

An Adventure's Worth of Backstory and Smiles

By: A.X. Bueno

“Alright, folks we have arrived at Ancicleft Island! Please be sure to take all your bags, berries and belongings with you and thank you for riding the Lapras Ferry today.” The Lapras announces, signaling to all its passengers that it’s time to disembark.

“*Unngh*, here already?” I stretch my arms and try to rub the sleep out of my eyes through the sockets of the skull that’s very attached to my face.

I was hoping to be able to nap a little longer but I came here for some adventure and maybe a bit of money to take back with me, not sleep so I get up and leave the Lapras Ferry behind as they depart off to their next destination. I on the other hand walk away from the dock and towards the only building on this island. It’s only one floor high but it’s got plenty of rooms; a bar, multiple bedrooms for weary travelers, an items store and a storage stand. It’s not my first time here but I always take a second or two to appreciate the size and efficiency of Bradios Plaza. After that though I get the routine started by heading right to the bar to grab the usual, already knowing what mission I’ll do.

“What’ll it be, Pedro?” The Steenee asks me as one of its white fingerless hands grabs a cup.

“Same as before Cana, Mago-Aguav berry juice, well blended.”

“You got it!”

In less than two minutes Cana hands me my cocktail with a smile and a straw in it which I take before I head to my other stop here, the Kangaskhan storage stand. I take out some reviver and stun seeds, a few elixirs, an escape orb and a couple of extra berries, I like to be prepared. I take a look at the rescuers board here and pick two missions that seem simple enough but while I was busy picking my choices of mission there were footsteps growing closer. When I turn around I almost spill my drink but manage to catch myself as the smiling, golden scaled face that’s looking right at me isn’t much of a surprise.

“I see you got your usual and knowing you, you no doubt you picked our mission already. We’re leaving as soon as you’re done with your drink, right partner?”

“Yes, Smiles. I wanna sip it in peace before we head out to the main canyon, unlike last time.” I give the Druddigon a look to show I’m serious but all he gives me back is his namesake and blue eyes that are practically sparkling with anticipation.

“Come on, I just wanted to head out a little sooner since you seemed ready to move. I didn’t realize your cup was still half full, honest. This time I’ll wait patiently I promise!” The Druddigon says with a less smiling and more honest look now on his spiky gold face before we both take a seat at a table near the left side entrance of the plaza.

For a whole five to ten minutes or so we sit in silence and I’m able to enjoy my drink while Smiles fidgets in the chair across from me. He plays with his silver rescuers badge moving it around in circles with his claws as well as occasionally tapping those same claws against each other. He also darts his eyes around as well to see what’s going on around him I guess or maybe just to look at the path into the canyon we’re heading to and to see how crowded or clear it is. With how crowded a place this plaza can be sometimes you have to dodge or find openings past fellow Pokémon to get where you want to go in here. I’m not worried about getting to my destination though and know to also keep the journey in mind so I sip my juice savoring the mix of sweet and bitter on my tongue till the very last drop which Smiles directs his head towards me to see as I plop my cup down on the table.

“Ooooh! So you’re done now? Can we get going?” Smiles is grinning wide now with an exuberance in his eyes.

“Yeah. Just as soon as I return this cup to Cana at the bar. You can wait here if you want.” I say that but know he won’t as I walk over to the bar and drop off the cup with Smiles right on my tail but thankfully that’s not literally the case.

“LET’S GOOO!” He shouts enthusiastically right next to my ear.

“Yep. Let’s get a move on.”

“I’ll race you to the canyon entrance!” Smiles’s green scaled feet are already in a position that tells me he’ll rush off the instant I say yes.

“Not to the plaza exit?” I say mainly to get him to pause for a moment and it seems to work as his feet and forehead tense up for a second before unclenching and returning to ready position.

“Nah. That’d be too easy plus this makes it so we go right in, no slowing down!” He adds a determined fist to his ready stance now.

“I see... alright you’re on! 1...2...3...go!” The word go barely exits my mouth before he practically bounces off the rounded edge of the bar table and is scrambling past a nearby chair.

He always manages to get a head start on me whenever we race no matter the place or if it's me counting down or him. That never stops me from trying my best to beat him despite the odds not being in my favor with things like his headstart and the 2 feet of height difference between us. I almost manage to close the gap between us as Smiles has to stop himself from almost bowling over an ivysaur that has a tray of drinks held by their hands and a tip jar held by their vines. While Smiles starts apologizing to the vine having waiter is when I manage to overtake him although I make the arrogant mistake of looking back to see where he is just as I'm about a few feet or so from the finish line. He was right behind my tail for I don't even know how long and turning back for just a few seconds allows him to seal a victory as he passes and I try to regain my lucky lead but can't, victory as usual being so close yet remaining unobtained as we cross from large, cozy plaza and bar/rest stop to sprawling, rocky canyon entrance.

"Looks like I won again. You almost had me this time but turning back to check on where I was was what really cost you otherwise you might have beat me for a change. Still, that was a *rock* solid effort."

"I don't know what hurts more, the sting of another defeat or you trying to cushion the blow with a pun." I say that sarcastically while trying to hide my slight smile from our poking fun at how these races between us usually end.

"Pfft, you know you **luv**-disc them."

"Ha! Be serious for a second, we have a job to do, you know." I start walking again as does Smiles, we have plenty of canyon to get through before we can call this mission done.

"Heh. You've got it boss... oooh I think I see something over there!" I watch Smiles's face change from smirking to excited as his clawed hands point to some Poké coins on the uneven ground.

Looks to be about 32 of them and he gestures for me to take them from their spot next to one of the maze-like walls of this place but I don't and tell him "you found them first, they're all yours." He nods and then walks giddily towards the coins, smiling as he picks them up. We then keep going, leaving that first room behind us and slipping into the first of undoubtedly many kinda narrow hallways we'll have to go through. That's how it usually goes. We walk through it fast enough only to discover several sleeping Pokémon in this room scattered around including one, a Lairon blocking one of the ways out. I know we're going to have to fight so I can tighten my grip around my trusty weapon, this bittersweet reminder of what I lost a long time ago in my hand and I'm ready to strike hard with it.

"We've got a Lairon, two Phanphy and a Noctowl. You ready to fight?"

“*Sigh*. I’ve got your back. Wish we could chat with them instead but that’s not something that can be helped, can it?” This is the part of our adventures, our dungeon crawling I guess you could say that Smiles doesn’t really care for.

As for me I don’t mind the scraps we get into on the way to our goal, a good use of my moves and they keep us sharp. Plus most other Pokémon don’t even remember they happen once they leave these dungeons, hanging around places like this for too long tends to make you too angry to think straight, much less remember things. Me and Smiles are on top of our respective games though with us being focused on important business. I think that as I fire blast the Lairon and it goes down as Smiles dragon claws the Noctowl, making it go down quickly too.

“Well that’s two down! Let’s keep it rolling.” I say trying to keep momentum while not getting too caught up in the battle as I put some effort into dodging a tackle from one of the phanphys.

“Uh huh. I guess I’ve got the other Phanphy.” Smiles says with little of his typical enthusiasm as he closes more of the gap between him and said Phanphy.

“Yep. Phanphy... is the same type as me, it’s gonna keep me a bit... busy.” I say with a pause as I go for a bonemerang and it proves effective hitting twice but that’s still not enough which is a bit surprising.

“So since fighting seems to make you more chatty for whatever reason can I ask you something?” Smiles gets this question out before charging at the Phanpy headfirst for what seems like the move Iron Head but he actually goes for Crunch and that takes the Phanphy down in only one move.

“Technically you just did but I’ll always allow another. What makes you think I’m more chatty in *Umphh* battle?” I question back as I tackle the Phanphy I’m dealing with after dodging its headbutt and it immediately goes down.

“The way you bark out battle strategies and can actually keep a conversation going through a fight. No offense but we both know chatting is more my forte than yours.” We both let that statement sit for a minute as the battle is over now and then Smiles coughs to clear the air.

“Anywho, I want to ask something that I’ve been wondering about for a good while now and I feel like we’ve got enough of a bond now that it won’t be awkward. What’s up with your skin?”

“Come again?”

“Your skin is red. I’m pretty sure the typical shiny color of a Marowak is green so what’s the deal there? Are you a whole new shiny variant, perpetually enraged, don’t know for sure? I’m just really curious and I’ve never really got the chance to ask before.” I can tell from the way Smiles is tapping his big claws together just inches in front of his scrunched up yellow underbelly that he’s asking me earnestly.

I tiredly sigh, trying to steel myself for this. “*Huhh*, I suppose I should tell you since I know it’ll only be a distraction for you if I don’t.”

“Jeez, try not to have too much faith in me now. You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to. I get how it is... being unique, as you can imagine.” Smiles slides his hand from golden face to yellow underbelly, also pointing out the red spikes everywhere on his body except his head, orange scales that cover the rest of him and his blue eyes, a full showing of his mix of shiny and non shiny traits.

“I’m not trying to make you feel bad or make it seem like you’re forcing this out of me... it’s nothing like that. You’re asking a totally reasonable question even if you could have been more sensitive about it. We hang out enough on these missions so I don’t have a problem letting you know but I just need a minute to... prepare myself. It’s a bit of a heavy explanation.” I say as we walk into a new room that has a path to another level of the canyon, a higher level.

“Ahh, it’s fine. You can take your time, maybe you’ll be ready by the time we reach the next level of this place.”

We defeat two random Unown that tried to attack us from the side. With only one move and basic tackles to attack us, taking them down was a breeze. They both drop some coins and me and Smiles split that. There’s also an Oran berry that we take with us as we ascend a ramp-like formation in the rock here. We climb up the path and then after a couple of uneventful rooms that have some orbs and a berry or two we get to a room we can stop for a snack break in.

Munch “Soooo... you ready now?”

Crunch “Arceus above you have so little patience. You’re lucky I mesh with you so well. Another bite or two and I’ll be *Mmph* ready.” I tell Smiles while I finish my apple and he’s done scarfing down his own apple and munching away at an oran berry.

“Sorry. I don’t mean to come off so impatient it’s just... I hear something.” Smiles ears twitch towards something.

“Huh... ohh. Rock type, easy takedown for me. I’ve got this.” I get up off the floor and throw my bone weapon boomerang style and hear Smiles mutter an “alright then.”

The Bonemerang hits the interruption to our conversation, a Cranidos right in the well protected head. That only staggers it surprisingly but the *thunk* on the return back ensures it’s taken care of. I’m about to sit back down when another pokèmon, a Metang this time, strolls in but from Smiles side of the room this time along with a Graveler right behind it.

“Well I suppose it’s my fight now.” Smiles says and goes for a super effective crunch which brings the Metang down with one hit.

“Nice crunch! Now it’s my move.” With that declaration I hit the Graveler with a bone rush having moved while Smiles attacked.

“Maybe we should head to a different room before anyone else comes looking to fight.” Smiles says with a bit of concern in his voice.

“Probably but I might start my explanation sooner than when we sit back down again.”

For a short while we walk in total silence with Smiles leading the way for about half a passageway's length before he takes a step back to let my considerably smaller feet and frame take the lead. Which I do without hesitation, it comes naturally after so long of running a team even if more than half that experience is work but a good chunk of it comes from these adventurer missions too. The reward for me taking the lead is some more Pokè coins and some stun seeds, I split the coins and give Smiles two stun seeds keeping the rest. We reach another room and are about to settle down there but not only is there an off feeling about the place but we get attacked again, by three Nidorino this time. We take them down with teamwork, a coordinated Ancientpower/Dragon Claw combo each and keep moving.

“When it comes to my skin, the simple answer is, I was born this way. My mom, back when she was still among the living, told me the story. When I hatched I came out looking... well not quite like this but a color not too dissimilar.” I brush some dust off my arm almost like trying to point out an example before continuing as we reach a room of the canyon with another natural stairway and start to sit down with no feelings of anything being off this time.

“Seeing their freshly hatched child with skin an unusual orange both my parents were worried that I was sick, that something was wrong. They rushed me to the nearest medical house as soon as they possibly could, in the middle of the nearest town square from their house just on the outer edge of town. My parents knocked frantically at the door, the Blissey inside took one look at me than my parents and smiled before asking why they looked so worried. My parents were puzzled

then angry at how this Blissey apparently couldn't see the problem, that is until he explained what the situation was." I take a second to catch my breath before continuing.

"Turns out the reason for my skin looking like it did and does now is a fairly rare condition. When two different types of Pokémon have babies together there's a 1 in 5,555 chance of their child ending up with the skin color of the parent opposite to the type of Pokémon they are. Can't really remember what the condition is called I think it was.... Pokérus... no wait that's something unrelated, maybe it was DisCompata Syndrome or Mismatchosis. My memory of that name feels like it's being smokescreened but it's something like that."

"That's okay, it all makes sense even if you don't know the name for sure. So what happened next?"

"Well once the Blissey explained that there was no need to worry since my condition didn't pose any real danger my parents sighed in relief and went home to where my sister was waiting." I sigh and then mutter to myself "if only the rest of my life were that easy."

"Right, your older sister. Remind me again, she doesn't have your condition, right?"

"She does not. Her dad was a regular Marowak while mine was a Charizard. Neither of whom stuck around when they were... needed." I look for the most objective and concise way to describe what happened between my family and the fathers who left us behind. Even though those who know me know I have harsher words about both of them but I try not to let those out too much.

"I see. I have another question or two for you but I suppose we should get moving again. Since you answered my first question and all." Smiles says while flashing me one of his namesake as he looks to the rocky steps we need to walk up to keep moving forward.

Making it up to the next level is as easy as climbing up to the last but this time we've got ornery rock and ground types waiting for us when we reach solid ground again. A room with a Golem, two Cranidos, two Gravelers and a Sandslash. Four of them; the Golem, the Gravelers and one of the Cranidos are surrounding us while the other two wait two paces away as backup. A lot to handle so soon being a few Pokémon short of one of those ambushes called monster houses but nothing beyond our combined skills.

"I've got the Golem and that Cranidos. You okay with the Gravelers?" I ask with my fist clenched around my bone club, strategizing.

“Sure. So another question for you- what?! Don’t pretend like we’re gonna have trouble with **them**.” Smiles rolls his eyes as he hits one of the Gravelers with a crunch weakening it as I consider his pretty valid point.

“*Sigh* You’re not wrong. What’s your question.” I come close to taking down the Cranidos with my Bonemerang but it staggers slowly back up as the bone flies back to my hand.

“I’ve heard that when a cubone’s mother dies they start wearing the skull of their dead mom but I know you have a sister and it’s not like Marowaks can only have one kid. So how does that work if a Marowak has more than one child? Who ends up getting the skull?” Smiles asks as he delivers a tough dragon claw to the Graveler in front of him.

“**Ughh**, I can’t believe that’s how so many still think we *all* get our skulls. The way it works is that we’re born with-watch your left!” I interrupt myself as I notice said Graveler on the left preparing a rock slide for Smiles before I look to see the Cranidos in front of me preparing to headbutt.

“Huh-ohh! Thanks!” There’s a strong **CHOMP** as my Druddigon fighting partner dodges the move and then counters with a crunch that brings the attacking Graveler down.

“One down! Now as I was saying...” The Cranidos chooses now to attack and I hit it with an Ancientpower move that manages to take it down. “... that’s a misconception that we all get our skulls from our dead moms. I was born with a skull and bone the same way you’re born with wings and a Bulbasaur is born with a bud on its back. When one of **Swipe** our moms dies we simply swap out the skull we had for hers... once it’s been properly cleaned. Assuming **THWONK** nature hasn’t done most of the work already.” I dodge an attack from the Golem while talking and counter with the start of a Bone Rush move.

“Well that’s dark... so **CRASH** you didn’t answer who gets the skull or rather which of you got the skull after... that tragic day-” Smiles stops talking after actually using iron head this time on the second Graveler which is pretty effective but isn’t a one hit KO as I see him carefully considering the sensitive subject he’s approaching. “-shoot, I could have rephrased that... or not pressed my luck. Forget I said anything, pal?”

“You could have **THWACK** rephrased that but it’s out there already and I don’t like leaving a question hanging so I’ll answer but let’s **THOK** try to move on to a different topic from the fate of my parents for at least a little bit **SMACK** okay?” I talk as I finish my Bone Rush move, a second one I started after concluding the first at four hits while Smiles tried to walk what he said. The seven combined hits knock the Golem out.

“Yeah, yeah I can do that” Smiles finishes off that second Graveler and then turns to look at the Sandslash and takes a few steps forward.

This leaves me to take on the other Cranidos which is okay if a bit boring. I take a few steps forward myself and turn to the left while Smiles faces forward. “To answer the question of who got the skull, I did and it wasn’t easy... but my sister decided I could use it more and I got it. Like you could have let me get that Sandslash instead of *Another* Cranidos.” I finish with a joke to distract from how many details I left out of that answer.

I go for another bonemerang and Smiles goes for a dragon claw, two hits each is all it takes to bring down both Pokémon which is almost surprising. Once both knock out it’s time to keep moving after collecting an apple and a citrus berry as the rewards of our victory. After we pick those up I’m left with plenty of time to think about “that tragic day” as Smiles put it and all that followed it until I got the skull I wear now. I’m left remembering the smell of the grass I was playing on, of the mixed berry stew cooking at home, of my mom smiling as she watched me and my sister spending some time outside the house playing as kids do. All of that gives way to the sounds of a pair of hastily flapping scaly wings and the panting breaths of a slightly bigger than average Charizard followed closely by the angry fluttering of at least a half dozen pairs of more feathery Mandibuzz wings.

In the present I’m turning a corner with Smiles into a room with more than a few Pokè coins lying around. I’m picking those up with him in relative silence but my mind still gives me images of my mother bursting out the door of my then home rushing me and my sister to safety inside when she saw the Mandibuzz were headed right for us along with my father. It’s tough not to remember the way my and the rest of my family’s collective hearts sank as my father didn’t bother to stop and fight instead continuing to flee as the flock of Mandibuzz let him get away to focus on my mom instead. I got to watch some of the battle from our window before my sister, being older, pulled me back inside to hide.

I didn’t see the way those birds ripped my mother apart and was spared the sight of any grisly remains at the time but I heard the sounds of it all happening as my sister kept both of us out of sight. Back then, being younger, I didn’t understand why we had to cower instead of watching the fight. I had faith that even though my dad wasn’t staying to finish what he started that my mom could still handle those mean old birds by herself, that she was more than strong enough. When you’re young like I was, you think your parents are the best at everything, that they’re perfect and indestructible and with any luck you’ll grow up to be like that. What broke me of that notion earlier than anyone should have it broken for them was the sounds of talons on bone, of flesh tearing and buzzard beaks snapping. Me and my sister hid for what felt like hours until it was safe, long after the noises and struggle and brief sounds of voices had stopped. When

we got outside there was no body, barely any blood and aside from some indents in the ground it almost didn't look like a horrific attack had just randomly happened.

"When did you learn Bone Rush?" Smiles casually asks after such a long silence and I'm instantly back in the canyon as we head up to another level of it.

"Hmm? Oh, around summer of last year. Why?" I casually answer him back. I'm still paying attention to the present even as a good chunk of my mind is flashing back to my past. Splitting my focus is something I'd say I've become adept at.

"I see. I've just never seen you use it before. Makes sense you'd know now though. I'd suppose you were destined to get the cemetery's namesake, right?" Smiles gives another one of his namesake as he tries to bring back a little levity to our adventure by asking something that's meant to be positive and it would be if the cemetery wasn't neglected and practically abandoned for years because for a while I was too young to inherit it and no one else would claim it in the interim.

"Life's too complicated for something as straightforward as destiny... at least that's how I see it. Also you've probably never seen me use it because the last few places we went to were either the forest or near the ocean. Haven't encountered many pokémon weak to ground moves in a while."

"That's fair. Your scarf's got a bit of dirt on it by the way." Smiles looks to me and then down towards my scarf sure enough there's a smudge near the tied knot on my bright blue scarf which I swipe away with the tip of my right claw.

The scarf holds a lot of value. A gift from my sister the day before she moved away to a decent sized marsh far from both our original home and our uncle's house where we were staying after the murder of our mom. I almost never take it off (to sleep being an exception) and more importantly I make sure it stays in good condition. I'll need to wash it when I get back to the plaza or something but before I can ponder that more, some winged figures come from the rock casted shadows ahead of us, out of one of the many passageways. It's three bird Pokémon; a Braviary, a Swellow, and then standing out to me in more ways there is a...A-

"Mandibuzz... **MANDIBUZZ!!**" I let this fiery rage take over my body and amplify my voice, a rage born from a mix of old wounds and a natural instinctive hatred that I'm willing to give in to. Screaming the same name that I screamed the day I went to go retrieve my mother's skull no matter the personal cost.

"Woah!" Is my Druddigon companion's only reaction as far as I can tell as I take the lead and don't hesitate to launch a fire blast at my eternal enemy, Mandibuzz.

“You can take down the others but the Mandibuzz is mine!”

My first attack misses, similar to that first time though back then I still had a lot of growing up to do both mentally and physically. I had gone for a ground type move so it wouldn't have been effective anyway plus I was filled more with a debilitating mix of sadness and unbridled rage. I was also alone back then, no one wanted to accompany me on such a dangerous and uncertain quest, my sister warned me against it but I went anyway and found a Mandibuzz just as alone. We had both been abandoned and it mocked me as I swung at it, ineffectual at first. It talked about how it and its kin had come for us cubones, my sister and me thanks to my father talking about us and leading those brutal birds back to us. Meanwhile, back in the moment I don't give this Mandibuzz time to speak and manage to do what it took me several failed moves to pull off as a young Cubone... land a successful hit.

My ancientpower hits it hard but isn't quite enough as I knock it out of the sky but it quickly gets back up, visibly shook. It counterattacks also just like that first Mandibuzz had, with Brave Bird which I dodge also like last time but with a more learned grace. Now that it's been given space to breathe I expect this Mandibuzz to know our perpetual feud given it's experienced enough to know Brave Bird, to express a mutual hatred back. Instead it silently mouths out “not bad” not even speaking, as if I'd want any of its praise but no doubt it doesn't realize that, it's just some random Mandibuzz.

I launch another fire blast and thankfully it hits since I had maybe one or two left in me without using an ether. The Mandibuzz feathers singe and it's a KO as she goes down. In the past it took about 6 hits of ancientpower from me and about 2 hits(dark pulse and air slash) from it for a draw to more or less be reached though it made it seem like pity by giving me back my mother's skull and what it said was her leg bone as well but it kept the rest. I went home and gave the leg bone to my sister who switched her original bone weapon for it and I switched out my original skull for my mother's at home, crying into it and not wanting anyone to see that or my face scrunched up by sorrow. Back then the danger had passed as I fled that place full of bones with origins i still shudder to think about though that particular Mandibuzz promised to come back to claim me and my sister and it tried to deliver on that promise on another day all too vivid in my mind but today, today I'm still on a mission. I look to see what else I can fight by looking in my partner's direction and I see him still dealing with that Swellow.

It dodges his dragon claw and he huffs in annoyance. I don't waste any time and I hit it with an ancientpower, another knockout. The bird hits the ground with a hearty thud but I'm not truly satisfied. I look further around and it's back to the two of us again. I look back to that Mandibuzz contemplating going back to truly finish the job, tightening my fist around my bone weapon but then I relax it and Smiles nods in approval. I am far from that chasm full of bones.

“Proud of you buddy. Let’s keep moving.”

“Uh-huh. Let’s.” Is my only response as we resume heading towards our goal.

“Sooo... was it a Mandibuzz that gave you that scar on the skull? If-If I may ask.”

“This...scar? Oh! It was already on the skull when I... made it mine. Or at least half of it was. My mom told me the story of how she got it a few times when she was still around and it’s a funny one, maybe I’ll tell it to you next time.” I avoid bringing up my part of the scar because it’s a bit complicated though it does involve Mandibuzz. Still a story best left for a later day, when I haven’t shared so much already.

“Okay. I think the mission objective is coming up soon, on the next floor of this place.” Smiles says as he finds a fancy gold scarf, good for selling but not much else. He picks up to offer it to me to have instead. However I’ve already got one I need to sell from lower in the canyon so I tell him he can have it and he thanks me with an orb that I can also sell for a good price so I do accept that.

We keep moving and take down two Minior’s, one blue and one yellow when they come out of their shells. Both go down easy and also were our last obstacle to going up another floor of this canyon. Where we were greeted by a room with multiple piles of coin and a lone sleeping Pupitar. It wakes up as we approach and I take it out with a Bonemerang, 2 hits. It drops an ether which I don’t think we’ll need given how close I think we are to our objective but take anyway because you never know how many other hostile ‘mons you can run into.

Luckily we don’t really run into any other Pokémon. At least not until after we search several more mostly empty nooks and rooms of this level of canyon. We wind up picking up a few more berries and some more Pokè coins. In the second to last room of this level is the T.M. disc that we came in here to find for the ‘mon who lost it. In this second to last room is also a Magmortar and Dunsparce duo guarding it. Me and Smiles walk up to face them.

The Magmortar goes for a thunderbolt against Smiles who evades it well enough and the Dunsparce tries to hit me with a drill run move and I manage to evade that fine. When I bounce back from evading I hit the Magmortar with a bonemerang while Smiles hits the Dunsparce with a Dragon Claw. The Magmortar retaliates with flamethrower towards me which I’m not able to dodge this time and it not only engulfs me but actually burns me. My lava based opponent actually makes me eat a rawst berry to heal from the burn it inflicted and I hit it with another bonemerang as payback, that drops it. I was expecting a bit more but this works out fine, it

means we can leave now I think as Smiles takes down his own drill focused foe with a reliable crunch attack.

With both pokémon now taken care of a T.M. disc appears on the rocky floor, presumably having fallen from off of either of them. I pick it up and both mine and Smiles rescuer badges glow to signify that we're done here.

"Guess it's time to head back... unless you want to go further into the canyon? See if we can reach the end?" Smiles looks to me as he asks with an expression that I actually can't read for once so I can't tell how serious he is when he asks me that but I know my answer.

"Not a chance. I don't know about you but I'm done with this place." I put my fingers close to my badge and wait for my colorful friend's response.

"Fine by me. I was getting tired of here too. Let's get out of this place!" He enthusiastically shouts as he presses his rescuer's badge. I do the same and we both teleport back to the job board back by Bradios Plaza. It's an instantaneous process, the teleportation meaning we arrive there before the 'mons who put the job out there to be selected off the board we now have to wait by.

"Sooo... now that the job is done and we've got a few minutes, did you mean what you said about us meshing well together?" Smiles asks as he rests his back, specifically the spot in between his orange wings on one of the wooden posts holding up the job board.

"I did." I give a simple confirmation.

"Oh! Cool... well then... would you want to do something maybe besides adventuring/rescue work? I know a sweets shop on this one island that sells candy and ice cream that are really flavorful but not too rich. Maybe we could go together and bond a little more? If-if you would want to. That's not the only place... I know either." He's nervous as he tries to explain his potential plans for us to me and I give him a soft pat on the back to try and pull him back from verbal tripping over himself.

"Relax... dude. Take a deep breath, there's no need to be so nervous. I'm not gonna hurt you and I'm not going anywhere. You don't need to rush to explain your plans to me, you know the kind of patience I have." I have to look up to give him this reassurance and he has to look down so he can see me as I do it, being short can be annoying sometimes.

"Right...right." He looks away from me then looks back, acting like a schoolkid despite us both being too old for that. I do get why though, kinda.

“That said if you’re looking for romance or some kind of proper relationship out of me then you’re watering the Sudowoodo.” I say as I twirl my bone weapon in my paw, a distraction to ease a bit of the awkwardness in the air.

“What-what do you mean?” Smiles asks with an expression that has become considerably sadder with golden ears drooping and blue eyes looking close to tears.

“I mean I don’t really do romance and I don’t want to lead you on by setting up your expectations for something I can’t really provide. We could have good times together and keep having adventures but I don’t believe I have what you might want from me.”

“Ah, I *SNIFFLE* see. I can understand that... even if it hurts a little, we’ll just stay... oh hey there’s the client.” Smiles sucks back in oncoming tears and heartache to point out the pokemon who put in the job order, it’s a Zangoose.

This Zangoose is male and looks to be a few inches taller than average, looking about 4 foot 7. One of its signature claws looks like it was broken off leaving only an inch of the original claw left and the rest seems to have been replaced by iron, which is similar enough in color to the original claw that it’s not too off putting but it is noticeable where the natural claw ends and the metal begins. Aside from all that and it’s red markings being a darker shade of red, practically maroon he looks like a typical zangoose with the white fur, markings on the ear and signature red(maroon) zigzag on the torso. He casually walks up to us and stops a few feet away from the job board so he can face me and Smiles, by himself.

“Thank you so much for retrieving this for me. I thought I’d lost it forever back in that canyon. Having it again will be a big help.” I’m surprised by how young this zangoose sounds given there’s a few worry lines on his face and the mostly missing claw combined with the fierceness in his eyes gives the impression of someone older than he seems to be. He sounds like he just became an adult though, there’s a youthful energy to his voice.

“It’s no problem, just what we do. You make sure to keep that safe now on your way home.” Smiles says as I hand the recovered technical disc to this Zangoose who takes it politely from my paws.

“Hope you’re able to put it to good use.” Is what I say while smiling, happy to be done with this mission and waiting for our reward.

“Oh I will. There’s this gang of Sevipers near my town. This makes it so I’ll finally have a super useful move against them.” The Zangoose is grinning now and I can feel my own grinning widening a little as an extra twinge of pride comes to it.

“Ohh, that’s what you need this for! What’s your name if I may ask?” I ask while extending a paw for him to shake.

“It’s Emilio, Mister Marowak.” says Emilio the Zangoose as he takes me up on my handshake with a bit of confusion in his hardened eyes.

“Okay. You can call me Pedro, Emilio. That’s my name and this...” I take a few seconds to write something down on a piece of paper I was lucky enough to carry on me along with a Malamar ink pen. “... is the address for Rushbone Cemetery along with my name. If you need any help taking down those Sevipers you send a letter my way and I’ll lend a paw.”

“Really!? But why? I’m more or less a total stranger to you.” Emilio raises a bushy eyebrow at me and I can understand why.

“We may be strangers to each other but I’m familiar enough with foes who seem to only want to destroy you. Like I said if you need help it’s just a letter away. You don’t have to accept my help or even the address but I know fighting alone can be hard.” I stand back and wait for a response.

“Uh-huhhhh... well if I need help I’ll consider reaching out. Thanks for getting my disc back. Bye.” Emilio the Zangoose goes on his way and it’s back to me and Smiles by ourselves again. Once Emilio’s tail along with the rest of him vanishes beyond the horizon Smiles speaks up.

“That was... something. So uhh..... I guess now that that’s handled we should part ways now, as friends. You know if I haven’t made things awkward and all. *Sigh* Till next time?” Smiles extends his hand with a sad look back on his face and this final sounding farewell which leaves me kind of puzzled.

“You mean tomorrow? Cause I’m gonna be staying here a few days and if I remember right you planned to be staying here a few days too. Why are you treating this like a final goodbye?”

“Oh, right. I just thought you had to get back to the cemetery as soon as we were finished here.”

“Nah, I don’t. Daimon’s watching it so I’m good to keep doing missions a few days.”

“The Steelix? That’s good. You know you’re one of the few pokemon I know who works while on vacation. I hope the ‘mons you employ appreciate that.”

“They appreciate the bonuses I come back with, that’s for sure. *Haha!*” Smiles laughs at me saying that losing that sad look again as he wipes away a tear.

“I bet they do. See you tomorrow.” He puts out his hand again but in a more jubilant manner and I clasp it as firmly as I can with my own hand/paw that’s not quite as big.

“Till tomorrow, partner.” With that we head back inside the plaza proper and then go our separate ways. The sun sets on this day as I open the door to the room I’m renting here and I’m sure Smiles is already through the door to his. One day's mission ends and while I’m in no rush knowing Rushbone is in good hands I settle into bed knowing tomorrows’ is on the other end of a solid night's sleep.