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Synopsis

Our heroes set foot on- Oh shoot, it's Mandarin Island again! Hide your pikachu! Hide your Togepi!

No, it's just another suspiciously similar coastal city and Ash is all "Where the food at? Everyone knows food is my own unique trait that just happens to be shared with nearly every single freaking shonen protagonist since Dragon Ball! I want to eat the very most, like no one ever ate!"

Then a scared mob runs past and for a minute it really does look like another Pikachu Re-Volt until they mention it's actually a flagrant conflagration taking place and ash is all "Golly, I haven't risked my beautiful skin with a run through fire since Celadon! Let's go!"

And DANG, that is a fire, all right! Good job Officer Jenny is on the scene and she's all "As an officer of the law, I'm telling you all to stand back! This is a highly volatile situation that requires qualified specialis- " "Hi Officer Jenny! We're likely going to kill ourselves!" "Aren't we precocious?"

Then ash and misty immediately display why getting civilians to put out a fire is a bad idea as they put themselves in harm's way to do literally nothing to the fire. AIM AT THE BASE, NOT THE TOP, YOU MORONS! YOU'RE JUST GIVING THE RAIN A FREAKING APRIL SHOWER! Then the building begins to collapse and they're all "We're in harm's way! Why didn't anyone warn us of the dangers of approaching a massive blaze?" *jenny*"Where are those cuffs?"

But luckily a squad of wartortle show up and handily put the fire out, much to the massive respect of Squirtle. After the dust settles, the leader introduces himself as Captain Aiden and Ash is all "So, I have to know, do you have like 50 brothers who are also named Aiden that randomly decided to become firefighters?" "What a bizarre thing to ask someone!"

"..."

"...*Sigh* YES..."

Then we get a great establishing scene showing how the firefighters use the Squirtle line at different stages for different types of fire. Squirtle for confined fires, Wartortle for your average fire and Blastoise for major fires.

“Wait, a massive warehouse going up in flames and threatening to set the neighboring buildings on fire ISN’T a major fire?”

“Forest fires, Ash”

“Well I’m an idiot... also what if there’s a grease fire?”

“Oh we have a sandshrew on standby for that. You alright there, sandy?”

“Sandshrew!”

But as Squirtle observes all this he feels a pull towards his origin story and out come the sunglasses! Dang, they must pinch in that shell...

After Ash fills in the audience- TRACEY on Squirtle’s backstory, he challenges Aiden to a battle against wartortle to prove itself. Because as we all know, the best way to prove you’re a good firefighter is to beat one up.

Then the two competitors stare each other down for an uncomfortably long time, so much so that even pikachu seems to notice.

“Are you two... okay? Do you need some private time?”

Meanwhile, Of course team rocket plan to steal squirtle and wartortle as well... just that wartortle.

“You know, there are also rare and powerful blastoise here...” “Sure, why don’t you stand up to those cannons first and we’ll be right behind you!” “Flag that, I like my entrails!”

Ah, okay, I thought we were going to have a battle but it’s actually more of a competition which is much more in keeping with firefighting culture AND the season in general. I guess the orange islands just love their tests of skill... Well, first we have a footrace and you know what that means... CHEESY 80’S SYNTH! Aw yeah!

Squirtle seems to be doing well until he pulls a Cool runnings by tripping and taking wartortle with him. That’s what you get when you don’t do the trademark squirtle naruto run, I guess... also apparently tripping and rolling along a flat surface somehow increases speed now as tracey remarks that they set a land speed record? You’d think

that'd get more focus! "Usain Bolt trips at the finish line, breaks the sound barrier!" ... or like we've seen many times before, maybe Tracey is just horrible with numbers.

Aiden is impressed though, and offers to take squirtle for a full day of training. Ash is all "Any training I don't have to do is good training!" and Pikachu is all "Finally someone ELSE can get pummeled by a government training regimen! Be glad these aren't Growlithe, buddy!"

So the training begins with... Skeet shooting? *Misty* "What, you guys often fight fire that's flying through the air?"

"The fletchling line, Chandelure, Moltres, Ho-oh, Oricorio, Volcarona..."

"Okay, yeah, dumb question..."

"Oh and Charizard! Man, they're the worst! Some trainers just can't control them and they end up torching entire house parties! Can you imagine?"

ash "Yeah, what... morons..."

But then one of the skeets appears to have a mind of it's own and before we all assume it's just a new species of pokemon we see the Rocket logo before the squad gives chase.

"Wait, warturtle! Stop!"

"What do you think we are, some kind of trained unit? We do what we want, screw the police!"

Then they fall into a massive hole that was apparently dug without anyone's knowledge outside the front freaking gate! *aiden* "Sandshrew, you didn't!" "Oh NOW you notice my work!"

But yes, team rocket catch the entire group in a net and are about to abscond with the squad until Aiden calls for the Blastoise division who perforate the ballon and blast Team rocket halfway to Unova OR they just get away with it with pikachu as a bonus, why not. But before they do, we get one of those scenes that you know contains a ton of japanese puns that 4kids just had to roll with when they suddenly appear in full matsuri getup complete with adorable windchimes.

The gang are smokescreened but luckily Tracey uses Scyther's twirly whirly attack to blow it away.

"Yeah, I'm awesome, check me out!"

"Great, scyther! Now could you fly over to the net and cut it down?"

“OH crumbs, me back! I’m only a poor, old mon...”

Contrivances aside it looks like team rocket actually got away this time! They’re in the clear as long as they don’t land nearby for no reason and then they land nearby for no reason. Again.

So team rocket bicker about who gets to keep one of the warturtle when they send the rest to the boss, which seems really dumb when, you know, they could ALL take one each, but we don’t have time to dwell on that as there’s a big fire downtown, the blastoise can’t get through due to an overturned truck and the squirtle aren’t powerful enough! What a maddeningly specific dilemma! So with the clock ticking, misty volunteers with marrill and... scyther, (who’ll be useful as a sacrifice to the fire gods, I guess?) As Ash and the others go to confront team rocket. Speaking of team rocket, though, squirtle and the others manage to escape by filling the shockingly watertight cabin and then actually really cleverly leapfrogging to safety. Then they goad meowth into cutting them out and Ash is all “Squirtle! We’re here to... save... you. Another job well done!”

Then after punching, blasting and zapping team rocket into the horizon, they head back to the blaze where scyther is doing his best to be useful by... cutting debris, okay... but luckily the gang show up just in time to rescue misty and fight the fire. But oh no! A child is trapped, what’ll they do? Why they get a fastball special from Blastoise of course, which is so awesome you almost forget that THE BLASTOISE ARE MEANT TO BE TRAPPED BEHIND A TRUCK. Well anyway, there are some cool moments as the two work together to rescue the boy while misty worries:

“It’s been an awfully long time!”

“Maybe.”

“...What? No, I’m pretty sure it has been a long time...”

“Well, you know, time is relative-”

“Oh shut up.”

Then they escape, the fire is put out, the squirtle and warturtle are bros for life, and we get yet another really awkwardly long shot of them staring at each other.

“...Seriously, do you two need some privacy?”

“Then as we say goodbye, misty’s all “who would have believed it? Those two as friends!”

“...I would have?”

“What?”

“When did we ever see them at odds? They’ve never shown anything but mutual respect for each other!”

“...huh.”

“Look, can we just leave already? We need to cheese it before Jenny books us for reckless endangerment and tampering with a potential crime scene! Again!”

“Right!”

Thoughts

Boy, that was a thing that happened. A story about firefighters with almost zero conflict, that’s impressive. I mean, think about it: if Team Rocket, the laziest form of conflict, didn’t show up, there would be NOTHING in this story resembling growth, conflict, or resolution. I know that sounds a bit harsh, but let me break it down.

Squirtle helps fight a fire. He’s a little down that he needed help, but he has a deep respect for wartortle and wants to prove himself to his new idol. Then he immediately does just that by doing well in the skeet shooting. If team rocket didn’t show up, they would then fight the fire in the exact same way they did at the end of the episode, and wartortle... would still respect squirtle and vice versa. When on earth was the phrase “Who would have believed it? Those two as friends!” earned? They respect each other at the beginning and at the end with no growth in the middle! There was no bitterness from squirtle, no cockiness from wartortle, no overcoming differences to escape team rocket... It’s like the worst possible kind of superman story, where character, pacing and plot give way to manufactured tension and cool action with no investment.

Strangely though, even with all that said, as a slice of life episode this actually wasn’t too bad. I’ve made no secret of the fact that my favorite part of the series is when we see how this fascinating world works in more detail, and finally seeing how the last essential service after police and EMT worked was fantastic, we even see how different squads were used for different situations and their training regimen. I ate all that up and the set-pieces themselves were great, with clever escapes and cool strategies, even if the animation was pretty stiff at times and the pacing went way off during certain meaningful moments, as explained in the synopsis. But even I can’t get behind such a glut of lore if it doesn’t have a story to back it up. I loved Po-ke corral not just for the infodump on Oak’s lab but for Ash and Gary’s re-establishment of their rivalry and the tiny bit of respect that occurs over the course of the episode. There’s a mantra that’s been emerging on the internet for people who nitpick to the expense of enjoying the overall experience, which is “No meaning, only lore.”, and I think that sums up this

episode for me, though I did enjoy the lore and action enough to have a pretty good time regardless. It was a tasty treat with no nourishment. I'll give it a great ball.

Trivia

Before I go into the other stuff, I'd like to point you guys to my review of episode 12, where I mention the fascinating background of competing firefighters in Japan, however competition between firefighters is by no means an exclusively Japanese phenomenon. When you get that many people to the peak of physical performance you're going to want to flex in non-life threatening situations and there are many competitions that allow firefighters to do just that, including the world firefighting games, which were even held in my home country of New Zealand at one point! There are some great events and I suggest you look up some videos if you're into that kind of thing.

Speaking of the firefighters though, you'll notice that in the dub, Wartortle's group is called "Team" Wartortle, in the same way you would say Team Rocket. In Japanese there's more of a distinction, as in Japanese, they actually use the English word 'Team' for Wartortle and Team Rocket is known as Rocket-dan. This is probably because although '-dan' can mean team, it can also have gang connotations. In fact, the original Squirtle Squad, when it was just a group of hooligans, was known as Zenigame-DAN in Japanese, so it's neat to see this kind of distinction made.

Moving on to another difference between the versions, this one's just weird. Aiden is the fire chief, right? Well, that's not his name in Japan! "Well, duh, Suede!" you might say, "of course he did! It was probably Mamoru or Ryouichi or something right?" nope. It was Russell. RUSSELL. They changed his name from Russell to Aiden. That's dumber than when they changed Kyo to Koga, at least those were two Japanese names! 4Kids has made some pretty bizarre localisation choices but this goes down as one of the most inexplicable to me.

Another change that's SLIGHTLY more justified is when Meowth attacks Jessie and James and these stars appear. In the original, you actually see Meowth scratch Team Rocket, so I guess they edited it to make it less violent. What's weird about this is that Meowth has scratched people on camera before, maybe they got complaints or something?

Lastly, another fact regarding Whos That Pokemon, The voices saying it change this episode and remained this way for 208 eps until they stopped doing it for 6 years before bringing it back. I guess that's one way Tracey left a lasting impression on the show...

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Script help:edmg7 shadao, Jerseyluck, Verdant Range, WatcherMark

Patrons

And so, Suede, cooled off of his high by a cool splash of mediocrity, turns his head to the horizon and hopes for the best. I mean, it's not like the show can get much lazier... right?