



The Game of Time

Chapter Two: Avengers Assemble



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MEWTWO

My dearest Amber,

I write this letter to you from the lazy shores of Johto, after travelling around my own region of Kanto and searching for the Winged Mirages. These legendaries are spoken of in many myths and even eyewitness accounts. I can

now happily pronounce them very real guardians, as I have had the honour of speaking to them myself.

The first, named Articuno, had a beautiful song.

Mewtwo paused in his letter writing and felt a small smile appear on his face at the remembrance. He'd flown the majority of time towards the Orange Archipelago - it had been mentioned most recently as a good place for sightings - and spotted Ice Island shrouded in cloud.

He had felt Articuno's presence only a few minutes later upon descent through the chilly air. The guardian's strength had loomed from below; deep and bestial and yet unmistakably calculating. Mewtwo had halted slightly at the eerie feeling of a stranger's power not so much touching his mind but simply enveloping it in mental ice.

Articuno may not have been psychic, but it did not matter really; Mewtwo could tell how strong it was anyway. He'd made contact.

<Freezing One.>

Articuno had reacted by crying out to him in a strange haunting tone and flapping its way towards him.

Articuno's language was this song, and I will remember it forever. I learned something very important that day, Amber, which was further concreted in my visits to Fire and Lightning Islands. I am unique also in the sense that I am

not so much a protector and guardian of my home in Fiore as it is a protector - a refuge, if you will - for me. This is different to other legendaries such as these Winged Mirages, who through an innate instinct seemingly born with them are moved to fiercely protect their territory against harm. Of course, this does not mean I would not defend the Seer Repository with all my strength if it was ever threatened, but that I came to it not as a guardian per se. I find it much easier to leave it physically than I found it would be for Articuno to leave Ice Island.

So is my idea of a Council flawed? The Winged Mirages were - once they learned I had not arrived to do them battle for their much prized territory - friendly enough (barring Zapdos, who was, putting it lightly, impetuously aggressive), but apart from conceding it would be wise for an alliance I did not get much else from them. Perhaps...

No. No, that is foolish thought. All I needed from them was fact of their existence, and knowledge of their minds - and I have both. I could call to them all from here right now, and they would hear me even if they could not reply. That is Council enough... for now.

Oh, Amber, the things I have read and learned. The legends surrounding the mythical pokémon of Johto are fascinating. My quest continues onwards as I head towards the forests of this region in search of the guardian who protects them. I believe I have met them once before, but we merely brushed minds before

departing. I do have a name however - Celebi - to go on, and believe it won't take much time to make contact. Time, of course, being the key word here, as it's rumoured Celebi can manipulate it. I cannot wait to find out if this is actually the case. Imagine what could be done with that ability!

And so with that thought I journey onwards.

In memory,

Mewtwo



CELEBI

Celebi flew back through the rippling time stream towards her own timeline with a proud beam on her impish face. Taking Pikachu two back in time couldn't have gone better if she'd actually done any reconnaissance work beforehand. The Raichu turning up - brilliant! Almost as if he'd been instructed to be there befo-

Had she possibly influenced the situation later on and not remembered? It was certainly possible - future memories were faint at best for the most part, and quite rare. Occasionally she'd have an inkling of what had to be done to bring the

future memory to fruition but mostly it was just trusting upon instinct and letting everything eventuate as it will. *Perhaps I should make plans to go back further than the first time and tell the Raichu to meet Pikachutwo when I take her back. Or maybe-*

LITTLE GREEN ONE!

The force of the summons buffeted her rudely past the last few seconds of time stream travel and she fell back into her own time headfirst, wings flitting furiously for lift.

I SEE YOU.

The words made her head pound and her eyes tear up. Blearily, she made sure she was safely back fully at the Relic Stone, then sat at its base, raising a hand to her quivering antennae.

<Who is this?> she sent back. <And can you speak a little softer, please?>

I AM THE LORD OF TIME, DIALGA, AND I DO NOT TAKE KINDLY TO MY SERVANTS TAMPERING WITH THE PAST TO THIS EXTENT.

<What?> Celebi squawked. <Servants?!> Mouth grim, she shot back into the air, ignoring the sudden headache. <I am Celebi, the Voice of the Forest, and nobody's servant!> Mind racing and quickly growing irate, she cast her mind towards the source of the bellowing voice but found the way closed off to her.

Who was Dialga, anyway? Lord of Time? *She* was the time traveller. Flora and time energy were intrinsically connected, after all. Time Flowers, Voice of the Forest... she was the living embodiment of the symbiotic relationship her trees had to the power of time.

SENDING A POKÉMON BACK AND LEAVING IT THERE PERMANENTLY IS PROHIBITED. YOU WILL GO BACK NOW AND RETRIEVE THE POKÉMON BEFORE THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF THIS THOUGHTLESS MEDDLING ARE TO BE FELT IN YOUR TIME, PERHAPS RENDERING YOU UNABLE TO FIX IT FROM THEN ON. HURRY.

<I'll do no such thing.> she growled. <It's not meddling, not tampering; it's helping. I'm perfectly within my rights to help a pikachu find a proper home.>

THAT PIKACHU WAS NOT EVEN MEANT TO EXIST IN THE PRESENT, SO IT IS CERTAINLY NOT MEANT TO EXIST IN THE DISTANT PAST! Dialga roared.

<Not... meant to exist...?> Celebi shook her head violently. <Why don't you come down here and say that?>

Then, <Celebi? Are you there?>

After the painful barrage of mental roars, the extremely faint psychic call barely alerted her to another telepathic pokémon's mental voice - one whom she didn't recognise at first until repeating its words in her mind and finally placing them.

<Mew...two?> she asked in surprise. <Yes, I'm here.>

<Are you in Johto?>

<No, I'm on a business trip out of the region,> she said, and attempted to strengthen the psychic link between them. <Feel free to come and help me talk some sense into some self-proclaimed lord of time.>

<Lord of Time? The one in the Sinnoh Story of Origin?> She felt Mewtwo's instant acknowledgement through the link and turned her attention back to the physical, just as a massive head and neck broke through the fabric of reality and surged through the air towards her, maw open and teeth bared.



MEWTWO

Mewtwo used the strong link between him and Celebi to focus a very careful teleport to her location. He felt he'd never been there before, which would normally make it impossible without a link. He aimed for a large area of hopefully empty space next to Celebi's form and teleported away...

... only to come face to face with the furious gaze of what he presumed was Dialga; in the flesh. The creator of time itself.

According to the story, anyway.

Celebi floated next to him, eyes even wider than normal. <So that's what you look like,> she said to Dialga as it hovered deathly still in front of her; its mouth opened menacingly yet not even seeming to be breathing. <But if you're just trying to intimidate me, know that I'm perfectly capable of calling upon this forest to aid me in battle.>

<Celebi,> Mewtwo said gently. <Dialga's not spoken of as a psychic telepathic pokémon, I don't think it can answer you->

IT IS NOT MEANT TO EXIST.

<Aargh!> Mewtwo yelled, hands instinctively raising to his ear horns. <What kind of telepathy is that?>

HIDDEN, Dialga said, and for the first time Celebi heard emotion in its voice. Smugly, Dialga arched its neck up and hovered downwards carefully in the limited space of Relic Forest. **I CAME DOWN HERE AND SAID IT. NOW, GO AND RETRIEVE THE PIKACHU.**

<Hidden? More like hideous,> Mewtwo said. <No offence intended, of course, Lord of Time, but how are you actually communicating like that?>

I SPEAK WITH THE POWER OF TIME.

Just as Zapdos had communicated to me with its power of electricity. Both are pretty much as painful as the other... Mewtwo thought, as Celebi turned towards him in the air, eyebrows furrowed.

<Don't call it the Lord of Time,> she said. <That's my jurisdiction.>

YOU ARE MERELY A GUARDIAN OF THE TIME STREAMS, Dialga continued calmly, AND WATCHER OF THE TIME ENERGY OF THIS WORLD'S FORESTS. YOU CAN ONLY MOVE THROUGH TIME. I, HOWEVER, CONTROL TIME ITSELF. I HAVE BEEN AWARE OF YOU FOR A VERY LONG WHILE, LITTLE GREEN ONE, AND WATCHING CAREFULLY. YOU HAVE FLUTTERED GENTLY AND SOFTLY UNTIL NOW, AND I HAVE BEEN GRACIOUS ENOUGH TO CORRECT THE SMALL PARADOXES YOU CREATED UNKNOWINGLY. BUT THIS... IS TOO MUCH. YOU WILL BRING A TORNADO DOWN UPON US, I CAN FEEL IT.

<Paradoxes?> Celebi spluttered, her buzzing wings the only physical sound Mewtwo could still hear above the ringing in his brain from Dialga's mental deluge. <You go too far!> She began to glow luminescent green, eyes shining with power.

<Pardon me, Celebi,> Mewtwo said, casting a longer look at his surroundings. <But this is evidently a place of serenity and peace, and I come to you both with a call to ally, not war against each other.>

Celebi had the graciousness to look abashed as she let the potential attack silently dissipate. As mental silence fell, the cloying physical stillness became far

more apparent; as well as a strange, faint twittering sound from deep in the forest around them tickling his ears. Mewtwo took a deep breath and took a moment to wonder where in the world they were. It was a different type of energy in the clearing, that was for sure; seemingly emanating from the large stone structure built up in the centre. *I wonder what would happen if I touched it...*

<I wish to create a Council of guardians,> Mewtwo continued.
<Connected mentally, allowing us to better protect this world together.>

Dialga's face remained impassive, but at least its mouth had closed.

<I have already spoken to many guardians, and today I ask that you, Celebi, guardian of the time streams and Johto's forests, officially join us.>

Celebi had a finger to her mouth. <I have no future memory of this one at all,> she said, suddenly vaguely. <Dialga, does the Council happen?>

TIME RUNS OUT.

The Time Lord raised a clawed front hoof and stamped the invisible surface it hovered upon just a metre above the ground. **RETRIEVE THE PIKACHU! NOW!**

<No! If you want her back so badly, get her yourself!>

Quicker than Mewtwo had thought possible, Dialga swung its head towards Celebi and growled wordlessly at her.

<What, you can't?> Celebi said, an impish not-quite-nice smile on her face, not looking at all intimidated by its closeness. <Oh, I see; so you control time, but time controls you right back. Some Lord you are.>

Dialga had no opportunity to reply to Celebi's taunt. The air began to shine, then flashed pink. Mew stepped out of nowhere at Mewtwo's right hand side, mentally holding two other pokémon in the air behind her.

<You're here too?> Mewtwo said in surprise. <And...>

Gods. One of the other pokémon was Pikachutwo, a strange searching look in her expression as she gazed at him. The other was a healthy looking raichu. Last time he had seen Pikachutwo, she had been altered; turned to the shadows. Now, thankfully, she looked back to normal. With a pang, the psychic pokémon realised he'd completely forgotten her plight in amidst his own, and had neglected to go looking for her after his own purification. *I am the worst kind of creature indeed...*

To Mewtwo's surprise, Celebi reacted even stronger at the sight of Pikachutwo and the raichu. <What are *they* doing back here in this *when*?> she demanded, looking afraid. <How did you...?>

<Dialga's right - time's running out. Celebi, you must join the Council, right now. It's imperative.>

<Well, of course I will, but->

<Good, we thankfully welcome you.> Mew said in relief. <Now truly begins the Game of Time!>

Celebi grimaced in her direction. <Time is not a *game*, Mew.>

THIS IS YOUR FAULT, Dialga said, and started to shudder, its eyes slowly squinting closed. **SOMETHING IS VERY WRONG. I FEEL... SOMEONE, SOMETHING, HAS CREATED A TEMPORAL CAUSALITY LOOP...**

A strange whistling noise interrupted the legendary's dire words, steadily growing louder. Dialga's head arced up straight as it turned its attention to the sky. Then without any more warning the small missile hit home, billowing smoke in its explosion, and the Time Lord screamed pain and fury.

The impact blew the other guardians back through the air. Mewtwo sought hazy confirmation that Mew still had a hold of Pikachutwo and the raichu, then watched from the borders of the forest as Dialga's body became enclosed in a dark sphere of energy.

Team Rocket? he wondered, long-forgotten anger quick to resurface as Dialga's roar turned from outrage to suffering. *I would not be surprised to find them at the bottom of this...*

He flew upwards, out of the enclosed area, and surveyed the open sky. Before long he spotted the hateful craft hovering a small distance away. But it

was not Giovanni at its helm, rather a young woman with one hand on her hip, the other on the wheel.

Lovrina.

Mewtwo snarled. *Why didn't I kill you when I had the chanc-* No. No, no more killing. He swooped back down and without hesitation fired a shadow ball right at the crackling sphere surrounding Dialga. The attack passed right through it and hit the legendary instead, prompting another pained roar.

<Sorry,> Mewtwo said softly, trying not to let his sudden perturbation get the better of him. Before him stood the beginnings of his great and powerful Council, after all. Surely they could save this situation from becoming any worse.

Mew was already at Dialga's side, looking intensely at the field surrounding it. Pikachutwo and the raichu had at some point - perhaps when Mewtwo had been surveying the air - been put down on the ground, and were now huddling together on the Relic Stone.

Mew's tail lashed, then she clenched her fists and flames of pink began flickering around her body; but before she could attack the aircraft drew near enough to cast a shadow over the entire clearing and began slowly lowering closer.

Dialga shuddered again, its normally powerful stance starting to fold in on itself inside the energy ball. Then as Mewtwo and Mew watched its eyelids flew

open and it lashed out with what felt like a last desperate gambit: raw frantic power; smashing the sphere and dissipating it entirely.

TIME... Dialga bellowed, gasping for breath. **TIME IS BREAKING...**
FRACTURING...

Someone was gripping Mewtwo's wrist. He looked down and saw Celebi holding on tightly as she stared at Dialga.

<Look at it...> she said. <Look at its diamond.>

GRRRR... IT HURTS SO BADLY...

<I have a really bad feeling about this.> Celebi said.

Mewtwo looked. Dialga's diamond orb at the centre of its chest was pulsating a deep red-orange colour, and its normally shimmering aqua patterns on its skin had turned to deep orange. They looked wrong against the normal dark blue of its body.

DESTROY ME, WILL YOU? I WON'T LET YOU! Dialga roared, and slowly its head turned, ever so slowly, until it was resting directly at Celebi and Mewtwo in kind. Mewtwo looked in Dialga's eyes and saw sheer cunning malevolence - and yet, a desperate unthinking violence.

<Shadows...> Celebi whispered, and tugged at Mewtwo's arm. <We have to leave. Now.>

<I'm not going anywhere,> Mewtwo said harshly. <Some of the strongest pokémon in the region are gathered right here. We can manage this.>

From the aircraft, Lovrina's amplified voice floated down. "My beautiful XD003! Roar for me!"

YOU! YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS, HUMAN! YOU'LL ALL PAY FOR THIS!

Dialga turned his head again and roared silently into the sky, straight at the craft. The sound/time wave buffeted its metal frame like turbulence; Mewtwo could hear the creaking from where he stood. As he watched, Lovrina cried out into the microphone again, but the sound distorted just as the craft began to visually warp and distort as well until it had vanished into thin air.

<I don't believe it,> Celebi said. <I think... Dialga forced it back in time. But I didn't think it could do that...>

The Time Lord was growling low and menacingly as it turned its attention to the other guardians clustered around him. Then without warning it stamped a foot and howled another vicious time roar into the entire space around them.

<Go!> yelled Celebi, and flitted to the left. But it was too late. Dialga was gone, and the rippling trees around him had turned their leaves to yellow, then back to green in mere seconds as Mewtwo watched. Somehow, they seemed to be growing as well. Or... was he shrinking? With a start, he looked down at his

hands and saw them becoming pudgier, younger, less worn. *So, I'm going back in time and my body is as well?*

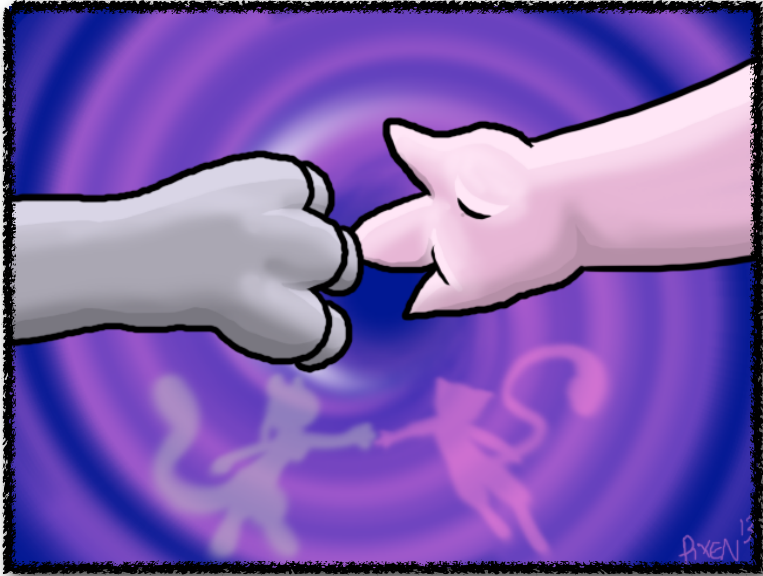
Mewtwo grew younger and younger in the space of a breath as the sunsets flew past him in the wrong direction. He looked up with startled eyes for Celebi, but she was gone too as Dialga had vanished. His gaze flicked around in panic until he noticed only Mew was left, still on the other side of the clearing. She was reaching for him, so he reached for her too. Somehow their progress towards each other seemed so slow compared to how scarily young he was becoming. His body felt even younger now than it had when he had awoken in his dream world so long ago and met Amber.

What happens when... It hardly bore thinking about. In desperation he made one final stretch and his now barely formed paw met with Mew's. She smiled at him, and as their hands had touched so did their minds.

I'll protect you, Mewtwo. No matter what... I'll protect you.

You always do, he replied.

Mew drew him in physically and held his rapidly shrinking form to her chest. Mewtwo felt her enclose his consciousness within her own, the two motions - one physical, the other mental - syncing up perfectly. He felt so perfectly shielded like this he hardly noticed as his body grew foetal, his previous



limbs now barely nubs upon his jellybean body, and then shrunk completely out of sight.

I've got you.

Mew held his consciousness carefully to her. As linked as they were, Mewtwo could even vaguely hear her outermost thoughts, flitting past his own awareness. *What do I do now? How far back are we going?*

Mewtwo remained unperturbed. He now felt incredibly sleepy; and besides, Mew's thoughts were moving far too quickly to take any real notice of. *Goodnight, Mama,* he said instinctively, and drifted off.

Mama?! Mew yelped, still holding him - what remained of him - to her chest. Then... That... actually might not be such a bad idea - bizarre as it is. I could protect you better, and...

She looked around her at the rapidly changing landscape. Relic Forest had disappeared eons ago. The world around her was beginning to move into its own infancy, just as Mewtwo had.

Why is it not affecting me? She had barely thought the question before the answer was clear to her. Of course - she was a mew, and mew didn't age like normal pokémon, so she naturally wouldn't age backwards as they did either.

Mew watched, silently, and saw things she had never imagined she would. The land had been slowly heading away from her in the planet's orbit through space as soon as they had become trapped in the violently misjudged roar of time, and from her vantage point Mew could not see very much at all, but somehow she still could feel as the legendary titans of earth and water did battle not very far from her location at all. As they vanished from her awareness, others faded in.

Stop it now, she pleaded. She'd gone far back enough. She had no desire to see-

And yet it continued. A million sunrises and sunsets. Something looming far above her and looking down with beady eye - *unmaking the world around her.* But that wasn't right, was it? It was in reverse, so that meant-

The world was thus unmade, and yet Mew still existed. As did Mewtwo, cradled invisibly at her belly. And... something... someone...?

The Time Lord does not even exist here yet, so why am I still going backwards? There is no more time to rewind, surely!

A great flash in reverse; its dull dim light slowly growing in intensity until the brightest yellow flare, and then dying completely.

That someone. *Stay with me*, Mew pleaded, as the entire world began exploding red and orange backwards around her. She shut her eyes, and felt not so much confirmation but the briefest whisper of the same, with no clue as to whether she'd merely imagined it. Mew kept her eyes shut until finally the silent subtle rushing of time power faded and was replaced with a gentle yet hot breeze and the strange sounds of a completely alien environment.

A time before time began.

And I can't even be scared about it even if I tried.

LOVRINA

Lovrina came to on the floor of her aircraft, blinking away headachy tears. She sat up quickly, taking stock. Her entire crew remained where they'd been moments before her XD003 had shown off its power to her, but most of them still

looked unconscious. A grin slunk onto her face, and she skipped up onto her feet, running to the dashboard and its wide window. “My beautiful XD- huh?”

The craft had crash-landed at some point, snapping off a wing and burying it nearly entirely in sand a few metres from the cockpit. As Lovrina stared out of the window, her mouth slowly dropping open, a fierce gust of wind grabbed a big pile of sand and lashed it against the metal side.

Where were they? Where was her XD003?

The girl whimpered, pouting. “Captain!” she shrilled. “What’s going on?”

Her Captain was groaning, slumped in a chair close by. “That was the legendary roar of time. We’ve time travelled: forwards, or backwards - I can’t really tell. We’re in real trouble now, missy.”

“Nuh-uh,” Lovrina said. “Some people will so help us.”

The Captain shook his head. “Some people? We don’t even know if there are even other people out there.”

She tromped away. He stared vaguely out the window, uncaring, as she pried the emergency door open and ventured outside.

Some time later...

“Yoo-hoo!”

A teenaged Wesley Williams threw his custom-built motorbike into neutral as he came to a stop halfway between Pyrite and Phenac, and stared in

amazement at the pink-haired teenager waving furiously on top of a tall sand dune. Further from her he noticed a wreck of what looked to be a high-tech plane.

Interesting...

He revved the bike's engines and chucked it back into gear, manoeuvring it slowly towards her location. As he drew up closer one of his two eevée, sitting primly at his side, flattened her ears and growled at her.

"Auvan!" he said in a disapproving tone, yet secretly wondering why she'd reacted so strongly like that. Auvan was normally a great judge of character. So was Vee, her elder brother, for that matter; but he normally kept it to himself.

How to play this?

"Is anyone hurt?" he asked, motioning at the wreck. "Dead?"

"Mmph," she answered, with a shrug of her shoulders. "It's so every girl for themselves now."

This made Wes laugh in astonishment. "And here I was thinking you'd have to be a tourist, but not with that cut-throat attitude."

"How's that?"

Wes put on his best evil grin and gave the throttle a quick twist with his hand. "Locals hear this engine in the distance and tend to shut their doors, not give me a wave."

“So, you’re a bad boy, huh?”

“Depends. Any pokéballs on that outfit anywhere? Any free roaming pokémon on board the plane?”

Lovrina shook her head, and Wes sighed in obvious disappointment. “Then I guess I’ll have to be good. C’mon, jump on and I’ll give you a ride to Phenac City.”

Luckily, Auvan kept her cool as she snuggled up to Vee and allowed Lovrina to take her normal place at the side. The turbo engines threw up gritty sand as they charged off, leaving the plane behind in the stifling heat of the desert.

Lovrina had her hands over her ears, and was staring out into the distance. Wes took the opportunity to make contact with his base of operations at Team Snagem HQ. “Unidentified aircraft spotted five k’s south-east of Phenac City.”

His radio crackled in response. “Any survivors?”

“That’s for you to find out, I’m getting out of this heat right *now*.”

SPARKLING

“*Sparkling!*” Chur yelled, holding her closely to him as he quavered at the base of the Relic Stone. “*What’s going on? I’m afraid!*”



Sparkling looked up at the raging Dialga and the other legendaries with gritted teeth and frowning eyebrows. The whole time had been a blur ever since she'd been granted a name and confessed to Chur that she was from the future. What was it Chur had said?

“So am I.”

But then he'd stopped, and looked highly confused at what he'd just said. Sparkling had been just as confused - and shocked - but she'd had no time to even enquire after more details.

For Celebi had reappeared in front of them, grabbed both of them by a paw and pulled them back into a raging time stream. Chur had screamed high and long, but Sparkling felt more like yelling in anger. Couldn't she just have her

peace now without being dragged about constantly by everyone? For once she'd felt relaxed in herself and her environment - only to have this happen without one word of explanation.

They'd whirled out of the time stream, and Mew had been there to take them further without any word as well. Mew had grasped them mentally and winked them out, and the next thing Sparkling knew she was staring right at Mewtwo and another Celebi - seemingly from another time for she'd reacted quite differently, as if she hadn't known at all they were back in the future - still under Mew's mental grasp until the pink legendary set them down gently and went to attend to Dialga.

Which brought them to now - both completely at a loss. Chur was probably more so than her, though, and she felt so sorry for him. He looked terrified, not only at the raging battle above them but the height of the domineering Relic Stone and the trees around them. He couldn't keep his gaze on one thing, kept flicking his head around and flinching at each in turn. *What a shock it must be to travel into the future*, she thought.

Then Dialga roared and the whole world fell apart. There was a thundering in her ears like the silent memory of an earthquake, things were vanishing before her very eyes and Chur's hug was shrinking. She looked at him,

her only constant in this now madly shifting world, and in horror saw he wasn't constant either - he was now turning into a pikachu.

She gaped at him, and he gaped at her back. "*You're devolving,*" she whispered.

"*So are you,*" he said in a voice of dread. "*I'm not... I'm not doing that to you, am I?*" In one motion he snatched his hands away from her and stepped away.

"*No!*" Sparkling cried, and took his paw again. She looked down at her own paw - it was not even fingered any longer. She let out a little mew of horror. "*What am I?*"

Chur took her back into a warm hug. "*You're a pichu again,*" he said woodenly.

Again? She'd never been a pichu before. Chur wasn't to know that, of course. *What's it like to be even smaller than a pikachu? I wonder what it feels like for Chur to be a pikachu again?* Then...

"*You've stopped, but it's still happening to me,*" he said.

Sparkling looked at him in shock. His pikachu ears were rounding out and he was shrinking further, now unable to fully enfold her in one of his comforting hugs she'd begun to enjoy. As they clasped each other like anchors, Chur too devolved until he was her height, his eyes closed at the sensation.

As she watched, he nervously opened one eye halfway. *“Has it stopped?”*

“Yes,” Sparkling replied in relief. *“We’re both pichu now.”*

Chur opened the other eye and looked at the flitting, reversing landscape. It seemed to be slowing down, but it still made him whimper before he looked back at Sparkling. Amazingly, a hesitant smile began slowly creeping onto his juvenile face. *“I like your ear,”* he said.

Something was odd about her ear? Something was definitely odd about him, too, but Sparkling couldn’t quite place it yet. She looked down at her belly and then his, at her paws, and then his. Then it clicked. *“I like your fur colour - a lot,”* she said honestly.

They both smiled at each other, then Sparkling found her smile widening into a broad grin. Faced with the discrimination and mental pain of cloning? Nothing doing. Unsure of her place in world - boring! Time travel and uncontrollable devolution? *That’s* more like it! Bring it on!

“It’s our magical mystery tour!” she piped, and began to giggle. *“Next stop, the distant past!”*

Chur stared at her in worry. *“You’re completely mad!”*

Time slowed, stopped, and without any further ado began playing in the right direction at a normal rate. Chur fell to his knees - the gesture looking to

Sparkling completely ridiculous in pichu form - and sank one cheek to the grass in abject relief. *“We’re still alive...”*

Sparkling sniffed dismissively. *“Of course we are.”* She grabbed one of his paws and raced off, Chur wailing as he was tugged reluctantly behind her. *“Let’s go explore!”*

PALKIA

The great Space Lord opened a lazy eye at the disturbance. **I WAS SLEEPING**, it said gruffly, and opened a portal into the air above Relic Forest, swooping through headfirst. **COME, BROTHER. CEASE THIS NOW.**

TIME IS CORRUPTED! Dialga bellowed, and blasted the circle with another savage roar of time. But there was nobody else there any longer to force backwards in time.

Palkia paused as it noticed Dialga’s primal state. Then it casually reached into another, smaller, portal and drew out a squirming pink celebi in a careful claw hold.

<Oh,> the pink celebi said.

IS THE MYSTERY SPACE READY?

The celebi gritted her teeth. <It'll have to be. There's no way we're letting it stay in this space to do any more damage.>

AGREED.

Palkia began preparing a spacial rend attack, and the celebi backed away. The Space Lord noticed this and grunted in her direction.

The celebi chuckled. <No offence, but you're horribly imprecise with that attack.>

NONE TAKEN, Palkia said, and blasted primal Dialga right in the face, casting it beyond; into the mysterious space. **YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HAS TO DEAL WITH IT NOW**

<Obliged, I'm sure,> muttered the celebi.