

Mission 2.1

"When subjected to constant exposure and "training," pokemon may be taught to fight in ways that would normally contradict common thought. It is more rare for pokemon to learn elemental, or "special" attacks, that contradict their own element [type], but it is possible to learn attacks that utilize attributes the pokemon is able to comprehend. (e.g.: pokemon originating from mountainous terrain to learn to swim; pokemon primarily accustomed to using mental (psychic) attacks to learn to use purely physical attacks – so long as it has appropriate physical attributes)."

- Excerpt from "Training Your Pokemon: Brains and Brawn" in *Pokemon Journal Monthly*

"That was quite a show."

Zeke cracked an eye. The sun had set far to the west, casting the speaker in silhouette. Light shining through her hair cast a blue halo around her head.

Grinning, Zeke curled up to a sitting position. "Hey, Lynn."

Glancing around, he found Blaziken sitting against a near-by tree. Turning back to Lynn, she held out a small manilla envelope.

"Here's your winnings. I placed it like you asked," a wry smile showing disbelief and amusement. I just can't believe they called it a draw. You'd think they would worry about losing clients."

"Neither can I," he replied with a chuckle. "You take your cut already?"

"No, that's all of it," she said, shaking her head. "I found a new job, so I'll be leaving the Pit. The pay's about the same, but more sound."

"Really? Where?"

Jerking her head towards Goldenrod, "Undermarts. Part-time at the Herb Shop and the Groomer."

Zeke liked the easy smile on the woman's face.

Lynn turned and started her walk back to Goldenrod, stopping after a few feet. "You know, I quit because of you." Half turning to look back at Zeke, "The way you talked yesterday. All that emotion over a subject most people don't even consider and take for granted."

Zeke watched her with a soft smile.

"Thank you," she said, quickly turning away, continuing on the long road back to the city.

Blaziken sat and watched the humans interact through slitted lids. The human stood, brushed and shook himself, knocking plant and other particles from his clothes. He strode up to Blaziken with an easy gait, calm softening his rugged appearance. Partially cast in shadow, the scar looked deep and menacing.

Hand extended, Zeke asked, "We're heading out. Wanna Maybe grab a bite?"

Blaziken blinked at how easy the human spoke to him, even after scarring him so horribly. Glancing at the offered hand, Blaziken shifted and stood on his own; staring at Zeke, waiting for this strange human to act.

Shrugging, Zeke turned and began walking toward the National Park main building.

Blinking, Blaziken growled incredulously at the human's blasé attitude and stepped quickly to follow.

Checking in his locker key, the duo made their way through the park. Blaziken watched trainers and pokemon in silent, subdued wonder. Winged pokemon flitted about; trainers played with their happy-faced partners.

Zeke glanced over his over his shoulder at Blaziken, his smile faltering as he watched the emotions his companion exuded. Disgust, contempt and anger showed in his eyes and step and posture. And under it all was jealousy.

Lack of movement made Blaziken stop, the human halted and half turned to face him.

"Not all trainers are like that."

Blaziken, his aggressive emotions boiling like his type trait, focused his contempt at the man before him.

"It's true we humans can do terrible things, take advantage of the gifts given to us," his voice soft and quiet, concern and sorrow pinching his face and shadowing his eyes. "But that doesn't mean we're all like that. Many people love pokemon. Some are considered friends, others are treated as pets. There's a lot of good out there," Zeke grabbed his companion's shoulder, a smile on his lips and the faint glimmer of hope in his eyes. "And I want to show that to you."

One sentence. One sentence and a look made Blaziken's gut squirm and an odd, warm sensation having no connection to his fire gradually swell in his chest. This simple display of brotherly affection and compassion filled the pokemon with a feeling of wonder that washed away his hate and anger and jealousy like the tide that knocks down castles of sand and smooths it out until it is flat and again ready to be rebuilt. Thus was Blaziken's castle; not yet flat and ready, but the walls of rage he had built over the years slowly beginning to crumble. Shrewdness and cynicism were still there, ready to pounce and erect those walls again at the

first sign of betrayal; but the seed of hope was there, fluttering like the standard of an ally, eager and willing to help in times of need.

Zeke smiled at the obvious wonder on the pokemon's face the feel of those tense muscles under his hand finally easing.

"C'mon. Lets get going," Zeke said with a pat on Blaziken's shoulder, "It'll take a couple hours to get to the other gate and I'm starving."

The mention of food made Blaziken's stomach growl. In response, Zeke broke into a wide grin and a hearty chuckle. Blaziken gave the man an irritated look as he turned and continued walking, the pokemon falling into step quickly.

It was well after dark when Zeke and Blaziken reached the second gate; the nocturnal bugs and plants going about their routines. Within the gate was a little restaurant, open at all hours to accommodate the different types of trainers.

"C'n I take yer order?" asked the petite woman when Zeke and Blaziken sat down at the counter. Two other trainers were eating, located at separate tables further away from the kitchen.

"Two steaks, oh, medium rare, please," Zeke answered after a quick glance at the menu on the wall.

"The other fer yer companyun?" the woman asked with a sideways glance at the pokemon.

Zeke looked from the waitress, to Blaziken - who looked at the woman hostilely, body tense - and back. Dropping his cheery demeanor, Zeke leaned forward on the counter. "Is this going to be a problem? Shall I go around the area spreading the word that this place discriminates pokemon, refusing to serve them?"

Blaziken saw a hint of the monster he had seen in the ring: cold, hard eyes, low, even voice, face and expressionless mask.

The waitress pursed her lips, braving the scarred human's wrath. If he was bluffing, he did a damn good job of it. Finally she turned and gave their order to the cook in the back with controlled disgust and apprehension.

While they waited Zeke ran his finger tips over his new scar, feeling the ridges and depressions in his cheek and nose. He was lucky he could still breath through it.

Uneasiness spread through Blaziken who watched the man finger his wound.

Zeke was pulled from his musings by the chef's bell and call of "Two bulls to go!"

Boxed up, the waitress handed their steaks to Zeke curtly and with a cheerless "Have a nice night."

Zeke and Blaziken walked over to a low table with two long couches next to it.

Duffel on the floor near him, Zeke plopped down with a grunt; pulled the food out, passed one container to Blaziken sitting on the adjacent couch and pulled out a large pocket knife from a back pocket. He then dug into a side pouch on his duffel, manifesting a utility knife and held it out to the pokemon.

Blaziken, who had been inspecting his steak, eyed the red contraption suspiciously and looked at Zeke questioningly.

"Second from the left is the fork, knife's on the far right."

He went about cutting his meat, holding it steady with his fingers, audibly hissing and sharply inhaling as he worked on his slab of protein and eating while Blaziken inspected the compact tool.

Studying the utility knife, Blaziken found the three-pronged fork and knife where Zeke had said. He also found a spoon, corkscrew, and a claw-looking thing Blaziken wasn't familiar with.

Sliding the fork out, Blaziken watched Zeke carve a strip off his steak, skewer it with his blade tip, put it in his mouth and chew it as he went back to cutting. Looking back to the multi-tool in his hand, then down to his steak, Blaziken simply stabbed the meat, lifted it to his beak and bit off a moderately sized chunk, masticating it energetically and messily; more than half of the piece hanging out the side of his mouth.

Zeke stared, watching the sloppy method of consumption and couldn't resist laughing, causing Blaziken to stop eating and glare.

"Hahaha, I'm – heh – I'm sorry," he said, thankful he hadn't had any food in his mouth at the time. "You're supposed to cut the meat into manageable pieces, then eat it," he explained with a wide grin.

Blaziken's glare lessened. He slowly continued chewing as he looked down at the juicy steak hanging from the fork in his fist. With a small motion, which Zeke could surprisingly label a shrug, Blaziken let himself enjoy the tenderness and savory depth of flavor that tie within the steak.

Dinner was finished quickly. Zeke fell asleep on the couch he'd been sitting on; Blaziken let himself doze, still suspicious of the unfamiliar surroundings

Morning started early, Zeke's internal clock still set to military schedule, and with a quick run to the restroom and inventory check, the duo set out for Ecruteak. To Zeke's home.

The route to Ecruteak was, at a brisk pace, only a four hour trek. But Zeke wanted to take his time, no longer bound by the rush of the military. Contrary to rumors, wandering trainers aren't really pushy or battle-hungry. Most ask politely, even enthusiastically, but are understanding when rejected, if a bit put out. The trainers Zeke encountered as they walked were youths and teens, and few and far between besides.

With the sun nearing its zenith, Zeke and Blaziken reached Ecruteak.

As they entered Ecruteak, Blaziken noted the human had become more introverted, giving short hellos and brisk nods to whoever took notice of them. There was almost an underlying nervousness to him.

This was the first time Zeke had come home in five years. Back then he had to ask for directions to find his house, having not lay eyes on it since his father had enrolled him when he was seven. Six years of not being home, not seeing his father. He didn't get the welcome home he had been expecting. Now, after another five, years of absence, Zeke was filled with more than a little apprehension.

Zeke's father, Donathan Warwith III, did well in the Sinnoh Army, and when he finally proposed to Zeke's mother, he had a small, two-story house built for her. The foundation was set beside a small lake with the forest and the red and indigo Tin Tower behind. Large bay windows were set in the west-facing wall, giving a wide view of the sunset over the trees of the National Park and Route 38; contrasted by the ruin, the Burnt Tower, to the right. In life, Zeke's mother maintained a small garden on the southern side of the house, ensuring day-long sunlight.

Standing before the house, Zeke's heart sank. His earliest and faintest memories were of the vibrant blue paint – now faded, by sun and elements, to a depressing, desaturated slate gray.

The male sucked in a deep breath, let it out in a long sigh, and stepped up to the door. Blaziken wondered at the parentage of this man who could jump from jovial to serious. From what he could see, the building was structurally sound, but the whole property had an air of dereliction. The paint was faded and cracked, the grass was neatly kept, yet the skeletons of a garden lined the wall along the south-west corner and the remains of support frames stood eerily like weathered scarecrows.

On the porch, Zeke stood staring at the door, heart beating from uncertainty, unsure as to knock like a guest or simply stride in like the young man he was, having finally come home.

Sucking in a deep breath and expelling it, Zeke reached for the knocker and rapped three times. In a matter of moments the door swung open, revealing an older man who wore a storm cloud gray suit, sharply cut and tailored to fit, and accentuate , his rail-thin form.

"May I help you?" he asked with a cool drawl.

"Hey, Carleight," Zeke answered, attempting a small smile. "I'm back."

The older man's eyebrows shot skyward. "Zachary?"

Inside, the house appeared to be cleaned regularly, yet surprisingly spartan. To many, though, it seemed almost cell-like. Only a few chairs adorned the room; not even pictures hung from walls or sat on mantels.

Carleight led them to a sitting room and invited them to sit. Blaziken, unsure of what to do with himself, chose to sit on a hardwood chair next to a wall.

"Would you like a drink?" Carleight asked.

"No thanks, not staying long."

Nodding, the thin man sat down at a low coffee table, Zeke taking the chair opposite.

"You should have called ahead," Carleight said coolly.

Zeke propped his feet up on his duffel, glad to be off of them.

"Yea, well, the General never was good at conversation. Just figured I'd swing by to say hello."

Blaziken noticed the gray-clad man fidget slightly at the mention of the "General" person.

"So where is he, anyway? He was more prompt than this when I was younger."

"Where do you intend of staying, if you planed your visit so short?" Carleight asked, rubbing his fingers together slightly.

Zeke blinked, catching on that the thin sergeant was avoiding his question.

"At a motel, most likely," he said casually, shifting his feet back to the floor. "Now, are you going to answer my question? Where is the old man?"

Carleight sucked in a shaky breath. "You really should have called," he said quietly.

Zeke's eyes narrowed. "Where is he, sergeant?" His voice dropped in temperature.

Blaziken sprouted bumps under his feathers, anticipating the cold fury this human could summon.

Carleight swallowed hard under Zeke's harsh gaze.

"Your father," Carleight said, deflating into his chair, "Your father passed away last autumn, Zachary." Depression and mourning seeped from him, as if he death were recent.

Zeke's eyes widened in surprise. His father had seemed indomitable; at least that was how others had described him. The lack of emotion over the death of his father didn't bother him. What did bother Zeke was why no one had deemed it necessary to inform him about it.

"Why wasn't I told, Carleight?" Zeke asked, his voice even.

The sergeant rubbed his fingers again. "Your father wouldn't have want--"

A right hook contacted Carleight's jaw, his head jerked to the side from it. Zeke stood, gripping Carleight's uniform collar, dragging him over the low table.

"Why. Was I. Not. Informed?" Zeke's words were clear, his voice low. Anger and malice dripped from each word.

Carleight's voice was higher than it had been, his cheek red and already showing signs of swelling.

"Major General Warwith left you out of his will."

Zeke's eyes widened.

"All of the Major General's possessions were either donated or willed to certain associates. Even the house and land was given to the military." Carleight's voice quivered as he watched the rage build within the young militant.

Suddenly Zeke released Carleight, the slight sergeant falling onto the table. Zeke picked up his duffel bag and turned, heading to the hall.

"We're leaving."

Blaziken assumed he was just given an order and moved into step swiftly. Down the hall, almost to the door, Carleight staggered from the sitting room.

"Where – What – H-he was your fa--"

"NO!" Zeke roared, turning around, leveling his anger at Carleight. "No father does what he did! A real father would never cart their child away, leave them scared and alone and refuse to communicate! That bastard doesn't deserve the title of "father"!"

As Zeke unleashed his rage, Blaziken quietly continued to the front door, ready to open it and be out of range, knowing what damage the human could do when angry. He rubbed his sternum, thinking of how easy he had been beaten, thinking how much damage the male could do if he ever let go of his control.

Thinking of how easy Zeke could kill.

Carleighl leaned against the wall. "What are you going to do?" he asked, voice wavering.

Zeke breathed deeply, reigning his anger in.

"I'm divorcing from him," he replied.

Carleighl gaped.

"I am no longer a part of his family. The name of Warwither is going to die with him," Zeke declared, spite and hatred a near-tangible aura.

With that Zeke spun on his heel and marched through the door, Blaziken having opened it after Zeke's declaration, slamming it behind him.

Obediently Blaziken followed three paces behind Zeke and thought about his situation. He'd be engrossed in a fight by now. Or waiting for one. "Earn your daily bread on a daily basis." That was what his masters had always told their charges. It felt queer to not be waiting on a fight. To go about at leisure. To eat food that tasted real, he added as an afterthought. Admittedly, not having his schedule made him addlepatated, but being free, truly free; it was worth it. And with that freedom he could go about a schedule of his own design.

He must have been hungry, for his mind wandered back to the bland poke-chow they used to feed the pokemon. Supposedly it was made to deliver all the nutrients the pokemon needed – and a few of them liked it well enough – but Blaziken was too familiar with how little their "masters" cared for them.

Suddenly, Zeke turned left around a corner, then left again, entering a building that had tinny music playing within.

Blaziken followed Zeke in to find a restaurant. The facility was decked in a style Blaziken was unfamiliar with, but the dim reds, blues and golds blended together to create a soothing flow.

Unfortunately it fell on blind eyes with Zeke. They were quickly escorted by a man in a sea-green robe to a table along the right wall and handed menus. After a few minutes a young man walked up to their table.

"Hello," the waiter said with a smile. "Are you re– "

"Two burgers, done. Fries. Water," Zeke interrupted, his voice rough with anger.

The waiter quietly collected the menus and walked away.

Blaziken sat with his back to the wall, watching Zeke from the corner of his eye. The human sat rigidly in his seat, his eyes focused on nothing; rage burned in his eyes, his body a tense coil ready to spring.

Fifteen minutes passed and the waiter returned with their orders. Blaziken inspected the food, once again curious at the unfamiliar meal; and once more he watched Zeke, who had immediately attacked his burger, taking large bites and chewing each mouthful aggressively.

Hesitantly, Blaziken picked up his burger and took an experimental bite. Again, Blaziken was pleasantly surprised with the blend of flavors and textures and set to ravaging his meal, consuming all his food even quicker than Zeke's aggressive consumption.

Not used to such a messy food, Blaziken found himself preening, rubbing the sauces off his beak and licking them off his arm feathers.

Soon after, Zeke finished; he paid and they left, turning right and heading west.

As they walked past the Ecruteak gym, Zeke and Blaziken heard the sounds of battle. Looking toward the noise, they saw two pokémon, a kadabra facing off against a growlithe. Trainers shouted commands. Spectators cheered. Zeke moved on. Blaziken watched long enough to see the kadabra engage in a grapple and throw the canid.

Man and pokémon checked in to a motel room on the far west side of town, renting a two-bedded room for two nights. Zeke was calmer when he explained they would check out places to go tomorrow and leave early the day after. Despite it only being 2 in the afternoon, Zeke dropped his duffel beside one of the beds, flopped down on the lumpy mattress and went to sleep. Blaziken was unsure if he just slept on command or if he lay there thinking, but he himself was still wide awake and filled with energy.

After a moment, Blaziken decided to go outside and exercise. Two days of laziness and well-eating behind him, Blaziken could not push down that odd feeling that had begun his first night with this formidable human. Starting with warm-up exercises, Blaziken ran around the motel property's perimeter, moved on to lifting rocks of various weights and ended with releasing his flame in controlled bursts so as not to overheat and, in turn, cook his insides. Throughout his workout passerby, human and pokémon alike, stared at him oddly; some with more than a bit of trepidation. When he was finished, Blaziken returned to their room and headed for the small bathroom to wash the grime out from under his short, coarse feathers.

Thoroughly cleaned, Blaziken gently stoked his flame, heating the water under his feathers to evaporation to prevent it from molding.

Sufficiently exercised and respectfully cleaned, Blaziken settled down for the night.

Zeke woke at dawn. Still angry, he went out and ran laps up and down the street, returning after an hour. Blaziken had awoke as he entered.

"After I clean up we'll grab some breakfast," Zeke said, Making his way to the bathroom.

Breakfast turned out to be a protein-heavy wrap and a bottle of juice made from berries and apricorns with a high concentration of sugar.

Blaziken found himself rather bored while the human checked maps and schedules, wondering if he was going to keep his word and help him get stronger. Whether or not it would be smarter to part company with this directionless human.

It had reached midday when Zeke finished. Keeping his acquaintances he met in school and the small list of appointments and obligations in mind, Zeke laid out the best route to get them done with the least amount of traveling.

On their way to an early lunch, Zeke and Blaziken were discussing potential workout routines, when they heard a loud CRACK!! and a shouting voice. Turning a corner, they stumbled upon a small crowd standing by while a young boy repeatedly hit the sprawling form of a kadabra.

Zeke watched, the shock of the scene before him freezing him to the spot. Blaziken, familiar with owners abusing their pokemon, felt the old, dark hatred rise.

It was quickly quashed by an intense surge of animosity. Zeke began walking toward the scene of abuse. As he reached the outer edge of the crowd the boy reached into his pocket, pulling something out. Shifting the horse whip, he brought his hands together and, with some effort, pulled them apart and opened them. Something sparkled as it fell. The prostrate kadabra stopped moving, its gaze focused on the spot at the boy's feet. It was a spoon.

"What the hell are you doing?!"

The crowd and the boy turned as Zeke descended upon them. Closing on the boy and kadabra, Zeke noticed the scar on its head and eroded state of its body armor and tail, determining they were caused by long-term exposure to some type of acid.

"What the hell," Zeke repeated, "are you doing?"

The boy leered at Zeke, a poisonous smile spread across his young face.

"What's it look like? I'm disciplining my pokemon."

Zeke's face transformed, his scar twisting his rage-filled face into a horrible visage of hatred. Grabbing the front of the child's shirt, Zeke tore the horse whip from his small hand.

"What gives you the right..." Zeke's voice was small and wavering.

The condescending look spread over the boy's face again. Just as he was about to reply, Zeke screamed, "How would you like being beaten with a whip?! How'd you like to be bathed in acid, huh?!"

Releasing the child's shirt, Zeke cocked back his arm and, fueled by anger, brought down the whip, striking the boy.

"How do you like it?!" Zeke growled, raising the whip back and bringing it down on the kid once more. "How do you fucking like it?!"

Again Zeke raised the riding crop, and again he brought it down, beating the young boy. Repeatedly lashing and repeatedly shouting; Zeke vented all his pent-up rage.

Lying prone on the ground, the boy groaned, bruises and welts beginning to form; tears streaming down his face. Zeke breathed raggedly, as if he had exhausted all his energy.

Blaziken's eyes were wide, surprised at the anger inside this male human and the lengths his violent behavior could go.

Just then, Blaziken came upon a realization: This human – this angry, volatile, dangerous human – was now his trainer. He, a discarded, mutated, thrown away pokemon had been taken in by a human; well-trained and having no qualms about how he used that training. The very thought that he could never gauge how far he could go chilled Blaziken to the bone.

Anger played out, Zeke dropped the whip and picked up the broken spoon. Snapping his fingers at Blaziken, Zeke bent to inspect the kadabra still on the ground. As Blaziken approached, the boy shifted, raising his head to glare at Zeke.

"How dare you..." he said weakly. "Have you any idea who I am?"

Zeke stood. Blaziken, having knelt down with him looked up, confusion in his eyes.

Coldly Zeke replied, "What makes you think I care?"

"I'll have you ripped limb from limb!" the child growled. "My family- HRRG!!!" The boy grunted, Zeke's foot connected swiftly, kicking the boy in the solar plexus hard and lifting him from the ground, sending him flying four feet away and rolling another three.

Returning to the stunned kadabra, Zeke and Blaziken gingerly helped it up, giving their shoulders for support as they walked away from the scene. Due to his height, Blaziken was forced to stoop in order to get the kadabra's arm around his neck.

You should not have done that. Do you not realize the danger of what you just did? a male voice spoke out.

Zeke glanced at the kadabra. "So, you can talk," he said, mildly interested.

Of course. My master – the boy – would have had it no other way.

'What are our plans now?' asked a low, gravelly voice.

Zeke stopped in his tracks and stared over the kadabra's head at the beaked countenance of his companion. Abruptly, Zeke burst into body-shaking laughter. Blaziken's short feathers bristled in irritation.

'What's so funny?' he asked aggressively.

Through fits of laughter, Zeke replied, "I never would have expected such a deep, resonant voice to come from a slender, wiry body."

Giving him a bitter look, Blaziken growled and started walking again, forcing the kadabra and Zeke to move along. Once his laughing fit was finished, Zeke continued talking with the kadabra.

"Being a part of a high-ranking household, you ought to have a name."

Of course, he replied. *I am called Gellerman.*

"Hm... Mind if I call you Geller?"

...Sure.

Something dawned on Zeke then, and he asked over Geller's head, "Hey, do you have a name?"

Glancing to his right, Blaziken gave a resigned sigh. 'No,' he replied. 'I was never given a name.'

"Hm... I'll have to think of something..." he said thoughtfully.

Huffing, Blaziken asked again, 'Well? What is the plan now? With that show of yours, we can't exactly wait until tomorrow to leave.'

"We need to swing back at the motel to grab my stuff. Then we'll head to Olivine to catch the ferry to Vermilion."

Geller shifted uncomfortably, making him wince from the pain.

"As soon as we get you healed you're free to go wherever you want."

The kadabra's solemn attitude was evidenced in his mental voice. *I have no where else to go.*

Patting his arm, Zeke replied, "You're more than welcome to join us."

Surprised at the man's kindness, Geller looked up at the Blaziken to his left to see a faint smile and reassuring nod.

END