

Synopsis

Once again, the narrator does his job admirably by summing up my current feelings succinctly.

Yes, we are indeed finally out of the forest of filler and into story territory! Here we are in Violet city, home of the first gym leader! But of course before that of course we have to visit sideline central. Just like in the games! Yep, Pikachu being the sparky little loverat he is gets glomped by young fans, but before they can rip his adorable little stubs from their sockets, Ash rescues him and not a moment too soon!

Wait, this all seems familiar...

And this teacher doing a pitch-perfect Anime Girl Run is a pretty good ringer for the teacher in a Purr-fect Hero as well! Geez, of all the plots to re-hash you're going with that one? What's next, is Brock going to insist we help out this teacher because he's got repressed maternal abandonment issues?

Just call me Suedestradamus. So yep, the twerps pop by the pokemon academy as guest trainers. Hey, that's neat, we're actually visiting landmarks from the games, something that was severely lacking in the Cherrygrove episode. Now let's see... oh yeah, this was the place with that flamboyant french-I-mean-Kalosian teacher who twirled around a lot, how are they going to translate that?

I... don't know what I expected, though I am surprised they decide to make him German, what could no one at 4kids do a french accent? Mind you based on the evidence...

...maybe it was the right call. But anyway! Yes, you have to admire his energy, Priscilla certainly does, which leads to brock following suit (of course). It's definitely a cute sight gag... for the first five seconds.

Yeah we get it. Stop! For pete's sake can this get more awkward?

Apparently so. Luckily Zackie here speaks for most viewers of the show...

Which causes ash to brag about... possibly his least impressive accomplishment by now, let's be honest, with which Zackie is now thoroughly unimpressed.

“Listen brat, I’m just warming up! I won the orange league and saved the freaking world! I’m the mankey-fighting Chosen One! Literally! I’ve fought a Mankey!”

“Orange League? Sounds non-canon to me!”

“I’ll fire you out of a non-canon, you son of a-”

Then Misty’s all “O-kay! This is all getting a little too meta, let’s just all break for recess, okay?” “Uh, misty, I’m the teacher and it isn’t-” “Recess!”

So we get a nice recap of everyone’s teams... a nice, slow, awkwardly paced, recap... And hey, good on you bulbasaur! No means no!

still remember first time played with pokemon

“Yyep, all the way back in this same year! Good times, good times...”

Then in a weird case of plot whiplash, Brock’s all “HEY! IS THAT A NEW FOCUS I SEE?” “why yes it is brock! That’s the sprout tower, so named because legend has it that the pillar inside was once a giant bellsprout!”

“Phh! A giant pokemon, what are the odds of THAT happening?”

Meanwhile Zackie is making himself annoying, demanding pikachu join him.

“Come on, what’s he got that I don’t? I have the same hair AND I even have irises! It’s a no-brainer!”

Then he moves on to full toddler mode, trying to steal pikachu, getting mad when said mon defends himself, and going into full-on tantrum.

Geez, I know kids are still learning but usually they’re out of this phase by the time they hit school, this brat must be either spoiled rotten or have ASD, but I’m pretty darn sure the show isn’t progressive enough for it to be the latter, so I’m going to assume the former. THEN he freaking pickpockets a pocket ball from ash’s pocket and threatens to catch pikachu, to which Ash responds with... fear?

Ash, pikachu is not only registered to you but he has his own freaking pokeball! Did we all learn nothing from the snorlax episode? Well anyway, the twerp pursues the brat and what’s this?

I like ash’s expression here, it’s as if he simultaneously realised pikachu couldn’t actually get caught, but then his brain has to switch gears without the clutch to comprehend that it looks like he was. No, of course pikachu isn’t really caught, but ash still doesn’t know what to think which leads to this pretty well timed gag.

Oh yeah, I'd almost forgotten about you guys. Yeah, so Team rocket are about to take advantage of the, ahem, "newly captured" pikachu so Zackie lets it out and...

Well at least it's a pokemon you can actually capture in the area, so kudos for that. Hoping to lure pikachu with a trapped ash, they leave him to call for help OR they bring back the voice changers, why not.

Ash with a brooklyn accent is something I never knew I wanted, to be fair... then pikachu of course is able avoid capture and blasts off the rockets by... making the tree explode, I guess? Well whatever, mandatory appearance out of the way, Zackie is left to assess his new situation. But first lets join the class as they gaze upon the sways of the mighty beam!

"Yeah, I can see that. Really dense and borderline unstable without any real support!"

Now, back to Zackie. Has he grown to accept his new companion?

"WHOA! You hold on there kid, don't you EVER undersell a bellsprout! Those things are stronger than they look, TRUST me!" "I don't care, I wanna pikachuuu!" "Seriously kid, this very pikachu got it's zig-zaggy tail HANDED to it by a bellsprout, consider yourself lucky!"

Meanwhile Team rocket wait patiently for Ash to show up at the tower OR smoke everyone out I guess, why not, and Priscilla's all "Not a fire! Last time this happened at a tower in johto we lost three eeveelutions! Granted we gained some sick legendaries in the process but still!"

Then just as Zackie starts to warm up a little to bellsprout's admittedly adorable antics they spot the smoke and rush over to find team rocket is in the process of turning the tower into an*actual* rocket, holding it as ransom for pikachu. Despite the somewhat redundant smoke, it's actually a pretty decent plan as rocket schemes go, with ash powerless to do anything while meowth holds the button. So what's the play?

Oh, just... just hit it with a leaf, alright. So team rocket, cursing themselves for not going with a dead drop, fall back on the usual tactics with the usual results. All other options exhausted they then try to preserve their honor by self-blasting, along with this sneaky jab from James.

But then bellsprout cuts them loose, leaving them serenely sailing off into the horizon. This leads to another brilliantly brutal sign off.

But what about the tower? It's wobbling way more than is healthy! Well, then this happens.

Did... did bellsprout stop it? I mean it looks like that but I guess it could have just been freaking out like the rest of them, but the editing implies it did something... man that's weird. Let's forget about it!

So Zackie isn't as much of a jerk now, and he's all

"Yep, you bet kid, just watch out for that last one, they seem more trouble than they're worth. Now where's that gym?"

Thoughts

Hmm... yeah, it was alright.

The problem with this episode is that it's one of those where the good decisions are balanced out by the bad ones, and in this case there are some awesome highs and nasty lows, so it ends up feeling a little like water and oil. I loved seeing real locations from the games, especially with little details viewers might remember from the games and non-players might be intrigued by, like the incredible twirling teacher and the swaying column.

But then they sour the fresh ideas given to them by the games by framing them with recycled plot points. Did we really need ANOTHER bratty kid and ash embarrassing himself in front of kids, especially when the plot does a U-turn pretty much on a dime after the first act?

In fact, let's talk about Zackie, since that's where the conflicting choices seem to manifest the most. On the one hand, I know he's a little kid and BELIEVE me, as a dad I know kids can be bratty (sorry, son), but Zackie just acts three years younger than he's presented. He does some really bad things without any kind of consequence, and that's a big black mark for me. However, separate from that, once he's forced to travel with a pokemon that he doesn't originally want (which I guess was kind of a consequence for his rash behavior) He grows up a little and learns to dig bellsprout pretty darn organically. You can kind of see him realise the error of his ways without it being spelled

out and that was well done, but that horrible introduction just kept looming over the proceedings.

It's not just in the writing that things are so mismatched as well. The animation here had some astounding cuts with incredibly dynamic posing and coloring, like here where I can actually compare the same scene done two different ways!

Amazing what a difference good storyboarding and animation can do, right? But then we get slow stilted shots like this where you can almost hear the cels being slid across the camera for how boring they are!

This episode was actually storyboarded and edited by two first-timers who never did another episode, making me wonder if it was outsourced for time. Whatever the reason it just contributed to the overall dissonance and it left me feeling muddled about it overall.

That all being said, I still enjoyed myself, the locations and gags were a cut above the filler I've been going through and the feel good stuff at the end cancels out the bad stuff at the beginning for the most part. I'm feeling generous so I'll give it a great ball.

Trivia

Well, here's something to blow your mind off the bat: Did you know Giovanni appeared in this episode? I'm serious, Brock even joined him briefly!

...Okay fine, Giovanni is Earl Dervish's Japanese name. Gee, I wonder why they didn't go with that? Though it is funny that we have an Italian name for a guy portrayed as French in the games and German in the anime. That's one cosmopolitan meatball!

Moving on to the other aspect from the games, the sprout tower is of course based on real multi-level pagoda seen all over Japan, most notably the horyu-ji in Nara which is one of the oldest wooden buildings in the world, with its central pillar dated all the way back to 594 AD. That pillar, by the way, is known as a shinbashira and it really does help the building to survive earthquakes by allowing flexibility in the structure. It's so effective in fact, that the concept is still used in many modern buildings such as the tokyo skytree, though in skyscrapers they accomplish it more often with massive weights than with giant columns, as seen in that awesome mission in Mirror's edge Catalyst where you break one, causing massive property damage LOOK I JUST LOVE MIRRORS EDGE OK

Lastly, this one should be pretty obvious but I feel I have to mention it every time now: this episode was banned in south korea due to its clearly japanese architecture and japanese culture was a no-go zone over there. Mind you Korea has some pretty amazing pagodas of their own!

Patrons

And so, Suede leaves the area surrounding the now incredibly unstable tower and rushes off to the first gym of the season, will the battle soar? Or will the encounter be for the birds?