tree causing it to crack around the trunk; since this move was not quite as strong as 'Close Combat', the tree would not fall completely. This attack too failed to find the ghost.

"What's wrong? This is what you wanted right? *I'm 'spying' on you*" Frankie mocked Robert from behind a tree, still not yet revealing their position. This caused Rob to repeat his attack again, still missing the mark.

Now extremely frustrated, Robert repeatedly pummeled into every tree he thought Frankie could be hiding behind with his powerful 'Play Rough' - weakening the grove that surrounded him. Unfortunately for him, this was exactly what Frankie was looking for.

“Hey Donnie Darko!” Frankie revealed their position behind Rob and yelled out to the Rabbit, the human world reference completely flying over his head.

To Robert, this name calling was the last nail in Frankie’s coffin. The ghost was in his head, and he was pissed. He bound in Frankie’s direction, his strong legs striding through the bushes - eyes fixated on his target, but before he could reach them - he heard the Shuppet call out once more.

“Watch your step!” they spoke with a laugh.

Despite Frankie’s warning, Rob continued towards them at full pelt - that was until his foot caught on a hard metal object, pulling the chain forward as he tripped. As the chain was yanked stiff, so too were the rest of the chains that had been woven around the, now weakened, trees. With the kick of Robert’s well trained legs pulling tightly on the surrounding boscage; the trees were hastily pulled down on top of him - trapping the Lopunny under a mass of timber and frond.

“HAH!!! YES!!!” Frankie exclaimed their excitement to the world “Dude if Mylo was here right now he’d totally have shouted like ‘*Timbuuur*’ or something haha! Ha....”

A groaning noise could be heard from under the pile of trees.

“...*Yeaah, I should probably...*” Frankie cut themself off as they turned and dashed to assist Mylo with his bout.

Back with Alex and Mylo - their fight had been roughly even so far. Neither one of them were by any means a skilled fighter but each had managed to land some pretty heavy hits on the other. As their fight continued, a boost of confidence struck over Alex’s mind, their night of training really had paid off. It was only brief, but when a skilled fighter like Robert gives you pointers on your attack and defence - it can go a long way against an untrained foe. Not to mention that they outweighed Mylo in the number of damaging attacks 3 to 1. Mylo was going to have to find an edge, and fast.

“You’re pretty good dude... What, your Mom get you Kung-Fu lessons or something?” Mylo spoke with a panting breath.

"Stop trying to talk to me!" Alex stamped his foot on the ground, igniting it on impact. "You've been quipping this whole time, it's *really distracting!*"

"I don't have a problem with you man, your friend maybe but like, as long as we win, I'm down to be cool after this. I just... need you to get out of my way dude" Mylo noticed something glistening from behind where Alex stood, it seemed his stomp had unearthed something behind him.

"I'm not throwing away my chance to get home! I deserve it just as much as anyone else! And Rob needs me!" Alex stomped his foot once more, confirming Mylo's suspicions.

"No no I mean literally dude!" Mylo's comment caused Alex to look at him in confusion. "I need you..." Mylo swiped Alex's leg with his tail, giving him an opening to run past. "TO GET OUT MY WAY!"

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Mylo swiftly slid across the floor and wrenched a small infinity crystal from the island's surface. "YES!!! MEGA MYLO HERE WE COME!!!!"

Holding the powerful stone between his two paws, Mylo reached around with his tail, balling it into a fist and smashing down upon it. A beam of light shone from the cracks in the crystal, so bright that Mylo was forced to squeeze his eyes shut as his body began to change. Frankie saw the light shine out from behind the trees, helping them locate exactly where to find their boyfriend. This feeling, this sensation, it was unlike anything Mylo had ever felt before - not even when his form changed to that of a Pokémon did he feel anything close to what he did in that moment. Though surprisingly, it was nowhere near as painful as Pokédex entries had led him to believe. In fact, it wasn't painful at all. Once the power finished entering his system, the biggest thing Mylo was able to notice was that his head felt surprisingly heavy. The transformation was finalised just as quickly as it began, within seconds, Mylo attempted to open his eyes and look down at his new form. As the monkey peered upon his palms, his suspicions had been confirmed - outside of a crystalline glow, his body had hardly changed. He looked up to see Alex staring back at him in a state of anxiety. He'd clearly been powered up, but, whatever actually happened to the Aipom was a foreign concept, something entirely new.

"I... I won't let this stop me! I have to win!" Alex regained his composure as he attempted to conduct a counter attack while Mylo was still in his confused state. As if out of nowhere, Alex attempted a swift 'Quick Attack', trying to land his fist on Mylo's jaw. Be that as it may, upon contact with the Monkey's face there was, well, no contact at all. Alex's fist phased through Mylo's head like something each of them had only seen once before - whenever Frankie would

interact with a Normal-Type Pokémon. Understanding quickly washed over Mylo's mind. This was the Terastallization Merri spoke about in her announcement. This was the gimmick Mylo knew nothing about.

"I? I CHANGED TYPES???" Mylo spun around in an attempt to get a look at his own body, his hand tail reaching up to feel the crown upon his head. "Dude, do you know how much Kotaku will pay me to leak this!!! This is so freaking cool I can't believe I'm a Gho-"

The realisation set in.

"MYLO!" Frankie's voice caught the attention of both the Aipom and Raboot. Alex was now outnumbered, but neither member of Bionic Meteorosaurus seemed interested in him right now.

The ghost moved in closer, closing the gap between them and their boyfriend. "What are you wearing? What is that? Did you use one of the crystal thingies?"

Mylo stood there, motionless, the only part of him that had changed was his expression. He looked Frankie deep into their eyes as tears began to form on his own. Frankie, using their deductive reasoning, saw Mylo's face as well as the symbol his crown proclaimed to the skies; they knew the crystals were strong but, could this actually be possible?

"Are... are you?" Frankie could barely ask the question, their heart racing at what his could finally mean for the couple.

"I... I think so? I... don't know I've... never seen this before? I..." Mylo reached out his hand, he could not bring himself to walk forward out of fear of disappointment.

Frankie floated in closer, inches away from Mylo's touch. Could this really be it? After all this time? Alex watched on in silence, too scared to interrupt the moment and invoke a two on one attack. The two looked at each other and paused for what felt like an eternity. Both terrified of disappointment, both urging to feel the other's touch after so long.

After a moment of silence, Frankie drifted closer. Mylo too reached out with one last push...

But it was too late.

“WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR! GET HIM!” An angered yell from Robert, finally free of his bindings, caused all three of them to turn and look in his direction as the Lopunny channelled all the Fairy-Type energy he could into grappling Frankie with a critical ‘Play Rough’.

“**NO!**” As everything the couple dreamed of was ripped away in front under them, Mylo screamed out in anguish. The band’s hesitation had waisted their one chance of feeling the other’s affection. Mylo tried to grab at Robert with his tail, but it was too late, yet another critical hit would land on the side of the Aipom’s face, as Alex followed Robert’s command with the ‘Ember’ attack they had practised the night prior. The fight was back on.

“WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU!” Mylo cried out toward Alex in desperation, who was already now feeling self conscious after having to be told what to do by Robert. “IF YOU’RE ACTUALLY HUMAN IN THERE, YOU’D NEVER HAVE DONE WHAT YOU JUST DID!” Mylo breathed in and out heavily “I don’t know what this power can do, but I’m not gonna waste it. I’m sorry, but this is over!”

With that, Mylo was done talking - as he delivered his final words, he began to run circles around Alex. With each step Mylo took, he activated his ‘Double Team’ - leaving ghostly apparitions of himself behind to surround Alex completely. One by one each afterimage seemingly slammed into Alex as Mylo channelled his ‘Façade’; though in reality, the clones merely stood still as Mylo ran at top speed from place to place, creating the illusion that Alex was being attacked at all angles.

As round two of Frankie and Robert’s brawl began, the two collapsed to the floor as Frankie manically bit into Robert’s arm in an attempt to break free from his grasp. As the two tumbled, Robert’s back clashed into something sharp in the ground. Luckily for him, it did not pierce the skin, but it was enough to force him to loosen his grip on the ghoul. With a crash, the rivals parted. This time, Frankie had nowhere to run, but after what just took place, they no longer wanted to.

“What’s the matter? Surely you didn’t think your little stunt was enough to keep me down?” The rabbit found his way back to his feet, he was clearly hurt from both the tumble and the trees, but his resolve seemed to let him cast the pain aside completely. “Our fight isn’t finished, so don’t try and run off again!” Rob entered a professional fighting stance, he was looking to end this as soon as he could.

"I'm not going anywhere..." Frankie shook the dust off their cloth "You've no idea what you just took from me..." They glared at Robert with fire in their eyes "But you will!"

Just as both fighters were about to go for the kill, at almost the exact same moment they noticed a twinkle out the corner of their eyes. It was an Infinity Crystal, but just the one. This fight to the end had now become a mad dash to see who could secure the power-up first.

Within an instant, each contestant leaped toward the powerful stone. With both competitors managing to grasp it in the same second. Frankie's teeth latched onto the crystal for dear life, they'd originally planned to smash one open with the chains of an 'Embargo', but this was a dire situation, and it called for drastic measures; they felt their tooth slowly begin to crack under the strain, the pain was excruciating, but they had to hold on. Equally, Robert was also desperately trying to crack the crystal, letting down his Fairy-Type energy and instead attempting to hit it with a STAB 'Strength' attack - Even if this meant he could no longer pry Frankie away from the stone, it was his best bet at harnessing the infinity energy for himself.

With a burst of light even brighter than the one prior, the infinity crystal exploded open with a tangible wave of power, even dispelling some of Mylo's afterimages that stood too close to the initial blast. Both Frankie and Robert felt a tremendous flow of energy absorbed into their bodies, however, this energy was different to the variation Mylo felt. It was painful, maddeningly so, both of their forms began to shift - with Frankie's taking on the biggest change of the two. In the blink of an eye, each of the rivals had Mega Evolved. Mylo took a second to look over at the commotion, but what he saw was unlike what he had expected. Due to the two unintentionally sharing the crystal's power, their bodies were stuck in a state of limbo; not quite to the full power and potential of a Pokémon that had undergone Mega Evolution, but also far from the power of one that had not.

Just like was mentioned prior, Robert's form was the least changed of the two - but the same could not be said about his power. The top of his shirt had ripped open, revealing a black, upside-down, 'V' shaped pattern; flowing from his neck to the top of his chest. His overall build had also slimmed down somewhat - this did however, exclude his legs, which had seemingly doubled in muscle mass. His white fur boots had seemingly shrunk, in their place revealed a similar black pattern to that which had appeared on his neck; this time leading up to the top of his knees before being cut off by the trousers of his uniform, which seemed to have been forcefully ripped at the knees to become shorts. His eyebrows also grew slightly larger - with the fur on his ears now tying off into a knot half way down.

As for Frankie's form, it had changed almost completely. Their body had been replaced with a translucent exosuit which mimicked a Mega Banette; Frankie's original body was held in its centre, as if they were piloting it like a mech - Mylo's mind comparing it to that of a Reuniclus. However, the one distinct feature to that of a true Mega Banette came in the form of the zips that adorned their body. Each one had been fully sealed, seemingly locking Frankie away from the transformation's full power.

Dazed for a moment, the two newly evolved combatants step back to regain composure.

"This all huh?... Fine, it'll have to do" The phenomenon barely phased Robert now that the transformation had completed, leaving Frankie to worry that this might now be his first time using such a power-up.

The ghost tilted its head down to see what it had become. They had no idea what to call this body, but they knew one thing for sure, they had hands! And they were gonna use them! Without missing a beat, Frankie charged at Rob, causing him to do the same. The Mega Lopunny prepped itself to use a boosted 'Play Rough', hoping it would be enough of a decisive blow to get the win. Though before the two could clash, Frankie disappeared into the ground right in front of Robert's eyes - leaving him puzzled and confused as to where they would reappear. They weren't left to wait long, as Frankie promptly reemerged from under them - thumping the rabbit's lower jaw with a 'Shadow Sneak' uppercut!

"Heh, guess it was your lucky day after all. That shot wasn't half bad." Rob cracked his jaw, realigning it with his hand before returning with a 'Mega Kick' into Frankie's gut; Given the ghost's translucent body harboured the real Frankie underneath, he guessed that this would be the Puppet's new weak spot - and thanks to this forms 'Scrappy' ability, he was now free to use whatever attack he wanted on them.

Robert guessed correctly, as Frankie was sent stumbling backwards - grabbing their stomach. They knew they couldn't handle many more hits like that, their health was fading fast, even in this newly powered up form. They had to find a way to weaken Rob's striking power.

"Frankie was it?" Rob questioned his foe. "Want to know something that'll really piss you off? We can both see you're almost out for the count; and when you do end up fainting, forget knocking your boyfriend out..." Just like before, Robert's plans to get in Frankie's head were working, their focus locking onto him as he mentioned Mylo. "... With me like this, Ghost Tera or not, a Fighting move from me might kill him."

They may have wanted to get in Frankie's head, but the words Rob muttered in that moment went far beyond pissing them off. A flame began to burn in Frankie's soul, a bright and ghostly flame that could scorch even the surface of the sun. Robert had gone too far, and it would be his downfall.

Without even realising what they were doing, Frankie began to grunt and huff loudly. They brought their arms to their chest and clenched tightly before yelling out towards the Lopunny. "I won't... Let you... HURT HIM!" Their arms shot forward, and with them, purple flames launched out in Robert's direction. Before he had even a moment to move, Frankie had burnt him with their newly unlocked 'Will-O-Wisp'. Not only was Robert's health now on a timer, but his damage output had now been seriously hindered.

Robert winced as he felt the burn sear his body "Neat trick... I hate pranksters..." He grasped his shoulder, applying pressure to his aching burn in order to try and relieve some pain.

As Frankie and Robert's fight continued, Alex was almost on his last legs. Mylo's 'Façade's were proving too much for him to handle. The boy had desperately been attempting to land a hit on the real Aipom, each strike proving futile - and using up more of the Raboot's fire power. With more and more clones to distract Alex, Mylo crept up behind him.

"Boo!" Mylo teasingly jumped out at him, causing Alex to drop to the floor with a scream. "Get it! Coz I'm a ghost!" He pointed to his crown. Mylo was beginning to feel bad about the situation, he didn't want to fight Alex, especially not when he was in the same predicament as him and Frankie. He dispelled his afterimages and approached the Raboot slowly.

Alex was extremely worn out. He looked up at Mylo as sweat rolled down his face. "I won't... Give up! You can't make me! So don't even try!" Alex barely managed to get back on his feet before starting to back up away from Mylo. "I can't let... Rob down..." He spoke though huffing breaths.

"I don't want to do this dude, but I will. Please just jump off the side" Mylo's form glistened with ghostly energy as he continued to follow Alex, not risking lowering his guard.

"I'm not... Strong enough... I need to be... Stronger!" Alex fell back down to one knee as the flames on both feet gave out. As he peered down at the floor, he noticed the smallest shard of an Infinity Crystal under him; for a second, he considered smashing it but he stopped himself

before he could. Alex's mind was a whirlwind of self doubt. *"How could you let Robert down like this", "Was all my training for nothing", "I'm not strong enough, I'll never get home", "Why even bother with the crystal, I'll probably just mess everything up like I always do! My grades, my breathing equipment, and now this battle! I'm not good enough..."*

Frankie and Robert stood locked hand in hand as they wrestled each other for supremacy. The burn was just enough to bring them down to equal footing - it's scorching pain sizzled away at Robert's skin. Try as he might, he wasn't able to overpower the Mega Banette. He knew it was dangerous, but in Robert's mind, the only solution was to find another Infinity Crystal, maybe it could complete his transformation and give him the edge he needed against his foe. He turned his head slightly in an attempt to find any within reach - though instead, he saw Alex. The boy he had saved in the swamp, the boy he had saved when he first arrived in this world, the boy he had spent all night training. That boy had now fallen to his knees, he was about to be eliminated and there was nothing Robert could do about it. In his mind, Rob had no idea if what he did next was out of desperation or out of care - whichever it was, it was his last hope.

"ALEX! I KNOW YOU'RE NOT ABOUT TO GIVE UP!" Rob yelled across the island while he perilously attempted to hold off Frankie.

The yell caught both Mylo's and Alex's attention, though Frankie was far too blinded by fury to listen.

"REMEMBER WHAT I TAUGHT YOU! HARNESS THE FIRE IN YOUR SOUL!" This distraction caused Robert's grip to slip, Frankie was beginning to overpower him. But he kept going. "REMEMBER THE SALAZZLE..." He winced in pain "REMEMBER HOW SHE MADE YOU FEEL, REMEMBER YOUR MOM! REMEMBER... AND FIGHT!" Though the battle cry was not meant for him, for some reason, Robert's own words even managed to inspire himself. He tried with all his might to block out the pain of the burn. If Alex was going to keep fighting, so would he.

An emotional vortex spun through Alex's mind like a hurricane, a vortex that somehow managed to clear his mind. He thought back to the swamp - and how he snapped; but most importantly, he thought of his Mother. He *would* see her again, no matter what. With that, Alex stood once more. Flames shot out from his feet brighter than they ever had before, his emotions and power were both 'Blaze'ing in complete unison. As Mylo looked down at the source of the fire, he also realised what was hiding beneath the Raboot. Mylo desperately tried to tackle Alex to the ground, but it was too late. Alex jumped up into the air before slamming his feet back down to earth, cracking the crystal beneath him.

Just like each one had before, the crystal burst in an aurora of light. Mylo barely had time to shield his eyes before he bore witness to what was happening in front of him. He quickly ran backward when, as if hell itself had opened beneath him, a pillar of flames shot out from the ground - as it did so, taking the shape of a large globe; almost as big as half the island itself. Atop it stood Alex the Raboot, his stature had grown to an incredible degree - with his ears now matching the boy in height. Instantly Mylo recognised this as Cinderace's Gigantamax form - but to see a Raboot achieve it was something else entirely.

"WHY DOES HE GET TO BE A KAIJU?!?!" Mylo shouted out to Frankie, who had only just now noticed what was going on after being so fixated on Robert.

If this worked like it did in the games, and Mylo prayed to Arceus to beg for that to be the case - he would only have to survive through three attacks before he would be able to finish Alex off for good, but that would be a lot easier said than done.

"SMALL RABBIT'S BIG NOW! **SMALL RABBIT'S BIG NOW!!!**" Mylo desperately called out to Frankie to ensure they got the message - though considering Frankie's own predicament, this situation was all down to him.

"***I WON'T...***" Alex's voice echoed across the whole island as he launched a 'G-Max Fireball' in Mylo's direction.

"Shit!" Mylo barely managed to dodge out the way as he continued to try and run towards his partner - the end of the ball searing his tail slightly.

"***LET YOU...***" The emotion behind Alex's voice was clear, the boy was running on pure instinct alone as he launched his second fireball towards the monkey. This one seemingly hit the Aipom, before Alex realised it was yet another 'Double Team' afterimage. Mylo once again, barely managing to escape.

Both Robert and Frankie looked over to what was happening. Their grip on each other loosening as they viewed what was playing out before them. Frankie did not notice, but Robert turned back to look at them with a grin.

“DOWN!” With one final declaration of purpose - Alex’s final fireball was launched toward Mylo before his form began to shrink once more. His body falling down and hitting the ground on the outskirts of the woods, utterly exhausted.

“Fuck fuck fuck **FUCK!**” Mylo mindlessly swore as he ran at top speed to avoid the final G-Max attack. He had once again left an afterimage behind to get swallowed up into the flames, but the ball was still giving chase. With one final leap, Mylo managed to barely escape the blast's path... Or so he thought.

Capitalising on Frankie’s distracted state. Robert swiped their legs, dropping them to the floor. Within the same motion - Rob pounced toward Mylo, abandoning any attempt at defence and struck him with a flying ‘Close Combat’ kick to the chest.

It was super effective

In Mylo’s panicked state as desperately attempted to avoid the G-Max Fireball’s, he had failed to notice that the Infinity Energy swirling inside him had ran dry, he was no longer a Ghost-Type - and was fully susceptible to any Fighting-Type attacks, especially those enhanced by a form such as Robert’s.

The kick sent the Aipom hurdling at top speed toward the G-max attack, its flames engulfing him completely as the blast encompassed his body. Frankie let out a scream louder than a Noivern - but there was nothing the ghost could do but watch as their partner’s body shot through the sky lifelessly. Mylo’s body cratered into the land below, and collapsed at the edge of the Sky Island, his head peering over the edge as he lay there still.

Frankie shook in shock at what they had witnessed. Not in a million years did they expect the battle to turn out like this - what was the point of returning home if Mylo was unable to return with them. They watched helplessly as Robert stalked towards Mylo’s position.

“I’m sorry you two, this is just the way it’s gotta be. Just know that, I’m impressed.” These may have been the first sincere words Robert had spoken to the couple thus far, but they meant nothing in the face of what was about to happen.

As Frankie watched, they saw Robert prepare to hit Mylo with a second 'Close Combat' to knock him out for good. Robert had underestimated the two too many times by this point, he wasn't willing to do the same again. He readied himself, then began speeding toward the unmoving Aipom.

Frankie didn't know what to do, or how to stop it. They'd never catch up in time, nor would their chains reach that far before Mylo was launched away. But they had to try, something, anything, no matter what - they had to save him.

Frankie darted behind Robert, ghostly body floating across the land as to have nothing slowing them down. With sheer moments before Robert's attack landed on Mylo - Frankie called out in anguish.

"PLEASE JUST... STOP!" As much as the human desperately prayed this would work, they knew deep down that it would not... Which was exactly why they were met with such shock as Robert froze in place. As if by magic, Rob could no longer use 'Close Combat' - meaning he now had no moves that could hit either bandmate for Super Effective damage. Frankie had no way of realising at the time, but the stress of the situation had unlocked their fourth and final move - 'Disable'.

While this all took place, Mylo's vision slowly returned to him - there was a ringing in his ears like nothing he had ever experienced before. He was completely shut off to everything bar what he could make out below the island. As he lay there motionless, barely attached to reality; he could not help to have his attention drawn toward a green glow below him. Mylo's eyes struggled to adjust as he narrowly began to make out what he was seeing. It was his necklace - It shined bright with an energy not too dissimilar from the Infinity Crystals he had previously harnessed, yet at the same time, there was a distinct difference to it. This energy was not giving him strength, nor was it about to change his form in any way - the only thing it was providing was... direction. While he lay there, puzzled by what was before his eyes, he then too noticed something else arguably more peculiar. Between the clouds below the Sky Islands - a shadowy, snake-like, figure began to emerge; before burrowing into the clouds once more. It by no means seemed interested in the fight at hand, but it caught Mylo's attention more than even his necklace. Mylo's eyes squinted as he desperately attempted to figure out what he was seeing. Was that... Rayquaza? It couldn't be? Could it? Was that why his necklace was acting the way it was? Surely not. He had clearly been hit one too many times in his fight with Lucky Foot. With Mylo left in disbelief, the shadowy figure seemed to burrow its way deeper into the clouds below - before disappearing completely; as it did, so too did Mylo's necklace stop shining. Whatever it was Mylo had just seen, it filled him with a deep sense of drive. His body may be battered and bruised, but it did not change what he had to do. With his senses slowly returning to him, Mylo

gradually pushed himself away from the island's edge; though not before something familiar that was sticking out just off the side of the island's base caught his eye.

Frankie and Robert stood in a standoff, both were extremely tired with neither really wishing to make the first move. As they did so, each of their Mega forms began to power down - both fighters were out of energy.

"Really?... I couldn't've... Kept the... Hands?..." Frankie joked in an attempt to mask just how tired they really were.

"I feel you... I quite liked the knee highs..." Robert joked back, They had gained the Lopunny's respect tenfold. "You're not gonna quit, are you?"

Frankie stayed quiet, shaking their head. As they did so, they noticed something behind Rob. It was Mylo. The ghost desperately tried to hold the Rabbit's attention so as to not give their boyfriend away. "Not so bad for a spy huh?"

Robert laughed, exhausted, before replying back to them "You don't win this... I'm sorry but, Alex and I are-" He was cut off by a voice behind him.

"What's up... Doc..."

Robert turned to find Mylo, barely, standing behind him. But before the Rabbit had a chance to move, Mylo jumped up and launched his palm into the Lopunny's face. He had just used 'Fake-Out' for the first time. Robert flinched and doubled back on himself - Frankie capitalising on the opportunity before Rob could react; using 'Embargo' to wrap a chain around him, tying his arms to his sides. The ghost then brought the end of the chair to Mylo who, with the last of his strength, grabbed a hold of said chain and began spinning rapidly before letting go - sending Robert flying toward the woods where Alex had landed.

Alex, who had only just recovered enough to get back up, saw Robert fall to the ground and rushed over as quickly as he could. "ROB! ARE YOU OK?" He asked in a panic. "I'm... I'm so sorry I let you down. I... I didn't even manage to hit Mylo with a single attack..."

“Hey bud I... really appreciate this, but, can it wait till after you untie me?” Responded Rob, as sincere as he was able

“Oh my god of course.” Alex quickly began unwrapping the chain from around Robert’s body. “S-see... This is exactly what I mean... I’m so-”

“Stop that” Robert cut Alex off with a stern tone “That kind of talk will get us nowhere. Fact is... I underestimated these guys, that was my mistake. I wouldn’t have lasted anywhere near this long without you kid. So chin up... ok?”

Robert was putting on a brave face, but the fact was, he was even more damaged than Alex. At this point, his burns alone would be enough to take him out if he waited any longer. It was now or never. Robert attempted to get back on his feet before toppling back down. Seeing this, Alex offered him a hand up. Rob hesitated for a moment to accept the help, but he tossed his Façade aside and grabbed hold of Alex’s hand as the Raboot pulled him to his feet. Both members of Lucky Foot looked toward each other and nodded, they both understood that it was time for their final stand.

Across the island, Bionic Meteorsaurus had come to a very similar realisation. Starting this fight, they truly felt outmatched, but through discovering new moves and transformations, they’ve barely managed to stay in the fight; and now, it was all down to this.

“Are you ok?” Frankie’s voice wavered as they proposed the question.

“Somehow... I think so. What about you?” Mylo returned the question.

“Real answer, no. Hopeful answer, I’ve got to be.” Frankie tried to keep spirits as high as they could, but they also did not want to lie to themselves, nor to Mylo. “Be honest, can we do this?”

“I think so... but, you might not like my idea.” Mylo’s tail wrapped around in front of him, opening his hand to reveal one last Infinity Crystal.

“No way. No we’re not. You heard what Merri said. No Pokémon can do that twice. We don’t know what might happen if we-” Frankie’s worries were interrupted by a response from their boyfriend.

“Yeah exactly, nobody can handle two crystals worth of energy. But think about it, you and Rob managed to share it right? And neither of you fully Mega Evolved. That means if we share it... you'll only get half...” Mylo's plan was truly beginning to set in inside his head, but his resolve was absolute. He had already made up his mind.

Frankie quickly realised the truth that Mylo was attempting to skirt around, then spoke up in protest. “But you'll take half of it too! And you've already used a full one once! Sure it's only half but we still don't know what that will do to your body! Or how that could affect your head. I'm sorry but, we've got to think of another way.”

“I'm sorry but there isn't. Sure Rob's on his last legs but Alex has been recovering this whole time. We give an inch, and they'll find a way to win this. Plus, I don't put it past either of them to come up with the same idea. So we've got to capitalise on this now!” As Mylo spoke, he began to notice Alex and Robert returning to the battlefield. “Look ok, it's my fault we're in this stupid mess, I wanted to leave Bay City, I fell off that bridge. I was an idiot and now you're stuck here with no way back unless we use this crystal to beat these guys once and for all. I don't know what will happen but I've made up my mind, and I need you to trust me.”

Mylo looked up at his partner with determination in his eyes. They had to do this, Frankie could see that now. The Shuppet wanted to protest further, but they couldn't; they simply returned Mylo's gaze and uttered a single word.

“Ok.”

Placing the Crystal in the hand closest to Frankie, Mylo signalled with his tail that it was time to get this show on the road (👉->👉) as the couple began to step forward; meeting Lucky Foot in the middle.

Both duo's stood across from each other and waited for the other to make a move. Even before this point, Alex and Rob had already noticed the Crystal in Mylo's hand - but they still had to try. Not a word was spoken between the four, just a silent showing of respect before Robert squeezed Alex's hand, indicating that he was ok to walk and it was time to fight. As if time itself had slowed to a crawl, Lucky Foot began to run towards Mylo and Frankie as fast as they could; with Rob preparing to slam into Frankie with a 'Play Rough', and Alex charging up his feet for one final 'Ember'. In the same moment, Mylo tilted the crystal toward his partner, who grabbed ahold with their teeth and jolted their head in the opposite direction - cracking it open in two.

One last time the Infinity Energy broke free of its crystalline cage and catapulted its light into the sky like a beam attempting to reach the heavens. As it broke - the band were wrapped in an energy that by this point, felt all too familiar. As the power seeped inside of them - both Frankie and Mylo realised this was different to what happened to them prior, whereas Robert and Alex were able to deduce they were not growing like Alex once had. This was different, Z power. In a flash, Mylo and Frankie felt like they were right back on stage in front of the entire Bay City talent show crowd - but this time, they would not lose. The powers of Normalium-Z & Ghostium-Z shot through their veins, creating a power only they could share. As the sound of Drums, Guitars, Synths and more crashed through Lucky Foot's eardrums - a powerful, musical, beam of energy shot forth and clashed with the Rabbit's head on; this... was

「Bionic Band Slam」.

From this point on, everything was very much a blur for Mylo. Before blacking out completely, he remembered hearing Merriweather announce him and Frankie as the rounds winners. He remembered the panic in Frankie's voice and the look on their face. He remembered a large pink blur carrying him through the portal and back to camp. He even believed he could recall Robert asking if he was going to make it.

As for the full extent of the damage Mylo had been left with after the attack. It remained to be seen.