

“MAN,” said Jecht. “You know, I always thought of myself as a fire guy. You can tell I’m a fire guy, right, Auron? Or I could’ve been water, at least. Why is grass even a thing? Not like it can do anything. How’s this cat gonna fight, give everyone hay fever?”

“If you want a fire Pokémon, you can catch one later,” said Auron, holding Quaxly securely in his arms to ensure Jecht didn’t attempt to take it for himself.

“Oh, right,” said Jecht, “yeah, I’m gonna use my grass Pokémon to catch a fire type, sure, cos that’ll be easy. Thought you were meant to know about type effectiveness, Auron.”

“You can level it up,” Auron hissed back. “If that’s not too much of a chore.”

Jecht rolled his eyes. “Ugh. Dumb cat.” He aimed a half-hearted kick at Sprigatito, who was trotting along next to him; entirely unbothered, the Pokémon made an effortless dodge before shamelessly rubbing itself against Jecht’s bare ankles.

“You should be kind to your Pokémon, Jecht,” said Braska. “It is supposed to be your partner, after all. If you can’t form a bond with your first, it’ll be difficult to ask others to trust you later on, won’t it?”

“Well, *you’re* all right,” said Jecht, casting a pointed look at Fuecoco. Braska had had the good fortune to be given what seemed to be the friendliest, most laid-back Pokémon in Spira. The summoner and the miniature crocodile had apparently formed a bond within instants, and Fuecoco was now clinging

onto its trainer's robe as it waddled along behind him. To add insult to injury as far as Jecht was concerned, Braska had been deemed worthy of receiving the fire type.

"You've no-one to blame but yourself," said Auron. "They assigned us the Pokémon based on our personalities – if you weren't so self-obsessed, you could have ended up with a different one."

"Look, you and that duck are at least as self-obsessed as I am," Jecht pointed out.

"It has a name," Auron muttered, but Jecht was right – about Quaxly at least. The priests at the laboratory¹ had been very careful to emphasise to him that his new Pokémon would be extremely upset if its unusually bouffant hairstyle became at all disturbed, which seemed a rather impractical concern when he was supposed to be using it in battle. He couldn't see how it was supposed to match his own personality, either – although he could concede that it was a better fit than either of the other options.

Braska drew close to Jecht in the meantime. "Cheer up," he said. "You mentioned type effectiveness; I suppose you've realised the nature of your current advantage?"

"Huh?" said Jecht. "Oh – right! Hey, Auron – you're al-

¹There are a lot of Things To Consider about how a FFX/Pokémon crossover would work, but mostly I'm just amazed that I had cause to use the phrase "the priests at the laboratory".

ways talking about how we gotta make our Pokémon strong for the journey, ain't ya? So, you wanna battle?"

Auron turned to glare at him, but it wasn't as if he could say no. Battling was undoubtedly his very favourite activity. He had never been known to refuse a challenge, and he was confident that he had a far better grip on the mathematical side of things than Jecht did. Perhaps that would be enough to overcome his opponent's advantage. If he could use Growl a few times, he would be able to minimise Sprigatito's damage output before countering with an offensive move of his own.

"All right," he said.

"That's the stuff!" said Jecht. "OK, cat, show me what you're good for!"

Auron readied himself, but to no avail; even with its moves weakened, Sprigatito was able to knock Quaxly out with a couple of well-placed hits from Leafage before he even had the chance to use Pound. It was hardly a surprise, he admitted to himself as he recalled the motionless Pokémon to its ball.

"Super effective, loser," said Jecht smugly.

"Just you wait," said Auron. "Once it reaches level ten, it'll learn Wing Attack, and then –"

"Ain't gonna get to level ten in that state," Jecht interrupted him.

"Well, I'll have to use a Revive," said Auron, "seeing as you insisted on taking it down as early as this. Honestly, Jecht; we've barely left Bevelle. You know these items aren't easy to

come by, and it'll be hours before we get to the next restorative sphere."

"Whatever," said Jecht. "If you didn't have such a scrawny little Pokémon, we wouldn't have that problem." Sprigatito gave a little mew of what appeared to be agreement; Jecht looked down at it, momentarily surprised, and then added, "See? Cat knows what I'm talkin' about."

Auron didn't deign to reply.

"Oh, it looks like you're bonding with your Pokémon a little, Jecht," said Braska. "That's wonderful news. You see, there's nothing wrong with a grass type, is there? It'll certainly come in handy on the Mushroom Rock Road."

"Well, if it can beat Auron, I guess it's good for something," said Jecht. "Figured my Pokémon'd be the strongest, anyway. I am the great Jecht after all."

"Indeed," said Braska. "And maybe you'd like a battle with me now? I think Fuecoco's eager to show us what it can do."

Jecht looked down at the small red crocodile. "Uh," he said, "about that -"

"Oh, come on," said Braska winsomely. "You want your Pokémon to earn more experience, don't you?"

"Uh," said Jecht again, "actually, I'm good. I mean, Spriggy here's level six already. Don't wanna get too far ahead of you guys."

Braska smiled. "But I must insist."

“We’re supposed to do what Lord Braska says,” Auron pointed out.

“You can give *that* a rest,” said Jecht, before turning his attention back to Braska. “Ugh. Fine. I guess I will. Watch out, though – mine’s level six, remember. And I ain’t about to go easy on you.”

“I shall bear that in mind,” said Braska, gently detaching Fuecoco from his robe while Auron searched his belongings for another Revive.