

The chapter opens with Rune narrating over various guild jobs, starting with an escort mission through Drenched Bluff.

RUNE

Ever since our Waterfall Cave adventure, Malachi has kept us plenty busy with guild work so we can be selected for the upcoming expedition, or [placeholder name] as it's been called.

We've had to earn the Normal Rank the hard way- apparently discovering and then undiscovering a new mystery dungeon doesn't count towards a promotion.

We see them doing various jobs during this portion of the narration sequence.

RUNE

Yohann found a way to spin those plants into new clothing, so Dielle is looking better than ever in her new Bling Ruff.

Oh, and Inigo's been showing off his Attack Band.

We cut to Rune admiring Dielle from afar in her outfit, and then cut to Inigo with much less fanfare.

RUNE

But somehow, despite the passing weeks, and despite the leaves changing color, I still hardly feel like I've developed in my skills.

Maybe it has something to do with Dielle starting to teach me how to read and write- Something about it feels *familiar*, but not in a good way.

I feel inadequate.

And during the night, when I fall
asleep, I can't help but feel just
the same as always.

Lost.

We cut away from the action and find ourselves on the night
of a new moon. Rune awakens inside of a familiar place- the
Dream Realm.

DREAM REALM

Rune gazes up on a familiar, serpentine form.

RUNE

Oh cool, I didn't just imagine you
last time.

REQUIEM

You? Imagine someone as unique as
me? I'm shocked! And here I
thought I would have made a
lasting impression!

But as promised, it's been a few
weeks and I wanted to see you
again. How are you faring? You're
starting to look like your own
person now, what with your cute
little outfit and hair.

Rune softens up a bit.

RUNE

I... I don't even know. I've been
trying to get used to this "new
life" stuff you promised, but no
matter what I do it feels like
something's *missing*. And I'm *mad*
at you, but I'm also just... Tired
of being mad.

REQUIEM

Well if it consoles you at all, I
also don't like when you're mad at
me.

Because when I said I was assigned
to *help* you, I meant it.

She summons a table for the two of them, and gives Rune
some tea, which she participates in.

RUNE

I don't know, I just feel
directionless with it all. Didn't
you have some sort of... I dunno,
destiny planned out for me? I was
lost, which means you must have
put me back on some path, right?

REQUIEM

The only destiny you have is to
carve your own life for yourself.

Though ironically, I'd have
thought my *gift* would give you
direction in hard to read
situations.

RUNE

Wait... Are you saying-

She recalls her Dimensional Scream occurrences.

RUNE

You're the reason I have those
visions?!

REQUIEM

... Well you didn't have them
before we had our exchange, did
you?

RUNE

I thought that was just a Vulpix
thing! Like- like all the dark and
ice and stuff!

REQUIEM

I hate to break it to you, but
your little dark-type moves are
also a gift from me.

But hey, the ice is all you! I'm proud.

RUNE

W-What else have I done that isn't *mine*?

REQUIEM

Now now dear, it's more of a *partnership* than anything. Just because it's a gift from *me* doesn't mean it's not yours now.

Though it looks like it's about time for you to wake up again. A shame dreams feel so much shorter than the time it takes to craft them, hm?

RUNE

No! I still have so many questions-!

REQUIEM

Fine, fine. If it'll help you from going comatose and scaring your friends, I will make time to answer any three questions you have for me on my next visit. Sound like a deal?

RUNE

I'm not done-!

And she wakes up.

SHARPEDO BLUFF

RUNE

-With you!

Huh?

She looks around bewildered, and suddenly gets a headache.

RUNE

GAAAH-! I **wasted** it by talking

about feelings-!

Malachi coughs awkwardly from behind her.

MALACHI

You... Have a good dream?

RUNE

Let's just say it was one I didn't
wanna wake up from.

MALACHI

Oh! I have those sometimes! One
time I had this dream where I grew
a bunch of teeth and had a bunch
of clothes on- OH! Wait, no time,
we gotta gather at the guild! They
have an informational announcement
about the upcoming expedition!

RUNE

Ugh... That's today? Can I just
sleep in? I've got a killer
migraine.

MALACHI

Then we'll get you a Persim Latte
on the way! C'moon, this is super
important for our team!

RUNE

Buh... Okay, for the team.

We see a montage of the gang meeting up with Dielle and
Inigo outside the cafe while Rune downs a latte. They
arrive at the guild, where many teams have gathered in the
main hall.

WIGGLYTUFF GUILD

INIGO

Wow, lotsa folks here today, huh?

MALACHI

A lot more teams are eligible for
the expedition than I thought...

Then, we hear a loud chuckle off-screen.

JULIUS
Chaw-haw-haw! Lookit all the
rookies!

Everyone is hushed down, and other teams begin gossiping.

EXTRA
Is that...?

EXTRA
That's the leader of Team Skull!

EXTRA
No way!

EXTRA
I heard his team snipes jobs from
rookies...

EXTRA
I heard that they steal items from
pokemon and then collect the
bounty!

EXTRA
Well I heard that their leader,
Julius-

Has **killed** another explorer.

Throughout this speech we catch glimpses of the team
passing by in each panel. Soon, everyone quiets down when
Keaton enters the room.

KEATON
Alright everyone, time for our-

He sees Julius, and stops speaking. He seems aghast.

KEATON
You...

He quickly flies over.

KEATON
Julius!

He practically crash lands on Julius's face, and both of
them are laughing.

KEATON

You *old fart*, how long has it been?!

DIELLE

Did Chatot just...?

INIGO

Old fart?

JULIUS

Heyo, Keats. Too long, I missed ya. Administrative work treating you well?

KEATON

Pah! I'm molting more by the hour. I'm about to be plucked if the stress keeps up.

JULIUS

Mmm. I see you've got new meat.

RUNE

Hey, I'm more than a piece of meat. I also have a personality.

INIGO

Maybe *too much* personality.

MALACHI

Oh yeah...! Chatot, um, how do you know... Julian?

KEATON

It's *Julius*. And I'd *hope* I know him since we were teammates for most of my early career!

Everyone is floored by this revelation.

JULIUS

Heh, yeah we were buds.

Chatot is a little flushed.

KEATON

Were, I'd hope we still *are*!

JULIUS

Pah, you and your fancy semantics.
That's why you're the paperwork
fella now.

KEATON

Oh, and these must be your new
teammates!

He gestures at a Zubat and Koffing trailing Julius.

JULIUS

"New" is a bit generous. But yeah.
Our new team is called Team Skull.

KEATON

Not a far cry from when we were
Team Ruffians, eh?

Someone coughs.

EXTRA

Not to interrupt but... The
announcement, sir?

KEATON

Ah yes, of course. I got a bit
caught up reminiscing.

We have called upon teams today to
discuss an upcoming expedition.
The goal of this is to secure the
location of a powerful artifact
from theft, and to evacuate nearby
pokemon to prevent another tragedy
like Treeshroud.

Rune looks upset at this line, but Dielle pats her
reassuringly.

KEATON

As the exact location of this
artifact is undetermined at this
time, we will need the most adept
teams coordinating to meet our
goals. We will be closely
monitoring the rank and growth of
our guild's teams for suitable

candidates, though we will be outsourcing to get additional help.

He looks over at Julius.

KEATON

Be sure to keep up the good work in order to be selected.

That will be all.

The teams disperse, and Keaton immediately goes back to chatting with Julius. Malachi throws a concerned look while the team exits.

They go to Spinda Cafe for lunch to discuss plans to get selected for the expedition.

BEV'S BAR

MALACHI

Alright, team! We need to discuss our game plan if we're gonna have a chance at getting selected for the expedition!

I have a list of jobs between Drenched Bluff and Mt. Bristle, so if we split up-

YOHANN

Oh, if it isn't Team Maelstrom!

Yohann walks over and interrupts, with a Smeargle trailing behind him.

MALACHI

Oh, hi Yohann. And um, guy.

AZRAEL

Azrael.

YOHANN

He's my date. You don't mind if we join you, do you? Not a lot of tables today.

RUNE

(Dryly) Oh. We don't wanna interrupt your date.

YOHANN

Pah! You all are like family to me. So what are we talking about?

MALACHI

Oh! We were just deciding how to split up guild work.

YOHANN

Interesting. Any plans on going to Drenched Bluff?

MALACHI

Um... Yes?

YOHANN

Wow, what a coincidence! I was just thinking about how I needed some Oren vines for a piece.

DIELLE

Oran? Don't most farmers around here grow that?

MALACHI

They also don't grow vines, they're a bush plant.

YOHANN

No, no. You're thinking Oran, I need Oren. Nobody in town grows them since they're mildly poisonous.

DIELLE

I can go with him!

RUNE

Are you sure?

DIELLE

Of course! I... I really want to see how I do on my own.

Rune smiles.

RUNE

Go for it.

Dielle beams.

MALACHI

So that just leaves me, Inigo, and Rune for the Mt. Bristle jobs. So meet at Sharpedo Bluff tomorrow morning?

INIGO

Sounds like a plan.

We fade to the next morning.

SHARPEDO BLUFF

The following morning, we see the team gathered and looking at their jobs. While they're talking about it, they're approached by a familiar pink dude.

GUILDMASTER

Hiya friends!

MALACHI

Oh- hello sir. What can we do for you?

GUILDMASTER

I wanted to ask if I could give you guys a special mission! See, I'm running low on perfect apples, and they're sooo good I want more! But umm... I want someone to go with me.

MALACHI

H-Huh?

RUNE

You. Want someone to go with you? Am I hearing that right?

GUILDMASTER

Uh-huh! See it's sooo boring by myself, I want some friends!

MALACHI

Oh... We actually had some jobs to do today, so...

GUILDMASTER

Aw, pleeease? Please please please-

He pouts.

RUNE

[To herself] Does he wanna test how good of a fit we'll be for the expedition...?

She flashes a look at Malachi, who reciprocates it.

RUNE

[To herself] It looks like Malachi's thinking the same thing...

MALACHI

Well... These can wait a day!
Let's go!

The trio, with Wigglytuff now in tow, head out of town towards the woods.

APPLE WOODS

As we enter Apple Woods, we are invited in with beautiful autumn colors, and many twisted roots intertwining with one another. The team begins their hike through the woods.

INIGO

Where do we get the apples from?

GUILDMASTER

Oh, that's easy!

He pulls out a bag from his poncho.

GUILDMASTER

I got some stuff to trade with the nice people here!

He hands the bag to Rune.

INIGO

We're trading? This forest has a lot of apples, I don't think anyone would notice if they went missing.

GUILDMASTER

The perfect apples are different! The wild pokemon here tend to the tree to make sure it always has tasty fruit on it!

MALACHI

Besides, even if there aren't laws like in town, it's rude to just steal from someone's backyard.

RUNE

So who do we give these to?

GUILDMASTER

A nice lil Flapple named Braeburn! He leads the Applin tribe.

RUNE

And where's he at?

GUILDMASTER

Oh... Around!

RUNE

Around...?

GUILDMASTER

Nobody sits still in the wilds, silly! We have to find him.

INIGO

Looking for a pokemon shaped like an apple in an apple forest. Doesn't sound like a pain at all.

The team begins their search in montage format, checking high in trees, and the Guildmaster even plowing through leaf piles presumably in search of Braeburn. The mission continues to be (hehe) fruitless.

RUNE

Guhhh, we aren't getting anywhere!

INIGO

I don't get it, why doesn't this guy just live in one spot like the rest of us? This seems miserable.

MALACHI

Hey, living in a dungeon is far from miserable.

INIGO

The possibility of your house collapsing on your head any second *isn't* a bummer?

MALACHI

What it *is* is just a different way of living! It goes back to our roots, making compromises with the land. It's all based on the idea that if we take care of our home, it'll take care of us.

RUNE

"Our" home?

MALACHI

I-I just mean that's the type of thinking wild pokemon have! Besides, the guild is structured to give a helping hand to these communities, which is why we're trading for apples. Isn't that right, Guildmaster?

He turns around, and the Guildmaster is nowhere to be seen.

MALACHI

Where'd he go??

GUILDMASTER

HAH!

MALACHI

GAH!

The Guildmaster pops out of a pile of leaves, scaring

Malachi and making him spark.

GUILDMASTER

Sneak attack! Stay on your toes!

And yeah! You're right! The guild
is for helping our friends out!

RUNE

That's all fine and good, but
where do we go from here?

The Guildmaster ponders for a moment.

GUILDMASTER

Hm! You gotta feel it!

RUNE

Feel... What.

GUILDMASTER

Which way the dungeon flows!

RUNE

And how do we do that?

GUILDMASTER

First, you gotta close your eyes.

The team hesitantly does so.

GUILDMASTER

Now, reach deep down, so you can
feel your aura! And then... Reach
out and feel the dungeon's aura.
Which way does it pull you?

MALACHI

Sir? I don't think dungeons have
an aura.

GUILDMASTER

Sure they do! Where else do they
get the magic from?

MALACHI

Well that's highly debated-

As Malachi attempts a futile argument with the Guildmaster,

Rune is following the instructions.

RUNE

Feel my aura... And then the
dungeon.

Visually, we see her aura begin at her core, and then spread to her feet like roots. Soon, it taps an orange aura- and she feels herself being pulled in its direction. Faintly she hears Malachi.

MALACHI

Rune? **Rune!**

RUNE

Buh-

She opens her eyes. They're at a large root that cascades upward through the forest.

GUILDMASTER

Hey hey, you did it!

RUNE

Yeah... I guess I did!

But upon closer inspection, it turns out the tree is slowly crawling, using its roots to drag itself across the ground

GUILDMASTER

Wowie, it moved a lot since the
last time I visited!

INIGO

It's definitely... Moving...

GUILDMASTER

The perfect apple tree is up here.
Maybe Braeburn is there!

As they walk, a few Applin members look over at them.

RUNE

I wonder how Dielle's doing with
her mission...

INIGO

Probably fine.

RUNE
[Worried] *Probably?*

Inigo snickers.

We cut away to see a sinister shadow setting down a trail of apples. The team continues to walk, but the Guildmaster sees this trail.

GUILDMASTER
Ooh...!

He takes a bite of one.

GUILDMASTER
Not perfect, but still tasty!

He keeps eating the almost comedic trail as the team keeps walking without him. Very soon, they're at the perfect apple tree. Malachi looks up and... Team Skull has already collected all the apples!

JULIUS
Chaw-haw-haw... Look who finally showed up!

MALACHI
Oh um, hi. I didn't know you guys came here, too.

JULIUS
We caught wind that the guild's pantry was low.

MALACHI
Word travels fast, huh?

Rune and Inigo are very bristly compared to Malachi's friendly demeanor.

MALACHI
Um, if you guys got the apples then, I can go give these goods to Braeburn and get the guildmaster-

JULIUS
Now now hold on a mo', we're actually here to strike a deal wit' ya.

MALACHI

H-Huh?

JULIUS

That guildmaster of yours, he asked you to come on this errand rather than running a real mission?

RUNE

And? What do you care?

JULIUS

Hey calm down, I jus' wanna help. See, we caught word of a high profile exploration-

He flashes an envelope.

JULIUS

All we want is to trade wit' ya. Your apple errand for intel on this golden chamber.

RUNE

What about the Guildmaster?

JULIUS

We're explorers, we can find him just fine and get him home.

INIGO

And what's in it for you, huh?

JULIUS

We're jus' looking out for ya rookies. And... it's hard to shake a bad reputation. I'm tired of the rumors and lies- I'm sure you've already heard about somethin' that sounded outlandish.

So if you jus' wanna hand over the goods, we'll get them through the right channels and you all can go treasure hunting right away. After all, aren't you tired of errands and setups?

MALACHI

What do you mean...?

JULIUS

You know Keaton n' I are buds. He's told me all about the fake missions your Guildmaster has been sending you on. How they don't trust you to do *actual* exploration work. It stings, don't it? To be underestimated just because you're only **half evolved**?

Malachi visibly flinches.

RUNE

Hey.

I don't care *what* Keaton says about us. The work we're doing has been important to *us*. Even if they're small errands, maybe there's good reason for us to work our way up.

She turns around, nudging Malachi and Inigo.

RUNE

You can go ahead and take the apples to the guild if you insist on helping. *We'll* find Braeburn and the Guildmaster.

As they walk away, Rune is hit by something from behind. In doing so, she experiences a dimensional scream. Before she fades away though, she sees Julius's paw step in front of her.

(Dimensional Scream scenario 1)

In it, she sees Team Skull arriving at the Perfect Apple tree.

JULIUS

Hmm. Looking ripe.

Zubat flies in the scene.

ZUBAT

B-Boss! Bad news! He's not alone!

JULIUS

What? He has someone with him?

ZUBAT

Yeah, that rookie team from yesterday!

JULIUS

Ugh. Of course. Now we need t' find a way to isolate him.

(I got stuck lol)

(Dimensional Scream scenario 2)

In it, she sees the Guildmaster and Braeburn running past her.

GUILDMASTER

Oh no!

BRAEBURN

It's poisoning. Pechas, quick!
Oran for the Nidorina!

Some Applin members provide the berries.

BRAEBURN

We're gonna lose the Vulpix!

RUNE

Do... Do they mean me?

GUILDMASTER

Not if I have anything to say about it!

He emits waves of pink, using Heal Pulse.

GUILDMASTER

No, no, no,

BRAEBURN

The apples are gone- and the tree
is damaged from whatever move they
used...

RUNE

The guildmaster's sack is gone...
Did it get stolen?

The vision begins to billow away as darkness envelops the
scene.

RUNE

Wait, what happened? And... Why am
I not waking up?

Darkness continues.

Rune wakes up in the med bay of the guild, to the sound of
Keaton and Malachi arguing.

MALACHI

Please sir, this is all a big
misunderstanding-

He looks over at Julius, who narrows his eyes at him.

JULIUS

C'mon Keats, you don't have to be
so hard on the kid.

KEATON

I certainly *do*! The simple fact of
the matter is that even doing a
simple errand, one of their
members was nearly *killed*! If the
Guildmaster wasn't there to heal
her, she might have succumb to
that poison powder!

JULIUS

Hey, *breathe*. She's alive, and you
can take food from my team's
personal pantry to feed your
staff.

KEATON

Oh Julius, you don't have to...

JULIUS

I insist. As a matter o' fact,
I'll even go into the woods
tomorrow to see who could have
poisoned your little crew member,
n' bring a suitable antidote from
an apothecary. Ol' Wiggly doesn't
have to worry.

Keaton smiles.

But quickly, the tone shifts as Wigglytuff walks in with a
steely cold gaze.

GUILDMASTER

I want a word with Rune.

Everyone moves out of the way for him, as Keaton turns to
the team.

KEATON

I cannot express my disappointment
in what transpired today enough.
You're *lucky* that Rune survived
today's ordeal. Were it not for
the presence of the Guildmaster,
she very well could have *died*.

I know this must be stressful for
you to hear, but I'm afraid I
cannot recommend your team for the
expedition. Your teammate is
gravely injured, you failed a
fairly simple errand and had very
valuable goods stolen!

MALACHI

... Yes sir.

KEATON

Now, rest up. Be wise and take a
break from exploring before going
at it again.

He hops away, molting many feathers in the process. Once

he's gone, Inigo breaks the silence.

INIGO

Why'd you roll over like that?
Like, you agree that Team Skull
were *probably* the ones that
attacked us, right?!

MALACHI

And what if they did? Who do you
think Chatot would believe, his
best friend, or the recruits he
never wanted?!

Besides. We can't even prove they
did it. It's useless.

Inigo chuffs.

INIGO

I'm not gonna let them beat me
again. Mark my words.

We cut to Rune and the Guildmaster in the med bay.

RUNE

Um... Guildmaster.

I... I'm sorry. I don't know what
happened, everything came and went
so quickly, and we failed this
mission, and because of that we
aren't gonna be able to go on the
expedition, and the food stock
is-!

GUILDMASTER

Hey.

They're just apples.

Rune seems taken back.

RUNE

Uh... Y-Yeah.

She looks down.

GUILDMASTER

I'm glad you're doing better. I was worried.

RUNE

I know.

He looks at her quizzically.

RUNE

The uh. Visions. I saw you before I passed out. Thanks.

GUILDMASTER

Of course.

RUNE

I'm just... Really glad that it was me. I don't know what I would have done, especially if Dielle was on the mission with us and also got hurt-!

GUILDMASTER

But you need to take care of yourself, too.

RUNE

I guess. But I always feel so weak, it's like I'm...

GUILDMASTER

Not in sync with your body?

RUNE

Y-Yeah. Wait- you know what that's like?

The Guildmaster smiles.

GUILDMASTER

Well, I should. I'm a human like you.

RUNE

You're... what? What are you saying?

GUILDMASTER

Maybe I'm not always super honest,
but I had a hunch for a looong
time that you were like me. You're
not coordinated, you were missing
your aura for a bit, but most
importantly... You have the mark
of a human champion, like me!

RUNE

W-

GUILDMASTER

And... It's been so *lonely*. Humans
don't exist anymore. They *haven't*
existed for thousands of years.
I-I've been looking for someone
like me for so long now,

RUNE

But I'm **not** like you.

GUILDMASTER

Hm?

RUNE

I'm not a human! I'm a Vulpix, and
I have a family, and-

GUILDMASTER

Huh? Do you... Really not remember
anything?

RUNE

Why does everyone ask me that?!
No, I can't!

GUILDMASTER

But... You should *remember* your
life as a human. I- I lived in
Kalos,

RUNE

Well, I don't remember *anything*!
Just my name! That's it, that's
literally the **only** thing.

A silence hangs in the air.

GUILDMASTER

I... I'm sorry. I got ahead of myself.

He rubs his face as a stressed tic.

GUILDMASTER

I didn't mean to put you on the spot. Um... I hope you recover well. If you wanna talk more, let me know.

He leaves, while Rune sits in the med bay. She looks down at her paws.

RUNE

I *can't* have been human... Could I?