3: The Forest

I breathed in as I exited the city limits, Noibat’s Poké Ball clipped to my belt, enjoying the crisp air of the countryside. No matter how you looked at it, Aquacorde was not a major city and the air quality reflected this.

I would normally have left Noibat outside of its Poké Ball rather than returning it, but at some point while I was finishing packing my bags it had decided to take a nap. Rather than wasting time trying to wake it up as I had done earlier this morning, I had simply recalled it to the Poké Ball when I left.

Actually, now that we were out here… I pulled the red-and-white sphere off my belt and activated it, before using the direct release function.

Noibat materialised in midair with a flash of light. It glanced around for a moment then swooped over to my shoulder, alighting with a small chuffing noise. I gave it a look as I continued walking, not entirely sure I enjoyed being used as a perch for a Pokémon that was perfectly capable of flying on its own.

“So,” I began, breaking the silence. “Have a nice sleep?”

The Dragon-type looked almost guilty for a second (Or I thought it did, at least) before performing a rather complicated motion that averaged out to being a close approximation of a shrug.

“Noi bat, bat noibat bat?” it responded.

*...I really need to work on learnining Noibat-speak.*

I took my best guess at what that came out to before trying to work out a reply. “Next time try not to pick a time to snooze right before we go if it was that bad.”

“…bat noibat noi, batnoi,” Noibat squeaked. I gave it a second, distinctly unimpressed, look, rather strongly suspecting that I’d just been insulted. However, I chose not to start something and instead merely walked on in silence.

And it *was* silence. Save my footsteps, Noibat’s wingbeats and the wind in the trees there was practically no noise. From prior experience with woodland I knew they were usually quieter than portrayed in media, but I would at least have expected birdsong. Did bird Pokémon even sing in the same way that regular birds did?

After about twenty minutes of steady progress the silence started getting to me. “Noibat,” I said aloud. “You mind taking a look to see if there’s anything moving around here?”

Noibat gave me an odd look. “Bat, noibat?”

I shrugged. “The quiet is getting to me a bit. I’ve been in woods before, and they’re never this still in the morning.”

Noibat considered this, then nodded. “Batnoi bat noi.”

Bobbing slightly in the air, it made a loud clicking noise and rushed off down the path. I put my headphones back up and walked after it, reasoning that if I stayed on the path I’d be relatively easy to find.

A few minutes later with no sign of Noibat, I had begun to question my decision. If Noibat had looped back around through the forest then it might well have no idea of where I’d gone. Or it might just have decided to fly off entirely because it didn’t want to get stuck with some dumbass newbie Trainer.

Well, probably not that last one. If it had been specifically picked out as a starter Pokémon, then I doubted that Drasna, whoever she might be, would have picked a Pokémon that didn’t *want* to be trained. From what I could remember of the anime, people were generally more empathic than that.

Well, *some* people. I doubted that a random Team Rocket grunt would have the capacity to deduce that a Pokémon might *not* want to do something. Or some of the ‘villain-of-the-week’ characters either.

Huh, maybe I was getting the Anime mixed up with the Ranger games?

A flutter of motion in the corner of my eye caught my attention and I stopped, pulling my headphones down again. If it was a wild Pokémon, then I wanted to be paying my full attention to it.

Thankfully, it was just Noibat. As the Flying-type flapped its way back over I raised a hand in greeting.

“Find anything?” I asked.

“Bat!” the purple bat nodded, bobbing enthusiastically in the air. “Noibat bat noi noibat?”

“…I have no idea what that meant,” I admitted after a moment of trying to process the rapid fire syllables. “Just show me the way to whatever it is you found.”

Noibat bobbed again and darted off, fortunately at a pace I could follow this time. I did so, shaking my head slightly at the overexcited Flying-type.

“Huh,” I said, looking at the small Pokémon some fifty feet away. “Not really sure what I expected, but I don’t think it was something so… mundane.”

Noibat, now perched on my shoulder, shrugged.

Sitting at the foot of a rather large tree was a Scatterbug. Small and wormlike but with an unsettlingly large head, the Bug-type was peacefully munching away at a fallen fruit of some kind, paying no attention to anything going on around it.

Moving as slowly as possible, I walked over to the Bug-type as it munched away at its meal. I was about five meters from it when the Scatterbug noticed me. The small Pokémon glanced up at me for a few seconds, then went straight back to eating.

I exchanged a look with Noibat, who shrugged. Not entirely sure how to take being summarily ignored, I squatted down slightly and waited for the Bug-type to finish. There wasn’t much left of the fruit, whatever it might have been, and it wasn’t like I was in a hurry to get somewhere.

A few minutes later, the Scatterbug finished chewing the last mouthful and slowly looked around. As its gaze passed over me it blinked and moved back slightly, as if it was the first time it had seen me. Which might be entirely possible; Noibat might have shown a level of intelligence I’d rate above some people I’d met, but from what I could remember that wasn’t necessarily universal. And if there were any particular species I’d willingly peg as dumb, it was first-stage Bugs. Mostly because they wouldn’t be able to hurt me too badly should I say it aloud, but I wasn’t going to admit *that* either

“Hi,” I said instead, watching the small Pokémon. It looked back at me blankly, but I continued on regardless. “I’m a Pokémon Trainer. Do you know what that means?”

The Bug-type continued its unblinking stare. I was beginning to think that it might not understand me at all when it nodded, the movement slow and deliberate.

Smiling, I continued. “So, would you want to come with me?”

The Bug type twisted its head slightly, looking unsure. Truth be told, *I* wasn’t entirely sure about this either. While I’d had a policy when playing the games of picking up the first Pokémon I encountered, a policy I’d decided to continue with now that I was actually a Trainer, those were *games*. Scatterbug might evolve into Vivillon eventually and be potentially incredibly useful, but Scatterbug themselves were, uh, kind of dopey.

That really might not be fair to the Scatterbug (they couldn’t help how they looked) but it was true. Depending on how long evolutions took, I might well be stuck with a derpy worm-thing for months.

The small Bug-type in front of me looked back up, and nodded again.

…I’d made the offer, it would be cruel to take it back now. And I’d made the decision to catch the first Pokémon I saw that agreed to come with me.

“Okay, I said, standing up fully. “Do you just want to come along, or do you want a battle first?”

Scatterbug spat a wire of white silk at the ground next to my foot.

I nodded, and stepped back. “A battle it is then. Noibat!”

The small Flaying-type flew off my shoulder to hover in front of and just above me as I backed off, letting the two Pokémon have the space they needed.

The thought suddenly occurred to me that I might have made a mistake. I didn’t actually know what moves Noibat actually knew at the moment. Oh sure, I could remember the general shape of its movepool, but I’d never actually needed to learn what the species could learn early on.

Still, I could make a few reasonable assumptions.

Right now I wasn’t really interested in status-type moves, so I could discard those as possibilities immediately. I knew that Noibat never naturally learned a Dragon move until evolution, so I could safely count Twister and Dragonbreath out. That left Flying moves and Normal moves as likely prospects for ones that a young, untrained one would know. No beak, so no Peck, no claws and no heavy, blunt appendage so no Scratch or Pound and Wing Attack was usually learned later. That left Tackle and Gust.

Well, only one way to find out. “Noibat, start with Tackle!”

“Bat!” said Pokemon acknowledged, and dived.

The Scatterbug looked up at Noibat’s diving form and wriggled slightly, winding itself up. Right as Noibat arrived, the Bug-type launched itself forward in a motion equal to Noibat’s, driving the both of them back.

As Noibat flapped back up to a point slowly lower than where it had been hovering before, I winced slightly. From what I could tell, Noibat had taken the impact worse than its opponent, which was slightly troubling. It might have been from Scatterbug being having better traction and footing than Noibat did, or possibly that Scatterbug the species were more physically durable than Noibat the species, but it still worried me. Just a raw match of Tackles would leave Noibat worse

Of course, the obvious solution was to stop Tackle clashes happening at all. “Noibat! Tackle again, but this time circle around to the side before you hit it!”

The purple bat bobbed slightly in the air to show it had understood before diving again, this time in a steady arc. The Scatterbug watched Noibat dive and shifted with the Flying-type’s motion, readying itself for another Tackle.

Noibat, fortunately, was ready. As it reached the point where it was in range of the Scatterbug’s Tackle it beat its wings once and shoved itself into a much sharper turn and avoided the Bug-type’s Tackle entirely, before curving back to slam its own Tackle into the Scatterbug’s side.

“Good job!” I called to it, grinning slightly. “Now, try it again!”

“Noibat noi!” Noibat replied, and spun into another dive. The Scatterbug repeated the process of attempting to counterattack, already turning to meet my Flying-type’s charge. Despite its best efforts, Noibat was simply too agile to get caught by the groundbound Bug-type and danced away before smacking it into the air with another Tackle.

I winced slightly as the Scatterbug bounced off the ground and rolled to a stop. That *had* to have hurt.

Shaking itself off, the Bug-type picked itself up and stared back up at Noibat as it circled back up to its favourite hovering point. There was a moment of stillness as I watched the Scatterbug wobble slightly, before I broke it with a snap. “Again!”

Immediately, I could see something was wrong. Rather than bunching up and bracing itself like it had all three previous times, the Scatterbug had instead reared back on its tail and puffed the small ruff of white hair on its neck out.

“Pull up!” I shouted, not wanting to take the risk. “Get out of there Noibat!”

Fortunately, Noibat heard me, and spun out of the dive. Just in time, too; a second later, and it would have run headlong into a glistening cloud of golden powder that the Bug had spewed from its mouth and the ruff of hair.

Recognising the glittering powder as Stun Spore, I revised my estimate of the Scatterbug’s strength quite significantly upward. The species only learned Stun Spore when they weren’t far away from evolving, as I recalled, and they evolved later than other early Bugs did too. Good, in the sense that I had found a relatively powerful Pokémon, but *bad* because first I had to beat it.

I considered for a moment, staring at the cloud of spores. Noibat *could* fly through that, and could probably even hit the Scatterbug. The problem with that was that it would then be stuck with paralysis for the remainder of the fight, and possibly some time after; I had paralysis medicine in my bag somewhere, but I only knew the bare basics in its use.

So, Tackle wasn’t an option.

Time to see if my other guess had any merit then. “Noibat!” I called, grabbing its attention. “Do you know Gust?”

Noibat bobbed in the air again. “Bat, noibat!” it responded, a little more strained than I was used to but not by much. Not surprising, it had just done some rather intensive aerobatics and taken a fairly powerful Tackle directly to the face.

“Okay, then use Gust!” I commanded sweeping one arm forward. Noibat complied, steadily rising a few inches in the air as it beat its wings faster and faster- and then, with a single, mighty flap an *immense* burst of wind burst forth.

In seconds, the entire cloud of golden spores was gone, blown away by the sheer force of the wind. Scatterbug only held on for a second longer before it too was torn off the ground, hurled into a tree by the sheer *force* of the wind.

Noibat dropped down slightly, flagging slightly from the effort. I didn’t blame it in the slightest; that had been an *incredible* attack.

“Good job Noibat!” I called again, pulling an empty Poké Ball off my belt. “Let’s…”

My words trailed off as the Scatterbug twitched, and stood. Shakily, slowly, but it *stood*. And by the way it was staring at Noibat, it wasn’t giving in.

“Okay, it can’t take another hit like that.” I told Noibat as the Scatterbug drew itself up and began puffing out another cloud of Stun Spore. “Can you manage another Gust?”

“…bat,” Noibat confirmed, with significantly much less energy than previously. “Noi, batnoi bat noi.” Tiredly, the Flying-type began beating its wings faster, working up the energy for another Gust attack.

Unfortunately, its opponent had other ideas.

Rearing back, the Scatterbug spat a long, glossy string of material directly at Noibat.

“Noibat, dodge!” I called, but not quite in time. While I’d seen the attack coming Noibat, focused on building the Gust attack, hadn’t. Even though it had obeyed my order to dodge I hadn’t reacted fast enough to let it get clear of the attack completely, and the silken String Shot snared one of its wings. With a squeak of surprise Noibat dropped to the floor, unable to keep itself aloft with only one wing.

“You okay Noibat?” I asked as said Pokémon picked itself up with the one wing it had that was still working. Noibat glanced over its shoulder and nodded slightly before turning back to face the unsteadily advancing Scatterbug.

Watching as the Bug-type puffed out another cloud of Stun Spore, I weighed my options. With only one wing, Noibat couldn’t use Gust anymore, and I doubted it would be able to get a Tackle off without being paralyzed if it could manage to do a Tackle while on foot at all. Somehow, looking at the way that it wobbled slightly while trying to stay balanced, I doubted that.

Fortunately, the Scatterbug was on its last legs too. In fact, judging by the steady deterioration of its gait, Noibat might be able to win just by outlasting it. Of course, that would require it to not get paralysed, so…

“Noibat!” I called. “Move away, lead it in a circle!”

“Noibat, bat noibat!” was the response I got, and Noibat began to do as I’d instructed and steadily began hopping away to the left. Scatterbug followed, puffing out a steady cloud of Stun Spore the entire time.

I winced as Noibat nearly tripped and fell, but continued to think. If it had the time to do so, I would suggest that the Fleying-type try to scrape away the web and take back to the air. Unfortunately, I knew from experience that Noibat didn’t have the best track record with fine motor skills, as several rather large messes where it had attempted to “help” could indicate.

It basically all came down to the impenetrable spore cloud that the Scatterbug was *still* managing to produce. If Noibat knew another ranged technique, or I could be sure that it could get through the spore cloud easily I’d tell it to go for it in a heartbeat. But neither of those were true, and I wasn’t-

Seemingly fed up of being led around by the nose, the Scatterbug spat another line of String Shot at Noibat as it hoped away, and caught it mid-leap on the other wing. Unable to dodge, the poor Flying-type went over backwards as the unexpected force of the silk line dragged it back.

“Noibat…” I clenched my hands as Noibat squeaked in surprise. I was out of time now, and I still didn’t have any ideas. All the Scatterbug had to do now was walk over to Noibat and paralyse it, something it was already in the process of doing, then possibly bury it in String Shot. Losing my first battle to a wild Pokémon, huh? I made a seriously pathetic Trainer. If Noibat knew another move-

*Another move.*

I was being an idiot. Almost all Pokémon at least knew one support move from the get-go, but this was the anime setting. Support moves usually weren’t *just support.*

In particular, there was one move I was pretty sure that Noibat knew by default that never counted as such.

“Noibat, use Screech!” I shouted, and clamped my hands over my ears.

My decision to do so proved well-founded as Noibat opened its mouth and shrieked so loudly that the noise was *visible.* Even with my hands over my ears it hurt. Not for the first time, I found myself cursing my good hearing as the ringing *noise* reverberated through my skull.

At last, it ended. I cracked open an eye just in time to watch the Scatterbug fall back over, utterly dazed. I waited several seconds for it to show any sign of movement before I grinned and ran over to Noibat. I most certainly did not cheer loudly as I did so. At all.

“Great job,” I told it, the rush of excitement that came from having *just won a real life Pokémon battle* making me feel a bit giddy. “Here, let me get this string off you…”

“Batnoi, noibat noi noi,” Noibat nodded as I picked it up and began carefully separating the tangles of String Shot from its wings. “Bat noi bat noibat.”

I grinned as the last few tangles of silk came off, and Noibat launched itself into the air again, doing a complicated series of loops that ended with it hovering around eye level two feet to my left. I shot it a look as I activated the empty Poké Ball that I was still holding’s resize function, and got a nod in return.

I gently lobbed the ball overarm at the still-dazed form of the Scatterbug. The Poké Ball sailed through the air in a smooth arc, collided with a tree trunk some five meters off from where I’d attempted to throw it, bounced off a rock and rolled off into a bush.

Noibat fell out of the air with laughter as I sighed, and walked over to Scatterbug’s unconscious form. Taking out a second empty Poké Ball I tapped the Bug-type on the head.

Scatterbug dissolved in a flood of red energy and I dropped the Poké Ball on the floor as it began to rock. It didn’t last though- after a second or two of violent shaking the ring around the front button flashed and the Poké Ball stilled.

Picking the occupied sphere up, I grinned again. This was *so much* cooler than just playing a game- I was *living* one. I successfully restrained the urge to loudly announce that I’d caught a Pokémon, instead settling for tossing the Poké Ball above my head and catching it.

The moment was, of course, ruined by Noibat’s continued raucoud laughter.

“Shut up,” I told it as I walked over to fish the Poké Ball I’d flubbed a throw with out of the bush. “It wasn’t *that* funny.”

For some reason, this only made it laugh harder.

A/N: I am well aware that Noibat does not actually learn Gust until level 11. I’m following the Anime’s rules on moves, which seem to be “If it can learn this move before it evolves, it will probably already know it when it first appears, or it will learn it at a suitably dramatic moment”. Generally I’m going to follow the game on move distribution, but there are a couple of odd standouts I’ll probably modify such as Mirror Coat or Magnitude. It’s not like the anime is a stranger to impossible movesets; as of the most recent series they’re *still* at it.

Similarly, Stun Spore is learned by Scatterbug at level 6. It evolves at level 9. While taken as a whole that is indeed close, proportionally that’s only a third of the way there. It would be like saying that Zweilous learns Dragon Rush close to evolution. My memory is not perfect, but for Pokémon (especially the games) it gets pretty close. My rule of thumb for this story is that if I can remember something without checking Bulbapedia then I can remember it in the story.

Of course, Scatterbug isn’t staying so for long, because trying to write for possibly the derpiest Pokémon in existence is difficult. Probably won’t stay a Spewpa for long either.