

The wind blew through the blue grass underneath A-Ninetales's paws. He glanced around left and right, looking for someone. His green bandana, holding his Explorer's badge with a custom lime green A for the center, snug tight around his neck. He carried a brown bag on his right side, which held explorer's supplies like seeds, orbs, berries, and apples. His long, nine tails remained still, brushing against the grass underneath.

He raised an eyebrow. "Hmm. This should be the location."

A-Ninetales twisted and nosed his way into his bag. With his teeth, he pulled out a letter with its seal ripped. He unfolded and lay it on the ground. Though the letter seemed to hold only paw shapes, it was in a language that he understood.

It said:

Hey, legendary explorer.

I went to explore this place and fainted. I'm afraid that I can't escape under my own power anymore. Could you come and rescue me?

From,

Leroy the Herdier

"Just another day's work," A-Ninetales said.

This message came this morning when he finished a mission on another planet along with his love, Saria. He told her about it and asked her to join, but she declined to his surprise. She explained that the last mission left her tired, and seeing the rings underneath her eyes, he had to agree. So, A-Ninetales left her under Glorfindel's care before heading out on this quest.

This planet itself felt strange, from the blue grass and mushroom trees to black clouds and blue sun. He stuck out bad thanks to his golden-white fur, with tails tipped with orange and a lime green A on his back. Along the way, A-Ninetales encountered anthro fungus creatures that attacked him on site. Though he attempted to communicate with them, their relentless attacks forced him to burn them to ashes. He felt terrible about doing so but knew time was against him and needed to hurry.

Although now he got to the place, he found no trace of his client. The grass showed no sign of bending from stepping or lying around. The clay-red dirt held no paw prints other than his own. No indication of wastes, like remains of apples, lay around. In short, no traces of Pokémon or any creature other than himself lay in this location.

"Hmm. This is strange." A-Ninetales sniffed around. The air held a stale scent, perhaps from the mushroom trees. "This is the place. Where is he?"

A-Ninetales sat down and rubbed his chin for a few seconds, deep in thought.

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"Alright. He's in position," Glaurung said.

Glaurung the anthro dragon lowered his binoculars from his face. His black scales shone in the sunlight. He twisted back to Saria and Glorfindel, with Saria grinning and Glorfindel sighing. Glorfindel the five-tailed kitsune held his staff up, which placed a magical cloaking field around him.

"That is a pretty neat spell you got," Glaurung said.

"You could've learned this simple spell if you continued your studies," Glorfindel growled through gritted teeth.

"Hey. I'm a simple dragon with simple goals: eating, getting myself big, and playing tricks and pranks." Glaurung shrugged. "I don't need any complex magic like that."

"And if you did know those things, you wouldn't need *my* help," Glorfindel countered. He folded his ears, green with black tips, back. "And you wouldn't be an us—"

"OK. Let's settle down now," Saria the Absol said. She stood on her hind legs and waved her front legs between Glaurung and Glorfindel. "We should focus on what we're here for: Helping my dear A-Ninetales relax."

"Right." Glorfindel relaxed and turned away. "I regret showing my anger."

"Apology accepted!" Glaurung raised a thumbs-up for Glorfindel.

Saria rolled her yellow eyes. "Uh-huh." She scratched on the ground. "Now, though A-Ninetales tries to be mature about it, he enjoys growing and being huge. He has also been feeling stressed out lately, so growing on this planet would help him ease that stress."

"Yup!" Glaurung grinned wide. "And I got the perfect plan to do so."

"I'm sure you do," Glorfindel said sarcastically.

"I sure do!" Glaurung reached into his pocket and pulled out an orb larger than it. Its glassy sphere held a mixture of red, orange, and yellow in the shape of fire. "I managed to get these Flame Orbs custom made! They're

set so that they would explode upon contact with A-Ninetales in a burst of fire! With a simple duplication spell, I produced more than enough to make A-Ninetales huge.

"Now, here's the plan." Glaurung bent down and drew on the ground. "I'll go ahead and agitate a bunch of those mushroom monsters. I'll lure them to A-Ninetales, where I'll hide, and they'll chase him instead. Now, they should chase him off a cliff, where I held a stash of those Flame Orbs. That'll be phase one. Phase two—"

"Uh, your movie-inspired plans held a lot of holes," Glorfindel said. He rolled his mysterious blue eyes. "First, where can you get a mob big enough for that?"

"Er, I'm planning on going out as far as—"

"Next, what makes you think he would run away from them? Even if you somehow got something like a thousand of them, he'll likely burn them into crisp than running from them."

"You know, I was more expecting that sheer numbers would—"

"Plus, even if Daren did choose to run, why would he head over a cliff? Would he have a death wish? Even so, how can you ensure that Daren will fall on the exact spot where your Flame Orbs stash is?"

“Look! It’ll work, OK!?” Glaurung stamped his fist against the ground. “If it works in the movies, it’ll work here!”

“I’m more fascinated by the fact that—”

“OK! Everyone, settle down!” Saria waved her paws again. She twisted to Glaurung. “Though that is a dumb strategy. Besides, I thought we agreed on mine, not yours.”

“Ah, gehehe. Sorry.” Glaurung scratched the back of his head below his light-yellow hair-fur. “So, what’s your plan?”

Saria winked.

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A-Ninetales lifted his left paw and glanced at it as though it held a watch.

“Hmm. Perhaps this letter was nothing more than a prank.” A-Ninetales sighed and leaned forward. Dark rings, which he did his best to hide, leaked through. “Sigh. Just my day. And I was hoping to rest with—”

A sudden thud came from behind.

A-Ninetales stood up, twisted around, and hung his chest close to the ground. His tails splayed behind him, curled in semicircles. He folded his ears back.

On the ground behind him lay a Flame Orb.

“Huh. Where did you come from?” A-Ninetales took cautious steps toward it. “I know I checked for something like you.”

Once he reached close enough, he tapped it with his black claw.