

Three young men joined the raucous applause as the announcer's commencement speech ended. Two of them let out loud wolf-whistles as Cynthia and Diantha left the stage. The third tried, but only managed to hiss through his teeth. They sat and chattered about the surprise championship invitations and the possible worth of the trophy while the rest of the people filed out of the arena. It was hard to make out what any of them were saying, even to the ones saying it in the first place, but eventually the crowd began to thin and they were able to relax in the stiff plastic chairs.

"So what I was trying to say before," spoke the man in the middle, pausing to sip at the ice melting in his cup, "the champion thing, the letters, what was that all about again? Did he say we can skip the league?"

"I think he did," replied the older man on one end. The youngest at the other end nodded in agreement. The middle man's eyes lit up. "But don't get your hopes up. Only one of us can enter."

"What!?" Both of the other boys turned to their elder and exploded.

"Zefron you son of a bitch!"

"Calm down."

"Fuck you!"

"Yeah! F-fuck you!"

"Dunther! Language!"

"You're not my real dad!"

"That's *not* funny."

"You knew all along didn't you?"

"When were you gonna tell us?"

"Would you have come otherwise?"

"No!"

"Fuck no!"

"Dunther!"

"Dunther!"

Their yelling match continued all the way out of the arena, each throwing out reasons why they should compete. Sometimes passers-by would drop in on their conversation, other trainers scoping out the competition. They would side with one and get yelled at by the others until they eventually left. They made their way downtown, walking fast, faces past, but who was to say whether or not they were home bound. The boys certainly were not, scoping out a place to sit and discuss the matter civilly.

"Look, for simplicity's sake, let's assume we could all fight at once." It was only some time later that the three weren't all livid enough at each other that they couldn't speak without shouting. The blond had lead them to a café where they sat outside. It was easier to be loud and angry outside. Driftveil slowly passed the three of them by as they fumed. "Who would order who around?"

"We do like we always do," offered the middle child, "We each pick two and we call the shots with our 'mons."

"Zef, Soto and Dun," chirped the youngest in agreement.

"the Legendary Beasts of Johto," the middle child replied. Soto had been trying to make that name stick for years to varying success. "Come on, Zefron, you can't contain the Beasts!"

"YOU CAN'T CONTAIN THE BEASTS!" Dunther crowed. Soto smirked at him, ruffling his junior's thin black hair. Zefron shook his head.

"It's not up to me." The blond man drew an envelope from within his jacket and flashed it at his brothers. On the front, in neat calligraphy, was the name 'Rodney "Zefron" Lowman'. This was news to both younger brothers. A braceleted hand snapped out, the stone on the bangle catching the light as the arm retreated. Soto squinted hard at the envelope amongst the squawking of the other two. He pulled from within it a slip of paper and began to peruse it.

"Soto, give it back," snapped Zefron. Soto pulled the paper away as their little brother grabbed at it. "Soto. Now."

"That's funny," the messy head of brown hair peeked over the letter, "your name isn't on the invitation itself."

*"Rutheford Soto Lowman give me my fucking letter this instant."*

"You never signed it!" Zefron lunged over the table at Soto and sent their glasses of water tumbling to the ground. Soto leapt up onto the back of his seat and balanced there, waving the paper. "Oh the *folly* of man!"

"It's a blank invitation?" Dunther's brown eyes almost twinkled as he eyed the paper, shouting, "I wanna fight! Gimme!"

"Gentleman!" They all froze in various states of shame and turned to meet the waitress' disapproving gaze. Soto lost his balance and fell backward on to the pavement. Dunther began to laugh at his two older brothers as they tried their best to fix themselves up and offer to pay for the broken glasses. They were all instead kicked out, but thankfully without having to pay too much. Soto hid the invitation up his sleeve while his elder was busy paying his share.

They began to walk throughout Driftveil in a simmering silence. Each was a good trainer in their own respects. Zefron, however, was the battler. While he and Soto both had the eight Johto badges to their name (and their little brother had seven) it wasn't saying much. The Johto league was notorious for being one of the most lax leagues in Japan. Adorning his blue letterman were various medallions and patches from lower-division competitions all across Japan. Around his collar were the eight badges, all

flawlessly polished for the occasion (as was every other ceremonial bit of metal that clinked as he walked). It was a jacket reserved for such occasions, but he was regularly just as gaudy.

Soto was a different story. He had an interest in everything Pokémon when he was little, and decided he wanted to catch them all. This led to a rabid obsession with anything and everything having to do with the legendaries. Like his brother he had dressed up as well, but in what he called his 'dashing explorer' attire. It consisted of an old, brown leather jacket with a bandolier of Pokéballs underneath and a length of rope at his hip. Also around his hips were various tools and small artifacts he had found. On his wrist, however, was one of his greatest finds: an old Key Stone he had dug out of the Ruins of Alph. That and a beautiful rainbow-colored feather were his prized possessions from his many misadventures.

Dunther was too young to have picked a dream yet. Unlike his brothers, who were twenty-two and nineteen, he was only twelve. He loved Pokémon, loved exploring, and loved battling. He was decently good at all three as proven by his near-completion of the gym circuit, but he did have a feather in his cap that neither brother had: a legendary bird. It had saved his skin on a number of occasions and was most of the reason why he was able to keep up with his brothers in the first place. Because of the shocking personality of the bird, the only defining article of clothing on the youngest boy was a large pair of rubber gloves.

They all wore jeans, however. It was just practical.

"I need a fedora," Soto mused, trying to fix his hair for the umpteenth time. Zefron and Dunther looked at each other from either side of their sibling.

"M'lady," chirped the younger, doffing an imaginary hat. The elder chuckled.

"Those are trilbies," the middle one tried to recover, "I mean like the one Unova James wears in those movies: wide brimmed, always snags 'em from under doors."

"Do you honestly think you look a thing like Unova James?" Zefron leveled his gaze at Soto, who puffed out his chest in reply.

"No, but I do look studly," he replied as he began to strut. "Besides, chicks dig archaeology."

"I think we're getting a little off topic here," Zefron took a few quick steps and rounded on his brothers. They all stopped and quietly waited for someone to say a word.

"I think we should make sure it's not fake first," offered Dunther. "What if it was a prank?"

"The rest of the trip seems to have been one big joke so far." Soto smirked at the glittering blond. Zefron rolled his eyes. "That's actually really smart, though. Good thinking." Dunther held up a hand for a fist bump, to which Soto obliged.

"But if it's not a fake," their elder cut in, "I still think I should fight. I received the invitation, after all."

"Well I think that's 'dash-shit. I've done well when you drag me along to tournaments, and need I remind you I'm the only one who can Mega Evolve anything." Soto held up his wrist. The Key Stone almost seemed to glow in the ancient stone band.

"Like it cares who uses it," Zefron scoffed, "it's a rock. Just give it to me. You already gave me some Blastoise."

"Fuck you!"

"Hey, I have the bird!" Dunther held up an Ultraball in his gloved hand, "I can go toe-to-toe with you guys! I wanna fight!"

"Sounds like we'll need to settle this the old fashioned way," Zefron smiled, reaching for his belt. Soto smirked and ripped a Pokéball from the magnetic bandolier. Dunther suddenly found himself with cold feet. He would either be trounced or would be scolded for relying on his fabled bird.

"M-maybe we should figure out if the letter is for real first," he squeaked out. Soto and Zefron both laughed in response, the former swinging his throwing arm in wide circles. Out from his sleeve flew the letter. A flash of energy led to the materialization of a great, spiky bird. "Get the letter!"

Before the other two knew what had happened, a Zapdos had snatched the letter up in its thin beak. Dunther began to run back towards the Pokémon World Tournament stadium. His bird scooped its beak down and bucked its trainer onto its back.

"That little shit!" Soto hissed as he fumbled for a different pokéball from his bandolier.

"Give me a ride," barked Zefron, "we can't let him fight."

"Hell no," Soto leapt up on to an Arcanine as it materialized, kicking it hard in the haunches. "Every man for himself!" The dog gave a great bark and bolted after the electric bird.

Zefron was left in the dust. None of his team were excellent runners, nor could any of them fly. He began to fish around his belt for a particular ball...

Dunther and the Zapdos screamed through the sky. The boy had produced a pair of goggles from his bag and slapped them on. He chanced a look at the ground behind him and saw that Soto was already in hot pursuit. A jet of flame screamed past them, missing by miles. It was a warning shot that nevertheless spooked both bird and rider. The bird let out a great screech. Dunther could barely make out some curse-laden thread from the ground below through the noise. He was only about ten feet up, the bird swooping under electrical wires and generally causing whiplash as it passed.

Unfortunately, the dense and distracted crowds made for very tricky terrain on the ground. The Arcanine was agile and his rider was skilled, but not nearly as agile as the bird. And not as wonderfully uninhibited. They lagged behind, but Soto had already figured out where they were going and steered the dog into an alley. His brothers both would head to the Tournament Center. Neither were the seasoned hunter he was, though. Neither relished in the thrill of the chase, had the spatial awareness, the gut intuition. A smile sprawled over the teen's face as he pulled hard on the mane of his mount. The Arcanine let loose a bark as it sprung on to a large trash can. They were on the rooftops in seconds.

As Zefron materialized outside of the Pokémon World Tournament center he could hardly believe the scene he was witnessing. One brother whipping around a corner on his black and yellow avian, the other bounding over the low suburban rooftops at an impressive clip. The eldest stood, arms folded, Slowking at his side, and waited. Soto was first, the Arcanine landing hard and bucking his trainer off his back. The teen swung his arms in wide circles and hit the ground low. In a practiced and flashy movement he somersaulted forwards and rose to his feet. There was a round of polite applause from onlookers in which Soto revelled for a moment.

"You look pleased as punch." Soto only smiled in response. The teen bounced on his heels and gave a somewhat anxious look around. Zefron cleared his throat, causing his brother to drop his smile and assume a similar position in front of the door.

The Zapdos flapped hard as it approached, slowing to an almost lazy hover in front of the two young men barricading the door. There was a murmur of interest from the now growing crowd around them. The bird was pinned between a snarling canine and two glowering trainers. Dunther ordered it down and the legendary landed with a skritch of claws against pavement.

"Let me through," Dunther called. He reached forward and slid the letter out from the Zapdos' beak. The bird gave an indignant, static-y squawk. "Let me through or... or I'll blast you!" The electronic screech of the bird shook the glass doors behind the two trainers. The crowd ooh'd at the display as the hiss of energy filled the air.

"As if, little man," Soto replied through a wide smile. He loved seeing the drive in other trainers, especially his brothers. Zefron's cold glare remained fixed on the boy as the middle brother continued, "besides, you can't even compete."

"That's a lie!"

"It's the truth, now hand me my letter," Zefron snapped. Soto looked him over incredulously.

"Your letter?"

"Yes, my letter."

"Says who?"

"Says the address on it!"

"It's blank!"

"It's still mine! Neither of you deserve it! I worked hard for my invitation-"

"Whoah, excuse me?"

"-and I won't have it stolen away from me by some impudent-"

"Does anybody have a pen?"

"-little trainer *or* some failure of a movie-star-archaeologist imitator!"

"Oh, you did NOT just call me an imitator."

"He did! I heard him!"

"Now give me my *fucking* letter or so help me-"

Soto strode away from his older brother and gave a shrill whistle. Both trainer and canine flanked either side of the bird as the elder brother yelled them down. Zefron's enthusiasm began to wither as the four of them glared daggers through him. Small arcs of electricity snapped. A low rumbling growl served as an underline to the intended meaning of Soto's sudden 'betrayal'.

"I changed my mind," spoke the middle brother, "I want Dunther to compete." The young boy looked over one wing, absolutely beaming. "I might just be a failure of an imitator, but if my math's any good I think we outnumber you."

"I- no, wait, I just," Zefron grasped for words, suddenly realizing what he had just said. The crowd looked on in hushed anticipation. The man's face flushed. He looked down at the Slowking to his side for some sort of help. The large spiny crown rotated as the beast shook its head.

"First the mega evolvers battle earlier, now some drama," hissed a member of the crowd a little too loudly to her friend, "I *love* the PWT."

"He can't fight," Zefron offered weakly, "not without... Not without a team."

"I have a team," barked Dunther. Zefron only stripped the pokéballs from his belt in response.

"No," Soto smirked, "no you don't. Not a full one. But you will." Soto jogged over to his elder and wrapped an arm around his shoulder. He understood his brother's meaning. "You only have four, and only two of them are any good in a fight."

"So you'll take some of ours." Zefron smiled weakly up at his little brother. The crowd gave a hushed gasp. Dunther slid off one size of the Zapdos. "You're a pretty good battler, anyways. You just need some strong pokémon at your command."

"And what's stronger than fam-" Soto was cut off by his little brother.

"The Arcanine and the Darmanitan!" Dunther pointed to Soto. The crowd laughed as he did. "A-and the Blastoise and the icy ghost lady!" He was almost jumping out of his skin with energy. Soto obliged readily, returning his dog and pulling another ball from his bandolier. Zefron fished out two balls from the pile in his hands before returning the rest to his belt.

"And which ones will you-" Zefron couldn't finish, either.

"Thunderhead and Lumos!" The bird behind him screeched again, but thankfully upwards in to the free air and not at the poor windows.

"The bird and the Ampharos?" Soto nodded his approval as he spoke, "nice choices."

"Is that it?" The crowd mumbled their agreement with the one of their number who called out.

"Yeah, show's over," Soto called, shooing the crowd away with his arms, "nothing to see here folks." The people dispersed with a general grumbling of disappointment among them. They must have been thirsty for action today.

"So I can fight?" Dunther was still unsure, albeit very excited. Both older brothers nodded in agreement.

"We'll have to hit the PC, and make sure the paperwork clears," Soto replied.

"Show you how our team mates act, give you some pointers," Zefron continued.

"But yeah, you're golden kid."

"And I'm..." Zefron hesitated. He sank to one knee and put a hand on his brother's shoulder. "I'm sorry for what I said." Soto cleared his throat behind him. "To you and to you only," Zefron hissed with a smirk. Dunther giggled as his older brothers immediately began to flare up at each other again. As they yelled, the youngest confidently strode in to the Tournament building and inquired about a pen.