



The Game of Time

Chapter Ten: Timey-Wimey Ball



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*Look not into the Pokémon's eyes.
In but an instant, you'll have no recollection of who you are.
Return home, but how? When there is nothing to remember?
Dare not touch the Pokémon's body.
In but three short days, all emotions will drain away.
Above all, above all, harm not the Pokémon.
In a scant five days,
the offender will grow immobile in entirety.*

~ A Horrific Myth

Knowledge was power. To Uxie, this old adage rang the truest; and hers was undoubtedly the most revered of all three tenets. For what was stirring emotion and the will to see things accomplished for if not for the wisdom guiding the actions in the first place?

I need to know what happened in this celebi's future.

The glimpses she had were at times sharp and vivid, others dark and hazed over. The information did not arrive in a constant flow; there were small flashes of pitch black in amongst the sight of so many

creatures from the future. Flashes which seemed almost like blips of nothingness where there should have been something. Anomalies... mistakes. Paradoxes, even?

Uxie was not meant to know about the boatman and the location of one of the largest, emptiest blips. Somehow she'd simply... learned it as some stage. Yet was it so surprising that she was the one guarding that knowledge; like the rest of the secrets of what lay before Dialga's first breath that she kept close? It was only right that most remain unspoken. What mattered now was that they remained motivated to move as a team. Even a Council, perhaps.

<Dialga,> she said, closing her eyes slowly and releasing the three blankly staring celebi from her mental grasp. <It is no wonder time breaks under the strain of this future.>

Whilst Aristeia's and Dianthus's eyes closed and heads bowed, Jade's body remained completely still.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

<You are not only the Guardian of Time. You are the embodiment of a single, straight timeline. A direct progression of cause to effect.>

YES?

<Celebi are *meddlers*, Lord of Time!> Uxie stressed, letting her close-eyed gaze meet Dialga's and allowing a little knowledge to flow through their psychic link. <They cannot help but flit about time as part of their daily duties. How can you possibly keep track of all the changes they produce flapping their wings about where they shouldn't?>

I MUST, SO I DO.

<That's too many futures->

CONSIDER THIS, Dialga said proudly, arching their neck up and baring their teeth. **A CELEBI TAKES A HUMAN AWAY INTO A FUTURE WHERE HE HAS BEEN GONE FOR FORTY YEARS. HOW? BECAUSE THE CELEBI DIED AND WAS UNABLE TO TAKE HIM BACK TO HIS OWN TIME. ONE FUTURE.**

THEN, THE OTHER CELEBI MEDDLE AND HEAL THE FIRST CELEBI; CREATING A NEW FUTURE IN WHICH THE BOY DOES RETURN AFTER ALL. TWO FUTURES. BOTH EXISTING AT THE SAME TIME.

<Oh,> Uxie said in a small voice. Then, <Oh,> she repeated louder, somehow getting wide-eyed without letting her eyelids crane open again. <Dialga, this is just what I'm saying. That's only just one

time they will change the course of history in a very impacting way.

You're saying you are somehow able to allow both futures to occur?>

YES.

<In close-by parallel universes with Palkia's assistance?>

NO, IN THE SAME UNIVERSE. I DO NOT NEED PALKIA.

<That wouldn't even work.>

I MAKE IT WORK.

THAT IS MOST FOOLHARDY, Arceus said from behind them,
AND VERY PERTURBING TO HEAR.

**CONSIDER THIS ALSO THEN, ARCEUS. YOU EXACT
YOUR JUDGEMENT UPON THE HUMANS FOR BETRAYING
YOU. I MEDDLE TO PREVENT OUR DEATHS AND SEND
SOME HUMANS BACK TO STOP THE BETRAYAL IN THE
FIRST PLACE. IT WORKS, BUT THE TWO FUTURES MUST
STILL EXIST - OTHERWISE SEE THE ORIGINAL EATEN
AWAY TO NOTHINGNESS. THERE ARE NO DEAD WORLDS
HERE. MY LIFE KEEPS THEM ALL ALIVE. ALL ANCHORED.**

<Except for that last final meddle... a paradox too large and far
reaching and too unknown to you. Something that - for once - had
practically nothing to do with celebi at the time,> Uxie wondered, her

two tails whisking about the space. <Stretched out so thin already what with Jade's chaotic Game of Time - how many times did she jump back and forth changing things here and there...? No wonder it was impossible to keep track of each and maintain them before the final blow. You've made your point. Hold on.>

Uxie closed herself to the outside world and let her brain whirl as it would; in hopes it could come up with a solution with all the extra knowledge of the future celebi now her own.

Dialga watched her silently, impassively. Palkia and Arceus too; hovering close by in the still slightly claustrophobic space and time of the void. Her sisters on either side, taking one of her hands each and giving them a supportive squeeze.

Would it be possible for Dialga to muster enough strength to support this large paradox that had originally broken time itself? But how? when even she was struggling with keeping them all in mind, let alone being the cause of their existence? That could even branch out so much to an infinite number of futures if the celebi were left unchecked. So this ridiculous reality that Dialga had taken upon themselves to look after on their own was not a viable solution.

But what if they tried the complete opposite and unleashed the MissingNo on the less than desirable futures to erase them from existence? Uxie could not stop her skin from creeping at the idea of their reality - even one a celebi had tried to fix - being deleted to make way for a 'better' version. Since - she wasn't sure, but after an informed guess figured - the celebi which had brought about that new future still came from the old one and would likewise be eaten. And what had Dialga said? Eaten *away to nothingness*? No, that could never be a future here. She refused.

<Dialga, do futures ever amalgamate after splitting?>

NO.

<Could they?>

... NO. THEY ARE TOO DIFFERENT.

Uxie sighed. Another possibility that just wouldn't work. If only the celebi hadn't all hidden away in the sanctuary... no celebi had ever reached the end of the Game and in essence conquered the fog; and Dialga - time itself, too - had broken. By Uxie removing their knowledge of what happened in the Game, she knew she had sealed their fate in this future.

Or had she? Knowledge could be learned as well as forgotten.
Knowledge of how to finally win at this Game - aeons before the celebi even noticed the strange fogginess to the future and decided to send their sacrificial seedling into the unknown.

It would have to be done so carefully though, so precisely that she did not create a paradox by ultimately fixing the problem to the extent that these three would not have ended up here at all. Knowledge was power, but too much knowledge would ruin it entirely. She would have to trick time... trick Dialga - and the entire celebi species, too.

<I'm sorry to do this, Grace,> Uxie whispered, her eyes opening to the single sacrificial celebi again. <But it is the only way I know how to cheat the Game.>

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The raichu dozed at the peak of the grassy hill during the heat of the summer's day. His ears pricked up at the feeling of the air about him shifting strangely unlike the soft breeze of beforehand; more like being pushed rather than flowing about.

He raised his head and blinked up at two other magical creatures levitating before him; neither pairs of eyes open.

<Your name?> one said.

“*Chur*,” he replied, still blinking away the last of his sleep and shaking his body from head to toe to rid himself of the awkward feeling of being stared at by four unopened eyes.

<At last I’ve found you,> it continued in triumph. <Look deep, *Chur*; and remember - then come with us.>

The next thing the raichu knew he was standing in a forest with the two others. The little alcove was quiet and still; golden light permeating through the canopy above. A strong beam of sunlight hit the wooden shrine the three were facing.

“*Where are we?*”

<In the future,> the other replied. <Go to the shrine.>

*Chur* padded forward hesitantly. “*What is this - what are you doing?*”

<Hoping for a miracle.>

*Chur* gulped and reached for the shrine’s doors. Before his hand could reach either of the knobs there was a blinding flash of energy

which knocked him back and a resounding roar of thunderous backlash ringing in his ears.

<Sorry, Dialga,> the other pokémon said. <Didn't expect that.>

Chur kept his eyes closed for a time, feeling the energy still flowing around his body and making it ripple uneasily. When he opened them, the shrine looked untouched. Below it huddled a young pichu with strange tufts of fur about its left ear. His heart raced at the sight of her.

*“Who is she?”* he gasped.

<Nobody you know... yet,> the pokémon said, taking his red cheeks in its hands and opening its eyes to him. <But you will.>

The man struggled onwards through the bitterly cold snowstorm, only the memory of a thread of light leading the way. He clambered up a high rocky ledge, his breath clouding at his face, and gasped in recognition as he came upon a large, almost diamond-shaped plate embedded in the detritus of the asteroid's explosion.

The plate felt smooth and glassy as he fumbled it into a solid hold under his arm with nearly numbed fingers. As he neared the great legendary and all the magical creatures huddling about it sharing their warmth in their last efforts to keep it alive the plate shifted out of his

grasp into the air, glowed with colourful energy, and flowed back into Arceus's form.

The crown on Arceus's waist glowed in summons; and all the other plates which had been scattered to the earth followed suit; rejoining their wielder.

The magical creatures about drew back as they felt the surge of energy revive the great legendary. As Arceus absorbed the last plate, their body glowed with golden light; and slowly they stirred and rose to their feet in triumph; taking to the air. The clouds shifted and parted, revealing the sun's rays of hope after the great tragedy had been averted.

*Human*, Arceus said wonderingly. *Are you the one who saved me?*

“Oh - no, no, Arceus. It was you who saved us!” the man said, lifting his hands in thanks.

Weeks later, the man looked down at what was left of his home village and surrounding devastated farmland from a high clifftop. “If it keeps up like this, we won't survive the winter.”

*Damos*, Arceus said from behind him. *You want to revitalise this land, don't you?*

“Yes.”

With their link transcending normal confines between human and magical creature, Damos reached out to Arceus and envisioned the lands stretching out before them as he wished them to be; a lush green paradise with the clean waters of a river feeding them as it wined through the centre.

*How... pitiful*, the legendary replied as the vision faded to dust brown, and took to the skies to circle back and face his human companion square in the eye. *Alright. I shall lend you my strength.* With a toss of a hoof, the sixteen plates flew out and began encircling their body. *These keep me alive. They're a part of my being. The power of ground, water, and grass; and combined with this, the power of electricity, they all meld together. And with the power of dragon, they increase.*

As Arceus listed each plate, so did it leave the circle and swoop towards Damos. The five plates combined in the air to form a spherical shape.

*Use this Jewel of Life for the greater good. To make the land rich and fertile*, Arceus said.

Damos took the jewel from the air. "The Jewel of Life," he breathed.

*But... without that Jewel... my life is diminished. Damos, I am trusting you. Trusting you with my life.*

“Arceus, I thank you.” Damos’s smile was proud as he looked down at the Jewel and back at Arceus, his eyes glimmering with tears. “You have my word. I will return it back to you!”

*I have one more thing to entrust to you, friend, Arceus said. Before I depart, I would see these two magical creatures remain here safely in this land to the end of their days under your protection.*

It gestured, opening up a rent in the air before Damos. Two little pichu, slumbering in foetal positions, flew out.

Instinctively, Damos held out his arms to bring the pair to his chest. “They will,” he said huskily. “I’ll protect them well.”

Arceus smiled at him. *And they you, perhaps.*

<Dialga, I need to reach the timeline where Sparkling exists as a pikachu.>

The Lord of Time looked at Uxie square in the face. **THE BROKEN ONE?**

<Yes.>

## **IS THE URGE TO MEDDLE RUBBING OFF ON YOU?**

Dialga asked, casting a suspicious eye at the prone Grace still shadowing Uxie's form; eyes shut and immobile.

<Please, just this one thing,> Uxie said. <Then I think I'll be done.>

Dialga rumbled in disquiet, but then bowed its head. **VERY WELL.**

"I came from the future," Sparkling said.

Chur's mouth quirked oddly. "So did I," he said woodenly, and then as if mirroring Sparkling's surprise the sky fractured above them.

Uxie and Grace appeared to them and with wooden, halted movements - as if puppeted by another - Grace flew down and grabbed at them.

Chur bellowed fright the whole way. The time stream shook with the force of four pokémon tumbling haphazardly through; Uxie barely keeping control of the tricky connection.

They came out over a lake. Uxie shoved her eyes open and held their gazes intently. For them, their knowledge of time passing disguised as this time seemingly not existing at all.

Mew ascended from the lake just as Uxie had hoped she would with the irresistible lure of curiosity at the surge of power just above her slumbering place.

<Do you want to play a game?> Uxie asked her.

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It's in our nature to survive, even if that means lying fallow for a while... even a very long, long while.

~ Celebi Elder

She knew she was Celebi, and that she was to guard the secret future. That was for sure. She knew someone important had just removed her from a strange nothing-place and placed her here on this barren nothing-land to lie fallow for a long time; sleeping away the aeons of time and space that cascaded above and around her; creating and changing the world almost as if a hand guided it deliberately. Perhaps it did, though she could not entirely be sure of that.

At any rate, she was Celebi-guard-the-secret-future; but as the years flowed into decades her little body curled up tightly in the ever-

shifting earth began to wither, then as the decades flowed into centuries she realised with surprise that she had grown out of it at some stage as her aching need for air and sunlight had far surpassed her satisfaction from the healthy earth and water which had always nourished her.

All these things, she realised, had been nourishing the world around her for this whole time as well. Far from the barren nothing-land she vaguely remembered from the beginning. This land was flourishing and healthy and she was a part of it. No longer Celebi-guard-the-secret-future. Who was Celebi? Nobody she knew. Secret future? She had forgotten it. Had she ever known it at all? Of course the future was secret. Nobody knew what would happen in the future until it had become the past.

Thus she remained pragmatic on the day one of her as yet unopened blossoms decided to swell and glow and hatch into a magical creature in damp-winged fragility rather than flower into petals as all its brothers and sisters did. After a moment to compose herself, she named it Guardenia; her protector, this land's protector. For once she had been Celebi-guard-the-secret-future, but the secret future she had guarded had come to pass, as surely as it would continue to come to pass, so now she

was just one tree amongst many; and this magical creature whom had sprung forth would be their defender.

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Clair sat on the boat with the gondolier, listening to the steady smack of oars against water. She tried - just once - to say something to them; but soon realised there was nothing more to say. Hope, and unease, flitted about her chest.

It grew dark, and darker still. The gondolier's form grew shadowed and distant, and soon she felt her eyes slipping shut. Nodding to herself, she bent over and lay down on the hard wooden seat to slumber.

She dreamed she was flying. Flying high, above a city; its pinpoints of golden, red and white lights a secure promise of the stability and reality of below. If she chose to descend, she'd find it bathed in light and bustling in life, in stark contrast to the forgotten place of before.

She hovered, and flew, and hovered some more - then something changed. Somebody else came into her space. They, too, were hovering close by, their form faded and grey.

“Hey - it’s you!” they said.

Clair faced them. <Me?> She looked at the form and saw it was a young human boy. <Do you know me?>

“You’re my friend,” the boy said. “My pokémon friend.”

<Pokémon?>

Clair raised her hands to her face and felt her eyes widen at the sight of them. She’d lost a few fingers; but the three that remained had apparently swelled and grown to compensate. <Is this who I am now?>

“What are you doing here?”

<I might ask you the same,> Clair said. <Can humans astral travel in this world?>

“Astral... huh? I don’t get it. We’re just dreaming, I guess. So let’s have a bit of fun!” The boy grinned and laughed, and whirled up and around with his arms outstretched, whooping his excitement.

Clair watched his antics, stunned, then giggled herself. <Alright. Fun. I can roll with that.>

She gathered her awareness of her body - her new and very different body, she surmised - and tried a wide loop-de-loop herself. The wind rushing around her body felt invigorating on her fur and skin. She couldn't help cackling a bit.

“Isn't it great?” the boy said. “C'mon!”

The pair flew over the city, past the surrounding villages and met with nature at its most untouched before discovering more hidden pockets of human society amongst the decadent nature reserves filled with amazing creatures of all shapes and sizes.

<These are pokémon, too?> Clair asked, as they flew on.

“Yup! And one day, I'll make friends with one and become a pokémon master!”

His positive excitement was contagious. Clair felt a surge of heart-thumping happiness at all he was showing her in the vivid dream. Her chest felt filled to burst. This energy - was it how pokémon sometimes felt? She let it do as it would, and as it rippled across her body from the tip of her head to her toes she paused in the air in wonderment.

The boy's eyes crinkled in a wide open grin that practically split his face. “Woah! That's awesome!”

The burst of energy had changed her yet again. She cast a quick look down at herself to take stock yet again; but soon realised the brimming energy within her demanded she do something more with it - and fast.

With a shout of laughter, she gathered her inner momentum and shot across the sky in blinding-fast speeds. She continued burning across the sky for moments on end, her power feeling limitless.

“Hey,” the boy called from somewhere far away where she’d left him. “Don’t go too far, you’ll reach the edge.”

*There is no edge.*

“There’s a limit, I think,” he said; for once his boyish enthusiasm dampened by a strange wisdom.

<I want to go beyond the limit,> she insisted; but slowed down, and allowed his voice to materialise his form back next to her as if she had barely even left. With another strange shifting of power, her body suddenly morphed back to normal now the surge of excitement had waned.

“I think I’m waking up,” the boy said, who was starting to drift away even as he had appeared. “You should try to wake up, too.”

<I’m not awake yet?> Clair asked. *It all feels so real...*

The boy shook his head. “This is only a little bit of what you can see in the real world. It’ll be even better when your eyes open for good.”

<I can’t wait for that,> Clair said honestly. <I’ll come find you when I do.>

“Can’t wait to meet you again!” He raised a hand to wave.

<What’s your name?> she asked.

“I’m Ash. Ash, from Pallet Town.”

<I’m...>

*Who am I?*

But she had no time to answer him. The boy was gone.

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The being stood still. Forgotten.

The gondolier had not returned. The other souls about the place had seemingly vanished whilst the being hadn’t been looking.

They looked to the water’s edge, and decided to walk it a while.

As they walked they told themselves another story.

“Once long ago, I wanted to be forgotten forever. It would protect me, and the ones around me. But try as I might, they

remembered; and they came for me. Some with evil intent; others with good. Being forgotten was not the perfect solution. And is it now? No - still, even here in this place, somebody came for me.”

And the being had given the seat to Clair.

“Was that somebody of evil, or good intent? Down here, forgotten, I will never know. It is not my purpose to know. The forgotten cannot have purpose. I wanted so long for such things... once a long time ago. Do I want it again?”

The water rippled softly in reply.

“Yes,” the being decided, and stopped short on the shore. Their toes nearly touching the side of a sleek black-wood craft neatly beached at the end of the sands. There was no more land to traverse. Only the river which bordered this place to the last - or next.

The being smiled, lashed their tail, climbed into the boat, and took the oars firmly with a three-fingered hold.

Thus ends ‘The Game of Time’

The saga will continue