

Honda paced back and forth in her room; her staff held in her shaking hands as she walked around in circles. Her nervousness wouldn't seem to go away – the butterflies in her stomach were there to stay, it seemed. She felt like she had so much built-up energy that she was going to explode! And that could be a literal statement coming from a mage.

The pink-haired magician was a new recruit to her adventuring guild, and she wasn't the most experienced person out there. But she was learning! And she was doing it pretty quickly – her spells only backfired like... half of the time. Maybe that was a bit of an exaggeration... But the guild leaders saw potential in her, and decided that she could work with and train under them. She would just need to be assigned with an experienced adventurer any time she went out on any kind of mission, to make sure she didn't end up causing things to go horribly awry.

But this time, she wasn't going on some beginner friendly training mission. This was important! The guild had been tracking down and investigating portals, or "dimensional rifts" as the technical people called them. Strange tears in space and time that led people to other worlds! And the best adventurers of the guild started hopping through them, exploring these other worlds, and documenting what they found. Today, she would be going through one of these rifts and exploring the other side!

...Sure, every portal so far had led to a dimension that was entirely safe and harmless, but you never know! This could be the first one to be jam-packed full of adventure! Tons of fighting, and running, and magic! Dangerous beasts, powerful artifacts... maybe even... *r-romance*...

As that thought popped into her mind, she suddenly shot up as she heard the loud bang of knocks at her door, and a muffled "Hey" from outside – the gruff voice of her partner Saki. She immediately smoothed out her clothes and made sure her hair was in order, yelling back a "Coming!".

As she opened the door, she saw Saki leaning against the wall just next to her now open door, the taller woman looking confidently down at her. Honda couldn't help but blush as she looked up at the silver-haired thief, her nerves flooding back into her stomach for another reason this time. The two of them had been working together for a while now, ever since Saki apparently "took pity" on her a while back, in her own words. She was actually really nice though, once you got past that tough outer shell! And she was an expert adventurer herself.

"H-hi, Saki..." Honda said, her anxiety more than apparent as the much smaller mage held her staff close to her chest, her voice shaking just about as much as her arms were. Her gaze dropped down to the ground, but only a second later, she felt Saki's hand on her head, ruffling her hair just a bit.

“Good mornin’ to you too, scrawny,” Saki replied, taking a moment to poke fun at her partner. “What’s got you all worked up today? Scared of taking a nice walk in the park on another world or something?” Saki’s voice radiated confidence and bravado, and for good reason. She’d been through plenty of these portals and seen the other sides, with no issues to speak of in any of her reports. Of course, that didn’t mean that Honda wouldn’t end up flubbing a spell or two to get them in a pickle, but that was nothing the rogue couldn’t get them out of.

“W-well, I’m just... excited! And a little nervous, you know, but... having you around is... nice.” Honda looked back up at her, a smile on her face, getting a sly chuckle in return. Always a charmer, that mage. Even if she wasn’t the most reliable partner, she was a cute face to keep around on adventures that would otherwise be boring and lonely. So she kept her around, even if it meant cleaning up her messes for her.

“Well, let’s get going then,” Saki responded with confidence, trying to brush past the compliment her partner had given her. She started walking down the hallway and toward the exit of the building, her large strides carrying her forward faster than Honda could keep up too easily. With an “Eep!” as she was suddenly left behind, the mage quickly moved to catch up with her, heading out as well.

Honda took an apprehensive step back, her eyes wide with awe. In the center of the forest clearing floated a small black orb, pitch dark inside aside from occasional flashes of blue light that poked through the darkness. It was more than definitely magical, that much she was sure of.

“S-so this is what it looks like? It’s... so different seeing one of these in person, rather than just reading about them in a report.” She continued looking over it, unsure what to make of exactly what she was seeing. She’d seen some magical spells that look similar to this, but all of those spells were quick, only a flash before the magic faded away. This was like it was captured in a moment of time, perfectly suspended there.

She looked over at Saki, who had taken up leaning against a tree lazily. The two looked at each other for a moment, neither saying anything, before Saki raised an eye. “Uh, you gonna activate it? Kinda need your magic to do that,” she said, looking up at the sky, miming measuring the time to egg her on.

“O-oh! Sorry, yeah, I’ll just, uh...” Honda fumbled a bit with the staff in her hands as she quickly righted it, her thoughts racing. Her worry spiked for a moment, unsure if she’d be able to even cast the spell correctly or if she’d end up getting the two of them into trouble... but she quickly shook her head, purging the worried thoughts. She could do this.

The mage started thinking through her lines, running through the spell a few times in her head to ensure she'd get it right, before attempting the real thing. Practiced words of power mixed with rehearsed motions, she called upon the arcane powers surrounding her to do her bidding, extending her will towards the dark sphere ahead of her as she cast the spell she'd been taught for this mission.

As her magic interacted with the sphere, it began to glow, pink light surrounding the darkness for just a moment before it quickly expanded, forming an ovular doorway in the center of the forest clearing, the streaks of blue light shining in the darkness of the void ahead of them. As she stood in awe, staring into the portal, Honda suddenly felt Saki grab the back of her shirt and begin pulling her toward the door as she walked up herself.

"Come on, time to get started..." she said, her voice sounding somewhat bored, as if she'd been through this too many times to still have any excitement for it. As the duo stepped into the portal, they felt weightless for a moment, as if floating in an empty, endless void, their visions obscured, and their senses dulled. Before all of a sudden, they were overloaded with the new sensations of a different place to the one they'd just left.

As the duo's feet hit the ground, they found themselves standing on a rocky surface, surrounded by stone walls in a thin, tall structure of some kind. Holes in each of the walls let in sunlight, and an open doorway stood in front of them. They could both still see the rift floating behind them as it collapsed from a gateway to a small, floating orb once more. Honda looked up to Saki next to her worriedly, not quite ready to see what might be waiting outside for them. However, the confident gaze of her partner looking ahead helped steel the shy girl's will just a bit more.

As Saki started to walk out, Honda followed behind, the two of them stepping out into the light. Their footsteps crunched on the sandy surface beneath them, and as their eyes readjusted to the brightness of the open outdoors, they were able to see the area they'd found themselves in. Plenty of people walked around what looked like a nature park, complete with fenced-off flower beds, benches and fountains, and a lake in the center with a small island. However – of note were the creatures that they walked with.

Tons of beasts of incredibly varying shapes and sizes walked around the park with their presumed owners. A white and blue squirrel rummaged around in a small bush as someone looked on, coming out with two blue berries to share with him. A little yellow duck splashed around in the pond as a lady sat on the shore watching it. Some yellow creature with a strangely jagged tail even sat on the shoulder of a kid as he ran around the park with glee. People all over this park were spending time with whatever these mystical creatures were, and it was fascinating.

"Huh. The hell is up with this place?" Saki said, a confused expression on her face. She'd never experienced a world like this one before. It seemed at least somewhat similar to their own, but whatever these creatures were, she'd never seen or heard of anything like them. They'd probably need to take a bit more thorough of a look around, and maybe find a library to learn about these things without being too... suspiciously unknowledgeable about things that people considered normal here.

As she looked back at Honda, she saw the small pink-haired mage enamored by these creatures, clearly staring at them all around the park. One person even waved at her as they noticed her, and the small pink cat they held in their arms mimicked the motion, which resulted in a squeal from Honda. Placing a hand to her temples, the rogue grabbed onto her arm and started pulling her down the path, to what looked like an exit to the park.

"I know you're easily excitable, but we do still have a *job* to do, Honda. You can't get too enamored by the pretty animals." As she pulled her down the path, the attendant at the gate smiled at her, and she faked a smile back, trying to just look like a couple who needed to be on their way. Their outfits were probably a bit strange for the locals, but people wore weird things all the time, right? In any case, getting out of this nature park and into what would hopefully be a more crowded town would help them to blend in more, and probably have less of those weird creatures out and about, so Honda would be less distracted by them.

That was incorrect.

Honda looked on in awe as she saw the various people walking in the streets with these fantastical creatures. Giant fluffy orange dogs bounding up to their masters, embers shaking off of their fur... tiny brown bunnies with fluffy tails hopping along with their owners... small grey birds sitting on the shoulders of their trainers... she couldn't help but let out a squeal of glee!

"It's all so... so...! **Magical!!**" she yelled out, Saki suddenly recoiling back next to her as some heads turned to look in their direction. "They're so cute! And wonderful! And... and...! I wanna be a trainer too!" she couldn't contain her excitement, all of it bursting out at once, though as she realized all of the eyes staring at her from different directions, she started to shrink back down again, people gradually making their ways about their days.

"Uh... really?" Saki responded with a raised eyebrow. "They don't seem all that special to me. More like a hassle to take care of. Like pets, but they can burn down a house." She seemed mostly disinterested with the entire idea. This world had some interesting and potentially dangerous things in it, sure, but it

all seemed really... peaceful despite all that. Boring. "What's got you so riled up about the idea, anyways?" she asked the smaller girl next to her, shrugging her shoulders at the idea of owning and caring for one of these creatures. She had her work cut out for her already just taking care of Honda, anyways. That girl could find a way to get herself into trouble in the safest universe out there.

And regardless, they needed to make less of a scene here and just get to learning what these things were, and what this world was like. Taking Honda's arm in her hand once more, she started half dragging her forward, away from the giant fire puppies that she was trying her hardest to escape from her grasp in order to pet. They needed to find a library.

Letting out a tired *sigh*, Saki returned a book to the shelf where she'd found it, deciding that she'd read enough to know that this place was nonthreatening. Sure, some of these... *Pokémon* reportedly had immense power, but people actually attempting to utilize that power as a weapon were uncommon, and apparently they'd been foiled time and time again by relatively inexperienced trainers, so there really wasn't too much worry about it all.

Meanwhile, the entire time that the rogue had been carefully studying books on these things' biology and the recent history of the world, Honda had been flipping through a big book filled with a page on every species known to exist, interjecting her reading with gasps as she would suddenly hold up the book to show off a new cute one that she found, bringing up new random facts about it every now and then. She'd become enamored by these things, and Saki just couldn't really get it. Some of them were kinda cute, but she just wasn't really an animal person.

Making Honda return the book as they left the library, Saki looked down at the mage, who was looking back up at her with puppy-dog eyes as the two walked off towards the edge of town, intending to make their way back to their own world. Saki took a deep breath, letting it out with a sigh as she readied herself for exactly what she knew was going to come next. "Okay, fine, you can stop looking pathetic. What do you want?"

"Can... can I... have one?" Honda replied, her voice shaking a bit in nervousness, seeming like she was already on the verge of tears. She was clearly extremely desperate to have one of these magical creatures for her own – entirely obsessed with the idea of them. Saki knew that she should say no... but she was being so cute and desperate about it...

"Ughhhhh, *fine*," she responded, Honda suddenly breathing in deep and letting out a squeal of joy. She instantly started rattling off every last thing she'd learned about the species she was interested in and

wanted to have, as the rogue mostly tuned out. They generally weren't supposed to bring creatures back from these other worlds, but she'd be thinking about it for the next few weeks if she didn't get something. Maybe she'd find something low-maintenance, like one of those rabbits or something.

"-and I've been practicing the spell a lot, and I think I could probably do it well enough to modify it to work for one of the pokémon in this world, and—" as Saki tuned back into what Honda was saying, she blinked a few times, processing what she was talking about, before cutting her off.

"Hold on, who said anything about magic? You sure that's a good idea?" she asked, immediately worried. Magic was already unpredictable enough coming from the inexperienced mage, but in another world where she might not fully understand the flow of magic around her... it could be a recipe for disaster.

"Y-yeah, I practiced this spell for weeks!" Honda looked around as they neared the edge of town, before looking to the woods to the left of the path. With an excited glint in her eye, she waved for Saki to follow her as she ducked into the tree line, heading away from the general population so that they wouldn't see her casting any spells. After all, so long as nobody knew, it was safe, right? And she *really* did practice it, like honestly! A ton!

As she stopped in a small clearing, she looked around for a moment, making sure that there was nobody nearby, and waiting for Saki to catch up. As the confused rogue dashed into the clearing, she started to ask a question, only for Honda to excitedly begin explaining on her own, no prompting required.

"So, it's like a familiar spell! You cast it, and it draws an animal spirit to be your companion and work with you! I was hoping to make a new friend sometime with it... and if it works here, I could have the perfect pokémon partner! ...Th-that's what the book said about them... I think it was a kid's book..." she started to trail off as her mind wandered, before she snapped back to it and looked at Saki once more, her irresistible puppy-dog eyes immediately charming the rogue.

"*Fine*, I guess you can try it, and at least see what it does. Worst that happens is one of the big ones comes out and we either fight it or leave." Saki sighed once more, leaning back against a tree to let Honda do her thing, who squealed with glee once more and immediately got to work. Saki listened with a yawn as she began going over various chants under her breath, preparing herself to cast the spell, before she stepped to the center of the clearing and began. Meanwhile, the rogue decided to take watch, making sure nobody approached them in the middle of the spellcasting.

As she spoke out the words of power, the end of her staff began to glow, threads of light extending from its tip and wrapping around her in intricate, weaving patterns. The light that surrounded her began a bright white, before they shifted to a light pink hue, matching the color of her hair. She took careful steps around the clearing, each one leaving a footprint of the same pink light behind her as she traced arcane sigils in the air.

And if Saki were paying more attention, she might have noticed that each footprint left behind was slightly smaller than the last...

As she reached a more complex part of the incantation, Honda stepped into the center of the ritual circle she'd traced out, closing her eyes to focus. She held her staff in two hands, extending her arms upward to hold it aloft above her head, each thread of light connecting down to one of the sigils in midair. She felt her arms tremble, as if the staff were heavier than normal, but she held fast, ensuring that she didn't lose her concentration at such an important moment.

Her hair began to float up in the magical wind that surrounded her, but she never felt it fall back down, as unbeknownst to her, it shortened itself, forming something more similar to a bowl-cut than her previous style. However, she could feel the wind causing her robes to bat against her legs, which seemed to be longer than normal. She couldn't let these strange feelings distract her though – she had almost reached the end of the spell.

With the final words of power echoing out from her voice, now much squeakier than it once was, the pink light of her magic filled the clearing, letting Saki know that it was time to check back in on her – the rogue entering the clearing again to see if the spell had succeeded, or if there was a new mess to clean up.

As Honda cautiously reopened her eyes to check if things had gone horribly wrong, she found herself in darkness – or at least mostly darkness. Something cloth-like was mostly blocking the light from reaching her eyes, and she struggled to push it off of her. She felt like she was stuck under a heavy blanket, trying to crawl her way out and see what exactly she'd managed to conjure forth, whether it was a partner for her or not. Eventually the light reached her eyes once more as she managed to pull herself out from under the pile of fabric, looking up at a forest that seemed much larger than it once was.

As she re-entered the clearing, Saki saw something she didn't quite expect. In the center of the clearing sat all of Honda's clothes, her staff on the ground next to them, and the pile of clothing seemingly wriggling. As she stared for a moment, she saw a creature climb its way out of the mess, only one foot tall, with what looked like a white body, and a pink bowl cut around its head, with two small, red horns sticking out – one in the front, and one in the back.

If she remembered correctly from Honda's earlier gush about this particular pokémon, it was called Ralts. However, it normally had green hair, not pink. That pink hair looked more like... like Honda's.

Saki's mind raced for a moment, thinking of all of the possibilities that had just been gifted to her on a silver platter. She walked forward and crouched down, her arms resting on her knees, a cocky grin plastered onto her face.

"I dunno, Honda... I think I might be starting to see the appeal of keeping one of these pokémon for myself..."

Honda gulped.