

POKÉMON: TALES OF THE DRAGON WHISPERER

CHAPTER 1

A Shadow over Poni



The sun peered over the horizon, reflecting its light on the calm, serene waves as the orange sky greeted Seafolk Village with a new day. The humble people of this boating town began their routines for the day, always treating each other like family, as is the Alolan way. Fishermen sailing to open sea, travellers heading to Exeggutor Island for a day in the sun, and trainers going about their day, ready for the adventures ahead.

As one beam of sunlight entered the window of a Gyarados-shaped boat home, peeking into a room packed with tools, posters portraying Raihan and Lance, and memorabilia resembling the likes of several Dragon-type Pokémon, a young man's small, sharp, dark

eyes slowly began to open. Those eyes belonged to a tan, youthful face... which was suddenly licked by a large tongue.

The clanging, chiming sound of a Kommo-o's scales echoed in the room, as the young man laughed with surprise, struggling to keep the enormous beast off of him, panting and licking like an overjoyed Growlithe. "H-Hey! Mo-o!", cried out the young man in between chuckles, practically pushing away the Dragon/Fighting type's jaws away from the playful beast. "Come on, we gotta get movin'! No work can get done on an empty stomach!" With an understanding growl, Mo-o, as that was the scaly Pokémon's — admittedly not very original — nickname, got off his partner's bed.

The young man in question, well built for his age, changed from his sleeping robe, similar to a kimono of sorts, and donned a traditional outfit adorned with scales from the whole Jangmo-o line. Tightening the sandals just right before donning a stylish poncho, the boy was almost ready for the day. He turned to face his partner for a moment. "Don't forget yer band, friend", he said, in a warm tone. Mo-o smiled with his huge grin, full of teeth, and stumbled, with light stomps, to the room's entrance. Hung over the door were two yellow bands, marked with a red circle in the middle. The dragon took one of them and wore it over his arm, proudly staring at it as the young man took the second one, fastening it over his forehead. "Now we're ready for the day."

Rushing downstairs, the scale-clad youngster made his way to the living room down the hall. The Kommo-o had to be a little more careful not to crack the floorboards. "Good thing we don't have next-door neighbours, Koa", remarked an older, yet still warm, female voice, "otherwise they'd have a field day with that stomping!" "Ma!", exclaimed Koa with a smile. "Breakfast?" "It's in the works, dear," answered Koa's mother, outfitted with an inviting pink kimono. Koa's mother was a little aged, but her smile was as steady as the sash that kept her hair up. "Go get your father for us, will you?" With a nod, Koa and Mo-o walked to the next room.

Koa knocked with some hesitation, afraid to make any excessive noise. After the first knock, a stern, tall man in his mid forties with a long, sharp, downwards-spiked moustache stepped out, dressed in a stellar kimono outfitted with stark black and white tones reminiscent of another land and another time. Twin dragons battled in his robe. "I'm already up, son," explained the man with a grumble.

Now all together, Koa's mother placed a few bowls of fruit on the table. After sharing a common prayer to the Tapus, Koa began to dig in, offering a piece or two to Mo-o, who stood beside his seat at the table. The elder wasn't too impressed with this.

"Koa, have some table manners, will you? And stop bringing your dragon to the table!" Declared Koa's father, with a disappointed tone. Koa was at a loss for words, visibly shrinking in his chair as he brought his body into itself. Mo-o, who was happily munching on a berry, seemed unaware of this dilemma. Koa took a deep breath. "Head back to my room for now. I'll return soon enough." Koa's tone started to sound like his father as he took in a little formality. Mo-o growled with disappointment, his scales chiming in a sad note as he walked off.

The young man's father continued, "Our dragons are the centre of our lives, boy. But do not let our bonds with them weaken your composure." He cleared his throat as he neatly picked out the next berry, peeling it carefully with diligence.

"Yes, father", said Koa, showing some mild discontent.

"Cut him some slack, dear," intervened Koa's mother, "Mo-o is another member of the family at this point. Don't you see how Koa makes all his Pokémon friends wear our crest?" Her husband simply scoffed, as Koa himself quieted his antics down. Hearing no response, she continued. "Our son has been working very hard, and you know about his little "venture"..."

The moustached man cleared his throat after wiping his mouth from berry juice. "That silly idea of setting up a trial in the Canyon?" His gaze turned to Koa. "Son, I've told you many times that you should drop it. There's never been a trial here in Poni other than the Kahuna's own Grand Trial. The Totem tests trialgoers himself. There's no need for what they have in the other islands." Koa's hands shook on the table slightly as he tightened his fists.

"But father," Koa retorted, "Times have changed! After what happened three years ago, with the founding of the League and our champion Elio leaving for Ultra Space, the Island Challenge is more popular than ever! Shouldn't someone — a local, someone prepared, knowledgeable and who loves Poni and her wonders — show them the way?"

Koa's father shook his head. "It's never happened before, so why should that happen now? Just stick to your tours, boy. Soon enough, we'll send you off to Unova anyway. There's no need for you to squander your talents here. There's nothing even here! We don't even have a power grid in Poni, anyway. We're lucky that our home runs on Darumaka droppings, or we'd have nothing."

The prospect of being sent away to a sterile, concrete jungle across the sea, with dirty air, masses of strangers, and an oppressive feeling of constant competition disgusted Koa. Without adding another word, Koa stood up, angrily taking the last fruit in his bowl with him. "Then fine," he replied coldly. "I'm leaving. Take care." The young man stormed off back to his room to grab his things before heading out. Koa's mother raised a finger to speak, but her son had already left the table. She stared daggers into her husband's eyes, mumbling under her breath.

"That's not even decided yet...!"

As Koa made his way through the village, with the cheerful Mo-o at his side, feelings of anger and inadequacy bubbled up from the inside. His father's expectations were always too much. Whatever Koa dreamed of just wasn't important. The stoic, successful Gym Leader his father saw in him... just wasn't there. Koa preferred being out in nature, taking care of the Pokémon and people of the wilderness. Fresh wind in his face, fertile earth under his sandals. In what universe could he ever live his life in a big Unovan city, with dirty air, annoying crowds and five skyscrapers for every tree? That was inconceivable! For now, all that Koa could do was dream on his own. But he wasn't alone.

The majestic cliffs and rock formations of the Vast Poni Canyon rose over Koa's eyes as he and his partner crossed the Poni Path. Its striped mountains greeted the two of them as a gentle breeze swept past Koa's face, making his Mudbray tail float in the wind slightly, as well as making Mo-o's scales chime. The scales made a little tune, which calmed down Koa to a degree. They were home.

"And here we have the Altar of the Sunne," Koa explained, surrounded by a small crew of tourists from all over the world. The young man made his coin by showing tourists around the Canyon, and now they were at the final stop: an inside look at the Altar of the Sunne. Many onlookers stood in awe of the sacred site. Some were more stylish than others. Photos were taken, and gasps of surprise were had.

Koa proceeded, "Here, Alola's most important ritual takes place in times of crisis. This is a sacred place. You can watch from afar, but after the incident from three years ago, only in emergencies can one climb the stairs."

A tourist expressed disappointment. "What the hell, man!? I came all the way to this stupid island to take a picture up there!", exclaimed a sleazy, mid-20s influencer type with sun shades and a backwards cap.

Koa sighed, knowing someone like this wouldn't understand, or at the very least respect, the idea of sanctity. He deepened his voice and tightened his accent to try and seem a little more imposing; much like his father.

"Please understand, sir — three years ago, an Ultra Wormhole was opened here. This is for your own good —" The tourist interrupted Koa by going up the stairs, as he started recording for social media with a selfie stick while mumbling about how he goes wherever he wants.

Koa gave Mo-o a glance, and the Dragon/Fighting type sprung into action, jumping towards the stairs and landing with a thud in front of the man, growling as the dragon's scales clanged with an intimidating rattle. "GAH!!", shouted the influencer, "I'm being attacked by the tour guide's pet dragon! Wait until my lawyers hear about this!"

The influencer, still recording, ran off, leaving the group. Mo-o was confused, as he certainly didn't even lay a claw on the man. "It's alright, Mo-o," shouted Koa from his spot at the group, "His loss. Let's continue." With an understanding growl, the Kommo-o returned to his partner's side. Some of the tourists were surprised, some clapped for Koa and Mo-o, and one or two tourists went back home. An older woman in a kimono, accompanied by her husband, stepped up.

"You did well, child. I would not be able to stand my home's relics being disrespected either."

With awe in his eyes, Koa asked, "Is that so? May I... ask where you come from, ma'am?" The woman smiled.

"Celestic Town, in Sinnoh. You'd love it there." Koa was overjoyed! So many questions flooded his mind about Sinnoh's creation myths — but he was the tour guide today, not her.

The dragon whisperer kept it to himself, for now, as he proceeded with the tour for those who chose to stay.

The hours went by. The sun now patiently waited over a blue sky, clear of clouds. Wingull and Pikipék flocks filled the heavens with jolly air. As for Koa? Now finished with his first shift for the day, the young man parkoured through the rocky cliffs and tree branches, getting his daily workout in before lunch. Mo-o followed close behind with big jumps, as he was less dexterous, but not the less mobile for it. Soon, the two inseparable partners made it out of the Canyon and returned to Seafolk Village.

As they both stood in front of the Floating Restaurant's front door, Koa produced Mo-o's Poké Ball from his pouch, making the Dragon/Fighting type pout in protest. He whined, begging his partner not to put him back in. Koa chuckled, but asserted himself. "Mo-o... yer a big guy! The biggest — you'd scare the patrons. Can'tcha take at least half an hour in the ball?" As if to bargain, the Kommo-o's tail rattled, making sad chimes. Koa felt some pity, but kept reasoning for his stance anyway.

"It'll be quick, 'kay? We'll be back together in a jiffy — heck, you ain't even leavin' my side! Come on, I'll getcha somethin' tasty after. Sounds good?" This convinced Mo-o, who roared excitedly at the thought of getting a yummy snack. Finally, Koa pressed the button, and the enormous Kommo-o returned to its Poké Ball in a flash of energy.

The front door's bell chimed as the young man walked in. People were talking and eating, yet the parlour's energy was soothing. It didn't feel crowded. Eating at the Floating Restaurant felt like an extended family visit to Koa, even if he ate by himself most times. The owner looked over from his spot.

"Alola and welcome to the Floating Restaurant! May I..." The owner of the food parlour, a large, jolly sailor in his forties, took a second to realise who had come in, probably because he took his job so seriously that even the greeting was an involuntary process. "Koa! It's always great seeing you here. What can I get you?"

Koa smiled, relaxing his tired expression after the incident from before. He was a regular, so the owner was well-acquainted with him. As he sat down at his favourite spot, the owner brought him some cutlery. Koa nodded, and replied succinctly.

"The usual."

"Z-Noodles it is! And for a drink?"

"I think I'd be fine with some soda, thank you..."

"You seem tired, buddy. Long day at work?"

Koa sighed, reclining back in his chair. "Some... influencer guy tried to climb up the stairs of the Altar."

The owner was shocked. "Really?! Did you stop him?"

“Naturally. But — sometimes I feel like I have to... wrangle these people who come to our home, like it’s some kind of amusement park, thinkin’ they can do whatever they want here.”

“Aw, don’t be like that,” said the owner, “there’s still good people on your tours, right?”

“Of course. I suppose there’s a bit of everything. Sometimes that makes me want to travel too... have ya ever been to Sinnoh?”

“Sinnoh...” The owner thought for a second. “There was this one time I had to go to Canalave City for a business trip. It was a good time —“

The conversation was interrupted by another chime of the door. A new patron walked in — someone a little... smaller.

“Kahuna Hapu!” Exclaimed the owner, excitedly grabbing some things as the feisty, jolly girl walked in. “What can I do for you?”

“Alola! I think I’ll have a round of Z-Noodles... oh, hey! Good to see you here, Koa!”

Upon being greeted, Koa remembered his talk with his father earlier today. Hapu was someone he was well-acquainted with, but some formality was probably in order. He deepened his voice to seem more stoic. “Hapu! I-I mean... Kahuna Hapu! What— what an honour to have you here with us.”

“Pfft— Bahaha!” Hapu looked at Koa with a confused smirk, before bursting into a chuckle. “The heck was that? C’mon, Koa! I’ve known you since we were the size of Cutiefly. No need to put your guard up for a friend.”

“F-Friend? I-I know not if such an honour befits a simple peasant such as myself...” Koa looked side to side, clearly nervous. Hapu was not impressed.

“Koa... has your dad been chewing you out again?” The question made Koa drop his posh paladin shtick, as he looked down in disappointment.

“Y-Yeah... my day’s been kind of a mess in general. Sorry. I just wanted to sound more like him. That was stupid of me...”

“I can tell you’ve got things on your mind. May I?” Hapu pulled the chair next to Koa back, sitting next to him at the bar after his nod. The air was awkward for a few moments, as Hapu gathered the words to cheer up her friend. Koa simply looked down at the table.

“Koa... you know your dad can’t get the better of you. We’ve been over this, haven’t we?”

“Been over... what?” Koa raised an eyebrow in genuine confusion.

“Your dream! As the Kahuna I am, I’m all for you being a Trial Captain! Yes, it’s never happened before in Poni... but you know what? Now’s a great time for firsts.”

Koa's eyes widened, revealing his tiny, sharp, dragon-like pupils. "You... do ya really mean it? It's possible?"

"Of course!" Hapu smiled, patting Koa on the back. "Honestly, with how overworked the other captains have been lately and the rates of success on the Trial Challenge being the way they are, I can't think of anyone who's more prepared than you are, Koa. You know the Canyon like the back of your hand, you can lead others, and the Totem Kommo-o likes you! So what's bringing you down?"

Koa was glad to hear all that, so he genuinely asked himself what exactly made him feel down. It was more than just the prospect of being sent away from his home. Koa felt a calling. A special kind of destiny meant for him, that he had to prove to others. Whatever that was, Koa was reaching for the words to even express it. The truth was hard to reach, but Hapu was as blunt as a Sky Uppercut.

"Hmm... lemme guess. You just want to impress your dad, don't you?"

"N-No way!" Koa replied a bit harshly, not wanting to be overcome by embarrassment. "I-I have a... feelin'. I feel like, if no one's gonna do this — then I should."

"That's good. Exactly what I wanted to hear. Go on..."

"But... my parents — or at least my dad — they want me to be successful. Money and power... I don't care for those. He wants me to go away to Unova and go through the gyms... but I'd miss out on so much beauty here! How can I convey my dreams, my conviction, to my father?"

"Tch... he's trying to get you out of here? That's..." Hapu looked genuinely pained to hear that. Now it wasn't just a matter of helping Koa achieve his dream — there had to be something she could do to get Koa to stay!

"I get it. You just wish he were on the same page... even if I back you up, nothing compares to your pops being there for you."

Koa sat in silence for a second, at a loss as to what to say. Hapu's spirit didn't waver, however.

"Weeeeell... maybe your dad's stubborn. But I think, if we move some strings and get you where you want to be — maybe he'll see?"

"You'd... do that for me, Hapu?"

"Of course, chum! I'll put in a word with the other Kahunas. They know you already, it's rare for kids to pass the whole Island Challenge anyway. They know you're a good dude! Erm... you do have a plan for your trial, right?"

“Y-Yes!” Koa replied enthusiastically, almost as if he had waited for someone to ask him that question for ages. “A test of courage! A trialgoer should be able to show kindness to Pokémon in need, gain the trust of the Pokémon of the Canyon, and most importantly — never back down against the odds!”

Hapu chuckled. “I can tell you’ve been planning this! Well champ, you think you’ll manage until then?”

“Yes!” Koa was positively beaming, almost ready to burst at the seams. “Thank you, Hapu... I won’t let ya down. It’s a promise.”

“Don’t mention it, bud. Now, you wanna check the news to get your mind off things?”

Hapu pointed to a TV installed at the ceiling of the diner, a recent addition. Many of the older patrons appreciated being able to watch the news, or ongoing championships, while eating their noodles. Koa wasn’t much of a TV person, but he agreed anyway, just to clear his thoughts while waiting for his food.

What the screen currently showed, however, would surprise the two in a way they would never have anticipated.

The news report focused on a press release taking place in what looked to be Hau’oli City, Alola’s proud, bustling metropolis. Professor Kukui, the sitting Champion, addressed an excited, yet seemingly confused crowd. His podium showed a logo neither Koa nor Hapu had ever seen before.

“Hey, is that Professor Kukui?” Hapu asked out loud. She sounded happy, genuinely wondering what the cause of the press release could be.

“Macro Cosmos...” Koa mumbled under his breath. Macro Cosmos seemed to be a name associated with the press release, but he couldn’t tell what this meant without listening first.

Professor Kukui addressed the crowd. “Alola! Good day to you all. As all of you surely already know, the Alola Pokémon League has only been getting on its feet for the past three years. We’re a proud region, and I couldn’t be prouder of my dear Alola — but there’s always more that can be done to improve the way of life of every Alolan, as well as our beloved Pokémon. That is why, I am announcing the Alola Pokémon League’s partnership with Galar’s very own Macro Cosmos corporation!”

Hapu raised an eyebrow as the crowd on the screen clapped cordially. Something about this didn’t sit well with her. Koa looked over to her, wondering what was on the Kahuna’s mind.

“Somethin’ the matter, Hapu?” As soon as Koa saw the look on her face, that bad feeling started creeping over to him too.

“It’s alright. Just... I think something’s off here.” Hapu shrugged, tapping the table with her fingers in a nervous gesture. Koa didn’t give it much thought at first, but he couldn’t disagree.

Kukui continued, “To elaborate on the plans for this partnership and the benefits we bring to you all, I’d like to give a warm welcome to Macro Cosmos’ Chairman Hemlock.”

Kukui stepped off the podium, and a sharply dressed man in his mid thirties walked in, followed by a smiling Roserade. He wore a dark blue, almost black suit, with red accents and golden trim. He wore a striped red tie, and his black hair, with some accents of grey hairs here and there, was neatly slicked back. His square jaw showed a photogenic smile, fit for a movie, and adorned by a needle-like mini beard falling down from his chin.

The man cleared his throat as he got on the podium, shortly before he spoke in a warm tone. “Greetings! People of Alola. I’m Chairman Hemlock, from Galar’s Macro Cosmos. We have been leaders in energy production, technology and infrastructure development for decades, and Macro Cosmos has decided to extend a hand to Alola in a... time of need.”

“Time of need...?” Koa tilted his head. This Hemlock guy was actually rather reassuring to listen to, but it was almost as if something deeper had slipped with that comment.

“Let’s let him talk.” Hapu shook her head, hyper-focused on the broadcast. This, in turn, caused Koa to put his hands on the sides of his face and furrow his brow, trying to seem as clever as he thought Hapu was. They were both so entranced by the situation that they failed to notice the two rounds of noodles that had arrived on their table.

Hemlock proceeded with his speech. He looked saddened, as he took a hand to his chest in a solemn gesture. “Two years ago, my predecessor, Chairman Rose, made a grave mistake by attempting to bolster Dynamax Energy production by calling forth a wild, unruly Pokémon from another dimension. The damages were great... but our current Champion, as well as our ex-Champion, managed to subdue the threat.”

Hemlock’s voice wavered, almost too much. It was hard to tell whether he was being overdramatic, or whether he truly felt so strongly about the events he described.

“As he now pays back for the damages and destruction with prison time, I, Chairman Hemlock, felt that I too had to pay the world back to make amends. For all the commodities and achievements that we have, and perhaps you all might not.” Hemlock made a pause, during which he made a confused face. He quickly regained composure as he looked down, and looked back into the camera to carry on once again.

“I am aware that Alola had a similar disaster three years ago — with the invasion of the Ultra Beasts, which were bravely pushed back by the wonderful Kakunas! ...K-Kahunas. Yes. My mistake. Erm — That is why, Macro Cosmos has chosen Alola as the first to benefit from our friendship!”

“How can he get that wrong!?” Hapu angrily exclaimed, in between scoops of her Z-Noodles. “The word Kahuna isn’t even that hard.”

Koa held his breath. This guy... seemed a little out of place here in Alola. He had clearly travelled a long way, so perhaps he was just unfamiliar with the term Kahuna. At least, so thought Koa.

“Cut him some slack, Hapu. Didn’tcha say to let him talk? I think there’s still a bit more he’s gotta say.”

And indeed, Hemlock had more. “Our first step is to provide a steady supply of Dynamax Energy to Alola, in order to help power an infrastructure plan that will be developed over the course of the next three years. Macro Cosmos promises to install electricity and heating all over the region, starting with a Dynamax power grid that will be installed in the Vast Poni Canyon!”

“D-Dyna-what...?” Koa couldn’t hide his confusion. Hapu shifted in place, clearly nervous as she thought of what to even do about this.

The roaring sounds of cheering and clapping from the TV didn’t even phase Koa. He had his doubts about this whole venture at first — this Hemlock guy didn’t even seem like such a bad person, perhaps only a little clueless — but to think that these corporate suits were installing some kind of machine on his favourite place in the world? It was too much. Koa’s gaze sank towards the halfway empty noodle bowl, as he felt his world sink deeper and deeper into confusion.

First, his father wanted to send him away. Second, he was being disrespected at his job. And now... the Canyon was being sullied?

Koa quickly slurped the remaining noodles and left a bunch of cash on the table — certainly a little more than what his cup and soda were worth, but he didn’t care. The young man started to steadily walk out of the restaurant, alarming Hapu.

“H-Hey —! Koa! Where are you going!?” Hapu fumbled with her wallet, quickly counting bills to make sure her meal had been paid, before stepping down from the — too high for her — high seat, following after her scale-clad friend. Koa practically speed-walked through the open streets of Seafolk Village, making his way towards Poni Path. Hapu didn’t take too long to catch up with him, but Koa didn’t seem to be listening to reason.

“Hey! What’s gotten into you?! I know it seems bad, but we didn’t even finish watching the presentation! Maybe that Hemlock guy has an explanation for —“

“No way.” Koa wasn’t having it. “Power grid or not, I ain’t gonna sit here idle while a bunch of foreigners put their hands all over the Canyon!”

“Maybe it’ll be good! Maybe you won’t have to power your heating in your house with Darumaka poops anymore!”

“You think I mind that, of all things?” Koa seemed offended by the question.

“W-Well...” Hapu stopped to think, still speed-walking beside Koa. “Maybe you don’t, but tons of people do! It’s a genuine concern, Koa — we do need improvements like these!”

Koa stopped shortly after arriving at the Poni Wilds. The young man took a deep breath, looking down to the ground, and finally listened to reason... but he looked defeated. The dragon enthusiast always acted resilient. He weathered the storm when needed, and always tried to remain optimistic. But this was too much. Hapu didn’t quite know what to do here. As much as she thought some help to Alola’s infrastructure would do a lot of good, the young Kahuna did understand Koa’s position as well. The Canyon was essentially sacred ground, especially to Koa. She wanted to give the power grid the benefit of the doubt, but neither of them knew enough to do anything about it yet.

“Hey, I know what we’ll do...” Hapu rubbed Koa’s arm in an effort to comfort him. “Let’s just go to the Canyon. If the workers have already started construction there, I’m sure they’ll gladly talk to us. Maybe we can get them to slow down?”

“Of course I’m going to go, Hapu.” Koa replied succinctly. “I have to keep my home safe. This is what I was talking about before — something I have to do, because no one else will. But... Do you want to come with?”

“Absolutely! I’m the Kahuna, so this is part of my job. You’re not doing this alone. Don’t forget that!” Hapu threw out one of her own Poké Balls, letting out her trusty Mudsdales. The Ground type neighed as Hapu, by some miracle of acrobatics, physics or both, got on her steed’s back. “No time to waste!” She declared with excitement, as the duo prepared to hit the road.

With that mutual declaration of determination, both friends faced the path to the Canyon... not before Mo-o burst out of his Poké Ball, huffing and roaring in righteous anger! The valiant dragon had been listening in on the conversation, and looked to be as unhappy with the turn of events as Koa was. Hapu jumped in surprise as the Kommo-o stood upright in front of the both of them. Koa simply patted his partner on the shoulder scales.

“I know, I know. That’s my home too. Let’s get to the bottom of this, Mo-o.” Koa declared solemnly, as the Dragon/Fighting type blew air out of his nose with determination. Mo-o got on its hind feet, rising to an impressive height, and hoisted his partner on his plated shoulders as a mount. This made Hapu laugh heartily, and both riders and their mounts finally went on their way.

Koa and Hapu arrived at the entrance of the Canyon in no time. There were vehicles at the entrance, carrying what seemed to be large parts for some kind of contraption. As expected, workers wearing Macro Cosmos logos on their uniforms walked in and out of the entrance carrying equipment in and out, and construction workers with hard helmets were discussing some blueprints.

“Alolaaaa!” Hapu led the way first, making her presence known to the workers. “I’m Kahuna Hapu. May I ask what’s going on around here?”

“Kahuna?” One of the construction workers piped up. “Ah, so you’re in charge around here! I’ll call the superintendent.” The worker headed off into the construction site, and came back with a gruff man that didn’t look like he was from around those parts. He had a monocle, a chestnut brown handlebar moustache and a suit and tie.

“What do you kids want? I’ve got a busy day ahead.” The superintendent had no patience for these two, and the tone he used with Hapu showed he was very much out of his depth. The shorter one of the two grumbled as she jumped off her steed.

“Do you not know who I am? I’m the Kahuna around here. Heck, I don’t get why I wasn’t told about this! Could you please explain, sir?”

The superintendent perked up, remembering something. “Ah, I see. I was told the village elder on this island was a child — that is why you were singularly excluded from the negotiations and contracts. The other three gave us some trouble with the initial plans a few months ago, but they seemed to understand.”

Hapu shuddered in disappointment. There was a hint of betrayal in her eyes — how could she not have been told by the other Kahunas? Koa was at a loss as to how to cheer her up, since he decided he’d just let her do the talking for now, but he had to do something!

“I... I’m sure there’s an explanation, Hapu. A-Anyway, sir...” Koa took over for the time being. “What exactly are you building here?”

The superintendent cleared his throat. “We’re installing a Dynamax power grid here. The best energy resource, straight from the Galar region. Seafolk Village will have a more effective means of heating, electricity and even internet access. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Koa watched in silence as the man explained the construction plans. It did seem useful... but a gut feeling still rested in the young man’s gut.

“But... What about wildlife? What about the Pokémon that live here? The natural rock formations? What shall happen to the Totem’s lair? I work as a tour guide here, too...”

“Relax, kiddo.” The superintendent nonchalantly handwaved Koa’s concerns away, twirling his moustache. “We’ll, uh, try not to go into especially relevant areas. The Kahunas are still overseeing the perimeter plans for construction. Anything else?”

Koa was at a loss for words. He was initially very staunchly opposed to the construction, but there did seem to be many benefits for the people of Seafolk. And these foreigners, despite being somewhat clueless, were probably trying to be careful... yet, that pit in his stomach wasn’t going away!

“Well, that’s great. If you’ll excuse me, I have more important things to do now. Run along, children.” The superintendent turned his back and started giving directions to several workers. The worker from before approached the two inquisitive youngsters, as two other workers behind him carried a fence.

“Glad that’s all resolved. I’ll have to ask you to step off now, though.” The workers began placing the fence, right in between the two kids and the workers.

“And why’s that!?” Hapu angrily perked up, as Mudsdale whinnied behind her. The worker shrugged. “The Canyon’s being closed off for now. Uh... maybe they’ll let you in, Kahuna Hapu. You just have to file some paperwork.” Hapu shook her head. “Nope, they think I’m too young for that, apparently.”

Koa’s heart sank, and his head was now hanging low. His favourite place in the world... invaded by technology... blocked off for possibly months... and he couldn’t do anything about it, because it was all for a good cause? Mo-o let out a low, sad grumble as he shared the feelings of his human partner. A few face licks landed on Koa’s tanned face, but the boy’s expression did not change.

“Let’s... let’s just go home, Koa.” Hapu’s voice took her friend out of the trance. The Kahuna jumped on top of Mudsdale once again, and began the trek back home. Koa and Mo-o followed after a few moments.

The two youngsters were utterly defeated. These foreigners, adults, and their bureaucracy were leaving their burning hearts behind. A place of wonder and communion with Pokémon and the natural world was being sullied, and this would just be the start: Alola was about to become more and more like Unova and Galar. That wasn’t all bad in theory, since many people would clearly have easier lives, and perhaps a lot of foreigners would move in... but that wouldn’t be the Alola they knew anymore.

“Tch...” Hapu clenched her fists tightly, as a few tears fell down her tiny face. “I can’t believe they didn’t tell me. I... I know I’m a lil’ tater tot, but that’s never been an issue before... what’s goin’ on all of a sudden?! What’s that Hemlock guy tellin’ em?!”

“You... think he’s at fault?” Koa innocently asked, not knowing what else to say.”

“Well I dunno, maybe!” Hapu shrugged as she sniffled, drying her tears away. “I don’t get all of this! The paperwork, the weird plans and stuff... yer in my same boat, ain’tcha, Koa?”

Koa nodded. “I don’t know how a bunch of guys with ties can just convince our Kahunas that their way of life is better than our own. We all help each other ‘round here, what’s the problem with Alola?”

“I mean... it’s good that some people will live better lives, but I can’t help but mourn something ‘bout this whole deal, ya know? I... I think I get what ya meant earlier, Koa.”

“And... what are we gonna do?”

“I... I don’t know.”

Hapu came to a stop in the middle of the road. So did Koa and Mo-o. The sun was setting and Seafolk was visible from over the Poni Path hills. People were going back home from

their work. Pellipers flocked back to the shores and boat homes were being lit up, as the sky turned from blue, to orange, to pink, to purple.

“For now... just go home, Koa. I’m gonna talk to the Kahunas ‘cause I really don’t want to think they did any of this with bad intentions, but... c’mon! I wanted a word in this too!”

“I’m sorry that they went ahead without you, Hapu. I’m sure they had good reasons.” Hapu nodded as Koa tried to comfort her. “Just talk to me if something happens, okay?”

“Will do. Ah, that’s right... you might not get to be Captain for a while if the Canyon’s blocked, will ya?” Hapu lamented, while the sky turned darker. “Thanks for comin’ all the way here anyway, Koa. You’re a real one.”

“It was the least I could do. I mean... ya kinda tagged along with me in the first place, right?”

Hapu chuckled. “Yeah. Guess I did. But this was way scarier than I thought at first — I’m happy to have you by my side.”

The duo said their goodbyes for the day and headed off in different directions. Koa returned to his boat home, as his parents were ready to make dinner.

“Koa!” Exclaimed his mother, concerned, as she rushed to hug her child. “You came back so late! What were you doing?!”

“Ma, I...” Koa was interrupted by his mother’s smothering. He hugged her back, if anything, to get her to settle down. Mo-o, meanwhile, tried to not hit his head on the ceiling for the upteenth time as he stepped towards Koa’s room.

“I went to check out the construction at the Canyon with Kahuna Hapu. We don’t like what’s goin’ on in there.”

“With all those machines and smoke lyin’ around!? What were you thinking!? You could’ve been hurt!” Koa sighed. “Ma, I had Mo-o with me. And all my friends. I was gonna be okay.”

Mother, father and child sat at the dinner table. Koa kept his back straight under the judging stare of his father, who clearly didn’t approve of the way his mother greeted him earlier. Koa’s mother seemed concerned about what happened today, but she seemed happy to have her son around as they all ate their malasadas amicably.

“So... how’s Hapu?”

“Uh... she’s doing good. We had noodles earlier.”

“You two were always close. You have a few years on her, but I’m glad you’re both sticking by each other!”

Koa’s father, on the other hand, sat at the front chair, still wearing the same robe from earlier in the day, with a furrowed brow. Koa looked at him with a knot in his throat.

“Son.” The older man said, breaking the silence. “You went to talk to the construction workers with the Kahuna, correct?” Koa nodded, and his father continued. “Stay away from them. The necessary resource of a power grid shouldn’t compromise one of our most beautiful landmarks, but... stay out of it. That’s adult business.”

Koa stopped eating for a moment, leaving his malasada on the plate. The young man swallowed some saliva as his face turned more stern than usual, as if the sheer conflict of standing up to his father showed in his brow.

“Father, the Canyon has been closed off. I can’t do my job anymore. What am I supposed to do now?”

“Just get a new one,” replied the elder of the two with a nonchalant swagger. “I’m sure there’s something out there for you to do. You’re a talented young man.”

“But Father... haven’t you seen what’s goin’ on in there? A bunch of suits from Galar just showed up and told us how to live, and we’re just gonna stay home and take it?!”

“Why do you care about what happens here so much? I love our home too, Koa, but you should have your eyes set elsewhere. The world’s your oyster. You should go and do what I couldn’t in my time. You actually have a chance.”

“Father, I don’t want to go to Unova! I want to stay here! Why can’t you accept that?!”

Koa’s father slammed his fist on the table, a dark, inky scowl appearing on his face. “And what will you do after you’re done being a Trial Captain for a Trial that doesn’t even exist?! That position has no future!”

“Ikaika, please!” Koa’s mother sternly called out to her husband, cutting through the argument. “You promised you wouldn’t bring this up at the dinner table anymore!”

The patriarch took a deep breath, settling down. He shot Koa one last disapproving stare, as he went back to his and his wife’s bedroom. Koa sighed in disappointment, as shaky hands approached the malasada to finish the dinner snack in peace. The dragon tamer’s mother smiled at him, shaking off the stress from a moment ago.

“Koa, honey... just leave this to me and your father. Finish your malasada and go to bed, alright?”

The young man nodded as he dug into the malasada once again, slowly regaining composure. He didn’t take long to leave the plate empty, and without another word — much like his father —, Koa went back to his room for the night.

As usual, the boy’s night was invaded by vivid dreams. Two splendorous beasts of legend, one bright as day, and the other black as night, battled on a wide canyon in front of Koa’s eyes. Flame and thunder clashed all around him — it was the tale of Reshiram, defender of truth, and Zekrom, embodiment of ideals. One of his father’s favourite stories from the wide

repertoire of draconic lore that had been passed down to Koa from his father, who heard it from his father, and his father from his own father before him, all the way back into the Ka'uhane family's deep history in the Unova region.

This time, Reshiram seemed to be winning, as a flashing Draco Meteor struck Zekrom cleanly, knocking the electric beast down to the canyon below. However, far from giving up, Zekrom rose back up into the skies, sparking blue lightning erupting from all around its body, as it prepared to retaliate with Dragon Claw, surprising a tired Reshiram. Even with this sudden tipping of the scales, the battle did not seem close to a definitive conclusion. Eventually, Koa hears someone calling out to him as his sight became cloudy, the world becoming a swirl of colours around him that melted into whiteness, and then...

"...Koa. It's me, your mother."

Koa bolted awake, blinking twice before the sight of his mother, who walked into his room in the middle of the night. He looked down, as Mo-o still slept soundly with his large head on the boy's legs, hugging the bed frame. Petting his partner's forehead scale, Koa spoke softly.

"Ma? What is it?"

"It's nothing, sweetie. But... I've noticed you seem very invested in everything that's happening at the Canyon. Am I right?"

"Well..." Koa shyly looked away. "I work there. It's only natural."

"Not just that, silly." Koa's mother took her son's hand, holding it tightly. "You love the Canyon. And you hate that they're working their big machines in there, isn't that right?"

Koa nodded, his face now showing clear signs of frustration. "I... I don't get it. Why did Professor Kukui agree to this? The Kahunas... Hapu felt so betrayed! You know, she didn't even get a word in about what they're doin' in there!"

"I can imagine. But... I think, deep down, you feel like you have a responsibility to the Canyon. That's why you're so focused on being a Trial Captain... you want to take care of it, even if it's not your job to do so."

"Well..." Koa felt very exposed. He wasn't exactly good at formulating his feelings as words, and his mother was seeing right through him. "How else am I supposed to feel, Ma? Everything's been changin' since the League was formed, and now Alola's on the map. Hapu works really hard, but... I feel like there's a spot that's not bein' filled. If I were there already, I could have protected the Canyon! I could... talk to these guys, and figure somethin' out!"

"There it is. You don't just want to be a Trial Captain, Koa... you're worried about your home and your friends."

"B-But..." Koa stuttered, doubts showing in his voice. "I-I don't know if I'm ready. I... I really, REALLY want to do somethin' about it all, but I don't know if it's my place. How can I know

that, Ma? How can I know that all of this — the Trial, the suits, my place in the world — how can I know I'm doin' it all right?"

Koa's mother shook her head, and hugged her son's shoulders. He sniffed, holding back tears as she held her boy's head.

"What's that saying you like to say these days?"

"Uh... Pikipeks of a feather flock together?"

"The other one."

"...If I don't do this, who will?"

"That's all you have to know, Koa."

Koa's mother stepped back, now holding both his hands in a warm grasp.

"You're a capable young man. Hapu trusts you. You're certainly good at battling, and you know your way around the island like no one else. That's why you're such a great tour guide! And now, there's a shadow of doubt over the island. Who knows — maybe that Hemlock guy has perfectly good intentions! But his employees need a good talking to. Who would install a power grid on the region's most beautiful landscape?"

Koa nodded in silence, as his mother wiped a few tears away.

"Your father — despite what he says — is too old to go and face them on his own, in case things get ugly. I've never been that good with battles myself... we need brave young people, like the Champion. And Hapu! And you as well."

"You... you think I'm ready for that, Ma?"

"Sometimes, it's not about whether you're ready or not, Koa. Sometimes, your duty calls to you. And that's a call only you can answer."

Deep thoughts filled Koa's mind. All those doubts from the day — they were starting to clear up. The answer was obvious now. He had a chance to do good, and he wasn't going to let it go to waste.

"...thanks, Ma. If you believe in me... maybe I can do it."

"That's great. For now, go back to bed, honey."

Koa's mother kissed him on the forehead and walked out of the room, closing the door quietly on her way out.

The sun rose once again over Seafolk Village, and the citizens began their day once again. However, unlike most days, the sharp, ringing sound of drills and jackhammers could be

heard all over the island, waking up Koa and startling Mo-o awake, as the large dragon looked all over the room for the source of the noise. Koa frantically tried to calm down his partner, doing his best to stop the large Kommo-o from wrecking his room — until a knock at the door made the two friends stop in their tracks.

After having gotten dressed and ready in a jiffy, Koa quickly answered the door... and was met by the shocking sight of a frantic Hapu, sweating bullets.

“Koa! Ya gotta come quick— it’s Tapu Fini! It’s sick!”

——- END OF CHAPTER 1 ——