

Chapter 40: Natural Disaster.

The Aquatic War Arc.

Everyone's backs pin against each other, eyes widening at the two armies: Some charge after them while the rest fight each other. Justin and Ada squint, lifting their arms in unison. A blue and purple shield forms around the group, blocking the incoming Water moves.

"GAH!" the teens wince, closing their eyes and stroking their arms. The combined Mystical Shield fades, hordes of Gyarados and Wishiwashi swarming the group within seconds.

Mesmeren gulps and snaps towards the cabin, running. A Wishiwashi and Gyarados jolt in front of her, the Drowzee falling on her behind. "EEK!" she yelps.

Courtney grits her teeth, grabbing her sword's hilt. "Dammit." She looks around. "There's—Gah! So many of them!" She winces.

A Wishiwashi's liquefied fin slams beside Ramon, water splashing on him. The fox yelps, falling on his back.

"Ramon!" Ada yells, blocking another Wishiwashi's Liquidation with her claws, groaning. Ramon shakes, eyeing at the large fish in front of him. Tears stream down his cheeks, the fox completely immobilized by misery.

Coleo squints at the Wishiwashi, jumping off from the Zoroark and taking out his dagger. Before the large fish can prepare his Hydro Pump, Coleo slashes him several times, the Wishiwashi yelping and backing away. The Blipbug backflips on the Zoroark's head, tugging his hair.

"YARGH, LAD! PULL YESELF TOGETHER!" Coleo yells. Ramon gasps, looking up at an insect peeping over his head. "I do not know what ye ar' goin' through, but we need ye help on belayin' these lakeswimmers from hurtin' us!" Sighs. "Please."

Ramon blinks for a moment, looking around: Justin sweating at his blades clashing against a Gyarados' Aqua Tail, Ada pushing a few Wishiwashis back with her purple beams, Courtney and Sylock kicking and shoving some Gyarados back while Mesmeren whimpers behind them, and Roan slashing another Gyarados with Dragon Claw.

Everyone's desperation leads the fox's shakiness to slow down, a simple sigh radiating from him. He stands. "Al-Alright..."

"Thanks." Coleo clenches the fox's hair, Ramon's claws glowing white. A Gyarados swings his aquatic tail at Ramon, the Zoroark countering it with Fury Swipes. "Ngh!" Coleo grunts, gritting his teeth. Ramon grunts as well, pushing his claws forward. He soon shoves the serpentine away, panting.

Roan hops over a Hydro Pump, yelping while airborne. “HOLY—” his eyes widen at the two incoming Wishiwashis, both shrouded in white auras. Roan opens his mouth and, “AAAAAAAAAAH!”

Before the two fishes even reach the dragon, large winds blow them back and collide against a group of Gyarados. Roan lands, eyeing the dark brown boy twirling his blades. “Thank you, Justin! You’re a lifesaver!” The kid exclaims before whimpering, stroking his arm.

Justin lifts his thumb. “No proble—AH!” he groans, stroking his arm as well. “This stupid ass pain, man. I swear.” He sees the Wishiwashis floating back up, both charging towards the two. “...Did that not do anything to them??? What?”

Roan also notices three Gyarados behind the boy, quaking . “OH NO! BEHIND YOU, JUSTIN!”

The boy jolts behind him, twirling his blades. “Crap!” He swings his Sorcery Blades, huge winds gnashing against the three Gyarados. The Gyarados snarl, shaking themselves from the winds before dashing forward. Justin blinks. *What’s going on with my winds? Why ain’t they doing SOME damage like it did at Majestic???* He grips his blades, frowning.

Mesmeren jumps and ducks from the many Hydro Pumps, stroking her head as she trembles. Her lips quiver, tears welling up. *Get me out get me out get me out get me out ge—* her panicky thoughts halt when an Aqua Tail lands in front of her, the Drowzee backing away within seconds.

“EEK!” She eyes the Gyarados up, his browbeat glare striking into her heart. The Pokémon simply opens his mouth, a stream of liquid charging itself. Mesmeren shakes her head, tears falling down. “PI-Please no!”

The moment the Hydro Pump fires, a Flamethrower collides against it, blinding the Gyarados. Mesmeren looks behind her at Sylock, the Blaziken dashing towards the serpent and jumping. He kicks the Pokémon’s face, roars of pain exuding him. Landing, Sylock grunts in discomfort, his hand gripping his hilt.

“Th-Thank you, Sylock,” Mesmeren says before whimpering, stroking her chest. She then looks down, her shadow getting bigger as it doesn’t take long for her to hear the incoming Double-Edge. “AAH!” She rolls forward, a Wishiwashi crashing into the spot. She leaps off, colliding against Sylock. “Oof!” Mesmeren groans, bouncing off instantly. She then dusts him. “S-Sorry!”

Sylock sighs and stands, pulling out his sword while eyeing everywhere. Mesmeren gets close to him, trembling. Many of the aquatic soldiers rush towards them, Sylock grinding his teeth. *How the HELL do I deal with so many Water types while having a scared person in the back!?* he thinks.

Ada extends her claws and swipes, pushing several of the water soldiers away from her. She pants, jumping from a sudden Hydro Pump before blocking a Wishiwashi's Aqua Tail, groaning. "UGH!" She's pushed back, sliding across the wet grass.

Courtney dodges the Water moves, white trails following her. She shoves a Gyarados with her Quick Attack, wincing afterwards. Her eyes then widen to a Hydro Pump slamming her out of the blue, pushing her away. "ACK!" She flips over and over before sliding back.

Ramon blocks each Aqua Tail with his white claws, backing away from two Gyarados. Then a third one lurches from behind them, flipping forward to slam her Aqua Tail. Ramon gnashes his teeth, jumping away in time.

He slides across the ground, gripping it. Soon his back is met with Ada and Courtney's, both eyeing the group of furious soldiers. Ramon pants, rumbling. "T-There's so many of them!" He whimpers.

"Lots of them against eight of us..." Courtney grips her sword along with the strap-on. "This ain't lookin' pretty, y'all."

Ada nods. "Yeah...If only my body wasn't in pain today!" She shoots her purple lasers towards the incoming water soldiers, pushing them back. She whimpers, stroking the side of her stomach. "Why am I hurt whenever I use my Magic moves, let alone doing basic attacks!? I wasn't feeling this way yesterday, so why now!?"

Coleo squints as Ramon pushes another group of fish with Dark Pulse. "It has somethin' to do with the—Argh, Weakener Lycus put in our apples," Coleo says.

"Weakener?" The Lopunny collides her sword against a Wishiwashi's Aqua Tail. "The heck is that!?" She shoves the Pokémon back, grunting.

Ada keeps shooting her projectiles, whimpering. "GAH!" Her eyes widen to more of the soldiers charging towards them, gnashing her teeth. "Arceus gracious, there's *MORE* of them!?" She snaps towards the boy, Justin jumping over a Gyarados while kicking the other in the face. "JUSTIN! I NEED YOU FOR THE SHIELD, PLEASE!"

The boy lands, panting heavily while nodding. "You ain't gotta tell me twice!" He rushes towards the teen, gritting his teeth in anxiety.

Roan yelps and follows the boy. "W-Wait for me, Justin sir!"

Sylock eyes the two before grabbing Mesmeren by the head. "E-Eh!?" the Drowzee says, being pulled by the Blaziken. Sylock zips forward, two Wishiwashis ramming against each other in his place, knocking themselves out.

Everyone eventually regroups, Justin standing next to Ada as his blades disappear. He throws his arms forward, Ada following suit: A huge blue and purple shield surrounds the gang, blocking off any attacks. The teens whimper, closing their eyes and gnashing their teeth.

“Sh-Shit it hurts, fam!”

“I-I know...Whatever this ‘Weakener’ is, it’s doing anything but benefitting us!” Ada winces.

“Weakener, fam? The hell is—GAH!” Justin pants.

“I’m on the same—AGH, boat as you are, Justin.”

Ramon looks at the teens: The pale skins of dread, the black circles of torment. Anxiety and misery surround them, seeping within as they use their combined shield. The Zoroark lowers his ears, sorrow painting his green eyes. ...*This is my fault*. His bangs cloud his left eye. *They’re hurt because of me...*

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Over at the lake itself, Virtuous collides his liquefied fins against Behemoth’s aquatic tail, the two growling at each other while airborne. The armies below bash and ram, some even using their Hydro Pumps to push the others away. Virtuous huffs, smacking Behemoth away with his fin. Behemoth shakes his head, snarling before charging towards the Wishiwashi, tackling him. Virtuous grunts, shielding himself while pushed.

“I HATE YOU SO FUCKING MUCH!” Behemoth exclaims, shoving more.

“Hah! Same here, you empty-headed debacle!” Virtuous groans. “Truly the biggest pain in the buttock! Not only on my trainer, but also on *me*, too!” He headbutts the leader Gyarados. Behemoth groans before Virtuous Hydro Pumps him, pushing him away.

Aquatus ducks under one Gyarados’ tail before shoving him away, the serpentine colliding against another. A column of water ushers towards the School, two Gyarados spawning within, their eyes glowing light blue. Aquatus rolls to the side, evading the combined Waterfalls. She pushes another Gyarados with Hydro Pump, dodging more incoming Aqua Tails as the water splashes up.

Gah! This is crazier than the last big phase! she thinks, grunting. Her tailfins are coated in blue energy, the School grinding her teeth at four Gyarados dashing after her. She swings her Aqua Tail, slamming them against the lake. A huge water wave springs up, another Gyarados leaping out while screaming her war cry. Aquatus jumps forward and bashes against the serpent’s belly, pushing her far away. The Mystic Water School lands back, panting heavily.

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The Mystical Shield fades in and out, the teens whimpering. "Can't hold on much longer! Brace yourselves, fams!" Justin closes one eye while spawning his Sorcery Blades, the shield disappearing completely.

Many Hydro Pumps and Aqua Tails spiral towards the group, their eyes gapping with dread.

"OH SHI—" Courtney cuts herself off as the group jumps, dodging the Water moves. The attacks hit the ground, exploding everyone away from each other.

"AAAH!"

Everyone screams while separating: Justin with Ada to the southwest, Courtney with Sylock to the northwest; and Ramon with Coleo, Roan, and Mesmeren to the southeast. The water sprinkles more onto them as they land.

Justin and Ada groan, their heads nudging each other. The two blink before turning their heads, blushing. Ada is about to say something until their shadows grow bigger, both looking up: Five Gyarados tower over them, fury spreading throughout.

The teens gulp. "Crap," they say. The Gyarados open their maws and shoot their menacing flood, the teens rolling over within seconds.

Meanwhile, Courtney has her head planted onto her arm, panting. "Ah...Not sure how long I can last durin' all of this," she mentions to the Blaziken lying beside, wincing and stroking the grass. "Dammit!"

Sylock looks up at an upside-down group of Schools, white auras encasing them. He grits his teeth, flipping backwards and landing onto his feet. He groans in agony, stroking his left arm while one of his eyes is closed. *Damn this poison or whatever that Lycus asshole put inside of me!* He pants, gripping his sword as blue and purple energy surround it. *I'm an idiot for trusting him...I should've known better.* He looks behind him, seeing a struggling Lopunny lying on the ground while forcing herself up. *Now I'll lose her because of—*

Pauses.

A brief image of a Buneary and a Combusken appears in his head, bumping each other's fist.

....*No. I refuse to lose you.* Sylock snaps at the Wishiwashis group, bringing his sword to the right. *NOT EVEN TO SOME STUPID FISHES!* He snarls, swinging his sword and shooting a large magical wave. The blue and purple wave collides against the blue fishes, pushing them away. Sylock pants, eyeing his silver sword, the energy around it fading. *Thank you, Delia.* He then rushes to Courtney's aid, helping her up.

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At the southeast, the other four are already up and protecting themselves, Coleo gripping onto Ramon's hair further. Roan collides his Dragon Claw against a Wishiwashi's Double-Edge, groaning while pushing forward. The large fish overpowers the dragon, shoving.

"AH!" He rolls around the ground a bit before jabbing it with his claws, stopping. He grunts, gritting his teeth. "This is—AGH, almost worse than the hurricane incident! *ALMOST!*" Roan leaps from two Aqua Tails slamming beside him. "YIKES!"

Ramon ducks from one Hydro Pump before jumping over another, zooming towards one Gyarados that's about to use Aqua Tail. He jabs him with his dark paws quickly, pushing him back. Once his Sucker Punch fades, a large shadow forms over him, Ramon yelping. He turns around at another Gyarados lurching forward, his maw shrouding in icy auras.

"Ah no ye don't!" Coleo puffs his cheeks, rinsing something in his mouth before firing a glob of web at the serpent, clouding his vision. The Gyarados backs away, flailing under the Sticky Web.

Ramon sighs in relief, lifting his claw at the insect. "Thanks, Coleo."

Coleo grunts in pain a little before nodding. "No problem, matee—AAAAAAAAY!!!" Coleo screams, eyeing a Wishiwashi School behind the Zoroark. Ramon turns, eyes enlarging at the incoming Double-Edge. He screams as well.

The School almost reaches them until he pauses, being pushed away by force. The two turn around, Mesmeren panting heavily as her eyes stop glowing. She lowers her hands, dropping to the ground, whimpering.

"U-Ugh. Confusion u-usually doesn't take a lot out of me," she says.

Ramon rushes to the tapir, picking her up. "Thanks for saving us there."

Mesmeren blinks, her hands connecting with Ramon's. Her face grows red.

OhMyGoodnessGraciousHe'sHoldingMyHands—AAAAAAH!!! She slowly lifts her mouth, smiling. "N-No problem!"

Ramon raises his brow at the shaky smile, smiling back. "Alright the—" he's smacked away by a Gyarados' Aqua Tail, screaming towards the lake.

Mesmeren jumps back, yelping. "RAMON!" she screams as Coleo grits his teeth, hanging onto the fox as tightly as possible.

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Aquatus groans while dodging more and more of the Gyarados' Aqua Tails, glaring. "Is this SERIOUSLY all you guys can think of doing!?" she exclaims. She soon yelps to something wrapping around her, wincing. "What the—" a Gyarados' Crunch clamps her, the dark auras radiating his maw. The soldier then tosses Aquatus towards land. "AAAH!"

Eventually, Ramon and Aquatus collide their backs against each other, the two coughing up blood. The Zoroark falls on the grass while the Wishiwashi falls on the water, both groaning. As the two pick themselves up, they turn around, making eye contact. Aquatus' necklace shifts, her eyes radiating with spite. Ramon lowers his ears, his eyes nearing its teary state.

The fox looks away, guilt spreading across. "I can explain."

Aquatus looks side to side, spotting more Gyarados heading her way. She casts her Aqua Tail, staring back at Ramon. "After what the Floatzel showed us?" She smacks one Gyarados away. "Why should I hear *ANYTHING* you have to say!?"

Ramon trembles, gritting his teeth. "I-It's not entirely like how Lycus portrays it!" He collides a Gyarados' Hydro Pump with his Dark Pulse.

Aquatus headbutts another Gyarados. "Are you saying those images *weren't* you? Were you NOT the same Zoroark that transformed into 'Larry' and 'Sam'?"

"Erm..."

Aquatus glares at the fox. "Sounds like Lycus is right about your kind being deceptive." Ramon feels his heart being stabbed by multiple needles, eyes widening. Aquatus continues, "You were pretending to be our friend. And for what? Just to cause *more* drama in this war? Something that neither I nor Quintin wanted!?" Aquatus backs away from a Gyarados' Hydro Pump before shoving him away. "It's thanks to you: This war will *never* end!"

"But..." Ramon sluggishly moves away from a Gyarados' Aqua Tail, falling on his behind. "It's..."

"It's exactly how you intended it, right? You Zoroarks—" she grits her teeth. "Should be ashamed of yourselves!" Aquatus yells, tears streaming down her cheeks. She fires Hydro Pump at two more Gyarados, pushing them away.

...*She's right.* Tears slide down the fox's cheeks, everything feeling as though they no longer exist. Ramon's paws stroke the grass, his heart beating at a slow pace. *I shouldn't have used my Illusion.* Images of him transforming into a Wishiwashi pop into his head. *I have no reason to.* Images of him transforming into a Gyarados pop into his head. *Even though I did it to convince the leaders on ending the war, I...ultimately made things worse.*

"L..." Coleo's voice vaguely rings through Ramon's mind.

I should've said no. I should've let the war sit by and solve itself. I should've... Images of him being saved by the two teens from Travis appear in his mind. *...not met anyone.* Muffle sounds of the fox crying emanate the void.

I'm a Zorua. A Zoroark.

"La...!" Coleo's voice rings stronger.

I'm a monster from the start...Maybe that's why I ate the dead Alomomola. Maybe that's why Nomar and I went out hunting before I was taken away. Maybe that's why I couldn't remember my past with the Institute: I... Images of Travis scolding him in Gloomy Woods appear in his mind. *I've ruined the Prospective Institute with my Illusion! I wanted to forget about it, and move on like none of it happened! Maybe that's why I have amnesia because I purposefully gave myself one to forget about my unforgivable deeds, exactly what a Zoroark would d—*

"LAD! MOOOOOOOOOVE!"

Coleo's voice booms through Ramon, the Zoroark witnessing an incoming Gyarados' Crunch. Ramon rolls over, the Gyarados ramming into the ground and groaning.

"...Ugh." Ramon plants his paw on his forehead, tears streaming down like crazy.

Coleo sighs heavily, looking down at the somber state the fox is in. He frowns, glaring towards Aquatus. "LASS!"

Aquatus blinks, tossing a Gyarados into the lake. She stares at Ramon. "You don't sound like that a moment ago?"

"That's cuz of the lad o' top of the Zoroark!" Coleo exposes himself from the red hair, Aquatus quirks her brow.

"Who are you?" The School pushes a Gyarados away from her.

"Virtuous and Behemoth's friend, Coleo. He's *not* the one who thought of the idea: His friends did, and I followed throu' so that we could end the war!"

Aquatus tilts her head. "You're the leaders' friend? And this Illusion scheme exists to end the war?" She shakes her head. "I found it too hard to believe after knowing what that Zoroark has done. Perhaps you COULD be a Zoroark, too."

"Lass—" Coleo grips his setae. "Even *if* that is the case, Lycus lied about why Ramon used his Illusion! The lad wanted to convin' me friends to end the war while not getting caught."

Aquatus dodges one Hydro Pump before snarling. “Why couldn’t you do it yourselves, then!? Why *toy* with our emotions by having your friend pretending to be like us!?”

“BECAUSE VIRTUOUS AND BEHEMOTH WOULD *NOT* LISTEN, LASS! I TRIED!” Coleo tears rain down his cheeks, the storm accelerating it. “I grew up with those two addles with me trainer. I tried tellin’ them not to fight over who is the strongest! I tried tellin’ them not to take it too far, and yet the more they fought, the more serious it got. And now...it has gotten so bad, *both* of ye kinds are involved.”

Aquatus lowers her glare, slowly turning into concern. “Are...you telling the truth?”

Coleo nods. “Take a look at our faces, lass: We are both hurt, and want this man-o-war to end.” He points at himself and then at Ramon, who continues to tear up. The fox looks at Aquatus, his lips quivering. Aquatus stares at them for what feels like an hour, her mind wandering. “I... wished there was a way I could prove to ye.”

“...” Before Aquatus can say anything—

“AAAAH!!!”

Quintin’s screams catch their attention. They turn towards him: The Water Gem Gyarados is swimming around in panics, dodging and ducking each menacing stream from several Wishiwashis.

Aquatus gasps. “Quintin!” She gnashes her teeth, shaking her head. “Great: Now I’m stuck!”

Coleo raises his brow. “What do ye mean?”

Aquatus blinks before zooming behind Ramon, smacking two Gyarados away with Aqua Tail. “Quintin’s my friend, and he’s in trouble! But I’m also by Virtuous’ side in this war. If I go help him: Virtuous and others will see me as a backstabber.” She whimpers, panic rising within. “What should I do? Keep my loyalty or go help Quintin?”

Ramon snuffles, wiping away some tears. “A-Aquatus...” He stands, trembling. Aquatus looks at the fox. “I...I know that I’ve been disguising as you and Quintin’s friend throughout these past two days. But my feelings during those disguises were absolutely genuine, even if I had to lie about my origins.” Snuffles. “I *never* intended to harm anyone like this, contrary to what Lycus had you thinking.” He shakes his head. “Like Coleo said, I had no choice but to be under those disguises. I needed enough time to convince the two leaders to end the war...But—” he sighs, another tear sliding. “It doesn’t excuse myself for pretending to be someone I am not, despite my genuine feelings. And...I am truly sorry for doing that to you two.”

Tears cloud the lady Wishiwashi’s vision. “And you expect me to forgive you? Just like that?”

"No. I don't." Ramon looks down at his right paw, the mourning scar mocking him. "I frankly deserve no forgiveness..." *No Zoroarks such as myself do.*

"Ramon, lad..." Coleo looks down.

"I see..." Aquatus shakes her head, eyeing Quintin from afar. "Even after being told all of this, it doesn't help me decide what I should do about Quintin. I just...*don't* know."

"Aquatus..." Ramon slowly smiles. "I've known you enough to know that's not true: Deep down, you know which decision is truly right for *you*."

Aquatus gazes at Ramon for a brief moment, memories of her chatting with his Wishiwashi self sprinkling throughout: Her going over everything wrong with the war with him, her being stressed out by it all. And to top it off, yesterday's time hanging out with Quintin shows up in her mind. The Wishiwashi's tears stream down her cheeks, nodding.

"You're right." She looks at Quintin, several Gyarados dashing towards her and Ramon. She encases herself in white auras, glaring. "I know what I should do. Thank you, Ramon."

Without a second thought, the School zooms towards the Gyarados and pushes them out of the way, groaning from Double-Edge's recoil. Coleo looks at the fox, smiling. "Nice jo' on givin' her the good ol' pep talk, matey."

Ramon looks away in melancholy, stroking his arm. "...I guess so." *Not like it changes the kind of species I am, anyways.* Then he and Coleo return back to the others, dodging any Water moves along the way.

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Quintin whimpers, surrounded by three Wishiwashis. He covers himself. "W-We can talk this out, man. We don't have to fight, ya know?"

"We don't talk to inferiors," one of the Wishiwashis states as he and the others prepare their Hydro Pumps. Quintin gulps. "Now peri—ACK!" He's shoved by Aquatus, flying from her Double-Edge.

Before the others can react, Aquatus blasts the first with her Hydro Pump and slaps the second with her Aqua Tail, knocking them away. The Water Gem Gyarados looks at the Mystic Water Wishiwashi, gasping while widening his eyes with glee. "Aquatus!" He sighs in relief. "Man am I glad that you helped me!"

Her aquatic auras fade, the large fish nodding. "I'm glad I got here in time, too." She jolts her attention towards Quintin, squinting. "You aren't supposed to be out here, by the way! It's unsafe."

Quintin laughs nervously, scratching his head with his tail. “Y-Yeah, I know. I just wanted to bring my bro his crown, that’s all.” His head lowers. “Sorry.”

Aquatus lowers her glares, sighing. “It’s fine.” She pats the serpentine by the side. “Are you hurt in any way?”

Quintin stares off. “Besides what ‘Sam’ did to me, I’m alright...”

Aquatus looks at Ramon and the others. “...About that—”

“TRAITOR!”

Aquatus and Quintin snap their attention towards five Wishiwashis ahead, all summoning their Aqua Tails.

The lead Wishiwashi in front of the four says, “How *dare* you save a low-life, despicable Gyarados!? You fend! You absolute backstabbing fend!” She snarls. “You’re a traitor to all of Wishiwashis!”

Aquatus’ necklace shifts , the fish frowning at the five. She huffs. “I’m a traitor to our *war*, not to our *kind*!” She shrouds her tailfins in blue energy, looking at Quintin and smirking. “Stay close behind me at all costs. I’ll explain the ‘Larry’ and ‘Sam’ situation while protecting you, okay?” Quintin doesn’t say anything else, giving the School a shy nod.

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Ramon and his friends are regrouped by this point, becoming more and more exhaustive: Courtney and Sylock block the many Aqua Tails with their swords, Justin and Ada push some Gyarados away with Mystical Projectiles, and Mesmeren and Roan clash their moves with the aquatic soldiers’. Ramon dodges a Wishiwashi’s Hydro Pump before firing his Dark Pulse , pushing him back. One Gyarados slams his tail besides Justin, the teen jumping away.

“Shit, forget this!” Justin grunts, glancing at Ada. “Ada, shield again!”

“Right! AGH!” Ada grunts as well before the two lift their arms up, casting a huge shield around themselves and others. The combined Mystical Shield endures the Wishiwashis and Gyarados’ attacks, the aquatic soldiers hammering it.

“Ugh...” Ada squints, grinding her teeth, keeping her arms up.

Bang, another hits the shield.

“Ugh!” Justin pants, keeping his arms up.

BANG!

Justin and Ada's eyes stretch.

"AAAH!" the two scream in agony, purple blood spilling out of their mouths, splattering across the shield. Everyone eyes the teens, dread radiating throughout: Mesmeren trembling like crazy, Sylock and Courtney gripping their hilts, and Roan falling on his behind.

The Axew grips the grass, focusing on the blood dripping the teens' lips. "O-Oh god!"

Justin looks at the group behind him, his dark circles emanating his grim state. "B-Bad news, fams..." Coughs. "That was our last useth of the shield."

"Last useth?" Coleo says.

"W-We...can only use—AGH, our Mystical Shield three times during a figh—AAH" Ada screams, coughing out more blood. Tears descend her cheeks. "God, this hurts!"

Justin widens his eyes at the girl, gritting his teeth. "Hang in there, Ada! AAAH!" He screams as well, spitting his blood on the ground. "Screw this stupid Weakener, man!"

Ramon whimpers, lowering his ears. "Ada! Justin!" he shouts.

Roan puts his hands against his head, the teens screaming and coughing nonstop as the aquatic soldiers ram their shield. "Wh-What should we do!?" the Axew questions. "Once this shield is down, those Gyarados and Wishiwashis will kill us all!" He whines, tears streaming down his cheeks. "We're all feeling too weak to handle them! I-I don't want to die! Not when I haven't found Simon yet!"

Courtney snaps her fingers. "This dang Weakener screwin' with us and all! We would've handled this fight better if it ain't for it."

Coleo puts his setae under his chin, pondering thoughts. *Think, lad. We got time.* He soon sees the shield fading, panic seeping. *NO, WE DO NOT HAV' TIME! WHAT DO WE DO!?* He looks behind him, staring up at Behemoth and Virtuous slashing each other. *Hmm...* He then turns towards Mesmeren, who is mortified by everything going on. *Okay, maybe she may help!* "Lass!"

Mesmeren doesn't hear him, her hands pinning against her chest.

"LASS!" Coleo screams. "I NEED YE TO USE YER CONFUSION AND TOSS ME, NOW!"

Mesmeren still doesn't listen: Trapped inside of her panicky state that's spreading nothing but hopelessness. Her focus is no longer on the teens, rather it's on the many Gyarados and Wishiwashis banging the shield. *We're going to die*. Tears falling, body quaking, eyes begging to scream. The shield fades further as the teens scream, the Drowzee whimpering.

Coleo strokes the Zoroark's hair, gritting his teeth. *HOLY BARBARACLE, SHE DEEP IN FEAR!*

"I—" Ada wails. "I CAN'T HOLD ON MUCH LONGER!" She gasps before falling to the ground, the shield shifting from purple and blue to just *blue*.

"ADAAAAA!!!" Justin screeches, gasping as well. He falls after her, the two landing next to each other, barely moving while panting.

The shield is gone.

Ramon's paws shake, the fox gasping. "No..."

Several Gyarados and Wishiwashis come ushering towards the group, their tails and maws at the ready. Courtney grits her teeth. *Crap crap crap crap—*

"AAAAAAH!!!" Mesmeren screams loudly and covers herself, petrification taking over.

"..." Everything feels as though it's in slow motion, Ramon eyeing the Drowzee. He freezes momentarily before gnashing his teeth, snarling. "NO!" he shouts, shadowy auras flourishing throughout him. He leaps in front of Mesmeren instantly.

"WHOA!" Coleo shouts, clinging on.

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The tapir's ears flicker to something eerie yet fuse-like. "Hmm..?" Her eyes open, gasping. "Whoa..."

Courtney blinks before groaning, rubbing her head and looking up. "...What in the..." Courtney pauses, gazing at something shrouding over the group.

Sylock raises his brow. *What...am I looking at?* he thinks, he and Roan gazing up, shocked and mesmerized.

"Shiver me timbers, lad." Coleo tilts his head, being engulfed in shadow energies.

Justin and Ada groan, the two slowly look behind them. "It's...dark all of the sudden." Justin pants, blinking at something in front of him. "...Ada."

“...Yes?”

“What...is going on with Ramon?” Justin points, everyone looking.

Many shadowy arms sprout out of the Zoroark’s back, surrounding the group in a large shield. Everyone can vaguely see the aquatic soldiers either hitting the shield or gazing at it in bewilderment.

The group keeps their focus on the fox, Ada staring in intrigue. “I...have no clue,” Ada answers to the boy.

Ramon turns around, staring at the group with black scleras and red irises. He lifts his right paw, the scar forming a dark spot. Then a shadowy hand leaps out, the fox jumps a little. *J-Jeez!* A whole arm follows afterwards, extending itself. The hand grips the air, Ramon staring up in awe.

Shadow Arch, a voice says in Ramon’s mind, raspiness emanating.

Hmm? Did you say that, Nomar? Ramon thinks, blinking.

Say what? Nomar asks.

...Huh.

Roan holds his hands together. “So...cool!” He smiles. “How are you doing this, Ramon sir? Your eyes even have a different look, too!”

Ramon shakes his head. “I have no clue. This just...suddenly happened after seeing you all get hurt.”

Courtney puts his hand beneath her chin, thinking. “Hmm...” She gasps and slams her hand onto her palm. “You’re using yer Rune!”

“What?” Ramon blinks, eyeing up and down at his dark arms. “How so?” He suddenly coughs black blood onto his right paw, wincing.

The rabbit raises her brow at the blood’s color. “Yeah...That’s a sign of you using your Rune right there.”

“R-Right.”

Courtney tilts her head. “Say, why does your blood lo—”

“Sorry to cut ye out, but I need Ramon to do somethin’ for me!” Coleo says, Ramon looking up the leaning Blipbug. “I need ye to toss me towards Virtuous and Behemoth! It’s the only way I can grab the two addle’s attention.” Whimpers. “Please.”

Ramon shoots his gaze at the two leaders, Virtuous and Behemoth ramming their heads against each other before Behemoth charges a yellow-orange beam. He lays his paw underneath his chin, his ears flickering to the Hyper Beam. “I’m...not sure.”

“How?”

The fox glances up at his shadow arm. “This is my first time using my Rune, so I have no clue if this...*shadow hand* would consume you if it touches you.” He whimpers.

Coleo shrugs. “I mean, I am on top of ye while ye are covered in this...” The Blipbug eyes around. “Dark thing or somethin’. I feel fine and unharmed, lad.”

“Hmm...”

“Look, we do not have much time. I don’t want me two pals killing themselves.” Coleo holds his setae together. “Please. Just trust me in this plan.”

“...What if it fails, much like with the Illusion plan? What if I don’t throw you properly? I—”

“*Believe* in yourself that you can throw me, lad.” The Blipbug smiles down. “If the plan fails, then we can think of another one. We got this.”

Ramon looks at Coleo for a moment, lips sealed. He then nods. “Okay.” He glances at his shadow arm, the hand wiggling its fingers briefly before lurching towards Coleo. It swirls around the bug, gripping him with caution. “I think I can open the shield enough to where I throw you, but not have the Gyarados and Wishiwashis enter inside.”

“Got it.” Coleo frowns at the two Water leaders above.

The shield exposes an opening, showing Behemoth and Virtuous afar. Ramon brings the hand towards him, his face meeting Coleo’s. “Are you ready?”

Coleo nods. “As ready as any lad can be, argh.”

“Alright then.” Ramon glares at the leaders, his hand jolting back. “Here goes nothing!” The hand jets forward, flinging Coleo towards the opening.

“AAAAAAH!” The Blipbug exits the hole, zooming forward as he flips. The entrance closes afterwards. *THE LAD THREW HARDER THAN I EXPECTED!* He bypasses the soldiers, some stopping their brawls to gaze at the screaming bug.

Behemoth forms icy auras around his maw, snarling. "Time to end this shi—" something pins against his face, the Gyarados yelping. "What the!?" He blinks and looks at his snout, gasping at the Blipbug with a brown strap-on. "Coleo!?"

"Argh..." Coleo rubs the side of his head. "Behe—" Virtuous rams against Behemoth's belly with Double-Edge, the Blipbug bouncing off. "AAAAAH!"

Ramon and the others spike up with worries, staring at their fallen insect friend.

"COLEO!" they scream.

Virtuous blinks. "Coleo? What in the world are those traitors talking about?"

Behemoth pushes Virtuous away. "YO, GET THE FUCK OFF FROM ME: I JUST SAW COLEO OVER THERE!" He points at the insect, Coleo crashing right into the lake. Behemoth and Virtuous gnash their teeth, the Gyarados nudging his tail against his head. "OH SHIT, NO!"

The two leaders roar as loud as an airplane, the armies pausing their attacks midway. Even those who are hitting Ramon's shield have come to a halt, eyeing Virtuous and Behemoth.

"My Wishis, stop fighting! Something big has happened!" Virtuous claims.

Aquatus lowers her guard, looking at the leaders in confusion alongside Quintin. "What?" the two say.

Ramon keeps the shield up, everyone having a sharp eye on the leaders. Virtuous and Behemoth dive after Coleo, a huge splash surfacing.

Silence.

Everyone gazes at the spot, commotion flourishing throughout. Eventually, the kings hop out, placing Coleo in front of Ramon and his friends. The Blipbug coughs out, gasping.

"Blimey! Ack!" Coleo shouts, panting. "I—Argh, almost died!"

Virtuous and Behemoth gaze down at Coleo, the two sighing in relief. "I'm at least glad you didn't, my beloved bug," Virtuous states. Everyone looks at the three, the two armies settling with more perplexion. "It's been so long since we've last seen you, Coleo. Where have you been?" The King's Rock Wishiwashi leans closer with anxiousness.

"Yeah, man. Haven't heard of ya in a long while," Behemoth agrees.

Justin blinks several times. "...Yo, what are those two leaders sayin' again?" he asks, eyeing Roan. "Can't understand them cuz of roaring and...whining sounds???" He scratches the side of his head.

Roan nods. "No problem, Justin! I can translate what these Nativus are saying."

"Thanks, fam."

As Roan guides Justin, Coleo glares at the two leaders, dark circles displaying his fury. "Ye two...I was at the cabin the whole time." He tilts his head towards the far brown cabin, groaning. "Hoping ye two wou—"

"Well I'm satisfied to hear that, Coleo!" Virtuous glares at Behemoth. "*Epecially* since this numbskull here almost got you killed."

Behemoth raises his brow, snarling. "The *HELL* do you mean by that!? YOU WERE THE ONE WHO HIT ME WHILE HE WAS ON MY FACE!"

Virtuous leans closer, summoning blue energies around his fins. "Like I was supposed to know he was there! If you knew he was, you could've prevented his near death more properly!"

Behemoth's face is against Virtuous', his tail shrouding in blue auras. "He deadass landed on my face. Out of nowhere."

Virtuous snarls. "When will you ever admit that you're wrong!?"

Behemoth snarls back. "When will YOU ever admit that you're wrong!?"

Coleo slams his setae on the ground. "ENOUGH!" The two leaders glance at the bug. "YE TWO ARE *BOTH* WRONG!"