

## Synopsis

We open with an unusually sober conversation between the twerps about team Rocket's abysmal track record, and to be honest they aren't wrong...

Kind of sad one of the only times the gang actually discuss team rocket outside of reacting to their appearance and it's to drag them over the coals. At least the rockets themselves pretty much cop to it and it's pretty funny to see.

Then Meowth reacts how most fans do when the status quo is challenged...

...and they opine that their pathetic lineup is the main reason they keep failing, even though Ash beat them with just a pikachu multiple times. It doesn't help that they keep miscounting how many pokemon the twerps DO have!

There's sixteen there, and Snorlax isn't even with them at the moment! Mind you, I guess they couldn't know that. So with one last exclamation of exasperation...

...We rejoin the twerps who have now moving on to discussing how OP Charizard is.

\*unfair\*

“I’m sorry, unfair? I’ve only used him like four times, and one of those times he got served by freaking chikorita! Besides, if carrying an overleveled mega-mon in case of an emergency is unfair, I’m pretty sure we’d have to boot a lot of trainers out of the league! It’s not my fault stealth rock hasn’t been invented yet!”

Honestly, This goes on so long I started to wonder if they just did a transcript of a meeting in the writer’s room.

“Honestly ash, isn’t it kind of STALE that you can ALWAYS bring out charizard as a cheap win condition? It’s almost like your battles will always have the shadow of an easy win looming over them!”

“Look, no one brings up Brock’s Onix, so stop with the Charizard hate! It’s not like he’s going anywhere!”

“Did you guys say charizard?”

Yes, now it’s time to meet THIS tall lick of fire with a freaking awesome if somewhat chafe-y design, who watches over the Charicific valley. What is that? Well, why don’t we check the exposition guidebook?

IS THE POKEMON WORLD JUST UNAWARE OF FENCES OR ADEQUATE SIGNAGE? I'm starting to think that trespassing is the Jennys form of parking tickets, easy fines to help bolster the budget! Well anyway, Liza here is all

"Hey, you own a Charizard, don't you? Sniff sniff... yep, singed hair and the rubbery smell of 2nd degree burns, no hiding it. Also... that's odd, is that charcoal on your breath? Are you.... Burned internally?"

"Oh, that's from pikachu, he fries me so good sometimes I still smell steak and kidney pie when I burp."

So she offers to take them to the valley to see the charizard, but there's only enough room for two in the back, so Ash has to ride Charizard!

"G-g-gulp! I've never ridden on Charizard except for that time when I did! What'll I do?"

Even charizard seems to have forgotten that obscure little episode where THEIR ENTIRE EMOTIONAL ARC CULMINATED, so wacky shenanigans ensue.

I do admit, even if it makes no sense, charizard flapping like a confused budgie is freaking adorable. Then we get a nice concession to how hard it is to talk while wind is whipping past your ears although rotary phone out of

nowhere still caused me to double take. Then finally Charizard gets the hang of it until it... doesn't, disturbingly suddenly.

Finally they arrive at the valley and WOW, are we sure Liza isn't some sort of supervillain? I mean, with the sculpted canyon lair, the leather and the dragons and the freaking CANE I'm getting a real scorpio vibe from her. I'm half expecting He-man to be tortured in the background.

But yes, after they pass the valley of Skyrim logos they arrive at the gate with ash straggling behind...  
phhhhahaha! Okay, this episode is worth it for charizard's expression alone. But anyway, after they establish that the valley is actually a high intensity training center where Charizard compete and train relentlessly to become the strongest charizard in the world SWEET SLURPUFF SHE IS A SUPERVILLAIN! THE REIGN OF LIZA, QUEEN OF DRAGONS IS IMMANENT! ALL HAIL!

All that aside though, Ash is miffed that Charizard is implied to be weak and immature by the high standards of the valley and he's all "How dare you! My charizard is the epitome of restraint and power! That's why it got beaten by a chikorita and didn't take orders until I saved its life! I challenge you to a battle!"

Liza refuses because...

...but... I'm guessing Charla can ENTER the valley, right? She's still powerful enough that beating her would prove his mettle! But no, apparently it needs to be a wild one from the valley, so Charizard shows how mature and confident it is by freaking sucker-punching the weakest one, with predictable results.

Honestly, this is really interesting, for ages we've assumed Charizard is just this untame-able juggernaut, but it turns out it really was just an upstart poser with a bit of natural talent. It's a neat revelation. I mean, it would have been nice to see some strategy but just being flicked away is also pretty demoralising for a Pokemon like him. Even against the gentlest giant, Charizard is - OOOH that's a nasty gut shot - completely outclassed and sent packing.

"Hey, uh didn't you invite us here? We kind of need your ride to get back."

"Can't talk, I'm literally and symbolically closing him off from his potential."

"Wow, you are evil!"

Then after Charizard is all

\*Let me iiiin\*

Team Rocket show of their... really lame mech of the week.  
Hey I'm not the only one who thinks so!

But enough of that, Liza re-opens the door to basically go

“...stop that.”

Well okay, she doesn't do that, but Charizard basically seems to think Pokémon runs on Naruto rules where if you just keep coming back swinging you eventually triumph, but at least today it doesn't work like that and it gets its tail handed to it again.

Then Liza's all

“Hey uh, seriously you brought us here, do you at least have some sleeping bags or a tent we could-”

SLAM

And Charizard is finally completely cowed to the point that he's finally willing to obey instructions to the letter, as he sure is staying there and cooling down! Um, I'm pretty sure that's not what she meant, guy...

No but I get it, he's equal parts readjusting his psyche after having his walls broken down and showing Liza that he's willing to endure anything to get stronger, I can dig it. Though I don't exactly get what ash is going for here...

I mean it's a nice sentiment for sure, but Charizard DIDN'T GET IN. At the moment, there's nothing to decide! I'm kind of agreeing with Jessie on this:

"I don't know, but it's intense"

Then after reciting the REAL team rocket motto:

They agree to help Charizard accomplish his dream, by doing what they do best: losing spectacularly. But before that, OW BROCK THAT IS NOT A HEALTHY SLEEPING POSITION. THERE IS A FLAT SURFACE RIGHT THERE DO YOU HATE YOUR POSTURE?

But then Team Rocket use their bug catcher mech to stage an attempted break in and... you know, what was their plan with this thing before they decided to throw the fight? Oh never mind, Charizard takes the bait and blasts them off apparently impressing Liza, though that can't be right...

“See Liza? Charizard’s strong enough to beat a giant robot!”

“Giant robot what? The door was closed, I can’t see through metal! I was applauding his top tier door-knocking!”

Though this line is pretty good.

Poor team rocket, even when they try to help, they fail miserably. No, Charizard gets in to the super training area to pump up its stats and then **ASH WHAT ARE YOU DOING?**

I am totally with Misty on this one, you’re way better than this trite and inconsistent garbage! Just last night you gave a great speech about how you don’t want to step on his dreams, he has shown explicitly that this is where he wants to be, **YOU DIDN’T PULL THIS CRAP WITH PIKACHU, JUST WISH THE DRAGON WELL, YOU IGNORAMUS!**

No, instead of that we get “Get out of here, b-baka! Your IV’s are sub-optimal and your nature doesn’t compliment your moveset!”. **AGAIN. THIS IS SO LAME.** Oh well, at least we get a good watercolour painting out of it.



“Um, ash? Where are you going? We still don’t have a way out of the valley.”

“Well this is going to be awkward...”

## Thoughts

Everyone remembers this episode, though not quite as fondly as the butterfree or pikachu goodbye episodes or even Charizard Chills. I always wondered why... until I saw it again.

For what’s ostensibly meant to be a dramatic realisation of Charizard’s potential and a powerful close to both his tenure on the show and his arc as a character, this episode was really... goofy. Don’t get me wrong, humor absolutely has a place even in the darkest of stories and having charizard taken down a peg is definitely fertile ground for humourous japes. But here it seems to come at a price of backtracking most of charizard’s growth and filling up too much space that could have been used to better explore the themes being presented.

It’s especially disappointing that this was written by Takeshi Shudo, the head writer and general showrunner of pokemon. He was great at creating a cohesive and fascinating world, but when it comes to episodes he himself wrote the results can be... mixed. I mean, he’s

written some of my absolute favourite episodes like go west young meowth, but he is definitely not above dropping a clunker like dig those diglett once in a while. Here, SOME of his strengths are on display, such as unique locations and well-implemented Team Rocket, but one of his biggest weaknesses, that he seems to write a good short story and then pad out the rest with fluffy tat such as in Mystery At the lighthouse, is front and centre.

The gags are good, the animation and especially expressions are great thanks to my old dream team of Yuji Asada and Akihiro Tamagawa reuniting and a lot of the powerful moments are still there, but it's soured somewhat to me in later life due to the weird plot holes, annoying tropes and regressive characterisation.

The relationship between Charizard and ash is one of the most interesting and complex in the show, yet he got a send off that almost felt like an afterthought, rather than a culmination of his character like brock's goodbye or a tear-jerking emotional rollercoaster like Pikachu's. It's a real shame but it was still fun. That's a great ball.

Trivia

Yay! Dogasu's back for one episode only so I've got plenty of juicy comparisons to the original Japanese, and there's a LOT to compare.

First of all there's an interesting name change going on with Liza. See in the Japanese, Lisa was the name of her Charizard, not her, as a reference to Charizard's Japanese name, Lizardon. So what was Liza's original name, then? Well, it was Sieg, most likely as a reference to the famous dragonslayer of German folklore, Siegfried. I'm guessing they changed it to avoid comparisons to \*ahem\* certain salutes, but they could have easily called her Frieda instead!

A lot of the changes in the script seems to be stopping the Rockets from talking in a meta way and leaning on the 4th wall, which is rich when 4kids gave us THIS gem...

For instance, at this point when the rockets are wondering what exactly Giovanni will do to them, in the original they're instead lamenting that they have no chance against Charizard since it's way too popular, as well as too strong.

There's also a weird reference to real world technology later when the original Brock yelled "Yahoo!" to show Ash it was just an echo, and then when Liza shows up he's all

"The echo said "yahoo!" Could you tell me your e-mail address?" Of all the companies to cross over to pokemon, we had to get Yahoo? At least it wasn't Ricola, I suppose...

When liza calls for charla, here:

In japanese, she's actually calling all the lizardon, hence why there were three flamethrowers launched. No early reference to hydreigon today, I'm afraid!

Another interesting note is that the valley isn't actually touted as some kind of brutal training ground in the original. There the charizard are simply considered mamori gami, or guardian deities of the valley, based on a common belief in shinto that shrines have guardian spirits in the form of animals protecting them, like that fox in persona 4.

Also there's another violence edit where these impact stars once again cover up vicious hits being taken by charizard. This one really confuses me because they left THIS one in which I feel is way more brutal than all of these combined.

Let's move on to the more reasonable edits, as in ones that had to cover for untranslatable puns. Why did Team

Rocket order a freaking bug catcher robot? Well, they don't know in Japanese either, but meowth says to just ignore it. The pun is in the fact that Mushi means both "Bug" and "ignore" in Japanese. Also there's a REALLY intense pun before that involving how, when written a certain way, the phrase "what in the world" can sound like the Japanese word for Germany and then Jessie mentions Italy and James mentions Holland and - look, it's just really obscure, all right?

One place that I feel 4kids really missed a trick is here, when Team Rocket are blasted off.

Yes, I know that they already said it so it would sound weird to say again, but it's also freaking weird to blast off in total silence! At least do a goofy holler or something!

That's better. In the Japanese they didn't say the equivalent until the appropriate moment, so again it seems odd they just left it out, but oh well.

Lastly this episode has a rare distinction of having scenes from it reanimated TWICE. Once for a flashback in The Fires of a Red Hot Reunion in Black and White, and AGAIN in "Alola, Kanto" in Sun and Moon! I wonder if I should do a special episode for that reunion, but then I'd have to give

my thoughts on Sun and Moon and... well maybe, we'll see how things go.

Patrons

And so, Suede tearfully runs from the episode after insulting it, hoping it doesn't realise how much he really does respect it. But ahead is more filler, and who knows if that can put a smile back on his face...