

<B>Team Enterprise Begins</B>

<B>Part 5</B>

The next morning, Ace, Ben and Pepper were making their way through Treasure Town on their way towards the Wigglytuff Guild. As soon as the trio finished the exhausting climb up the steps to the guild entrance; which consisted of a small structure in the shape of a Wigglytuff's head with a metal gate blocking the opening in the front; Ace turned to Pepper and asked dryly, "Okay, so... now what?"

"Um... I think we're supposed to stand up on that grate over there, so the sentry at the bottom can identify our footprints," Pepper shrugged, gesturing with a vine towards what appeared to be a deep, round hole in the ground covered with a grate made of crisscrossed bamboo sticks located directly between the staircase and the main entrance.

"<I>That's</I> their security system? <I>Really</I>?" Ace scoffed. "I know you told me this region was old fashioned, but I didn't know it was <I>that</I> primitive... Do they have vehicles with holes in the bottom that you drive with your feet, too?"

Pepper rolled her eyes in annoyance. "Just get on the grate..."

With a conceding sigh, Ace slowly stepped forward onto the crisscross-bamboo-covered hole. After a moment, the Pikachu heard two loud voices from down below.

"Footprint detected! Footprint detected!"

"Who's FOOTPRINT?"

"The footprint is Pikachu's!"

In response to this, Ace called down into the hole in a loud, snarky tone, "Hi, my name's 'Ace' by the way. Can you honestly not come up with a better visitor identification system than this? Like I.D. cards, or a secret code phrase or something? I mean, even just the equivalent of an old fashioned submarine scope! All you need is two mirrors and a hollow pipe bent ninety degrees at both ends! Surely you must be at least technologically advanced enough-"

Pepper cleared her throat loudly to interrupt, "We're just a few new residents of Treasure Town. I'm Pepper, and these are my friends, Ace and Ben. We're here to register for an exploration team. May we please come in?"

After a moment the louder of the two voices called up from the hole, "The rest of you get up on the grate, and then you may ENTER!"

As soon as both Pepper and Ben were identified by the sentries, the metal gate in the front of the Wigglytuff head shaped structure creaked as it slowly rose open, allowing the trio entrance into the underground facility via the wooden ladder that lead down another hole inside. Wasting no time, the three Pokemon promptly made their way inside the structure in single file, before one by one descending the ladder down into the guild.

Reaching the bottom step, the group immediately noticed a Chatot hopping towards them. “Welcome to Guildmaster Wigglytuff’s exploration team guild!” the Chatot squawked in a nasally male voice. “I’m Chatot, the Guildmaster’s head of intelligence, and I’ll be your guide through the process of forming an exploration team. Now, if you’ll just follow me, I’ll bring you to the Guildmaster to begin your registration.”

Exchanging a glance and nod with each other, Ace, Ben and Pepper promptly followed the flying type to the chambers of the Pokemon in charge of the guild. The group soon came to a large wooden door with a symbol of some kind painted on it, which Chatot pushed it open, to reveal behind it a large, stone-walled room decorated with a rectangular red carpet in the center and lit with a pair of tinder-torch-stands on either side of what looked like a wooden throne. Noticing the male Wigglytuff sitting on the throne, who appeared to be snoring despite his eyes being open, Pepper pointed a vine towards him, and inquired, “Um... is he... <I>sleeping</I>?”

Noticing this as well, Chatot gave the Chikorita a sheepish chuckle and shrug, before calling out loudly “Guildmaster? Guildmaster?! GUILDMASTER!!”

“Hiyah!” the Wigglytuff suddenly greeted in a ditsy, sing-song tone, long ears perking up. “So, you three want to start an exploration team, am I right?”

Just as Pepper was about to open her mouth to speak, Chatot responded for her excitedly, “That’s correct, Guildmaster! That makes six new guild recruits in two days! That’s a record even for this guild!”

“<I>Six</I>...?” Pepper pondered out loud, curious. “Who were the other thr-”

However she was cut off again as Chatot turned to the trio and said, “Now, to begin your registration to the guild-”

“Wh-wh-whoa, hold on,” Ace interrupted, “I’m not registering for anything until I see the fine print.”

“Fine print? What do you mean by ‘<I>fine print</I>’?” Chatot inquired, tilting his musical-note-shaped head.

“I mean contracts. Job descriptions,” Ace explained. “Surely you must have some sort of paperwork documents listing out all the rules and fine details involved in joining this ‘<I>guild</I>’ of yours.”

“Why, of course, friendly friends!” Wigglytuff cheered, “Just gimme a sec to find the papers and you can read them as much as you like!”

As the bubbly Guildmaster turned around and began digging around inside a large chest next to his seat, Chatot squawked in protest, “B-but Guildmaster! This is blatantly against protocol!”

“Oh, nonsense, Chatot!” Wigglytuff dismissed nonchalantly as he retrieved a small bundle of papers from the chest and blew the dust off it before handing it to Ace. “Everyone should be allowed to know what sort of fun things they get to do before they do it! It makes sure everyone gets to have the most fun!”

After scanning his eyes over the pages for a moment, Ace read aloud with a cocky lopsided smirk, “<I>All Pokemon who join the guild as apprentices are subject to the rule that ninety-percent of all revenue earned from mission rewards will go to the guild. This rule can be bypassed, however, if the individual or team in question registers as an independent exploration party from the guild, so long as they have their own team base. In such case, said individual or team may still make use of the guild’s job and outlaw notice boards, without being subject to any of the guild’s other regimens.</I>”

After a long, tense pause, Chatot squaked, “Hold on just a minute! You forgot one detail! In order to officially graduate as an individual exploration team, you must first prove your skills by passing the guild graduation exam!”

“Okay, look, ‘<I>Toucan Spam</I>’,” Ace scoffed, “I once passed a test that was designed to be unbeatable. I’m pretty sure I can handle anything you and this quaint little guild can throw at me.”

“That will be determined once you take the exam.” Chatot huffed, unimpressed.

“Alright, if you want to see my skills, why don’t I show them to you right now?” Ace challenged confidently with another lopsided smirk. “Hit me. I dare you.”

“Wait-WHAT?! You want to fight in here?!” Chatot squawked.

“Ace, this is crazy!” Pepper exclaimed, equally shocked. “Why can’t we just let them set up the exam for us the proper way?!” Turning to Chatot, the Chikorita apologized, “Please, you have to excuse my friend... He’s just insa-I mean, not from around here...”

“Hey, why can’t the friendly friend Pikachu take the exam here?” Wigglytuff suddenly interjected, “Why do something later that you can do right now? Am I right? Besides, watching him put on a fancy show for us could be so much fun!”

“Guildmaster, you can’t honestly be serious!” Chatot objected, aghast. “If you fight in here you’ll tear the place apart!”

“Oh, silly Chatot! I never said <I>I</I> would be fighting him!” Wigglytuff informed with a dopey smile.

“Wha-Guildmaster, you don’t mean...!” Chatot squawked in disbelief.

With a nod, Wigglytuff affirmed, “Why of course I do, Chatot! They’re your rules. It only makes sense that you be the one enforce the, am I right?”

After a long moment of hesitation, Chatot conceded, “...Fine. I’ll do it.”

“Guys, I don’t know if this is such a good idea...” Pepper warned uncomfortably.

“Now don’t you worry, I’ll try not to rough him up too much,” Chatot assured, as he began flexing his wings in preparation for combat.

"I'm not worried about him, I'm worried about yo-" Pepper never got the chance to finish her sentence as Chatot suddenly lunged at Ace with an attack, only to in a mere split-second be grabbed by the wing and flipped over onto his back down hard on the floor. "Oh my Arceus!! Ace, STOP!!" Pepper shrieked upon seeing this display.

Helping the parrot-Pokemon back to his feet, Ace asked, "Hey, you alright? Maybe I did go a little too hard..."

"Hey...don't worry about me, coach... A little cup of tea and I'll be back on the field in no time..." Chatot stammered in a daze, staggering on the spot like a drunk.

"Well, I think I've seen enough! Friendly friends, you seem more than strong enough to start your own exploration team!" Wigglytuff commended.

"No argument here..." Chatot slurred, toppling over onto his backside once again.

"So, friendly friends! Have you decided on a team name yet?" Wigglytuff then asked.

"No, come to think of it, I haven't..." Pepper admitted.

"I've thought of one," Ace proclaimed, "And I've even come up with a motto for us, too. '<I>Team Enterprise! To...boldly-go-where...no-Pokemon-has-gone...before!</I>'"

Raising an eyebrow, Ben began to point out dryly, "Ace, you do realize that's-" However, the Lucario was silenced by a subtle nudge in the leg from his human-turned-Pikachu comrade.

"Team Enterprise? That sounds like a great name!" Wigglytuff cheered, as he began to inhale a large breath. "Registration complete! Yoom..."

Sensing something, Ben extended a paw outward, causing a transparent-red, dome-shaped Detect-barrier to materialize in front of him, Ace, Pepper and Chatot.

"...TAAAAAHHH!!!"

The four Pokemon behind the barrier covered their ears and braced themselves as the room shook violently from the immense power of the Wigglytuff Guildmaster's Hyper Voice. As soon as the loud noise finally died down, and Ben's Detect shield faded, Wigglytuff declared joyfully, "Congratulations, Team Enterprise! You are now an official exploration team!"

Shaking herself back to her senses, Pepper remarked, "Wow... okay... I guess that wasn't so bad... Well guys, it looks like our new careers as an exploration team have just begun!"