

Synopsis

The gym may be over but we're not back in the filler forest just yet, as the gang are still in Ecruteak deciding on the route to the next non-filler milestone.

"Brock, we may be an equal distance from both but one is in the complete opposite direction of the league with another gym further along, so unless we want to backtrack TWICE our route is pretty clear"

"You're right, Misty! Mahogany it is!"

"Ugh, I need retail therapy..."

So they decide to stick around for some R & R... Ash? No objections, Ash? Just going to... hang around Ecruteak without moving on...? Right, so you did endanger Hoothoot for no reason, good to know, ya brat... well, we can't dwell on that too long as eevee here is searching for a protagonist as robotically as possible. Thing's so stiff I half expect it to do a backflip... then misty showers it with affection while ash does the shortest laugh known to man,

And misty's all

brock "What are you on about, misty? You spend 80% of your screen time hugging a normal type!"

"Yeah, but it's not fluffy!...I'm assuming, it's hard to tell sometimes with the art style."

Then Sakura here... oh, sorry I mean sa-KOOR-a, ugh...

Don't worry Japan, we get better... eventually. Then the gang introduce themselves...

Ah, so Sakura is under 18, you can tell from the lack of steam from brock's ears. So Ash is all "So, do you have a cadre of spandex clad circus siblings at your western palatial estate too?"

"...what? No, I... what?"

"Sorry, usually eevee trainers have a weird family that necessitates showing off the eeveelutions. Except Gary, weirdly..."

"Oh, that's weird. Say, you wanna meet my four kimono-clad tea ceremony sisters at our eastern palatial estate?"

"...sure."

Yep so after Sakura dips her hair in ink and gets ready for the ceremony (I do love the pokeball hairpins) Brock does his thing with her sisters who must be older, I guess.

“Eigo Janai desu”

No of course this place is strictly non-regional! Can't have other ethnicities in your show about travelling to different lands, right Fiorello Cappucino?

“Italia!”

Then this sister throws her audience back in their seats with her astounding arrangement skills.

“Can she do that?” “Witchcraft!” “Fireblast her!”

*flower

Okay that's pretty funny, though my gosh, brock, think of the audience!

GASP

“He changed it!” “It's different now!” “HANG him!”

Lastly they take part in a tea ceremony with some neat details, like this

“Tradition in what culture?”

“Why Johto culture of course! Drink the dang tea.”

Then after a cute pun 4kids must have been relieved was translatable into english...

We meet the other sisters and... oof. Look, I'm glad we're actually getting Japanese names but oh wow.

THEY WOULD HAVE HEARD THE PROPER PRONUNCIATION IN THE BOOTH WHEN THEY WROTE FOR THE LIP FLAPS! Well okay, MAYBE they got a written script and a dialogue-free master... that kept the music... but still! They were in freaking New York, I refuse to believe that they couldn't have found someone Japanese to help them with the names! To-mayo sounds like another name for freaking fry sauce! Well on a lighter note at least this happens.

They... actually call out Brock on his pick-up artistry? That's refreshing! Too bad it doesn't stick as we have to point out the parallels between misty and sakura! ...With the subtlety of a railroad spike.

“Yeah yeah! Only difference is my sisters took all the princess dolls and your sisters ARE princess dolls!”

This jab seems particularly cruel:

you're not beautiful

YOU ALL HAVE THE SAME-ISH FACE. YOUR WHOLE FAMILY HAS TORIYAMA SYNDROME. Mind you, when you think about it that's a cutting satire on societal norms, the liquid nature of beauty standards and how humans always find ways to discriminate but I'm... guessing that MIGHT not be intentional.

And for once I'm glad to see team rocket as we still have nothing much in terms of a plot twerp side. They of course have no respect for tradition (though you'd think James would have at least some sense of decorum) and get the most uncomfortable group stare possible.

Oh geez, my autistic brain can't stand it! So...much... second-hand embarrassment... Luckily the rockets are all “screw it” and get rumbled by AAHHHH WHO ARE YOUUU?

There are... OTHER police who aren't Jenny clones? I mean I know we've seen some in the background but I always thought they were just mascots, you know? Well we don't have time for such thoughts as first we have a delightful motto...

And then it's time for the sisters to show off they're battle prowess! WOW I WONDER IF THESE FOUR SISTERS OF AN EEVEE TRAINER HAVE SOME KIND OF - aw just let em out.

Er, James? Your count is off... though I guess you WOULD only know about umbreon from Gary, but in terms of the show this is seriously odd! Like I love umbreon, it's my favourite eeveelution but it's gotten plenty of spotlight, and now that they have to make a cut to fit the original eevee into the five sisters and they choose the ONE that hasn't been shown off yet? Oh wait, *slap* of course, sakura's eevee will evolve during the course of this battle, making espeon the centre of attention, that makes sense! It's even during the day with high friendship! Carry on then.

Ah, well of course we need to establish their bond further, so instead we'll get a showcase of just how strong the sisters and their eeveelutions are-

Okay, so after the rockets blast off we get a VERY abrupt cut to misty and sakura relating, almost as if Team rocket was stuffed in to pad out time!

you must be a trainer too

“Hey, you’re right! What tipped you off?”

“Oh it’s mainly the way you hold yourself, the turns of phrase you use... the battle in front of my face kind of cemented it, though.”

“Oh yeah, it’s almost like that battle was stuffed in for time without thought for continuity, huh?”

Then after a weird kind of ad for the show within a show that’s technically an ad...

We actually get a cool idea of having Sakura join the party as a newbie trainer, pre-empting May by a good 80 episodes! I wonder if it’ll pan out! Misty runs the idea by the rest of the gang and WHOA Brock what happened to your nose! I guess Misty’s yank from earlier did more damage than I thought, No wonder she usually goes for the ear!

So the life-changing decision is made in less time it takes to hardboil a chansey egg, without any kind of *pfft* parental... consent... almost got it that time...

Well okay, she still needs to run it by her sisters but not before showing she... drops her umbrella?

Okay, I’ll play along for now, what is that meant to represent?

WHAT

If you can’t... THOSE ARE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SKILL SETS! THIS IS POKEMON, NOT DODGEBALL!

ALSO I’M KIND OF MAD SHE DIDN’T SAY “IF YOU CAN’T MASTER AN UMBRELLA HOW CAN YOU MASTER AN UMBREON” AND THAT’S MORE SUBJECTIVE BUT I’M STILL STUCK IN YELL MODE!!!

Yes. Because Sakura is clumsy she is deemed unworthy of being a trainer. Nobody tell Red from origins! So the twerps try to ease the sister’s minds and Brock? You want to say the most self-effacing phrase possible?

Luckily the sisters ignore that and decide to allow Sakura to leave if the twerps can beat them in a battle. Vaporeon is out first - hey neat, a lure ball! - and this happens.

“Misty, I have TWO GRASS TYPES-”

“But I’m a water trainer so I know how they think!”

“So do !! They THINK they aren’t hurt by water types! Lemme in, ya dingus!”

“Don’t worry, Ash, neither of us will use water moves!”

“...what?!”

Okay, they do eventually use water moves but of course they don’t do much, that’d be silly! Instead let’s get poliwirl out of the match with... aurora beam. Hoo. Well now it’s Jolteon’s turn - hey, a moon ball! That’s... weird, Umbreon’s right there - but before then we have a rocket encore! With whaaaa...?

Heh, you could almost say they predicted sylveon with that colour scheme, but never mind that now! Sakura tries to take them on, with disappointing results...

No, ya gotta use take down, THAT’s what launches team rocket, remember? But eevee is caught, the twerps trap the others...

Then umbreon is rolled out - hey, a fast ball WHY WASN’T IT A MOON BALL LIGHTNING IS FAST UMBREON ARE DARK SWAP BALLS DANGIT - and the rockets are blasted off properly to make way for the fight between jolteon and PIKACHU COME ON

So apparently thunderwave cancels incoming electric attacks, good to know - Sorry! Third rule - but they can’t do it a second time and so get nuked by thunder. Right, now it’s time for umbreon, sweet - huh?

“...the episode ran out of time for another battle.” No, Sakura has decided to stay because...?

Yes, we’ve been over this. You wanted to learn how to be a better trainer through experience, the twerps can help and protect you while you do that. What you think Ash was ready when he set out? He was in his freaking PJs! The twerps even point this out if you can believe it...

What... but... No! You just... the whole point was for you to... learn and... Look, nothing wrong with being self reliant but this is just coming across so muddled!

you had to have faith in yourself ash

“You’re right, FrysaUCE!” “I’m Satsuki...” “You’re right, Citrus!” “That’s Satsuma” “When I won my battles it was all me! I NEVER needed my companions to help me in a tight spot or for moral support or to give me advice or for general safety! It was all me, baby!”

So Sakura stays, the twerps leave for Olivine and the most valuable lesson of all is taught... Screw Espeon.

Thoughts

UUGGGHH WHATTA MESSSSS...

This episode had great animation and cool locations and neat ideas but it was just so disappointing on all those fronts. The animation by the usually top tier A team of Asada and Iwane had its moments but for the most part it failed to deliver. The battles were too short and relied too much on “hit it very hard”. Some of it was by necessity for time but I know ONE SEQUENCE IN PARTICULAR that could have been easily cut to give the battles the room they needed to breathe.

The locations and characters were cool as well... Until they took a back seat to the recycled conflict and aforementioned bland battles. Imagine if each sister battled in full regalia and had moves and strats based on their roles in tea ceremony? It would have even served double duty of showing Sakura that there was value in staying behind and learning from them!

And speaking of that, UUUGH that ending! Like I said, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to be more independent and self-reliant before setting out on a journey, but that was never established as an issue! Sakura SAID she knew she was inexperienced, that’s why she wanted to learn from the twerps! I guess “getting cold feet is valid” is also a decent message, but again, it just seems to come out of nowhere and is explained poorly in my eyes. My view is also somewhat biased as I thought the idea was great to have Sakura stick around to have a new dynamic to explore in the party. She didn’t have to STAY, but just have a Todd situation where she hangs out for maybe five episodes or heck, wait until they have to pass by Ecruteak again and have her decide to stay with her sisters then!

I want to give this a rock so much, but I can’t dock points too much for missed opportunities, that’s like saying a movie sucks because my fanfiction is better. But even standing on its own it’s dull and annoying, so that’s a poke ball. And WHERE WAS FREAKING ESPEON-

Trivia

Now here's a bizarre case of 4kids being LESS convoluted in their localisation than the GAMES! Shocking I know but the kimono sisters in this episode not only have the same names as the Japanese version, but in turn the same names as in the games... in Japan.

Let me put it this way, the english version of the Gold and Silver GAMES... changed the names of the kimono girls... to OTHER JAPANESE NAMES. Not 4kids. The GAMES.

In the western release of Gold and Silver, Sumomo became Kuni, Satsuki became Miki, Koume became Naoko, Tamao became Zuki and weirdest of all, SAKURA, one of the most western friendly japanese names of all time thanks to Cardcaptors... was changed to Sayo.

...

kenan WHY?

This is DOUBLE confusing as in pokemon Go, a way you can choose how your eevee evolves is by nicknaming them either Sakura or Tamao they evolve into Espeon or Umbreon, respectively. The JAPANESE names.

So bravo 4kids. You did this one good. Golf clap.

They actually did another somewhat justified if still confusing change during Jolteon's battle. See, here they use thunder wave to deflect thunderbolt. Kind of bogus, but in japanese they use... Zap cannon? Zap cannon. Like, of course they should have used light screen or something instead of thunder wave but ZAP CANNON? It's just weird all over sometimes... oh no, maybe this is the foreshadowing of the infamous... thunder armor.

Brr. Oh and lastly, though this shouldn't need to be said I'd still encourage you to look up some mini-documentaries on tea ceremony when you get the chance, it's a fascinating look into one of the most intricate and precise of japanese traditions. The rules and history of it are seriously way more interesting than you would expect, tea has toppled empires in Japan, so be sure to check it out. I'm just glad 4kids didn't make them baristas.

And so, Suede stomps away from ecruteak, frustrated at potential companionship and stories lost. But all that glitters isn't gold, and hopefully the next episode can kill two birds with one stone...