

I Choose You, Pikachu!

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THE GAME

HEART

Pokemon is a role-playing game in which you embody Red, who is setting off from his home to become the Pokemon master! The character is going out on his own for the first time to seek his destiny. This game really evokes the feeling of gaining independence for the first time and striking out on your own. The gameplay is a top-down view in which you explore the towns around you and the forests in hopes of finding wild pokemon to collect. Walking through brush and grass increases your chance of finding something. Once you find a pokemon, you engage in a pokemon fight. Only pokemon that you have with you are able to fight against other pokemon. If your pokemon pass out, you return automatically to the last town you visited. One distinct feature of this game is the fact that you interact with other characters in the game solely through commands you give to the pokemon you collect. There is no direct combat among the humans of the game. Another unique fact is that nothing dies in the game - Pokemon only faint. The map the player traverses is unique in that while the player has some ability to explore, for the most part they are directed to the different levels and cannot wander into an area where they shouldn't. While some might argue this a negative, I think it removes a frustration point of running into enemies that are too difficult and then being forced to restart because of exploring. That method almost seems a negative reinforcement to explore. The audience for the game evolved over time. At first the audience was a variety of gamers. When the TV show came out in America, it drew a much younger audience of mostly early

elementary. Then when the collectible card game came out, it drew more children into the franchise. Eventually it became that those older than elementary didn't admit they participated in it. I think overall the game had an appeal to many since it involved collecting and immersed the player in the game well with the immediate reward of pokemon, and even if you didn't catch the pokemon, paying attention to the details and combinations of the monsters made it appealing to build a team against it. It almost contained both a collection addiction and a strategy in terms of finding weakness in opponent pokemon in a manner that it wasn't just strength but thought that helped the player progress.

THEME

The story is one of accomplishment. You have a goal for yourself: to become the best. While the best is difficult to achieve, it is possible in this world since all it means is creating the best team, putting effort into making the team the best, and then facing what would be considered the best your world, as determined by them maintaining their status by beating everyone that comes against them. Or in the case at the end, beating a combination of what could be considered the absolute best in a variety of areas. You must be well rounded enough to take on all of them. This definitely has a message/metaphor to send to the players as they progress through. The story takes place in a variety of lands, but mostly in that of forest and caves. It's fairly based in what would be a temperate area.



The player is a native of the world, and while you know how to get around, throughout you feel that it is the first time on your own. The sense of place is very well conceived. You do see yourself move around the world via an avatar. It is very generic male however, so it is easy to port your own conception of what it should be within it, which helps the immersion factor.

PURPOSE

The only goal in the game is one that you make up. Not the player but the player character. The only goal is self-driven in many senses. There is a minimal goal you can achieve, but the game-instilled goal is to do the best you can so it really reflects the player's personality in how they play the game. There is no time limit and the pokemon availability is such that you get rewarded and progress at a speed where the task doesn't become tedious.

The player achieves the goals put forth by the game through exploration and self determination. You are provided some guidance by being given a starter pokemon that take on the basic level wild ones so you can have a chance to start your collection. You are aided by the non-player characters many times to achieve your goals.



One of the starter Pokemon.

The main task in the game is exploring to find more pokemon and collect all of the 150 (in the original games). Another aspect are puzzles. Many times you get placed in situations in which you have to figure your way out of a dungeon or building using “Chip’s Challenge” style of thinking of pushing around boxes to progress. Between collecting and puzzle solving, the game becomes immersive and goal oriented. For those who wish to achieve, it offers excellent feedback to encourage progress. The other main goal is to beat the currently reigning Poke Masters to become the very best fighter.

PRESENTATION

The environment of the game is very friendly in the sense the only danger are the pokemon in the grass. You can easily get around and not be threatened by any real world threats. This adds a comfort level for the player. The paths are made very clear to the player and ultimate short-term location goals (i.e. the towns you must go through in order to progress). There are no sounds to represent the wildlife of the area. Instead, the music relates the atmosphere of the area. There is transition music when a fight begins with a pokemon, but in general the town, the wilderness, and the gym music are all unique to each

situation and thus the player associates the music with location. The only boundaries in the game are hills, walls, and trees. While many trees hold pokémon, they are all accessible by going up next to them. This makes forests traversable only by specific paths, which is a mechanic to make things easier on the player through time and allows for real life schemas in that if you had to enter a forest, the paths would be limited.

The player really doesn't have too much embodiment. Most of the play takes place among the pokémon. The pokémon appear as still images and the only interaction you see among them are in attacks (action and reactions) and the statistics. The player character interacts in the environment while the pokémon are the main mechanic of interaction.

MECHANICS

The speed of the game is very well paced. While the entirety of the game may take time to collect all the pokémon, the checkpoints are the only truly important points to meet and these are well placed throughout the world. There is just enough time in the space between challenges to build up the pokémon through your explorations to take on the next master. The fighting takes place in a turn-based manner, but are only one-on-one with changing team members and a max in a fight. When running against wild pokémon, only one attacks at a time. The only time you have to prepare a team is when battling another human, and these are more to make sure you are progressing enough to make it possible to beat the gym leaders. The game can last from 20 to 80 hours, averaging in the 40 hour range.

The game is definitely linear in structure. The goals are clearly defined and lead the game play. The player must make it through the gyms and the final large gym in order to be considered the pokemon master. The player is then guided through paths to the next destination at which point they have to prove themselves in order to move on. This helps the player from getting frustrated if they accidentally wander into an area they are not prepared for. The game is playable with new content in the sense that the pokemon that appear are in a random order so you can make new strategies with the new teams you create. Also, replaying the game, you can manipulate the different types (water, fire, ice, ground, etc.) and progress through the game.

This game didn't allow multiple players to effect the base of the game, but it did allow you to link the Gameboys together in order to share pokemon to make teamwork allow you to effectively collect all the pokemon and to battle in order to challenge each other. In the original games, you had to share in order to gain all the pokemon because the game came in two versions and not all 150 came on each game.


The game movement was controlled by the directional pad. The fights were determined in a role-play manner of having various options each pokemon specialized in to attack, defend, special moves, and retreat. The game went between that of an adventure game and that of an RPG throughout.

AFFORDANCES

The actions are fairly limited in the game. You can explore the world, discover new pokemon, fight the gym masters and solve puzzles in your

environment. Not too many things are specifically forbidden as they just aren't possible.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Red -  - The character player.

Pokemon – The protagonists and antagonists. Not only are you trying to capture the pokemon, you must also battle them in order to make your pokemon stronger. They are integral to the situation.

Gym leaders – The checkpoints for the player character. You must beat these teams of pokemon in order to progress further in the game.

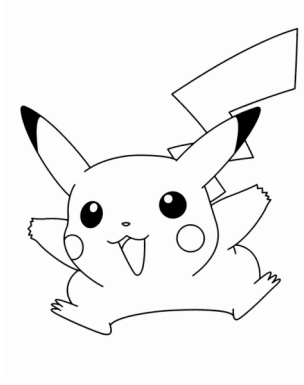
Random poke masters – Necessary to keep the longer stretches of game still in control and the player in check.

Random towns people – Aid you in supplies, advice and direction.

GAME DIRECTION

The game evolved into something more than it was thought. It is still coming out with sequels almost 10 years after its debut. On top of that, it was a major merchandise source. Cards, TV shows, plushies, movies, etc, it was a great marketing ploy. It was the perfect appearance for children to enjoy the cute monsters and enough puns and animal base to make parents agree with the children. While it was positively received, it ran into controversy once popular, like many games. Problems with the fact it involved fighting, monsters and the such made it a hot bed of controversy for adults.

THE CHARACTER - PIKACHU



ROLE

Pikachu turned into something more than I think anyone could have predicted. While at first it was just a pokemon that you find early on, it became widely popular among the fans. It became the sidekick of the player character in the third game, Pokemon Yellow. It was received right away and then followed behind the player throughout. While it was a fairly strong pokemon, it by no means stood out besides the fact it's power was somewhat unique to role playing games (electricity) and not one of the major arcane. In terms of the game, it was a powerful character in fighting other characters. The main popularity came from the TV show that really didn't have too much based on the game, but made the game popular to new audience (children).



A Halloween costume based on the character and a car modeled off it.

APPEARANCE AND STYLE

The character is very well designed for popularity. While modeled off of a mouse/rat, its color is not natural for an animal, especially a mouse. On top of that, its tail doesn't reflect the animal it's based on, instead being representative of its power. It does not reflect the typical stereotypes of a mouse being creepy or scary in the least.



A poor real rat made to look like Pikachu versus one of the original depictions.

The face is of particular importance to the character's design. While the eyes are not exceptionally large in terms of the face and actually reflect that of the animal it was based on, it does possess a baby-face in the size of the cheeks in relation to the body and face. The large cheeks give it the baby look and the mouth is very reflective of personality. The ears portray a lot of emotion in the directions they move and size makes them a focal point. The mouth is important as it helps to portray the character's emotions to situations paired with ear usage. With the two in combination it is easy for a player to determine how the character is feeling. Another note is of his nose. This is almost directly modeled off of the actual animals and maintains the cute-as-a-button appearance. The cheeks are a unique addition to the character, and no other characters in the game possess

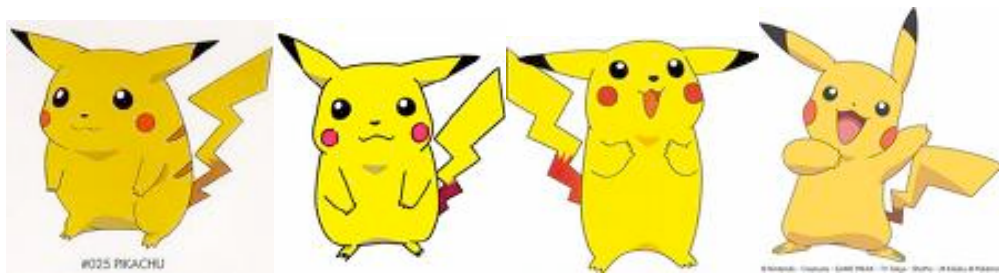
them, or at least to the same extent. Blushing cheeks typically depict bashfulness or embarrassment. In terms of Pikachu, it's the source of much of his power. The cheeks help add to the cuteness factor in that small children typically have the rosy cheeks look and get embarrassed easily. It is also easy to relate to. Many anime character have this addition to their appearance to show innocence.

The body is also interesting to observe. While a mouse/rat has a very long body, Pikachu is very stout in many terms. It could almost be considered overweight in many of the early depictions (shown above). The small legs and large torso give the impression of that of a small dog. The petite appearance of his appendages in comparison to the body make him almost super deformed/chibi. As much as he seems to be modeled off a rat/mouse, he also has cat features. These can be seen in his stripes and his tail is used most like a cat to obtain balance.

Sound is definitely very unique to the character as well. It's tone is very cute and just a combination of his name. This doesn't allow for any comprehensive speech to take place, but the meaning is obtained solely through tone, combination, speed, and length. For example, anger can be represented in fast, high pitch, quick noises. It is very much an intuitive method of communication. The talk could almost be considered baby-talk in the fact that it contains no actually words, just a meaning trying to be conveyed.

Pikachu's appearance has evolved over the years. He has gone from that of a slightly stout mouse/rat monster, to that of a more oval shaped character with personality (shown in difference in ear placement in the second picture

below). He has also become attentive of the player and interacts directly instead of as just one of the pokemon crew. He later even becomes more bipedal in movement and walks along with the player character instead of on all fours. As he became a more merchandised character, he became more athletic and entertaining in personality and action to be attractive to a wider crowd (and make the parents happy). He becomes much more charismatic when the focus of the games and merchandise start to focus on him.



Original Pikachu and older in chronological order.

PERSONALITY

Pikachu starts out as a fairly independent character but really develops into a companion. He becomes the one pokemon that can sit on shoulders and has a personality connection with the player character. While many of these connections are past the first versions of the game, it becomes quickly apparent as to his role as a companion and something to relate for in the game. He's the ultimate pet that everyone wants to have; a pet that understands you, and while you might not be able to communicate directly with him, you have an intuitive connection. The character is not very static in emotions either, and does have moods. This makes him easy to relate to. For example, when he gets mad or has tantrums, he fries whatever is frustrating him with electricity, or at least his

cheeks start to static. This could be related to the player in when they get angry they probably get red in the face and would like the ability to fry someone (without causing any real damage). It is also represented in the game that he puts forth a lot of effort to perform his powers, which makes him seem more heroic when he actually uses his powers. If it was easy for him, it would be hard to relate to. He reflects the personality of many of the audience the games became made for (mostly those in the elementary range). He became the child of the franchise.

PURPOSE

The character itself doesn't have any direct goals. Initially the character has the goals of a pokemon; fight when found against the aggressor, and when captured, be leveled up and obtain loyalty to the player. While the character didn't have to have loyalty right away if caught wild, it would shortly gain it. Overall, the character was created to battle. Later, the character goal changes to be that of a companion to the player and aid him in his goals of becoming the very best poke master. The character has simple goals as the base to act on and then develops a sidekick purpose later.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

The player character knows Pikachu as a pokemon to begin with. It is a monster to capture for the ultimate goal of collecting them all or becoming the best fighter. He is fairly powerful against most characters as electricity is fairly broad in strength and the character has a base strength in combat, which is decent. Later, the character becomes much more of a companion on the 'long journey' the

player character is on. The interaction is that of non-verbal communication and support. By having the character be supportive of the player character, it is possible to provide a relationship between the characters. The support comes from being a strong and reliant fighter, and almost starting with an automatic advantage the other pokemon can't keep up with. Loyalty to commands the player character does also helps to show its relation.

EVOLUTION

The topic of evolution has already been touched upon in the above sections. Pikachu not only changes in appearance, but also in relation to the player character. He goes from being one of the 150 to an individual that has a direct relation to the player character. The player character has the advantage of his support as he travels the land. The evolution also takes the focus of the game off of the main character created and focuses on the monsters more. This helps because the immersion doesn't come from becoming a character that is created but from the interactions with the monsters.

CHARACTER EVALUATION

APPEALING

In the first games, the character did not stand out so much to me. I liked the fire-based pokemon, Charmander, originally probably because it was one of the first ones you encounter and it has a powerful fire attack (and I'm biased to fire based attacks). However, as Pikachu became more of the focus character I have to admit he stood out much more to me. It was a cute concept carried over from the TV show that he was the main characters best friend pretty much. They

even had their own trials and tribulations (Pikachu gets really angry in one of the first episodes, runs away, but then gets really sick and the main character has to find a way to make him better). As he became more of a companion character and less of a monster, he definitely worked his way up the ranks of favorite pokemon. Maybe not so much in the first games as a key character, but in the later ones easily (they balanced his fighting skills differently). His power was always unique in that most of the other electrical pokemon don't show up until much later in the game. Pikachu could easily be seen as an appealing character and was uniquely drawn such that there couldn't already be existing merchandise of the same caliber. While there were plenty of stuffed dragons and turtles, there weren't very many very rotund mice/rat. The personality he could hold was also uniquely cute and his name had a fun sound to it. Overall, he was the better choice to make a popular character due to his uniqueness and cuteness factors.

The style of Pikachu definitely matched with his personality. His personality became that of a very influential pokemon the rest (becoming the liason between pokemon many times). While this wasn't true for his species, they actually made his character unique (and there are no real defining factors between others of his species...he just has a more expansive personality and more human-like qualities). Looking at the character himself, it's easy to see the possible volatile side to him but at the same time, seeing him as a fun character with his bright colors and evolved energetic appearance. His character turned into something that was almost human but cute enough that you felt like you

wanted to leave him as a pet. His rotund figure made it easy to imagine he would be fun to hold and hug, which made him a very lovable character.

The behavior was fairly consistent once he evolved as just a basic monster. He became such that he was the nice, energetic, well-rounded (no pun intended) kid at school that everyone liked, and if you didn't, you would come to after time. His loyalty was made clear and it became a security aspect of the game, that you would always have Pikachu. When they made him an individual minigame by attaching him to a pedometer and using the number of steps to make Pikachu happy by buying things with them and feeding him, he moved out of the Gameboy and became something of a companion to the consumer as well. He was everyone's best friend and supporting you if you needed him. His personality grew incredibly to a very expansive and influential character.

The feeling that he was alive became quickly apparent. In Pokemon Yellow, you could actually turn to him in the game and ask him questions/opinions about the situation. He contained human emotions in his reactions to events and clearly expressed them, be it anger, happiness, or being friendly. He became the role model instead of the player character. It was easy to see his loyalty to the player character when he would jump forward to face a threat for him and protect him immediately. This definitely made the player feel safe when he was around and became a force in the game to rely on.

Within the immersion of the game, the character remained strong throughout. Looking back, the fact that only one character became so human, past any of the traits the other pokemon possessed, is kind of weird to think

about. For the most part, it was difficult for it to break believability since it was placed in a fantasy world and a fantasy character, so they could do whatever they wanted to evolve his personality more and could just say that's how this world works. Granted, by making the characters seem more human, it definitely helped with schemas of real animals and interactions with other humans. Since it was easy to relate to, it was an easy character to believe in.

The strong visual appearance in the game, both from boldness and influence and the strong personality Pikachu embodied made him a strong character overall. It was easy to love, had faults so it wasn't perfect, but also made a presence in the game with its unique power. His bright colors made him stand out and the disassociation between being a strong character yet stout made him a unique conundrum and intriguing.

APPROPRIATE

Pikachu was largely appropriate for the game in terms of design. Something called a pocket monster can only be assumed to be some small, cute, chibi-formed, animal-like creature. He clearly fit all these requirements to become a popular character in the game and stand out. Even his original character design was unique from many, as most were based off of already existing animals or mythical creatures. While the base of Pikachu was easy to determine, the actual small details were difficult to place. It was possible to relate, but not easily identify.

The role in the original games was largely appropriate. He was one of the monsters to collect; unique, but nothing more. With the following games, he

became something like the pet dog that follows the player around. This worked in terms of plot, because you were supposed to tame the pokemon once you caught them and they became your loyal fighting force. By becoming a loyal companion, Pikachu managed to become integral to the player character and helped continue the morals placed by the game of friendship and loyalty and independence from the human world. It made the transition point easier for the player character to have a loyal companion right from the beginning and was an ease of mind.

EFFECTIVE

Pikachu worked well within the constraints of the game. He fit the character design of one of the pokemon. He helped to balance the game in terms of character types by providing an electrical type, which helps to balance and add to the normal major arcane. This gives more possibilities for the ultimate team to be formed. He helped to broaden the possibilities in the created environment for the player by making something that would be cool to obtain but something that isn't used by itself very often (usually it involves thunder and he really didn't involve sound in his attacks).

In the later games, Pikachu exploited some of the game mechanics. Now he wasn't just a balanced pokemon, he was able to level at a quicker rate to remain the pokemon you wanted to keep with you in your travels. This was an interesting technique for the designers, as they knew that if there wasn't a particular reason to keep Pikachu with you, he would be left behind and the purpose of having him be a loyal follower would be gone.

As much as the character was cute and had a cute voice, it wasn't really portrayed all that strongly in the games. If it was portrayed, it was done quickly. Since Pikachu was the strongest human-like character created, it stood out much more than the other pokemon. While they each had human qualities, none compared to that of Pikachu, both emotionally and in action. While he was everywhere in the games and merchandise, he never really grew old. This could be explained in that he evolved throughout the years, as described above, which helped him keep an audience that would get bored with him unless he was able to change and remain a role model for the players.

IF I COULD'VE....

I would have probably focused on what audience the game and the characters were focused on. While leaving it kind of ambiguous and making the characters cute to maybe attract the casual to non-gamers. However, this just gave the game ambiguity and when it was brought to the United States, the cuteness factor helped it become a kid's game. It would have been nice to see the game be marketed for a variety of ages and not just which one would profit better. The game had the factors of many good RPGs and was by no means a simple game. The Tamagotchi phase probably helped the game into the mindset easily, but it would have been nice to have a target audience for the game before putting it out instead of making it an underground activity for those over the elementary age.

I were to make a sequel of the game, I would probably make it either PC or Wii based. With the PC, it would be possible to take advantage of the ideology

that people should share and be friends with each other. The fact that sharing information is prevalent in the game would make it a good way to have people interact. It would be a talking point. For the Wii, it would be interesting to see it in a first person view, where you are the poke master and on a journey to find the pokemon. In order to catch the pokemon, you have to throw the pokeball with your wiiremote after finding it rustling in the grass or such. It wouldn't be so much a random fight tactic but instead more of an actually search and find method. This would really immerse the player into the game.

Another method for expansion would be through online card games. While they already exist, maybe have the pokemon be different cards and once you've hunted them down, you have to go back to town and use the information you found to fight other pokemasters. The tournaments would go from being NPC run to player run, and this would force the masters to keep training and obtaining new pokemon in order to retain their title.

WHAT HAVE OTHERS SAID

Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pikachu>

Wikipedia has various topics explaining the background of Pikachu as well as some of the background to Pokemon itself. The characterization of Pikachu is interesting to view as it really is detailed as to how the pokemon are found in the game. Pikachu has also been featured in brand commercials such as the 'Got Milk' campaign, in which mostly celebrities are featured. It really shows how popular to the culture Pikachu has become that an animated character has taken on just as much influence as existing humans in society. Pikachu is also featured

in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade among the various traditional balloons. He has even been modified to have light up cheeks at this point.

Hey You, Pikachu! –

<http://www.nintendo.com/gamemini?gameid=m-Game-0000-127>

This game is designed to make Pikachu an even more companion/friend based character. Not only does he interact in game, but there is a voice component where it is possible to communicate directly with him. They really make Pikachu into a friend for younger children to interact with and not just a character in a game. They also changed his image for the game so he seems almost toddler aged instead of animal like. This would direct the market as to who would probably purchase the game.

Commentary: Just Wait Until the Pokemon Generation Comes of Age -

<http://www.expansionmanagement.com/smo/articleviewer/default.asp?cmd=articledetail&articleid=16280&st=5>

Parents have typically been giving commentary on the Pokemon phenomena for many years. This parent, while very cynical about the success of the franchise, does bring up the point that children are learning trading skills. And while this doesn't necessarily mean anything good, it does mean that children are being encouraged to be social because of the game. There becomes a talking point for children when more than just their close friends and them can relate to something. It becomes a conversation starter for children.

Pokemon: A Christian Commentary II –

<http://www.christiananswers.net/spotlight/movies/pre2000/pokemon-commentary2.html>

Religion has had a problem with pokemon almost from the time it came out. It's interesting to learn how things that are meant as game mechanics or fantasy can so quickly be turned into the devil's work. Anything that is popular will inevitably be turned into some sort of negative commentary. It's also interesting to look at how a different set of opinions views the game mechanics. While evolution is a positive thing in most cases, the reviewer here believes it instead dies inside and then becomes born again more powerful. While the pokemon do evolve, it is never brought up in game if the characters even have an 'inner soul' or if they just exist. Being able to differentiate between game and social commentary is difficult to see some times.

Bibliography

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Images found by Google Image searches, "Pikachu", "Pokemon"