2.2 : Into the forest

The next day, I set out. Well, almost.

I hadn’t had much to buy because apparently I already owned most of it- save a set of Poké Balls and some Pokémon food, literally everything I’d needed had been already heaped in a pile in the office. The Pokémon food hadn’t been hard to buy either, as the corner shop had sold travel-appropriate bags of food.

The Poké Balls however were harder to find, apparently only being sold in licensed shops, such as the one I was walking towards now.

The small building’s door rang a bell as I opened it. Stepping in, I closed my eyes as a jet of warm air-conditioning blew over me, and then took a look around.

*For such a small shop,* I thought idly as I proceeded further in across the tiled blue floor. *It really is very well-packed.*

And indeed it was. The aisles were barely one person wide, and the shelves were stuffed from floor to ceiling with all kinds of odd stuff. I’d seen Pokémon accessories, canisters of unusual foods and liquids, electrical goods- even a few disc cases that resembled TMs.

The Poké Balls though, were all stacked behind the currently unmanned counter.

I made my way over, stopping a couple of times to take a closer look at things that caught my eye on the way. After a glance around the shop that didn’t reveal anyone who looked like they worked here (or anyone at all really), I leaned forward to get a better look at the Poké Balls.

I couldn’t quite see the Poké Balls on the lowest shelves, but the ones on the higher shelves were all mostly in packs or canisters which I hadn’t really expected. I could see a few packs of Great Balls near the top of the room, and a few of the canister sets included free Premier Balls, but aside from those all of the ones I could see were basic Poké Balls. There might have been a couple that had some fancy decorations added, but in the end they were all just Poké Balls.

I was seriously considering hoisting myself onto the counter to get a better look at the merchandise that was out of view – *this would be so much easier if I was still my real age-* when one of the shelves swung open like a door and a man wearing a green-ish uniform poked his head out.

“You okay there?” he asked me.

“I- yeah, I’m fine,” I said, leaning back away from the counter. “I was just- um,”

“Oh, a new Trainer?” the clerk asked, stepping out of the back room. “Buying kit for the road then?”

I nodded. “Just Poké Balls though, I have everything else already.”

“Okay then,” he said agreeably, gesturing to the back wall. “Any set you’d like in particular?”

Had I had more money to spare, this might have been a tough question. As I didn’t, I pointed out one of the ten-Poké Ball packs with a free premier ball that seemed to be the most value for money. “That one, please.”

“Sure thing,” the shopkeeper nodded, pulling the indicated canister out. “Trainer Card, please.”

I pulled it and the money I’d need to pay out, having left both close to hand to speed this part up. The clerk scanned first my card, then the Poké Balls before sliding them back to me and taking the payment. “Okay kid, the Poké Balls are registered to you now,” he said, offering a receipt. I took it, and stuffed the balls and the receipt in a side pocket of my bag.

“Thanks,” I told him honestly. Of course, I was thanking him for making it quick and not chatting, but I didn’t feel it prudent to mention that. “Have a nice day!”

“You too, kid,” he told me as I walked out of the shop. “Good luck at the League!”

The door jingled behind me as I shut it, and I let out a deep sigh. *Aaaand relax.*

Well, that was my face-to-face discussion for the day.

Now, time to set off for real.

The road out to Santalune terminated at a stone bridge spanning the banks of a really rather pretty river. I took a moment to appreciate the sight before I continued walking, shoes *click*ing off the paved slabs.

As I reached the other side of the bridge I gave one last glance to the town I was leaving behind.

*Come what may this is my path now*.

Turning my back on Aquacorde, I pulled the only Poké Ball on my belt free and gently tossed it into the air. With a whoosh of white light Noibat materialised in midair and shook itself, before fluttering down to my left shoulder. I shifted my headphone cable obligingly to let it settle, and gave it a look. I’d talked to it a bit last night, before it had decided to return itself to its Poké Ball to sleep.

“Bat?” Noibat said, returning my gaze.

I thought about it a bit more, then nodded to myself. “Noibat, when we get a bit further away from the city I’m going to ask you to show off a bit, okay?”

Noibat probably-smiled, and nodded. “Bat, noibat batnoi bat.”

“Great,” I told it. “Now, let’s get started.”

I gave one last look back at Aquacorde, then stepped forth.

Half an hour later, I stopped at a turn in the path that was fairly sparse in trees, and nodded. I nudged the drowsy bat on my shoulder, and gestured forward. “Noibat, it’s your turn.”

Shaking itself awake, Noibat looked at me before taking off, flapping into a hover some distance in front of me.

There was a moment of silence as I considered what to say. I didn’t know what moves Noibat knew- that was, after all the entire point of this exercise. I could make some fairly educated guesses if I had to- I knew that the Noibat line didn’t naturally learn any Dragon-type moves until they evolved, and that, as a Pokémon so closely related to noise, they probably had a sound-based move as the requisite support attack.

After a few seconds I broke the tableau by sighing. “I don’t know what moves you have,” I admitted to my Pokémon. “So just do whatever you can, I guess.”

Noibat looked back at me and nodded. “Bat, bat.”

The purple Pokémon flapped its wings as it circled higher, then dived forward at a conveniently-placed tree branch. There was no glowing, no flash of light or even an explosion but when Noibat impacted on the tree branch it simply snapped in two.

I stared slightly as Noibat circled back around. The branch that it had gone for had been fairly small, probably around as thick as my arm, but it was still something I’d have needed to exert quite a lot of effort with good leverage to snap. The Flying-type had just smashed right through with no apparent effort.

Finding my voice again, I nodded at Noibat as it returned to hover where it had been before. “Good job, Noibat. I’m guessing that was Tackle?”

Tackle was one of the few moves that I was pretty sure didn’t have any flashy effects at all in anime-canon, and I was also pretty sure that the Noibat line could learn it. The Noibat in question confirmed my guess by bobbing up and down with a cheerful “Noi!”

“Okay,” I said, nodding. “You have anything else?”

Noibat nodded again, and began beating its wings faster. I watched as it slowly hovered higher, wings steadily beating faster and faster until with a loud cry it swung them forwards and a slight breeze abruptly amplified into a gale.

Grabbing a tree to keep my balance in the abrupt windstorm, I watched as a vortex of debris gradually picked up and meandered away between the trees, stripping more than a few leaves and twigs away from the branches it encountered.

I raised an eyebrow as Noibat’s flapping slowed, and it sank steadily downwards in the air. I stepped forward and put out my arm, which the Flying-type landed on gratefully.

“Tackle and Gust,” I mused aloud, considering. In comparison to the smoothness that Noibat had demonstrated Tackle with, Gust had taken a fair amount of time to start and had exhausted it to the point where it had difficulty flying. Had it only learned it recently?

Actually, why it was having issues with Gust didn’t really matter. It might literally be my first day on the job, but even I could tell that it was having them, and it was my job as a Pokemon Trainer- as *Noibat’s* Trainer to help it get better and overcome that problem.

*Or at least,* I thought to myself as I lightly scratched the back of Noibat’s head, *That’s what I think I’m doing.*

“Do you know any other moves Noibat?” I asked again. Truth be told, this was a question I suspected I already knew the answer to. Most Pokemon typically learned an offensive move and a status move very early on, and I was almost certain that Noibat wasn’t an exception. More, considering what they were known for, I could narrow down which ones were likely; there were only three sound-based status moves that I could really see the tiny Pokemon on my arm learning, and I was also pretty sure that the Noibat line couldn’t learn Growl.

That left Supersonic and Screech.

Noibat nodded and hopped off my hand, fluttering forwards some twenty feet. It briefly glanced around as it settled on the ground, before looking back at me and gesturing with its wings towards its ears. “Batnoi batbat noi.”

Guessing that Noibat was telling me to cover my ears, I did so. The Pokemon in question nodded as I did so, inhaled, and *screamed*.

A literal shockwave of noise emanated from the little bat’s mouth, visible waves of white rippling out. Even with my ears firmly covered the noise was horrendous, a keening, grating *wail* that sent fingers of pain down my spine and made my teeth feel like they were about to fall out of their sockets.

A few seconds later the Screech ended. I looked up, a ringing in my ears slowly fading even as I realised it was there. Noibat was sat in the middle of a ring of bent grass seemingly perfectly content, if slightly worried.

“Wow,” I said, sounding like I was on the other side of a very long tunnel. “Um. Thanks for the warning Noibat.”

“Bat, noibat bat,” Noibat replied, fluttering back over. I gave it a small smile as it landed on my shoulder, thinking carefully.

I wasn’t entirely sure what to do next, aside from continuing on to Santalune City. I could stop and try to train Noibat for a while, or I could just rush through the forest as fast as I could and try to find a Pokémon Center to stop at, or…

“Noibat,” Noibat interrupted my thoughts, poking my cheek with a wing. “Bat noibat?”

“Sorry, just thinking,” I said. “I…”

An idea occurred to me, and I turned it over. It was a philosophy I’d held when playing the games, and though I couldn’t be sure if it was right to do here it was at least a starting point.

“Noibat,” I began. “Do you feel up for a fight?”

“Baaat,” Noibat nodded slowly. “Noi bat?”

“Then would you mind finding the nearest wild Pokémon to here?” I asked. “I think that I should probably get you a teammate, right?”

Noibat nodded again, much less hesitantly this time, and took flight. “Batnoi batbat noi.”

“Okay then,” I said, and waved a hand forward. “Please, lead the way.”

My policy on capturing Pokémon in the games had always been rather lackadaisical in that I usually went for what I thought looked cool, or just felt like capturing. Rarely, if ever, did I plan out which Pokémon I wanted in advance. I did, however, hold one rule that I was intending to apply even here;

The first time I set out on a new adventure, I would capture the first wild Pokémon I could.

The decision to hold to this rule was one that I found myself questioning as I crouched behind some foliage, Noibat resting on top of my head, as the pair of us spied on what was apparently the only Pokémon inside a mile’s radius.

I sighed, making an attempt to keep quiet as the Pokémon in question swiftly devoured an apple. It was the second one it had eaten in the time we’d been watching it, and judging by the scraps visible against the sparse vegetation, it had been keeping that pace up for a while.

“I’m not so sure this is a good idea anymore,” I admitted quietly to Noibat, watching as the wild Pokémon finished its apple and moved onto a third, devouring its food with a sort of determined commitment that I would compare to someone practising something they already knew by heart but still needed to improve at. “I mean, for one if it keeps eating at that rate I’ll have no food left inside three days.”

The other was that a Scatterbug was not the sort of Pokémon I’d have deliberately picked out, if only for the fact that they looked *so very* derpy.

Noibat gave the Pokémon in question a glance, and shrugged with its wings. “Bat noibat, noi noi batbat.”

Unfortunately, Noibat wasn’t quite as quiet as I’d been, and the Scatterbug stared in our direction. After a few seconds of intense scrutiny the Bug-type turned back to its meal, steadily munching away at the apple it was working on now. I couldn’t tell if it had spotted us and decided that we weren’t a threat, or had simply failed to notice us and dismissed the noise as wind.

The pair of us sat there for a few more moments, before I sighed again and stood. *Screw it, if I don’t do this now I’ll be here all day.*

The Scatterbug didn’t even glance up as I broke through the undergrowth, instead continuing to eat its meal. It *did* glance up when I stopped several meters away, but returned its focus back to its meal when I leaned back against a tree.

Leaning against a tree and just watching the Scatterbug continue to eat wasn’t out of any intent to look cool, or continue my observations from a closer perspective; it was because I had absolutely no idea what to say or do.

The Bug-type gave us another look as it finished its latest apple, before looking up and casting a long, stringy line of goo into the tree above it. It was hard to not stare in a mix of amazement, befuddlement and awe as the Scatterbug tugged at the now-taut String Shot- to my poor, Earth-based sensibilities, seeing so much silk be thrown at such velocity and with such accuracy was by far the strangest thing I’d seen in person.

*Though,* I mused as the apple that the Scatterbug had snared with its line was pulled free from the tree and set upon by the ravenous Bug-type, *if I keep going, it won’t be that way for long. Not with what this world is like.*

A minute passed as I tried to work out what to say, the sounds of Scatterbug chewing the only thing breaking the silence.

“Noi,” Noibat hissed into my ear. “Batnoi, bat noi.” I gave the small Flying-type a look, and it shuffled back slightly. “Bat bat noibat.”

Getting the impression that Noibat was feeling every bit as awkward as I was, I swallowed my qualms and stepped forward again as Scatterbug finished its latest apple.

“Hi,” I said, kneeling down. “I’m a Pokémon Trainer. Do you know what that means?”

Internally I cringed at the cheesiness of the line. The words had just kind of spilled out, but Scatterbug seemed to be listening intently, lifting itself off the ground to look directly at me.

Very slowly, the Bug-type nodded.

“Well, I’d decided that I’d ask the next Pokémon I saw to join my team,” I continued. “And then Noibat told me you were here, so I decided to ask you if you wanted to come along.”

I kept my face as straight as possible while Scatterbug thought. While true, that had been putting something of a spin on events leading up to the current moment. Fortunately, the Bug-type didn’t seem to have noticed, and nodded another, slow nod before spitting a glob of silk