



The Phantom Child

Prologue: The Nightmare



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Where am I? Who am I? What am I?

Deep within his mind, the young Mewtwo struggled with the rushing waves of thought that constantly besieged him.

Am I a pokémon, or a person? What is the difference between a pokémon and a person?

He didn't know the answer to that - didn't know any of the answers to the dozens of questions repeating through his head - yet the possibility that there was no true answer frightened him more than the not knowing.

He sensed his body responding to his fear; curling up tighter into a fetal position. The feel of his chest upon his fingers was distant, as were the muffled sounds from outside himself. With a sudden impulse, he willed his body to move, to straighten from the posture he had remained in ever since his first time of awareness, but his arms refused to even twitch.

Can't move. Trapped. LET ME OUT.

It made him want to scream. But he wasn't even able to breathe without a machine, let alone scream, so he willed himself away from the panic and frustration; drew deeper down where the feelings stopped and the light faded and a thick silence fell.

Her remember place...



The darkness soon dawned into a new place. Mewtwo floated in the sky; high above the ground although completely dwarfed by the enormous snowcapped mountain before him.

This is different to last time. Where am I? Am I now ready to be?

His eyes widened as he caught a glimpse of something moving above him. Pink and lithe, it wound through the scattered clouds and out again, sparkles from

the pale sunlight glinting off its body, disappearing from sight through a considerably greyer patch of cloud then appearing once again until finally it circled the very peak of the mountain and then vanished from sight.

Mewtwo's shoulders slumped, and he hugged himself tighter. Had the creature only given him some time, perhaps he could have followed. He would have liked to know where was going.

Next time... he thought.

“What's this?” came a voice.

Mewtwo uncurled his body in shock, reveling in the fluid motion, and twisted in the air. Before him was a very bright light, shining yellow. He blinked furiously and quickly shielded his already watering eyes with a long grey arm.

The light frowned at him. “I don't like it.” It cast a beam of light towards the mountain and Mewtwo's gaze followed. The light struck the mountain and through the glare Mewtwo saw it completely melting away. He wondered if the pink creature had been struck too.

He chanced a look downwards. The untrod wilderness of before was now a neat row of little cottages bordered by a neat row of trees. Silent, and empty, and devoid of colour.

The light faded slightly, then it smiled. “See? All fixed.”

“This is where you used to live,” Mewtwo said.

“Uh-huh!” the light said, nodding. “I lived here, so it’s my remember place. You don’t get a remember place ‘cos you haven’t lived anywhere besides a tube.”

Slightly hurt, Mewtwo drew away from the light, looking away from it and allowing his eyes to readjust. “I could have lived there,” he said softly, and looked back up to the sky where only a few moments ago it had loomed protectively over him; imagining it in his mind’s eye.

“You don’t even know what that big thing was called,” the light said, “or what it was covered with.”

Mewtwo kept silent; half burning with embarrassment at the fact she was right, half hoping she would tell him even without him asking.

“It’s a *mountain*, and it’s got *snow* on it. Snow is really really cold water, so cold it goes solid. Now, what is this?”

Reluctantly Mewtwo turned back to the light. “That’s the sun,” he said, his eyes watering anew.

He heard a high giggle. “Right!” As he watched the light grew, encompassing his form and drawing him in to a blissful warmth and brightness. Closer and closer towards the core, and then there she was, her form silhouetted, rays of light and shadow beaming past her body.

Mewtwo strained his eyes to see her better but it was just too bright. He stretched his arms towards her but she darted out of reach and giggled again.

“Catch me!”

“I can’t see you to catch you,” he said.

She slowed her sun dance, pausing with one hand pointing towards him.

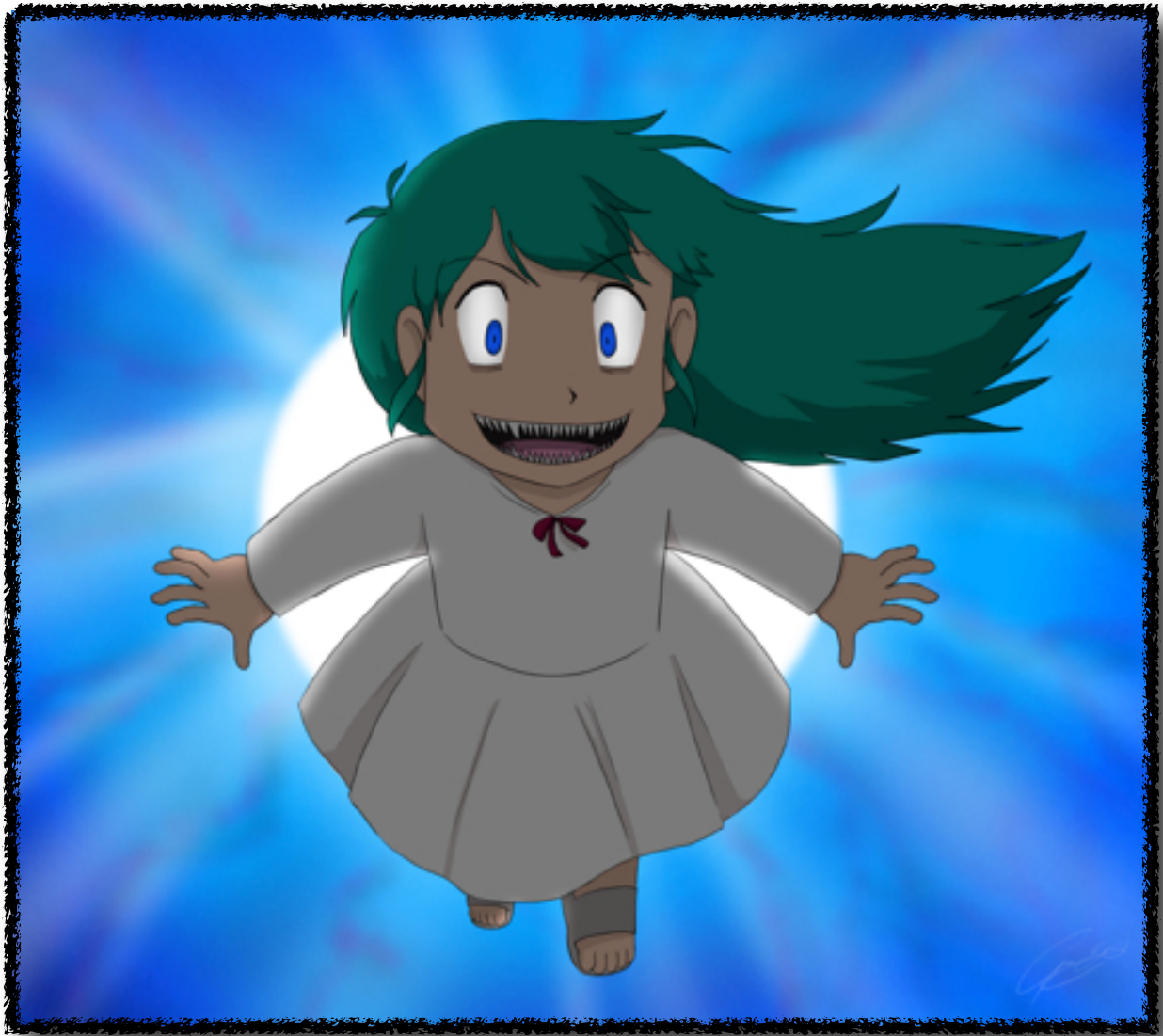
“Oh,” she said, then chuckled. “Oh, that’s right. My daddy told me not to look at the sun too long. Otherwise...”

The fear returned. Mewtwo closed his eyes but an obstinate purple haze and dull pain remained in his vision. “What? Otherwise what?”

“You go *blind*,” she hissed, and the sudden malice in her voice shocked him so much that he felt his eyelids fly open again.

She hovered before him, only now in plain sight. She was smiling toothily at him, but there was no pleasure in the smile. Her gaze upon him felt colder than the snow she had described.

“And if you get too close you *burn*,” she said, and the light flared into heat.



Agony enveloped his entire body; his skin blistering with the heat. He tilted his head back and screamed.

Close your eyes!

His eyes stayed open, keeping him dimly aware through the excruciating pain that she was hovering very close to him as he burned alive. He turned his head slowly towards her and her smile widened as their eyes met, widened into a deranged leer. He watched as her delicate baby teeth grew points and if possible

his shrieking grew even louder as she bent her face down towards his, her mouth opening further than it should go.

There's one more question to ask.

He took a breath, the hardest one to take, and stilled his screams. Somehow.

Just one more.

“Why?” he rasped, feeling the flames searing all the way down to his lungs and igniting his whole body from the inside, her teeth now only inches from his face. “*Why?*”

She hesitated at the question, her face morphing back to the memory of her when they had first met. Still she leaned forward over him, yet in that instant she was beautiful: just a young human child with flowing glossy sea-green hair and ageless eyes looking into his very soul.

The girl shrugged and giggled again, quirking her head slightly to the side.

“Because you lived.”

No, there's one more question after all. One more! Please! I must know!

“Who are you?”

“I am hate,” she said. Her face and teeth changed with one violent back-thrust of her neck, and then the tooth-filled mouth came down.



The Phantom Child

Chapter 1: Aftermath



Chapter One: Aftermath

Mewtwo awoke with a violent jerk, his eyes burning a frantic blue as he tried to reorientate himself as quickly as possible. He straightened, and eased his aching back into a sitting position, muscles quivering with the effort after so many long days of inactivity. His throat felt very hoarse. Perhaps he'd been screaming physically, too.

I am hate.

The words made him shiver.

<A dream,> he said. <Just a metaphorical dream. But that girl! Who was she in my real life?> It had been a very long time since he had felt such a rush of adrenaline through his body. Surprised at how shaken up he felt, he struggled to get his mind working at speed as it ran through his most recent memories.

In his dream he'd been very young, younger than he had been when the memories started. And the light was the girl, but then the light had turned to white-hot fire and he had burned. *I am hate.*

This can't be the first time I have seen her, he thought, but I can't remember! The word made him recall more of the dream. *What is a remember place?* he wondered.

He glanced down at his hands and fingers. They were skeletal at best now; the thin bones clearly visible through his pale smooth skin. Lifting a sinewy arm, he surveyed it, noting the similar symptoms.

<And so,> he murmured, turning his attention to the rest of his food-starved body. <Am I a pokémon after all? I certainly dehydrate like one.> His body, so unused for a long time, was now besieging his mind with cramps of want. His stomach... how it protested at him!

As he struggled upright, his bones creaked and ached with disuse. <How long have I been here?>

More to the point, he thought, where am I?

Soon after laying suspicious eyes upon the dripping rock walls surrounding him, he realised he must have chosen this spot specifically. The only reason, he supposed, was that it was the one place he knew of that was safe and didn't remind him of his cruel ex-trainer Giovanni.

He was never your trainer! You are your own master, and always have been!

<It is a sad day indeed when you must talk to yourself instead of your friends,> he chuckled dryly, well aware he was not feeling all that sane and balanced after the horribly vivid burning sensation which his mind refused to forget, and the malnutrition of his physical body to go alongside it. <The human, of course, has received the better deal: at least he doesn't have to remember chaining a pokémon to psychic shackles and torturing it until near-death because it wouldn't submit.>

More flashes of memory came to him. Other humans - mere youths yet all confident in their abilities to face the world and its many dangers - had helped him. Those same humans he had invited to his island of clones months beforehand, his main goal of striking back against them in retaliation... only because they had belonged to the same species as those that had created him. It seemed ironic, really, particularly since they didn't remember any events from the first time they had met.

<Which is probably the only reason they did lift a finger in aid,> he sighed - a tinge of humour lacing the sigh - and stood up, ignoring the dizzy spell that hinted at an imminent headache.

<So.> Was the girl before all that? Perhaps even before he opened his eyes to the cold gazes of the scientists as they silently surveyed their living, breathing clone? Before that... there was nothing; no memory, merely hints of past dreams;

as intangible as his cryptic thoughts which occurred just before the unconsciousness of sleep. All he was able to conjure up in his mind as he strained for any other clues of her identity was strange random images of a far-off snowcapped mountain - a pale coloured creature twisting through the sky towards it - and strange leafy silhouettes upon the multi-hued water of a sunset.

<She is real,> he spoke, trying to prove it to both himself and the silent darkness of the cavern around him. <She has to be. Never before have I ever dreamed of a human - any human, let alone one this specific.>

You are ignoring the plain and simple fact that she ate you in your dream... came a dry, intellectual voice. *To go searching for her, or more memories of her, may well mean your death.*

<I, and you, know very well that this is something which I must do.> Serious now, Mewtwo reached for his power, feeling it surge through his eyes in an iridescent blue colour. The pangs of hunger and thirst disappeared. <To try and dispute the fact within me will surely destroy me quicker than she may.>

He stepped off the dirt-coloured ledge, and before his knees could collapse with the effort, his psychic energy filled the air and supported his weight easily. <I remember you, now,> he said, determinedly. <And so I come.>

The fierce glow of blue within the deep of his eyes blazed forth, and he was gone; the cave once again silent and empty, the only faint echoes now being the plinking sound of dripping water.

A few seconds later he stood in midair over the ocean, a dark smudge of land just visible in the distance. The cold wind tickling his velvety grey fur, he sought another glimpse of her face in his mind's eye, but with frustration found out that as he tried to recall more of her features - her eyes, her hair - they lost their clarity.

With only a tenuous destination in mind, he flew through the air towards the land in the distance. He remembered flying this way once in anger; in rage even. There was no rage now, but his destination was the same.

Why he felt pulled towards this place, Mewtwo could not guess, but a niggling memory of the old lab, and a memory of a glass cylinder, empty and cold, visited him time and time again as he soared. Perhaps his birthplace would gift him with more fleeting memories, enough to go on and continue searching. Hopefully, it would not distract him with bad memories from his distant past. But then again, perhaps both good and bad were wrapped inexplicably; of the same vine.

New Island. Here, he had been created. Here, he had struck back for the first time. Yet after the young, newly born pokémon had learnt that the world

outside was as cruel and cold as the minds of his creators he had returned to make it his own. And his own it remained - no human knew of (or remembered) its existence now. Yet might it have been rediscovered?

He reached the place, watching as the surf repeatedly battered the rocks, circling down past the still blades of the fans and below the silent hall; eventually lowering himself onto the mossy and very unstable wharf. It seemed what had once been his palace was now a crumbling ruin, yet it looked as untouched as it had been since he had flown away with Mew. *Good*. Better a ruin than a restoration.

Slowly and carefully he padded up the stairs leading from the wharf, feeling strength returning to his muscles with every step. Eventually he stood facing the grand door of the main hall. At his arrival, it slowly creaked open, allowing him to step inside cautiously; his padded feet making barely any sound on the dirty floor.

The great chamber stood dead - its once shining yellow pillars dusty, the chairs strewn and broken about the floor, and some even spinarak-webbed. Occasionally a stray breeze from the now open doors gusted in, causing a brief flurry of movement from the natural refuse on the floor, but apart from that; the silence was oppressive. Even as close as the great hall was to the sea, the sound of the surf was inaudible.

As Mewtwo reached the middle of the spacious hall, his quicker footfalls began echoing eerily from wall to wall. As he grew closer to the podium memories started to surface again, and he grimaced - remembering a glimmer of pink. Irritated, he cast it from his mind. Mew was the last thing he needed on his mind. He'd spent enough time obsessing over his rival to last his entire life.

He stepped further away from the table, noting with curious acceptance that there was still untouched food here from all those months ago. The bread that wasn't dehydrated was covered with colourful fungus; scattered along with the also horrible looking fruit and broken crockery scattered all over the floor. *I'll have to find something fresh to eat pretty soon*, he decided. As bad as the sample looked here, just the idea of food was making his stomach rumble.

"Master?" came an ethereal voice, drifting from nowhere and yet echoing as any other sound would. "You look hungry, shall I lay out the luncheon?"

<Shut up,> Mewtwo growled in reply, kneading his forehead. <Go away. I have no need of *that* memory either.> He needed to go further into his castle, and reunite himself with things he had never wanted to see or hear ever again; not bandy words with a phantom voice of his human servant from before.

Yet, again it came, closer and louder this time. "Very well. Will there be anything else before I take my leave, Master?"

Ignoring it, trying to banish all thoughts of her, he padded further into the room, levitating up onto the podium - the moat now dry, and also dusty - where he had once fought off a charizard and a rhyhorn, and slowly rose further into the air, his eyes again glowing an eerie blue.

As he entered his control room, his psychic energy lifting him fully out of the spiraled entranceway and onto the floor next to his chair, he noticed that the multi-image screens were black and dead from lack of energy and a power source. Yet, they should have activated once he had drawn close. Perhaps the desperate psychic blasts at the end of his struggle with Mew had short-circuited them like the spotlights on the stadium.

Paused here, Mewtwo wondered where his old friends - the ones that had not been clones: the fearow and the dragonite - were now. Perhaps their own enmity of humankind had diminished somewhat, and they had found themselves worthy trainers. <Whatever their chosen path, I hope they are happy.>

There was a sultry breath at his neck tube, and a swish of material upon the obsidian floor behind him. "Master? Shall I prepare the dragonite messenger once again?"

Unable to contain the bestial shriek of surprise that roared from his unused vocal cords, he spun to face... nothing. Nothing but the gloom of a long

unused computer system, smaller pillars - similar to the ones downstairs yet somewhat more reminiscent of his broken birth tube - supporting the high roof.

<Memories,> he sighed, unable to believe that phantom voice had uprooted his confidence so much; feeling his body once trembling violently after the scare. It seemed his sleeping *and* waking minds were now both unable to differentiate between reality and memory; he could still feel the tickling sensation of her warm breath on his fur. <You aren't real,> he said, and swiped roughly at his neck to allay the tickle. *Gods, am I going insane? Perhaps I already am...*

“My Master always liked his little games,” came the warm confident voice, this time to his left. He jerked his head quickly towards the sound but again only shadows greeted him. “Are we pretending I’m not really here now? That’s a funny game; you know I’m always here by your side. Waiting. Watching...”

<You do not belong here any more,> he ground out, steadily becoming more furious and yet inwardly terrified. <Go away, Joy!>

A giggle. “As you wish, Master. You still look hungry. I will go downstairs and prepare dinner.”

Mewtwo turned his attention to the screens again, focusing his will. After a brief second, there was a loud buzz and a flicker of picture, which zapped out again a second later. “Muu,” he grunted vocally. <Damn you. Work!>

Another zap of light across the screen, and he was suddenly greeted with the bright view of fluffy clouds as they drifted close by outside the control room, above the placid ocean. Seating himself in his chair, he felt a sudden temptation to raise a hand and quicken the cloud's pace. Smiling ruefully, he shook it off. He was here for answers, not cheap thrills.

Who is the girl?

He thought for a moment. After destroying the whole laboratory in a violent rage, and Giovanni's gym soon after, he had returned; renamed his place of birth to New Island, salvaging what technology he could, and in a sense replicating it for his own purposes. In the meantime he had also salvaged a video tape and restored it as best as he could; even though watching and listening to it made him angry enough to want to destroy New Island all over again.

Had there been any *other* recording technology at all used by the scientists, any electronic notes taken with further clues about his childhood, or had it only been cloning equipment?

That girl... she must have been from before my birth. I cannot remember anything clearly before I was ready to be, apart from her - and also some words...

<Life is wonderful...>

But... why?

Focusing his will once more, he switched the screen displays. Now, they showed multiple images of crackling static - it appeared that the camera on the Fearow had either fallen off or been removed.

After rewinding the whole tape, which had been recorded automatically, Mewtwo scanned past the many images of trainers and their pokémon winning heated, fast-paced battles, until he had reached the very last case study; that of a young boy and his three pokémon. Apart from that, nothing. No clues as yet. No sudden flashes of inspired memory. This footage was too recent.

He switched the images again. More cameras; this time showing the underground cloning facility, looking ruined by a blast. In desperation, he flicked past more and more, all of which was no help. <Is there any data on the years of my creation at all? I... think I must have destroyed it all - if there was any extra besides that one tape at any point in time...>

Flick. Flick. Flick. Past the weathered stadium, the thick-bladed fans where the innocent mew had once played - Mewtwo watching this past footage with a look of amazement on his face - past even the camera overlooking the wharf.

Flick. Flick. Flick. *Fli-zzzzt!*

The monitors shorted out again with a loud zap of static, and Mewtwo flinched backwards in surprise. Reflecting in their black dead sheen was his own

face and torso, and close behind that the distorted silhouette of a woman in a maroon dress.



Mewtwo felt his heartbeat surge to an almost painful rate as he swung around in his chair, dreading what he was about to see yet unable to stop himself.

Nothing. Nobody. He was alone.

Or was he?

He swung back towards the monitor. There, the woman's reflection was still present. When he saw her take a step closer towards him he looked around his chair - still nothing.

A reflection. A memory. Not real.

She took another step. Mewtwo stared intently into the monitor, wishing her reflection was clearer yet unable to truly believe he was still seeing her.

“Master,” she said, and Mewtwo distinctly heard the sound from behind him. He resisted the temptation to look backwards a third time in hopes she’d be there: a solid, logical proof to the existence of the reflection.

She doesn't exist in reality. She's not here - by now she's back at the Old Shore Wharf pokémon centre maintaining the front desk. You don't have a human servant any more.

Then what is that in the monitor?!

<Yes, Joy?> he said.

“You are looking in all the wrong places,” she said firmly. “You must go elsewhere to find what you need to know.”

<Elsewhere? Where could anything else be? I built over the old lab.>

A sly smile graced her shadowy face. “And yet, it still exists. Go below. Rely on your oldest memories and do not push them away like you have done before. They will be the ones to assist you in recalling those memories that were taken away from you without permission.”

Half rising from his chair, Mewtwo leaned forward towards the reflection of the wraithlike shape still standing calmly. <So you are a memory as well? If not, what are you?>

“Does the fact that you are being instructed by an seemingly outwards source - that does not really exist - make any difference to how you will act? That is the question you should be asking,” she chided softly, stepping slowly backwards, back into the gloom of the shadows. “You know what I say is right. Go down, go below all this... all these structures and complications. Go to where the memories are at their weakest, and you will find further help.”

She disappeared. Mewtwo swiveled in his chair, wanting her back, to hear more of her words, but again there was nothing to see.

So he stood up, determined to do as Joy had advised, and disappeared likewise.



The Phantom Child

Chapter 2: Reflections



Chapter Two: Reflections

He stood outside the strange bulbous doorway, wondering why it had not automatically retreated into the wall as it had done before when he had last been here, creating his clones.

And as he thought about it, more memories flooded his brain...

He did not know anything about this world where humans and pokémon lived together, nor understood what pokémon really were; and the fact concerned him. But how could he know? He was the strongest, and so when he had been under the command of Giovanni, he had only needed to focus his will slightly before the strange assortment of opponents had screamed and started writhing in pain. No time to really study, or even understand what he was going up against, only that they were all so different... and could be all captured by humans who used those strange spherical pokéballs.

The idea of owning his own pokémon had come to him when he had been resting one night at New Island. At first, it had only been a niggling need -

“Wouldn’t it be helpful if I could really take the time to study one!” - but had throughout the night grown into a plan to create more clones like himself; super clones, their powers enhanced until they were invincible like him.

But to do that... he needed to create his own laboratory. And to do that...

After attempting to repair a little of the twisted metal and debris that lay scattered all over the earth, he realised there was no way he could possibly fix it on his own. But he needed to rebuild. This island was his now, he owned it, and so could not stand the sight of the ruins, all burnt and charred. And so he found a means to an end. After much thought - and anger at himself for once more bringing them into it - he decided to use humans to build his palace.

Casting his mind so far away to the north was difficult, but he had been trained once to tell when any were thinking of entering Giovanni’s Gym, and so it was not hard to differentiate between those humans who could build things to those that could not; and those who could design such a building to do him proud.

Leaving them to their own devices for the moment, he practised teleportation. He started with small things; bits of metal, broken shards of glass. Then, he tried himself. After that, he knew he could manage it, so with excitement in his chest, he sought those with the most experience and know-how on that other island he had only known only for a few weeks, and - gathering his power

and will - surrounded them with psychic energy, grasping them tightly so they would not implode in mid-transfer, and brought them to him.

They had panicked, of course, so he had had to brainwash them quickly, focusing all their attentions to the task at hand. Attending to their various needs by merely moulding their minds to his, he waited for the day when it would be finished.

Till as last... his palace finally was done; all three stories of it. He had put the remaining electronic technology from the destroyed laboratory downstairs in the basement, in preparation for creating more clones. The ground floor was left practically empty save for the enormous dining table in the centre. Upstairs was his domain, with his chair, constructed specifically for those with a tail.

Upon its finish, he had come across a problem with what to do with the architects and builders. Finding no rage in him to kill them, he sought to erase their memories and sent them back with no indication of where they had been for the past few months; hoping they would not remember their large grey coloured employer in the slightest...

That night he had gone down to the basement and watched for the first time the only surviving video footage of his past. The crackly voice had filled him with contempt and loathing as he recognised the speaker as the cold-hearted

human who had proclaimed Mewtwo's status as nothing but a laboratory experiment.

"I haven't got much time; I pray this record of our experiment survives!"

<Indeed it has, doctor,> Mewtwo had growled.

"A year ago we found the fossilised remains of the ancient pokémon: mew! There was sufficient genetic material in the fossilised eyelash to replicate mew. But Giovanni, who funded our project, insisted we try to design super-clones, more powerful than any living pokémon. Many attempts failed, but finally; from the gathered components we created a living pokémon with this machine! We called it Mewtwo. But for some reason the creature's anger is out of control. It is displaying un-measurable violence. With its psychic powers it is destroying our laboratory! Our goal and dream was to create the world's strongest pokémon with our hands. And we succeeded-"

The video had ended with a flash of static, and with it Mewtwo's interest. The 'world's strongest pokémon' - what did that matter now he had dreams to be the world's strongest pokémon trainer? He had already proven his worth as a pokémon, now it was time to prove his worth as somebody on the same level as a human - and better.

<What a waste of time,> he said. <I ignored that which was much more important - my history before the memories begin. Because that exists somewhere - it *has* to - and I need to find it.>

He raised a hand and concentrated. With a sound like scraping metal the doorway finally retreated into the wall, the screech grating upon his sensitive ears. Rusted, perhaps, unused for months after all.

How do you know it exists? came a thought. *How can you possibly have existence before you have memories of it?* The idea made him sag as he stood, staring at the ruin of the cloning machine in despair. <How so?> he said sadly. <Perhaps I am in fact chasing nothing but a dream...>

With nothing else to do, he stepped forward into the room.

“Good evening, Master.”

Joy stood close to the dusty conveyor belt, poised for service, her delicate hands folded at her front. Demurely she curtsied, never lifting her eyes to his own.

<You’re down here too?> Mewtwo asked in surprise. *I can see her far more clearly now.*

“Of course, my Master,” Joy replied. “I am always by your side, ready to serve you.”

<Then serve,> Mewtwo said, allowing a little of his desperation to seep into his tone, <by helping me remember.>

“As you wish,” Joy said, then paused. “You have reached as far and as deep as you can on your own. You are even having doubts about whether this is a futile task you have set yourself.”

<Is it?> he asked. <Am I chasing after the memory of a girl who does not actually exist beyond my dreams?>

Joy took a while to answer. “Not exactly.” She smiled. “You are on the right track to uncovering everything. You just need time.”

Silence fell. In the large echoey room his breathing seemed unnaturally loud, yet even though he never took his gaze off Joy he could see no sign of her own respiration. *That’s because she’s not really there.*

“How can you possibly have existence before you have memories of it?” Joy asked, echoing his own question of a few moments before. “How indeed?”

Mewtwo felt anger not for the first time with this spectral woman. <If you won’t tell me-> he ground out, but was interrupted.

“I cannot tell you, because I do not know myself,” said Joy, the pain in her voice obvious. “You are right - I am merely a memory of your own making. I am for the moment your muse, a creature of mere guidance towards resolution of your faded past. I am a part of your subconscious.”

She turned her face away and put her hands to her eyes, shaking slightly, her voice unsteady. “It was me who sent you the image of that girl in the dream, I did not know it would turn nightmarish-”

Stunned, Mewtwo could say or do nothing in return. He waited until Joy - or at least his subconscious mind in the form of Joy - had recovered from her emotions and was ready to speak again, and did not try to interrupt as the hidden part of his mind worked to impart knowledge to his consciousness.

“She exists,” said Joy adamantly. “I know she does. And you have but one fragmented memory of her to go upon... and the words: 'life is wonderful'.”

<Is it enough?>

“Yes,” said Joy. “Think about it. Life. What a wonderful, amazing thing. As a phenomenon, as a miracle of nature, as a series of experiences documented by memory. We are born, we grow up, we mature, and grow wise with each experience granted to us by life itself. We-”

<Wait,> said Mewtwo. <You once explained to me the miracle of birth...>

“Your knowledge of pokémon physiology proved useful for my plan,” recited Joy. “Do you remember saying that?”

<I do now,> admitted Mewtwo with a tinge of guilt at how little he had cared for another living thing. As far as he had been concerned back then, Joy had been his walking, talking encyclopaedia: merely property.

He'd psychically wrenched her away from the counter of the pokémon centre one late night after finding her knowledge-filled mind amidst so many others close by who did not know as much. And he had justified himself in doing so with the argument that the humans had viewed him as merely property to begin with.

Joy had been terrified - hysterical. She had screamed. None of the others had screamed. In sudden doubt and perturbation Mewtwo had brainwashed her so much her eyes had completely clouded over and her face had sunk into dull impassiveness. She never smiled after that.

"I also imparted my knowledge of human physiology and cloning techniques," said Joy, snapping Mewtwo out of his memory. "Yes?"

<Yes,> said Mewtwo. <It was... very interesting to say the least. I had not been conceived or born naturally - I had been cloned, *created*. It was very interesting to know just how the humans had done it, and such an odd feeling to find I could replicate the feat.>

"But only with pokémon," said Joy, stressing the last word. "Your clones were all pokémon."

Mewtwo blinked, nonplussed. <Of course they were. Did you expect me to clone humans? Create more of the one species I had sworn to annihilate?>

“So why would humans clone pokémon?” asked Joy, her voice slightly raised. “Why would they create you?”

The questions resonated deeply in Mewtwo's mind. He knew they were important, that somehow the answer to the missing memories lay in the answer to these. <The - the humans were greedy,> he said, trying to come up with justification. <They created me for money, for vainglory, so they could boast. They created me *because they damn well could!*>

“Really?” asked Joy coolly. “Are you that sure there was no other motivation? Are you prepared to dismiss all the humans that quickly? Think deeper. Think harder. Remember, 'there was sufficient genetic material in the fossilised eyelash to replicate mew. But Giovanni, who funded our project, insisted we try to design super-clones, more powerful than any living pokémon.' By all means, Giovanni shows his greed and aim for more power here. But does the doctor? It seems to me that the doctor had different ideals for this project when he uses the phrase '*but Giovanni*'.”

<You-> Mewtwo said, then paused. <You mean the doctor didn't plan to create me as a super clone? So the doctor wanted to clone mew simply to create another mew. Is there anything else you can surmise from his words?>

“There were others created,” Joy said. “You know it's true. Many of the doctor's other clones were failed attempts before you were created. You remember the lab. Yours was not the only one tube.”

<So clones of the DNA of mew need some tampering with before they survive, what of it? Perhaps the only reason I survived is because of Giovanni's push to improve the mew DNA.>

Joy sighed audibly. “It could be possible that not every clone was of Mew,” she said. “It is a possibility and nothing else. I am just making it clear to you that there was perhaps some other 'two, or 'three - or even 'four - in existence before it died.”

Suddenly, Joy's eyes widened, and her hands flew up in reaction. There was a flash of bright light, and she was suddenly gone from the room. Mewtwo jumped backwards in surprise, and felt his vision and hearing fading. <Am I fainting?> he thought.

One, two, three... f-four... five, six-uh, seven... eight, nine... ten!

The counting words reverberated somewhere in the depths of his mind, spoken by a very, very young voice, joined by another about the number eight. The voices simultaneously reached the number ten and broke into giddy, joyful laughter together.

Suddenly, Mewtwo felt like he really was about to faint. He stumbled once and then lowered himself carefully onto the floor into a seated position. <Those voices... who are they?> he asked himself, hoping for a bit of solace from his subconscious.

“I remembered something!” Joy said from nowhere. “The counting! I remember it now! You were learning about numbers and counting up to ten!”

<That was me?! Then who was the other voice?> Mewtwo demanded. <Who was with me back then? Why can't I remember?>

There was silence. Joy did not speak or appear again.

<Damn you! Why did you leave? Just when I need you the most!> Mewtwo cried. He staggered upright, pacing out of the room and levitating back up onto the ground floor, level to the sea. What he saw there made his heart skip a beat.

An adolescent human female with pink pigtails was standing next to the dining room table, looking curiously at him.

Mewtwo's right hand whipped up blindingly fast, creating an invisible barrier between him and the human. He quickly extended the barrier around to enclose the human inside an entire spherical shield, thickening it so they could not escape.

Is she really there? Or is she another facet of my subconscious mind?

Unsure, he lowered his hand, holding the shield with his mind only. <Who are you?> he demanded. <How did you find this place?>

“I'm Lovrina,” she said with a smile. “I'm a Cipher Admin.” Her smile widened, turning into a sickly-sweet beam. “Who are you, big boy?”

She must be real. Because I've never seen her before in my life - not even in my dreams.

<Answer my question,> Mewtwo said. <Was it by chance?>

She giggled. “Ooh, you're so serious. As it happens, Cipher has been looking so hard for a new base of operations. An hour ago our pretty submarine picked up a radar signal of this nice little island, which was *soo* not on any of our maps.” She looked around slowly. “It's perfect. But it'll probably need a little redecoration.”

Irked by her pretentiousness, Mewtwo did not answer straight away; deep in thought. *Cipher? Could that be another Team Rocket? They could be dangerous. What should I do? I swore I'd never erase another's memories ever again - how can I now that I am so struggling and frustrated with the task of regaining my own? How could I wish that on another? But... I don't trust her. She's seen me now. What will she do?*

Mewtwo straightened himself and lashed his tail once or twice, hoping to intimidate her slight form with his bulky six feet of height. He put on his best

glare. <This island belongs to me. You cannot have it.> He took a step forward. <You have to leave right now, and never return.> *And consider yourself lucky that I don't simply teleport you out of here myself and wipe your memory of this place completely away. And destroy your 'pretty' submarine.*

“Oh, how mean!” Lovrina squealed, putting her balled fists to her face. “You’re so not being nice to me! I want this island *now* - why aren’t you cooperating with me? Can’t we so make a deal? Pretty please?”

Ugh, stop talking... Mewtwo groaned. <No,> he said shortly. <No more deals with humans. Leave this place.>

The girl stuck out her tongue at him. “Bully to you, meanie.” Then, as if her personality had just switched in a moment, the hands were down back at her side - one already clutching a minimised pokéball - and her face deadly serious. Had her immaturity simply been a mask, then? “A little hurt could be *so* persuasive,” she said in a low voice, her eyes glittering.

Mewtwo had not noticed the pokéballs at her waist but now couldn’t take his gaze off them. He had completely forgotten about his own ones after capturing all those pokémon. Joy had supplied him with blueprints of trainer pokéballs, which he had vastly improved on and created from scratch. His pokéballs were all psychically linked to him and to each other, they were able to hone in on a pokémon’s life energy and gravitate towards it; making capturing far

easier. Moreover, they were not only able to capture pokémon, but pokéballs containing pokémon. Where had they all disappeared to? Maybe they were still down in the destroyed cloning machine.

“Kitty?” Lovrina said, tilting her head at him. “Are you listening?”

<I will not battle you either,> Mewtwo said, trying to put as much foreboding rumble in his mental voice as possible. He couldn’t really read her, didn’t know what she was going to do or say next. Her high-pitched, cutesy voice was alarmingly off-putting as well, for some reason. <Must I take matters into my own hands and remove you myself?>

Lovrina pouted, the pokéball still dwarfed by her fingertips but the high affectation in her voice back. <Oh, boo. Look, you are being so rude to me and I’m a guest in your house. Please, have a battle with me, and if you win, we’ll leave. Promise.”

Mewtwo felt he had agreed to enough deals with humans to last his entire lifetime already. They always had their ulterior motives, and normally were lying about the terms anyway. Still, the question had to be asked.

<And if I lose?>

Lovrina grinned. “You’ll so like that even better - I’ll make you the strongest pokémon in the world.”

Mewtwo could only blink at her, completely taken aback. Then, unable to stop himself, he burst into hysterical laughter. *Oh, so that's what it feels like*, he thought, a small corner of his mind able to ward off the hilarity simply enjoying the physical sensations of an uncontrollable laughing fit.

“That’s so not funny,” she said as his laughter began to finally subside.

<I *am* the strongest pokémon in the world!> Mewtwo said, still gasping for breath. <That’s what I was created to be! An emotionless fighting machine!>

Lovrina’s mood flipped again. Suddenly she was glaring at him, her eyes intense. Her finger tapped the pokéball’s button lightly - it maximised and she drew back to throw it.

Will I be the pokémon, or the trainer? Mewtwo wondered, the last vestiges of his hilarity still lingering. *Well, as I have no pokémon of my own any longer... Mewtwo, I choose you!*

He removed the shield around Lovrina to allow a proper throw and stepped a few paces back, gearing up as best he could in his state. *I don't need toned muscles for psychic attacks*, he reminded himself.

“You, emotionless?” Lovrina asked. “A fighting machine? Let me so show you what that *really* looks like!”

She threw the ball towards the ceiling. It sailed over the table and burst open in midair, revealing the diminutive shape of a pikachu, who as soon as it had fully materialised bent down and poised for its first attack command.

Its black ear-tips were zigzagged.



The Phantom Child

Chapter 3: Trigger



Chapter Three: Trigger

There were two things that flashed simultaneously into Mewtwo's mind. The first was that Lovrina's pikachu wasn't just any pikachu. That was Pikachutwo - one of his closest friends.

What are the odds of that...?

The second thought was that Pikachutwo looked *wrong*.

Very wrong.

His next train of thought came in Joy's voice. *Note the rigid stance and distant facial expression. The specimen doesn't appear to be regularly psyched up for battle.*

Pikachutwo doesn't only look wrong, Joy, she feels wrong. Mewtwo's psychic sense was screaming warning signs when it brushed over Pikachutwo's erratically spiking energy field.

I know, Joy said.

What have I done in leaving my clones without any of my protection? I knew their freedom would come with pitfalls... I shouldn't have stopped watching over them... I abandoned them...

There was a pause, then Joy said softly, *There's nothing more you could have done after Mount Quena. Every being on this earth needs freedom. That is the one thing they asked for, and that is what you - as their creator and friend - gave them.*

<Pikachutwo...> Mewtwo said softly, feeling a million questions flash through his mind; where she'd gone, what she'd done... Yet, there was nothing to say, not when Pikachutwo's deadened eyes looked not at him but through him, completely emotionless.

She doesn't seem to recognise me at all. The thought sent a pang through his heart.

<I cannot battle you, Lovrina,> he said, and relaxed his body out of his fighting stance. <I cannot battle this pikachu.>

"Oh, Kitty and Ziggy have a history?" Lovrina asked lightly. "That's so interesting."

Ziggy?

Sudden rage rushed through Mewtwo. <What have you done with her?> He felt his fingers tingling as if they were unconsciously gathering power for a

shadow ball attack. And all the while Pikachutwo stood frozen in the same position, her faraway gaze somehow boring through Mewtwo; it felt even more painful than the fire in his nightmare.

“Silly kitty,” she admonished. “Don’t look at me like that! Ziggy so came to Cipher willingly.”

<Her name is not Ziggy,> Mewtwo said.

Lovrina’s eyes grew flinty again. When she spoke next her voice was several tones lower. “Actually, it is.”

<Look at me, Pikachutwo,> Mewtwo said.

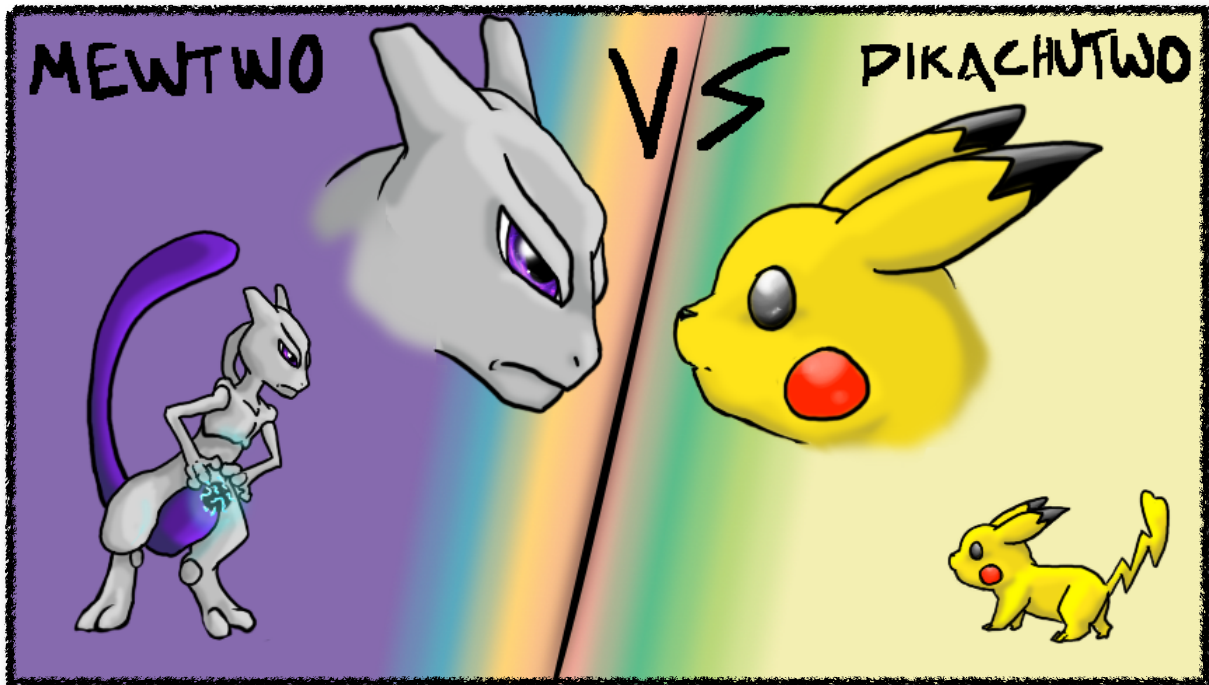
Amazingly, Pikachutwo shifted her focus until it rested solely on Mewtwo’s face. Their eyes met, and what Mewtwo saw in them made his breath hitch. He stared, unable to look away, feeling sudden nausea rising in his stomach; and then in a surprisingly difficult twist of his head wrenched his gaze away.

I can’t look at that.

But I can’t look away.

I need to kill Lovrina.

The third thought came completely out of the blue, yet Mewtwo seized upon it instantly.



He opened himself up to his power, flooding his body and turning his eyes shining azure. Through a haze of brilliant power he saw Lovrina reacting by flinging her hand out in a battle command.

Her voice rang out. “Ziggy, Shadow Bolt!”

Little do you know that I’m not powering up to fight with Pikachutwo after all. Mewtwo brought his hands together and aimed them at Lovrina.

He noticed Pikachutwo in his peripheral vision: charging up what looked like sparks of purple electricity (Shadow Bolt?) and shielded himself in a strong psychic barrier before roaring vocally and blasting Lovrina with a raw psychic energy attack.

She was flung backwards, and landed heavily on the marble floor. She didn't move.

Mewtwo relaxed his arms and let them fall back to his side. <Pikachutwo->

Crack.

Sudden pain hit, and radiated. His barrier shield might as well have never existed, given the level of agony. He felt his whole body turn to jelly and crumple, physically and mentally unable to support himself at the barrage.

Inanely, Joy piped up as his head hit the floor, sounding cheery as she related a newly discovered fact. *Psychic shields do not protect from the Shadow Bolt move.*

<Please, Pikachutwo,> Mewtwo gasped, his body still jerking from the electricity, his ears ringing. <Stop.>

Eyes streaming, he watched as Lovrina slowly staggered upright, her knees bent. She began chuckling under her breath. "All Ziggy wanted was to be strong. But now she's more than strong. She's invincible!"

<Please,> Mewtwo said, barely able to form mental words. <Stop. My friend, please stop.> He blinked to clear his eyes and watched as Pikachutwo blinked in synchrony. For an instant - just the briefest of moments - he saw comprehension blossom in them. But then he blinked again and it was gone, replaced with the same faded stare.

She's lost to me. Oh gods, make it stop...

“Ziggy, Shadow Rush!”

Pikachutwo tensed, and leaped towards him like an automaton, burning purple-black flames.

I can't watch this.

Mewtwo closed his eyes.

The shadows took him.

His eyes opened.

For a moment all he could see was the solemn faces of the scientists as they surveyed their experiment. But that wasn't now, that was the past. The past, at least, was over.

So what was he really seeing?

His vision finally cleared. The doctor faded into the form of Lovrina, her gaze just as clinical - the only real differences were the hair and outfit.

Where... am I?

He turned his head and winced at the intense surge of pain that started at his crown and ended up somewhere around his left cheek. Struggling through the pain which bode him close his eyes he looked around and recognised the room as his cloning facility downstairs from the dining area. But it was not the silent,

empty room of before when he had been exploring. Joy was not by the conveyor belt, rather a cluster of white-coats inspecting his equipment and talking loudly amongst themselves.

Lovrina stood before him, looking taller than she had upstairs. Mewtwo realised he was seated on a big chair by an empty wall; diodes plastered to his body and the chill of metal seeping into his skin. Behind Lovrina the cloning machine loomed; hazily fading between omanyte-inspired and wheel-like.

This... this is not the same. Was everything before... just a dream?

“Both humans and pokémon have been witnessed experiencing what’s known as a trigger; a sight, or sound - or generated by any one of our senses really - leading to a highly vivid replaying of a memory, normally one with negative connotations,” Joy said.

<Have you ever experienced a trigger?> Mewtwo asked.

“Yes, Master,” Joy said. But her tone was final, and Mewtwo didn’t enquire further.

Lovrina was suddenly gone again, replaced by the doctor.

“Excellent. We’ll start our testing right away.”

The fear spiked.

<This cannot be my destiny!>

Mewtwo reached for his power. But there was nowhere to draw from. In a panic, he thrashed wildly, feeling the diodes whip around him. A few were ripped entirely from his skin.

The sensation upon his skin slightly cleared his mind, and he halted - almost ashamedly - for losing so much control. There was no doctor. The doctor was dead. It was Lovrina standing there before him impassively. Definitely Lovrina.

“You’re so naughty,” she said. “It’s illegal for pokémon to attack humans during battle. And now I’ve so got a bad headache.”

Mewtwo blinked and looked around quickly, remaining silent. Pikachutwo was nowhere to be seen. Not that that particularly mattered; he couldn’t attack the human or the pokémon with no psychic power to call upon.

“Last chance, kitty,” Lovrina said. “Come along willingly and it’ll be a lot less painful for you.”

<Never,> Mewtwo said. <I will never, ever submit to another human.>

The human girl shrugged. “Ok dokey lokey.” She pulled a gun from her holster and fired it straight at him in one quick motion.

Fwitt.

Mewtwo snarled at the sharp sting at his neck, but didn't even have the strength to raise a hand and inspect the area. It hadn't recoiled or sounded like a bullet shot. *A sleeping dart, then?*

"Sweet dreams," Lovrina cooed, simpering at him. "Peons, it's so time to begin the procedure."

Damn you.

Had he said that aloud? There was no time to wonder; already dark clouds were billowing over his fading vision and his eyelids were drooping.

I don't want to go to sleep...

The young boy trainer stood before Mewtwo in the gloom, his cap hiding his face from clear view. He choked back a sob, and lifted his teary gaze to meet Mewtwo's eyes. "How could you do this?"

Around them: devastation. The entire landscape ravaged and furrowed with the aftermath of a freak storm. Thick smoke rose in several places on the horizon.

In disbelief, Mewtwo took a faltering step backwards.

<But... I... I didn't do this!> He turned a full circle, taking in the sight of the demolished buildings illuminated by the uneasy half-light of a sun shaded by

a haze of dirty grey brown. <You showed me how unselfish humans could be - and so I calmed the storm.>

“No, you just *thought* you did,” the boy said. “You’ve been hallucinating ever since you killed me.”

<You are not dead,> Mewtwo argued.

The trainer chuckled. “Aren’t I?”

He gestured to his right, where a little pink shape lay crumpled and broken in the mud. It was so damaged and misshapen it didn’t even look like it had ever been alive.

“We’re all dead here,” the trainer said.

<No,> Mewtwo whispered, denying both what he was seeing and hearing.

<I never did that. Never that.>

“You did. You even laughed while you did it. You’re no pokémon. You’re a monster - an abomination.”

<None of this is true,> Mewtwo said. <*This* is the hallucination!>

The boy brought his hands to his face and wiped away his tears. “How dare you call this an hallucination? Like you can just pretend it’s not the real world!” Through his fingers, Mewtwo saw his face warp with rage. “Can you call *this* an hallucination?!”

Mewtwo heard a strangled roar from above. He flinched and whirled out of the way, only to see Charizardtwo brutally slam the boy's Charizard into the ground in front of him.

Charizardtwo clambered off his still brother, wings open, and roared flames triumphantly into the sky. "I am strong now, aren't I, master?"

Mewtwo couldn't even answer his pokémon. All he could do was stare at Charizard, eyes open yet unseeing.

Dead.

This has already happened once before.

He heard the words in Joy's calm, cool tone.

This can't be reality. Things like this can't happen twice. I have to be dreaming again - right?

Mewtwo looked around once again, narrowing his eyes in scrutiny. The buildings were now silhouetted, casting long, deep black shadows over the ground. He sniffed the air curiously, feeling the acrid smoky air enter his lungs.

It certainly smells real.

Don't be fooled, said Joy. How can there be red sunset and shadows when only moments before the sky was completely grey?

Just like that the dream broke and began to sag at the edges. The boy trainer's face yawned into a horrifying gape as he raised a hand and started

towards Mewtwo. But even as he did so the entire landscape began to retreat even faster than the boy could move towards him.

Like looking out of a window, the rectangular picture shrunk and shrunk till it winked out completely and Mewtwo was left in darkness.

Open your eyes.

He did so. Lovrina was still standing there before him but the smirk on her face was gone, replaced with an irritated look. “What’s going on - why is it awake?”

Trying to keep his facial muscles impassive, Mewtwo struggled to summon some sort of psychic energy to strike at her - any at all. But still there was nothing. If his powers had been a lake, the water had completely run dry. He was powerless both physically and mentally.

<You’re a fool if you thought the strongest psychic pokémon in the world wouldn’t know how to lucid dream, Lovrina,> Mewtwo said, well aware he was very vulnerable. He needed to somehow bluff his way out, needed to escape. (Could he even fly right now?) <You think to break me with nightmares?>

“Peons!” Lovrina shouted, stamping her foot. “Put the equipment through its cycle again and turn it up to maximum this time!”

“But Miss Lovrina, the specimen needs to be sedated again before-”

“Turn it on! *Now!*” Lovrina screeched, still glaring at Mewtwo.

“Y-yes Miss!”

Mewtwo heard a whirring start up, and the chair he was sitting on shuddered and creaked. Something reminiscent of the feeling of warm sunlight began to bathe his skin, and he looked up, searching for a light source, but there was nothing above him save for the dark ceiling; tiny fire hydrants dotting it in a grid.

I didn't put those in. How long have I been asleep?

<What is it?> he asked, not really caring if he received an answer from Lovrina or not. <What are you doing?>

Legs, stand. STAND! It truly felt like he was paralyzed from the waist down. His legs refused to even quiver.

The warmth intensified, began prickling his skin as if he was being slowly sunburned - not unpleasant but still noticeable. When it intensified further into a slightly uncomfortable feeling, he shifted in hopes it would ease. His vision blurred and shifted. If this got any worse...

<Put me under, you *sadist*,> Mewtwo said, putting as much loathing into his tone as he could manage in his discomfort. <If you won't let me go, at least have the decency to listen to your underlings and make it painless.>

He squeezed his eyelids together, trying to rid them of the excess liquid making his vision swim. When he opened his eyes again Lovrina wasn't standing

in front of him anymore. She was standing over a peon at the computer console, staring at the buttons.

“We are at full power, Miss Lovrina,” the peon muttered.

“Then do it,” she replied.

The human might have pressed a button, or pulled a switch, but Mewtwo didn't see it so much as feel the result in the form of a deluge of sickening pain. He struggled to keep his eyes open in their ache to squint in agony, casting his gaze around him in hope he could identify what was happening.

The energy felt different than what he had endured at Mount Quena. That energy field had been visible. This one was definitely not. Mewtwo couldn't even tell what was making the energy. Perhaps it was the chair.

Why was he being made to endure yet again? Lovrina had not even properly explained what she wanted, besides indicating she might want to use him for battle. Well, Giovanni had tried that - twice - and failed miserably. He wasn't weak. Either Lovrina would die, or he would; but he would never ever submit.

<No matter how much pain-> he said, his words ground out slowly and carefully, <I will never- aargh!>

The pain was different. It didn't sear like the dream fire. It didn't rip like Pikachutwo's Shadow Bolt. It slunk, like poison. Nausea roiling in his belly, he

struggled against the prying paralysis. It was his neck tube and vitals which ached the worst; each wave of pain making the hairs down his spine prickle and stand on end.

It became too much, and Mewtwo closed his eyes.

The girl floated in front of him, bordered in the odd indescribable colour and texture of what closed eyes see.

“Remember me?”

Mewtwo opened them back up again hurriedly. Not such a good idea to sleep it seemed, after all. This time it was another human standing before him, gazing at him in pity.

“She’s out of the room for a few minutes,” the human said. “I... I can’t allow this to happen whilst you’re conscious.”

<You’re as much a monster as she is,> Mewtwo said.

The human flinched and hugged his small notepad to his chest further, his face tight. “I can help just a bit if you’ll let me.” He reached into his pocket and drew out a small hypodermic syringe. “This will make the pain go away, and you’ll sleep.”

Another wave of pain came just after the human had finished. Mewtwo bent over and retched bile in between his feet. He hacked as much of the disgusting stuff he could out of his throat, then spat it out. Raising his torso back to a seated position was a struggle, but once he had done so, Mewtwo fixed his gaze onto the human's eyes and snarled at him. <Get me out of here.>

The human paled further. "I can only do that with this."

<If you can't physically release me,> Mewtwo said, no longer caring. <then just go away.>

But the human stepped forward. Once he was in reach of Mewtwo's arm, he suddenly gasped and staggered, still carefully holding the syringe aloft. "Maximum power..." he murmured.

<I don't want it,> Mewtwo insisted.

He felt the human touch his shoulder and his revulsion grew. <Go away,> he said, then felt a sharp pain at the place. <Damn it, human!> Instinctively Mewtwo psychically shoved him away, but the man didn't even quiver. <She's waiting for me!> he cried. But of course the human would have no idea what he was talking about. <I can't go to sleep!>

"What are you doing?"

It was Lovrina's voice. The human flinched and the needle shook a little, sending more direct stabbing pain into Mewtwo's arm.

“Sorry,” the man gasped. “Nearly there.”

“Get out of there, you idiot!” she screamed.

“Done,” the man whispered in satisfaction, and withdrew the needle.

Mewtwo watched as he slumped till they were at eye level; the human on his knees, Mewtwo still prone in the chair. There was a glowing smile on the man’s face, but his eyes were blank.

In horror, Mewtwo felt his own eyes beginning to lose focus, his eyelids closing slowly. *No!* He struggled to no avail. The last thing he saw before sleep took him again was more peons under Lovrina’s command rushing in to the scene and dragging the human’s body away.

The girl was there in the darkness.

“I’ve been waiting for you.”

She teethed at him.

<Who are you? What is your reason for being?> the young Mewtwo asked curiously, wishing for some light and space. He wanted to feel the breeze and fly with it again.

“I am hate,” she said. “I am here to remind you, always, that humans are never to be trusted. Never to be befriended, never to be loved. They are dangerous and always self-serving. Always greedy, never generous.”

Mewtwo frowned. <Are you sure?> he asked. <I remember something, someone...>

The girl leered at him mockingly. “Yes?”

<The human boy!> he said. <He was not self-serving when he sacrificed himself to save the pokémon!>

“When was that?” the girl asked. “What boy? No human would ever sacrifice himself like that. It must have just been a dream.”

Despondent, Mewtwo looked down. <I guess so,> he said, and looked up at her again. <But you’re a human, right?>

“Yes,” she said.

<Then why are you here to remind me about these things? You want me to trust you that humans aren’t to be trusted, when you’re a human yourself! I can’t both trust and not trust at the same time, can I? That doesn’t make sense!>

The girl gaped at him. Then fury overcame her sharp features and she flew towards him. Mewtwo drew backwards in fright but soon realised his stance felt different than it had previously. He glanced down at himself and noticed with surprise that his body was now full grown.

He dodged the girl’s frontal assault and lashed out with a hand as she flew past, catching the hem of her dress. With a jerk her motion stopped and Mewtwo pulled her back the way she had come, taking his other hand and

slamming it into her neck. He pushed savagely, and her body met a solid surface somewhere in the darkness.

He squeezed, and she snarled.

“I’m a part of you,” she said raggedly. “Hate is a part of you. You can’t kill me.”

<Watch me,> Mewtwo said, and squeezed harder.

The girl began to gasp for breath. “This is an action of hate. You are both killing me and keeping me alive simultaneously.”

Mewtwo shook his head. <You’re just a human. You have to die.>

The girl made a sound that could have been a chuckle. She shook her head under the immense strain, and once more teethed at him before shutting her eyes and flowing into the form of young Mewtwo.

When young Mewtwo’s eyes opened he looked up and saw himself throttling him. Tears began to leak from the corners of his eyes. <Stop it!> he cried. <You’re killing me!>

<I can’t!> Adult Mewtwo cried back. <You have to die!>

<But I am you!> young Mewtwo insisted. <And you am I!>

Adult Mewtwo shook his head. <No. You are not me. You are hate.>

Young Mewtwo heaved in a final breath and used it to smile at his future self. <No. That is what you have become.>

<That's a lie,> Mewtwo snarled, and gripped him tighter. As he watched, young Mewtwo turned back into the girl, then into Lovrina. Back to the unknown girl, and back yet again; flicking between the two almost instantaneously. The hair colour changed, yet the expression upon their faces were the same. Mewtwo watched as her mouth began sagging open, gaping for the next impossible breath. Her skin grew pale, and then acquired a blue tinge.

And still her hair flowed from green to pink, then once more to green; and stayed that way. The young girl with green hair raised her bloodshot gaze to Mewtwo's. For once her mouth remained human, but the tongue inside was already darkening black. Mouth agape and still, she spoke solemn words into his mind.

You'll never know my name now.

Mewtwo blinked.

<What do you mean?> Had he known her name once? One that wasn't hate?

The girl didn't reply, instead, her head slumped down onto his aching sore hand. Her whole body turned limp in Mewtwo's grasp.

Oh Gods.

Mewtwo snatched his hand back and released her, but rather than landing on the invisible surface Mewtwo could feel under his feet, she plummeted away from him; ever downwards.

<No...> Mewtwo whispered. <Please! Come back! DON'T GO! Please!> His last word was drawn out in a mental pleading scream. But the girl didn't come back. He'd killed her.

Grief ripped through his chest as the clouds around him shifted and began glowing a deep purple colour. He seemed to hang in that strange world for a lifetime, feeling his heart breaking. She'd gone. He was alone.

Then, without conscious choice or decision, everything abated. The colours around him muted. His pain faded. Mewtwo lifted himself up from his curled up posture and straightened his back.

<I have had enough. I am done. I just don't care any more,> he said, and completely closed his heart to the memory of her.

Mewtwo opened his true eyes.

Lovrina crowed her delight. The sound hit his ears indistinctly. "My XD002! You're so perfect! Stand up for me, pretty kitty!"

Mewtwo stood up.

“Ooh, look at him,” Lovrina said, practically clapping her hands. “XD002, so tell these peons what a good job I’ve done.”

“Let us hear its psychic powers!”

Mewtwo didn’t understand the order. He stood still.

Lovrina’s mouth quirked. “What’s going on? Why won’t he follow orders?”

“Hmmm,” one of the humans said, and lifted himself onto his toes to look closely into Mewtwo’s eyes. “The machine ran without a hitch, though it might have struck the specimen mentally mute. We’ve never run the XD procedure on a telepathic pokémon before, after all. XD002, open your mouth.”

Mewtwo opened his mouth.

The human peered inside with a small torch. “Mmm, everything looks fine.” He ran his hands down Mewtwo’s back and arms, then turned back to Lovrina and nodded. “As far as I can see it’s perfectly healthy.”

“Improved through the power of human ingenuity!”

The human girl giggled. “XD002, close your mouth, you’re so drooling.”

Mewtwo closed his mouth.

“So do we need an enclosure?” Lovrina asked. “Like they did with XD001?”

“Is the new tank ready?”

“No, we’ll have to come up with a cage for it.”

The other human shook his head. “No. We’ve vastly improved upon the machine from the original blueprints, there’s no excess energy that could lead to the specimen needing to dispel any. He looks to be at a perfect energy level, in fact.”

“Yay!” Lovrina squealed. “XD002, sit down.”

Mewtwo sat. Deep in his mind it somehow felt like he was being strangled, but that part of him was too far away for him to reach, and he did not care enough either. So he just sat there as the humans chatted and laughed and celebrated, and kept sitting as their forms and voices drew away from him until he was left in complete silence.

Wonderful... empty... silence.



The Phantom Child

Chapter 4: Reactions



Chapter Four: Reactions

Months ago, Mew had felt an imbalance in the natural world - a power shift. The feeling of *something* dangerous and chaotic surging far out at sea had woken her from her hibernation and she'd - naturally - gone to investigate.

That time, she had discovered the imbalance to be initiated by a strange unknown pokémon who called himself Mewtwo; and had learned he was cloned from mew DNA. She had soon decided any resemblance to her species was very little indeed, not only physically but mentally; as he had such *anger*. Moreover, she'd never taken it upon herself to strike back in revenge upon humans and their pokémon friends.

So she had challenged him and his ideals, and they had battled for supremacy; both believing themselves to be superior, and then had reached a stalemate in the actions of the human boy who had demanded they - and their armies below - stop fighting.

Mew had departed from Mewtwo quickly afterwards, yet ever since then she had always been able to feel his presence no matter how distant they were. In

their battle Mewtwo had blasted her with psychic fire enough times for her to be able to pinpoint his exact location and state of health the link between them was so strong.

And now an imbalance had happened again. This time she definitely knew it was him at the centre of the disturbance. She could mentally feel that something was very wrong with his life force. From its normal place at the back of her mind as she unconsciously kept watch over him, Mewtwo's energy felt so wrong now it was at the forefront of her thoughts.

Whoever has done this to him...

As she drifted upwards - safe and warm inside her bubble - to the surface of the lake, Mew came the closest to righteous anger that she could.

“Mew,” she said determinedly. *I come for you.*

What has happened to you?

Inside the dark, silent room where she had once teased a meowth and two silly humans, Mew found herself staring still at Mewtwo for an uncountable time, her paws balling into fists as she hovered close to his form.

Mewtwo's body was as changed as his aura. Everything about him had spiked into points, as if mirroring his chaotic aura.

<Mewtwo,> she said into his mind. <Open your eyes and look at me.> He did not respond.

Mew would just have to go deeper in.



Touching his skin hurt her physically and mentally, but it was necessary; even though she wanted nothing more to shrink away from the feeling of his broiling psychic energy under her palms.

Where are you, Mewtwo? she thought. He was not where he should have been. His mind was empty in the places it should not have ever been. Where was his psyche? That could never be outright destroyed. Then where...?

Oh.

Mew drew her hands back and allowed a huge grin to appear on her face. <Clever,> she said to him in both admiration and pride. His remember place: somewhere to hide, secret from those with evil intent. They could never find him there. *That's where he will have fled.* Mew knew straight away how to find him. She hovered even closer and once again brought her paws to his skin.

Mew opened her eyes to the rippling surface of the water from the reverse side. The light of sunset on the water shifted uneasily above her as she floated inside her bubble and slowly drifted off to sleep, safe and content.

What was going on? That was *her* remember place, not Mewtwo's. Frowning, she tried again.

It was still sunset, but this time she was floating above the water's surface at the base of the mountain. The breeze in her ears sounded like whispering voices, and as she watched it flowed through the foliage around her and swayed the leaves hypnotically. Subtly, the whispering seemed to grow louder. "Fly..." the voices said. "Fly up..."

Mew squeezed her eyes together in frustration and tried for the third time.

The mountain loomed in front of her, cradled by fluffy white clouds at about its halfway point. The peak looked like it was touching the sky. "Fly up," the voices whispered again, more urgently this time. Could she? Could she go higher than the mountain and beyond it? What would she find on the other side? What was on the other side?

She couldn't remember, and that made her afraid. The fear led her extra speed as she went from hovering deathly still to careening up the mountainside the closest she'd ever been to its surface. The mountain was enormous but Mew zoomed up to its peak the fastest she ever had.

She looked beyond the mountain and saw nothing. Absolutely nothing. Her hackles raised. There was always something there, even though now she couldn't remember what it was. There was always something. Not that nothingness.

It took the shock of the sight wearing off for Mew to realise this was not her remember place at all - it was Mewtwo's. All of them were Mewtwo's, which explained the fear she had felt, the most natural feeling in the world in the remember place but otherwise completely alien to her; that fear was Mewtwo's as well. But even as similar as the remember places were to her own they all lacked the true memory of the encounter with the location. Somehow, he knew them, but only in half-memories; fragments, isolated from the rest of her memories. He had

never been over the mountain so he could not remember the other side. Though how had he known of these places at all? That was a puzzle.

Still, a puzzle it would have to stay for the moment. Mewtwo was still nowhere to be seen. Not even here on top of the mountain could she see or sense him close by. Then it dawned on her. There was only one more place he could be.

Inside the nothingness. He'd gone further than the mountain, further than the memories stopped, and then fallen away from them.

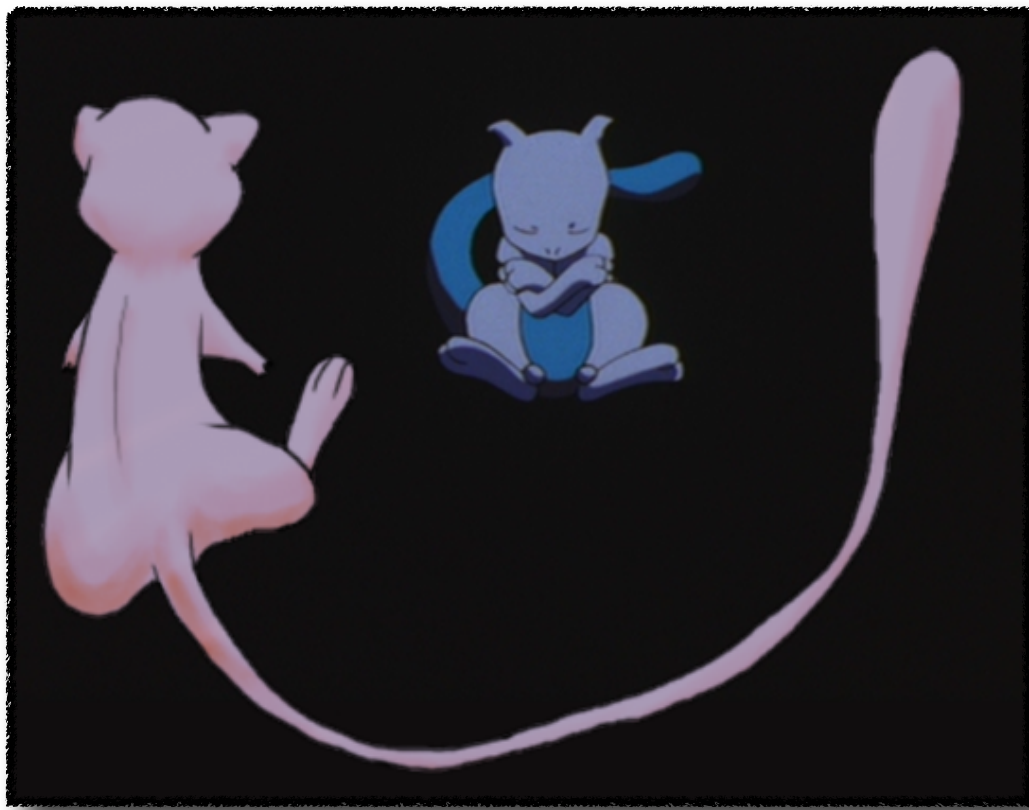
What are you hiding from, to go so far?

She did not want to go into the nothingness. Even the concept frightened her. But she had promised to find and save Mewtwo, and for that she would do anything. Taking a breath, Mew flipped in the air and without another thought whirled downwards at fur-raising speed.

The nothingness turned into blackness. Mew looked around for a while and saw nobody, until something caught her eye in her peripheral vision. She turned to face it and came into view of a much younger Mewtwo curled up and sleeping.

Relieved, Mew flew towards him. <Mewtwo, I'm here. Wake up, and follow me back.>

*<I sense others near me, but what are those strange sounds they make?>
the little Mewtwo asked.*



<It's me, it's Mew,> Mew said. <Can you hear me? Mewtwo?>

<I sense others near me, but what are those strange sounds they make?>

Mewtwo repeated.

He can't hear me. He's dreaming, maybe? But no, this is a remember place, and he's in too deep to dream. Has he been in this blackness before? Could this place be his distant past - is that why he is so young here?

<I sense others near me, but what are those strange sounds they make?>

<Mewtwo,> Mew said vehemently. <I don't know if you can hear me or not but if you can... I don't know how to save you on my own. But I'm going to go find someone who can help me, and then return for you.>

<I sense others near me, but what are those strange sounds they make?>

His voice is so young, so innocent. What happened here? *Mew shook her head and rose away from the darkness, looking down as his form shrunk from her.*

<I promise I will return.>

Mew knew exactly who she wanted to ask, the only issue was making contact after so much time. It had been years since she had even mentally spoken to another guardian, let alone one from a different region.

Besides, this particular guardian's ability made any meeting they may have a very confusing event. For all Mew knew it could be anything from minutes to centuries since Celebi had seen *her*.

As she flew up from Mewtwo's island she took the time to breathe deeply of the untainted high air; and hovered in its cloud-whitened silence for a few moments to clear her mind. Then she cast her mind far to the West and in one swift lash of her tail teleported away.

Mew materialised once more in the sky, but this time above a forest. The temperature was about the same - perhaps a few degrees warmer - yet the scent

was very different. Her nose wrinkled. <It even *smells* green.> she said quietly, then slowly made her way down towards the even warmer air below the tree-line.

Inside the forest the silence felt more welcoming and calm than in the high air. There in the large clearing she could feel the subtle warmth of the dappled sunlight playing over her fur, and felt her gaze wandering around in circles (inspiring a complete loop of her body in order to follow) before spotting the innocuous wooden shrine placed in the deeper shade of the clearing's circular border.

Mew floated over to it, her skin prickling in response to the hallowed area. No wonder there were no pokémon to be seen or heard; this was a place of power - and recent power, too from the feel of things - a sacred place. Mew hoped Celebi would be psychically watching over it from somewhere or somewhen. That would make physical contact far quicker and easier.

She closed her eyes and brought her paws together. *Nothing like a good prayer at their shrine to get a guardian's attention...* She'd realised this after her own journey of self-discovery to the Stone Tree of Beginning such a long time ago.

<Celebi, it's Mew. Can you hear me? I have need of your ability.>

Through closed lids she felt a rush of building power and saw a growing intensity of light before her. She opened her eyes to see the shrine glowing with

white-yellow light, swirling currents of air that she couldn't feel whisking leaves up from the earth and tumbling them around.

The light flashed powerful and true, and Mew's eyes closed in response. The already fading echoes of a cry of power hit her ears and then everything - light, power and all - subsided. When she opened her eyes again, Celebi sat jauntily on the shrine's top; a smile on her face.

<When's this?> Celebi asked nonchalantly, the gaze of her big blue eyes never leaving Mew's. <Oh, wait, never mind; it's coming to me now. Always takes a few moments to catch up! So, Ilex Forest in this when, huh?> She finally broke eye contact to look around. <Wow, looks great!>

<Mewtwo, however, does not,> Mew said, not unkindly, and used Celebi's curious silence to shortly explain both Mewtwo's history and current situation. When she began with the latter, Celebi's gaze focused even further and grew sharp. Once Mew had finished, Celebi's smile had become a frown.

<That sounds... familiar,> she said, direly.

Mew's ears pricked up in surprise. <You've seen this before? Where? When?>

<Haven't seen it, but felt it - well, there were a few differences than what exactly you're describing, but a fair bit more similarities. If they are related, perhaps the solution is as well? I was able to recover after I was helped to

remember who I truly was. It was my good memories with the humans that sparked the process off.>

Memories. There is that key word. Perhaps Celebi's altering was more similar to Mewtwo's than I thought. <Mewtwo's psyche seems to be stuck in an old memory, whilst his body and outer mind suffer in chaos.> she said. <I don't know what it means. I don't know what any of it means. He needs to replay the memory through, but I don't think he can on his own. Will you show me that *when?* So I can help him?>

<Difficult to do,> Celebi replied, her brow furrowing even further in concentration, <But not impossible, I think. I hope. Anyway, I'll need to pinpoint the *when* of the original memory's making from Mewtwo's mind - thank goodness I'm also psychic - but I think I'll need you to help me for the where.>

<Thank you.> Mew said, and held out her hand. <Shall we?>

Celebi took one look at Mewtwo's body as the pair teleported back into the lab, and recoiled in shock. <Dear Dialga! He's...!>

<Yes?> Mew demanded.

With a visibly paler face and drooping antennae, Celebi took Mew's hand again and squeezed it. <I might have been made dark, and the ones at Orre were

made shadow, but... Mew; they've turned him *extra dark*... Oh no, Mew, I'm so sorry, I should have realised it before.>

Mew shook her head, confused. <Extra dark? That means...?>

<That I most definitely do *not* want to get inside his head.>

Mew sighed, took Celebi's now limp grasp into a tighter squeeze and laid her free paw on Mewtwo's cheek. <Just... follow me? It'll be quick - I know the way to go now.> She paused. <Please?>

Shuddering, Celebi looked at Mew with deadened eyes. <Make it quick, Mother of All, and don't ever ask anything like this of me again.>

Noticing Celebi's complexion greying dramatically and pupils retracting till they resembled slits more than anything else, Mew acted very quickly. She barreled into Mewtwo's mind; past the chaos as fast as she could and then up to the mountain's peak. Once they were there Mew chanced a look at Celebi, who had been dragging the pace. Celebi was still greyish but her pupils were back to normal.

<Better?>

Celebi nodded weakly. <Mostly. Wasn't expecting any of that. It took me back, and not in a good way. You don't have any other unpleasant surprises in store, right?>

<Just don't look down,> Mew warned, and tipped the both of them over the other side into the nothingness.

Celebi and Mew floated before the young Mewtwo. By this stage, the vibrant green of Celebi's skin had returned.

<I can't seem to get into his mind to figure out the when,> Celebi said, sounding confused and frustrated.

Mew giggled, slightly hysterically. <That's his inner psyche, Celebi, we're already in his mind. We just had to go past all the chaos of his outer mind.>

<Oh. Of course. That trip has just left me a little shaken and disoriented,> she replied.

<I sense others near me, but what are those strange sounds they make?> said the young Mewtwo.

“Those are words! They're talking!” Celebi chirped enthusiastically.

<What? What did you just say?> asked Mew.

Celebi turned a terrified gaze to Mew. <I don't know. Oh Lord. Something's happening. What in Time?! Help me!>

Celebi shrieked wordlessly and began to reach for her. Mew held her hands out watching, shocked, as Celebi's form began to ripple and change, but something flung her away from the pair of them even as she strained harder to

make contact. She was pushed from the comforting darkness of Mewtwo's inner psyche, hurtled over the mountain at an otherwise bone breaking speed and barely was able to feel the chaotic mental energy of his outer mind until she was back in her own body -

She opened her eyes to a group of humans surveying her silently, beyond the dull metal bars enclosing her tightly in a cage. She looked to her left and saw Celebi's still form in another cage next to hers.

Oh, Mew, you unthinking fool. Of course the humans who had done this to Mewtwo would return to him at some point. Of course.

And yet she had not even thought of them until now. She made to teleport away.

Nothing. *Of course.*

"The mew specimen is awake."

"Start the procedure."

She violently recoiled at the feel of the human's gloved hands quickly scooping her up after opening the little door to her metal box, but it turned out to be barely a shudder. After discovering she could barely turn her head let alone swing her tail for balance, Mew fled from her body once again and took refuge under the shadow of her mountain...

Celebi felt the changes begin before she saw them. Horribly, her body morphed before her mind did; giving her the opportunity to mentally scream loud and long in horror at the sensation of the back of her head splitting into a million strands of hair and tickling down her spine - which by that stage had lengthened considerably. Her feet suddenly sprouting toes brought on a whimper and horrified moan.

The young mewtwo drew closer in curiosity. <What are you?>

<I am Celebi, the Voice of the Forest, and you are a monster!> Celebi shrieked mentally. <Release me from your mind!>

But then her mouth opened and started speaking human words. "I'm a human!" she said excitedly.

Her verbal voice was right - she had taken on the form of a young human. Mew had not warned her about being under Mewtwo's inner mind's control like this. Had Mew even known how vulnerable the pair of them were in here?

<Am I a human too?> the young mewtwo asked her.

She restrained herself from speaking mentally and having to deal with the sensation of saying two completely different things at the same time with verbal and mental voices. "Hmmm... Well, I don't think so - at least, you're not all human. I don't know, maybe you're both a pokémon and a human!"

Celebi mentally steadied herself further, trying to ward off the uneasy feeling of her body - especially her mouth - being completely out of her control.

Mewtwo needs this. I need to do this for him. Oh Lord of Time...

She relaxed as much as she was able, letting her body act as Mewtwo would have it act, and prepared herself for the moment his inner mind would release her...for that would be the moment she would have to take control and be the catalyst for his purification...



The Phantom Child

Chapter 5: My First Remember Place



Chapter Five: My First Remember Place

For the very first time, there was someone else with him in that dark place. It made him feel so happy, but he was just too curious about who she was and why she was there - as well as who he was and why he was there - that he found it impossible to even break a smile. Her next words were far too important to celebrate just yet.

“I’m a human,” she said.

<A- am I a human too?> he asked hopefully.

The human looked at him thoughtfully. “Hmmm... Well, I don’t think so - at least, you’re not all human. I don’t know, maybe you’re both a pokémon and a human!”

Mewtwo’s wonder and curiosity increased. <Is that even possible?>

“Well sure!” the girl said. “We’re really not all that different. Papa told me a story once about it. ‘There once was a time when there existed no differences to distinguish the two.’”

<I never knew that,> Mewtwo said.

“There’s lots more I want to teach you!” the girl enthused. “Come on!” She gestured excitedly and flew off. Mewtwo followed her and watched as the darkness folded and became a rounded corridor that he was able to fly completely out of, into the mellow light of an overcast morning.

“Sar!”

Mewtwo blinked in surprise as three more figures joined him and his new friend. They floated there in the air at his side comfortably, looking out at the sleepy village.

<Who are you?> he asked them. One by one, they turned their solemn faces to him and Mewtwo suddenly didn’t need a spoken answer any longer. <Never mind. I know you.> Yet, how did he know them? Something began niggling at him then. Not so much a nice feeling, either; an uneasy one, like a forgotten memory or passing thought. It seemed to intensify when he focused upon their skin markings.

But how could he have forgotten anything yet? He had only just started remembering. Before the girl, there had been nothing but darkness and silence, and echoey voices from a great distance, which he couldn’t even understand.

“This is my remember place,” the girl said. “I lived in that house over there - see? Mama has a green flower-pot on the verandah.”

Mewtwo flew closer. “I can’t see one.”

The girl was silent for a while. Mewtwo turned back towards her and saw her head bowed. “That is the problem with remember places,” she said croakily, “they never stay the same as in your memories.”

<I don’t understand,> Mewtwo said, trying to keep the whine out of his tone.

“This place is a faded memory, Mewtwo,” the girl explained. “It’s a pale comparison when compared to the real thing. Memories and remember places are vital, but... in time, they go... foggy, and grey.”

<At least you have a remember place.>

The girl straightened from her hunched over position in the sky, and brought her face in close. “You weren’t awake then! Now you are awake, so the memories have started. You can now have as many remember places as you like.”

<I don’t want a lot of remember places,> Mewtwo said emphatically. <I just want the one; and it can be anywhere just as long as I’m together with you, in the wind and sun.>

The girl’s eyes began to glimmer with tears, mirroring the first faint stars which began to appear on the other side of the setting sun. “That’s a good sounding remember place.”

Worried, Mewtwo reached for her. <No, I don’t want to only remember this time, I want us to keep making more memories too!>

The two grasped hands, until Mewtwo realised the feeling of her fingers was growing faint. He looked down at them in shock and saw her slowly becoming transparent.

<What's happening?> he asked in horror. <What's going on?>

"Mewtwo, I want you to remember both times now," the girl said. "Like the nightmare of Charizardtwo, except this time know that they both actually happened."

<Why are you fading?!>

The girl looked at him and smiled, a smile of infinite sadness. "I'm fading because you are now beginning to remember the first time."

Mewtwo's chest began to hitch. <Wh-what?>

"Remember what happened," the girl said. "Remember what happened in the space you couldn't quite remember when your body's eyes opened. 'Was everything before just a dream' you asked. No, it was a forgotten memory. But now it is time for you to remember it."

<I don't know what happened,> Mewtwo said, his breath ragged. <You were there. I think you taught me things. I don't know.>

"Mm-hmm," she said. "I taught you about humans and pokémon, about copies, about the sun, moon and stars."

<About cake and milk,> Mewtwo said, startled that that particular point had stuck so powerfully in his inner mind.

The girl giggled. "Yes, and cake and milk. But more importantly - the things I taught you without words. You know what those are, too."

Mewtwo thought, his head and eyes starting to swim. He supposed it must be true. She had existed - somehow, somewhere, somewhen - before he had even physically awoken. His first ever conversation had been with a human. Though, had she even been a real girl then? And what of now?

<Are you real?> he asked.

"Me?" she asked lightly, spinning around with a grin, and giggled at him. "I've always been real, even though you have forgotten me for a long time."

<They made me forget that you existed!> he raged. <Made me believe for so long that all humans were irredeemable; worthless creatures!>

The sky darkened further as the girl hovered closer. From out of nowhere, Mewtwo felt the urge to back off as she raised a hand to his cheek, still remaining half-transparent. Why is that? he wondered, then remembered the nightmare. Will this become a nightmare at the end, too?

"Don't worry," she said in reply, her fingers cool yet barely there against his flushed skin. "Just as a human damned his own race in your eyes so did

another redeem it. From selfishness to selflessness, and around again the circle turns.”

She’s right, Mewtwo realised with surprise. From her, to the scientists and Giovanni, to the young boy, to Giovanni yet again, and... that boy - again! And now, with his newest betrayal, to find himself here as like in the beginning.

<I want this cycle to stop,> he said firmly. <I am done with it all. I just want to remember it all and not feel so confused all the time.>

“Good,” the girl said, “for that is what is happening as we speak.”

Mewtwo had never felt so young and vulnerable as he looked to Bulbasaurtwo, Charmandertwo and Squirtletwo, and saw them fading away, sad looks upon their faces. As their forms faded completely, the last few sparkling motes of their life energy twinkled up and disappeared.

<Where did they go?> Mewtwo asked the girl, spinning in midair as if to look for them. He felt the strangest sensation of the then and the now being melded and combined further, and the memory of the then becoming far clearer. <I asked you that then, and you didn’t answer me. I want to hear it now.>

The girl sighed. “They died, Mewtwo; their physical bodies in the tubes died. I don’t know what happened to their aura. That is up to you to decide.”

I remembered them, *Mewtwo realised, his eyes closing in pain.* I didn't know it at the time, but I did remember them. I created them again. I'm... just like that human, intent on creating his daughter time and time again...

But, no. No. I am nothing like him. He remembered the first. I did not. My subconscious remembered them, but my waking mind did not. I am not at all like him.

He opened his eyes and looked at the girl in a different light. <You are that daughter,> he said in wonderment, the different intertwining stories finally coming together.

The girl nodded gravely. "I am. I..." She winced suddenly, hugging her arms to her chest, bending over slightly as she faded further.

<What's wrong? What's happening?> Mewtwo asked, knowing the answer yet dreading of it.

"It feels like it's time to say goodbye," the girl whispered, her voice in pain.

Mewtwo gaped. <Goodbye?!> he said. <But... I'm still so confused...> He felt as his throat began to close up again, and his eyes well with fresh tears. He brought a paw to his eyes and swiped at them roughly.

<I have never cried,> he said, for some reason his mental voice as choked as his physical one would have been. <And I never will cry tears of sadness or

pain. Because I must be the world's strongest... I don't have sadness nor pain!>

He blinked repeatedly, trying to suppress the horrid hot feeling at his eyelids.

The girl grunted in pain as she straightened, her eyes beginning to glimmer as well. "My Papa said that the only ones who shed tears because they're sad are humans. But... he also used to tell me a bedtime story; that when pokémon were sad and they cried, their tears were filled with life. The Winds of Water... that was my favourite bedtime story."

I'm not letting you go, Mewtwo thought, nearly remembering how the first time he had met this girl had ended, and yet not wanting to face the prospect of knowing. <Tell it to me.>

The girl smiled. "You saw it for yourself when the pokémon grieved for the boy. You know how it goes. Where there was death, now there is life."

The true memory struck him then - she is going to die! - and he screamed at her physically and mentally. <I'll cry for you, and give you life!>

She shook her head, blinking slowly. "I was just the last vestigial memory of the girl you had, Mewtwo; only here to help you remember her better. I cannot stay with you in this form - for it belongs to another - and this place for too long. But know this; they didn't let you properly grieve then, so now is the time."

The first hot tear of many escaped Mewtwo's right eye, coursing down his cheek. He blinked furiously but instead of stemming the tears, it made them flow

faster. Through his grief he felt a small part of him watching and waiting - hoping - for them to begin glimmering and twinkling over to the girl, restoring her energy.

But there was nothing. Just salty water making his head ache and his eyes smart; a horrible pressing lump against his voice box.

More tears fell, and still there was no life in them.

“I have to go now,” the girl said.

<No!> Mewtwo cried, gritting his teeth, eyebrows furrowing. <Stay with me! What good are tears if they can’t even bring you back and let you stay?! They mean nothing!>

She shook her head again. “Your tears mean everything, because they are a sign of your memory of me. And they also mean everything because they show that I will remain constantly in your heart. I am your sadness, but I am also your happiness. The two will never be separated. You won’t see me in this form, but you will still know me every day because of who I am.”

<Then who are you?> Mewtwo asked, his body hunched over and warped in emotion, hardly able to look at her through the glaze of tears and rage.

“My name is love,” she said, “and I am love itself. So now that you remember me, I remain with you always.”

The girl smiled one last smile of sadness and happiness, twirled her arms up into the air and in a moment more vanished in a dizzying swirl of life force.

Mewtwo's breath gasped in and he stared open-mouthed at the space she had inhabited. Her remember place was gone. She was gone. Forever.

Amber was gone.

<Please, Amber!> he cried, <Come back! Don't go! Please! Amber!>

His last cry became a drawn out howl of pain. As his mental voice faded he heard a faraway human voice shouting raggedly, "It's getting too upset, it mustn't remember this! Administer-"

Then the two remember places split once more from each other, and the human voice cut off with the old memory from before his birth. He remembered this time. There was no serum to take away his pain and anguish and sadness. It was all his to remember now, all at once, and it was nearly too much. Deep in his mind Mewtwo spasmed in grief, sobbing, screaming, railing against everything and everyone he'd ever known. Amber was gone. He was alone.

Yet was he?

A cool smooth touch upon his shoulder had Mewtwo's eyes shooting open.

Who was here?

How dare they intrude?!

He turned to face the trespasser and came face to face with two big luminous blue eyes staring at him in vehemence.

<Open your heart,> the strange pokémon said. <You are so close - take the final step and allow your heart to open once more. To care once more.>

<I...> Mewtwo said, completely baffled. <I don't know how->

<You do!> it cried. <You love her so much your inner mind used my form to let you see her once again! Now you just need to remember her and all your other loved ones in your heart and return back to the true world! Yes, love means feeling sadness, but true happiness too! Let your heart reopen, Mewtwo.>

Yes, that is true. Love is... multifaceted; happiness and sadness. Without Amber I had neither - I was adrift still... but now, -

Mewtwo opened his eyes.

When the memories threatened to blur at the sight of the inconsequential humans rushing about him like panicked durant around a disturbed nest, he shook off the sensation. He was fully in the here; seated atop the conveyor belt as Lovrina fumbled with her stun gun, eyes wide. He smiled at her, power so sweet rushing through his veins and gathering faster than she could flick off the safety and raise the gun to her shoulder.

He turned his attention beyond the silly girl and her silly weapon and saw the chair shuddering. From here he could almost see the negative energy as it pulsed into Mew's prone body as she lay upon it; flickering around the edges of his colour vision.

Mew did not look well. Neither did the pokémon he'd seen before in his inner mind; caged next to Mew and trembling spasmodically, its skin dramatically more wan than it had appeared then.

It was time to act.

Lovrina fired, but Mewtwo halted the dart's progress through the air with one lazy sweep of an arm, sending it clattering noisily to the polished floor. He encased Mew's fading life energy with a barrier like his own and brought his arms together, forming a sparking shadow ball sphere.

When it was at full power, Mewtwo sent it flying towards the chair's legs, sending the humans around it diving for shelter. The explosion it created rocked the entire room.

"New Island is going to come down around all our ears if you're not careful," Joy said.

It's alright for you though - you're imaginary, Mewtwo retorted, but took her words to heart. Between this and the earlier blast hole created by the originals after being freed from his cloning device, the room was probably not all that

stable any longer. It was definitely time to leave. The humans, he decided, were welcome to his palace after all.

Mew shielded comfortably, Mewtwo held her steady and levitated her closer to his form, feeling subtly as she lapsed into unconsciousness. He heard the other pokémon curse as her cage rocked about as yet unshielded. Mewtwo seized both cage and pokémon in his psychic grasp and sent a dire message publicly about the room for the humans:

<Before today, I would have killed you all and felt no remorse.>

Figuring that the complete destruction of the chair would have to suffice, Mewtwo glared blue at it, eyes shining, and felt with satisfaction as the entire built-in electrical wiring system burst into flames, creating smaller explosions around its chunky metal frame.

The sprinklers activated, and it was suddenly raining inside the entire room. Even the feeling of the water droplets hitting his shield was distasteful. Mewtwo raised into the air, Mew and the other pokémon on either side of him, and teleported them all away.



The Phantom Child

Epilogue: The Dream



Epilogue: The Dream

The three did not appear where Mewtwo was expecting them to. He'd been instinctively aiming for the safety of the deepest depths of his dungeon to take stock of the situation and go from there. Instead, he found himself in the air, looking down at the largest tree he had ever seen in his life.

He had never been here before. It was impossible to teleport somewhere you had never been before. That had to mean... he'd been guided.

He looked down at Mew, huddling in his arms. Her eyes were barely open, but nonetheless they flickered with intent. Her cheeks were dangerously flushed and as his body adjusted to the cold air he realised she was burning up with fever.

<Go... there...> she whispered, her paw lifting to point the way, then falling limply by her side.

Mewtwo didn't need to be told twice. He darted through the air as fast as he could manage; reminded as he did so of the time he had shot out from Giovanni's Gym so fast he'd left a trail of energy behind him. Right now he

didn't even bother to look to see if the same thing was happening. He kept his eyes focused upon the tree as it grew in his sight.

Impossible. The thing was much too large to be a tree. As he neared it even closer he realised it was instead some sort of incredible landmass. It was so large it was supporting hundreds of trees itself!

In awe, Mewtwo alighted on one of the thin ledges of stone which had appeared from far away as one of the formation's 'branches' and began walking further into the lush greenery of the cliff. This place... it felt clean, untouched. He could hear the musical chirruping of a bird pokémon somewhere in the trees around him. Perhaps a family of swallow.

Mew squirmed weakly against his chest. <Quickly...> she said. <That tunnel. Go.>

A tunnel? Mewtwo scanned the area and finally spotted a small opening, crystalline formations bunched at its entrance and dotting the insides of the tunnel. He padded over and decided it would be best to hover again as he went further.

Flying through the tunnel posed no problems. As he approached with Mew and Celebi in tow - who had remained wide-eyed and silent in her cage during the entire time, hands clasped at her front - the crystals shone with a lovely blue light, illuminating their way.

The tunnel ended suddenly, giving way to an enormous open space. Mewtwo gaped as he landed on the cavern's flat ground, staring up at the two immense crystals shining before and above them, energy so strong it was visible as it flowed from the lower to the upper in a constant stream.

What was this place? Mewtwo could hardly move, struck so powerfully with the view before him. Until Mew unfolded gracefully and levitated out of his arms.

"Meww..." she whimpered, struggling to stay aloft as she made her way towards the crystals. Mewtwo broke out of his reverie in concern, and padded gently behind her, arms tense and ready to catch her if the need arose.

<I think... I think I need to be freed now,> the other pokémon said, the tightness of barely controlled panic in her voice unmistakable. <Get me out.>

Mewtwo turned back to the pokémon, concentrating carefully upon the metal bars. He mentally twisted them further and further until the weak part snapped clean. Mewtwo then psychically bent the cage open further still, prying the bars back until the pokémon had enough space to fly clear.

<Thank you,> she said. <My name is Celebi.> With that, she fluttered through the air on gauzy wings to aid Mew. Mewtwo followed her progress with his eyes and saw Mew joined not only by Celebi but by a hesitant human dressed

in brown standing respectfully still next to a much smaller crystal, one arm aloft, hand held out to Mew.

Mewtwo waited for hot rage to flood him at the sight of the human. He waited for fear. For anger and distrust and cynicism. But they never came. He only felt a slight curiosity. Who was that human standing there - where had they come from? More importantly, how did he know the human meant no harm - rather had nothing but good intentions - without taking even the first mental step towards the human's mind?

Mewtwo watched and waited, still as a statue; watched as the human's stance strengthened suddenly, became far more confident, palm outstretched towards Mew's face. Not even this instilled any unease in him.

“Aura is with me!”

The human's voice echoed through the large space, breaking the hallowed silence, and then his hand began to *glow*.

Mewtwo's eyes widened, unaware that his mouth was already open in amazement. His neck tube began to subtly throb in response to the raw energy filling the space. Celebi remained hovering in the air, large eyes shut and head lowered. And Mew straightened in the air, her arms drew up and aloft. She gave a lash of her tail and her eyes flashed open, beaming power.

<My thanks, human,> she said, drawing away from him. A green aura surrounded Mew's body as she ascended towards the vertical flow of energy; melding with it and expelling the last of the negative energy from her body.

The human's knee buckled, and he stumbled awkwardly into a seated position, letting his breath out in an amused huff. "That really takes it out of you," he said.

Mew seemed to be prancing through the air as she flew down towards the human, a twinkle in her eye. <A sentiment which I'm sure Sir Aaron and Lucario would agree with.>

The human looked up somberly. "They were true heroes. I can only hope one day to be as noble and self-sacrificing as they were in your most desperate time of need."

Mew nodded gravely, all humour gone for the moment. <I do not appreciate your own courage any less than theirs, Akiva. Today you have saved the Tree of Beginning by saving me. Without you, it would have slowly began to degenerate in response to the negative energy in my body I could not quite cast out on my own. So thank you for reacting so quickly to my cry for help, and travelling so far.>

Akiva smiled and got to his feet. "No, thank you."

<Mew, you asked this human to help you?> Mewtwo asked, desperately trying to understand. <Couldn't I and Celebi have helped you instead? Or perhaps another pokémon?>

Akiva's proud gaze broke from Mew's and fell upon Mewtwo instead. The human's ensuing gasp was so loud it reverberated around the immense space. "Divided One!"

<Divided... one?> Mewtwo asked. <You know me?>

The human seemed stunned, his hands unconsciously clenching by his sides. "Yes, well, at least I know of you. Most Agrarian Seers do."

<And here I was thinking my questions about my beginnings had all been answered,> Mewtwo said dryly, as his mind began to race once again at what this all could mean. Could this man know more about his genesis? Perhaps the events which had led up to his creation?

Akiva's mouth quirked in a half-smile, still looking a bit dazed. "It would do me a great honour to have me and brothers and sisters answer those remaining questions, if we can. Would you like to accompany me back to the Seer Repository at Fiore?"

<I would,> Mewtwo said straight away, surprised at his conviction. *This man is safe. That place is safe.* Somehow, he just knew it. For the first time since

meeting Amber, Mewtwo felt honesty and warmth and decency flowing from a human being. *I want to know more!*

“Shall we?” Akiva said with a smile, gesturing to the beam of sunlight leading out into the open air. Mewtwo smiled back at him, and together they walked from that place; Mew and Celebi watching them go with matching expressions of hope and love.

<He’s not like the other copies,> Celebi said. <Not like *you*.>

<No,> Mew replied simply.

<Oh, nicely done, by the way,> Celebi said with a wink. <You make a marvelous Guardian of the Tree.>

Mew caught the wink and giggled. <Thanks.>

<But I do feel that Mewtwo, deliberately or not, is going to change the status quo between the legendaries.>

<Yes, I suppose so,> Mew looked at Celebi as they floated in the air. <Or is that a future memory?>

<Just an informed guess,> Celebi replied. <Do you want me to actually find out?>

<No, but thank you.>

The pair lapsed into silence, then Celebi giggled. <It’s about time things were shaken up again.>

<Until then?> Mew asked, hands raised as she summoned her energy to teleport.

The eerie wail of the trees outside became audible as the Voice of the Forest prepared the same. <Until then,> Celebi agreed.

The heart of the Stone Tree of Beginning echoed silence for many days afterwards, until one morning when Mew zipped excitedly into the expansive chamber with a little cry of happiness, holding a wind-up spinda toy. She twirled towards the main current of the Aura Network then froze halfway there.

Her nose wriggled in confusion, then her eyes grew sharp and appraising. Someone had been here in her absence. Three 'someone's', in fact; she could practically see their aura signatures. Two of the three signatures felt very similar to her.

After touching the time flower bouquet and watching the resulting footage, Mew's eyes were wide and disbelieving.

Imposter! she proclaimed, bursting into laughter and giving the toy a whirl. *Too bad they've all gone - I would have liked to play with the other mew again.* She had not seen that mew since the time it come to her for answers and guidance, long ago. Which she had given happily. It was always nice to have a playmate; especially if you looked just like them - or they looked just like you.

My dearest Amber,

I am home. Truly home. I have found a place where I feel I really belong, and with it I have found my life's purpose. And yet as one purpose is achieved I find another. I have spent the past week discovering more about my beginnings thanks to the work of many of my new human friends. Now, I feel my purpose has changed. I feel as if there is great need of permanent armistice between the pokémon my friends call 'legendaries'. Too long has there been great hostility between them. The Winds of Water, the Beast of the Sea, the even more recent clashes between the ones they call Rayquaza and Deoxys. The history books I have read are filled with horrible tales of bloodshed and destruction owing to their great power and rage. It has always been a very tenuous peace, I find, between legendaries; one liable to degenerate into vicious attacks with no warning.

I cannot help but dream of a lasting peace and alliance between all legendaries - a great Council of wisdom and strength. For I can't help but find in every book I read that time and time again we come under threat from both humans - and a strange vague enemy 'monster' mentioned here and there - that it seems such a waste to antagonise each other when we should be coming to each other's aid at these times of need. It was only my strong mental link with Mew which enabled her to know I was in danger: I could not call out for help myself

back then. If Mew had not known, no legendary would have. And I may have been lost to the shadows forever.

Amber, my home is here, but if I am to put this idea forward to every legendary I must soon depart from it. It will be a long, arduous task but I can't help but look forward to it with excitement and anticipation. I do not even know if I will succeed in persuading them to join in the Council, but at the very least I will in future have awareness of and links with them no matter the distance, and promise to myself if they are ever in trouble I will do my best to come to their aid. The rest, of course, is up to them.

In memory,

Mewtwo

Thus ends 'The Phantom Child'

The saga will continue with 'The Game Of Time'