

Synopsis

Wahey! The writers must have heard my impassioned plea all the way back in the past as they've decided to use a DIFFERENT pre-drawn background so we aren't in the woods for the eleventy-billionth time! And boy do they cut to the filler chase again!

"Here we are in a place!"

"I have a pokemon!"

"What pokemon?"

Title!

Okay okay, enough snark for now, so this kid Benny has an... heretofore unknown pokemon. Wow, it's really weird saying that about wobuffet, huh. Aside from Pikachu and Meowth it's like the longest lasting consistent pokemon in the entire series and here it is like some sort of discover-and-discard. Though you can already tell it's destined for longevity by the amount of craps it seems to be intent on giving, I love its expression.

*look as good as it can look

"Screw you buddy, I'm beautiful and I know I'm beautiful"

No, apparently there's a big trading meet in town for which Benny is preening wobuffet for dumping on someone else, no wonder it's so grumpy. Misty also isn't helping!

WOW that's shallow. Wobuffet is freaking OP in the right scenario, and Misty of all people shouldn't judge others preferences when she's such a tentacool fan!

"Hey, I never said I was a good person! Quite the opposite, actually..."

So after catching up with Team rocket who are ESTABLISHING A STRAINED RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE OF THEIR POKEMON IN AN EPISODE CENTRED ON TRADING HMM - though Jessie shouldn't be annoyed with lickitung, it's been making itself really useful lately! Oh and hi snubbull, writers figure you out yet? No? Carry on then...

But yes, the gang head to the square when oh no! Someone's herd of tauros is loose!

"Well at least it's nice to know I'm not the only one with a herd of tauros!"

No, it's apparently a tradition that this town has a running of the tauros on the day of it's trading meet! That seems... ill-advised, but okay! So anybody who can touch a horn as they run through without... getting run through gets a trophy! Why you'd have to be a reckless, impulsive idiot with half a death wish to - and he's T-posing in front of them already, isn't he...

Ok well not EXACTLY a T-pose but still! "I'm Ash Ketchum of Pallet town! I will not be kept from a chintzy trinket by the likes of you! COME AND GORE ME- Okay, maybe not!" Then we see that the tauros are actually running to a big tauros fight in the centre of town (yes, I'll bring up the obvious parallels in the trivia, be patient) and Ash wants in so he's all "professor, send over number 24 again!"

"Well sure but you need to send something over, you have six already."

"Wow, really? Man, when's the last time that's happened? Alright, so I have two grass-type pokemon in my team, so I should probably send over Heracross, right?"

"Why not."

So he rushes back to the stadium and runs over the crowd's freaking heads to get to the battlefield!

"Ow! Kid, the stairs are RIGHT THERE!"

"Can't talk! Winning!"

So we get a boring battle of attrition and recycled animation with admittedly GORGEOUS line work, dang I love it when they put on the thick lines, oh baby...ahem, and Team rocket are seen doing their usual tournament joint-casing...

WAIT HOLD UP WHAT WAS THAT?

4kids, you're slipping! Keep it up! Also I would make a gag about sushi on a stick but I bet you anything a county fair somewhere in California has done it.

So ash wins another competition! Let's forget about it and go back to the trading, oh yeah this episode was about trading wasn't it? Sure!

I don't blame them for braggin

"And then they'll hand them off to a stranger! Isn't it beautiful?" I mean, I get that it's meant to be like a stock market - no I mean a LIVESTOCK market - where hard-bred animals exchange owners, but I'm pretty sure pokemon are meant to be kind of different from that, you know? You're meant to be inseparable friends, traded only if you find someone you feel would be more compatible with them. It just raises ethics questions it really shouldn't have to, just say it's a meet and greet where you bring pokemon you aren't getting along with or using, like an adoption drive. But nope, instead we get people flogging their sentient pets like chattel and it's just a bit iffy.

Well, let's move on from that for now as Ash is getting some offers for his now-champion Tauros.

Dang, take the Nidoqueen! As long as he raised it right before evolving it that's way better stats! But no, Ash is all

"I can't trade ol' 25!"

"24"

"Yeah, 24! I mean, what, you think I have tauros to spare or something? What is this, a trading meetup?"

Speaking of trading though, Poor Benny just can't unload Wobbuffet!

"I know you're great, wobbuffet, so why can't I dump you onto a stranger?"

Before we can solve this, though, team rocket unveil their scam, where they say THEIR trading machine can raise... the...level.... Urgh, I guess I'll have to assume they mean their strength will be on ANOTHER level, yeah that's it. So the people think they're exchanging pokemon but they're actually getting empty pokeballs. Not a bad racket, though I imagine it can't last too long... mind you, Wonder Trade lasted for ages... Ahem!

Meanwhile Misty finally has an out with Psyduck and what does she do?

Yep, Jack squat. I know this probably means she really does have affection for it but she could try FREAKING SHOWING IT. Affection doesn't mean much when it's indistinguishable from dismissal, and as Diane so aptly put it in Bojack:

doesn't matter what you are deep down, what matters is what you do

Oh and I forgot to mention the twerps are trying to help Benny hawk his Wobbuffet, treating it like a freaking used car, that's nice isn't it...

Well luckily we get this adorable reunion to wash out the bad taste.

JAMES, YOU ADORABLE ABSOLUTE MARK! HOW DO YOU FALL FOR THE SAME-

Oh thanks heavens, he twigs just in time. Still! If the salesman wore glasses or something we'd most likely have another Gyarados tornado on our hands! So then... this happens, and it's so contrived it's almost beautiful.

Let's run that through. Benny's trade partner suddenly decides he wants a hoothoot, as he runs off Jessie collides with James who is chasing the salesman, she is sent flying by James' rippling pectorals I guess and the impact of hitting the trade machine causes Lickitung's pokeball to be SQUEEZED THROUGH JESSIE'S COAT AND OUT HER COLLAR TO FALL ON THE MACHINE JUST AS IT'S STARTING UP. Just... Final Destination would look at that and go "steady on" and it's a series of films that can't even talk!

Then Team Rocket are rumbled and they book it but not before James does one of his very first "fight fight fight"s. Daw...

Then they tie up the group and hit them with a vacuum so powerful it can pull pokeballs out of pockets but not lift Ash's hat. Dang, that's one specific Goldilocks zone... Then, I want you to brace yourself because this next part is probably the smartest thing Team Rocket will ever do until (ugh) Black and White.

YEP! THEY INTEGRATED BLASTING OFF INTO THE ESCAPE PLAN. THAT IS GENIUS. Too bad they had to recharge their brain cells or something as they then wait at the drop zone long enough for the twerps to catch up. Oh well, it was fun while it lasted. Then Jessie tries to bring out Lickitung and Ash then says a phrase that can only ever be said once, take it in...

This is followed by another event that hardly ever happens again: Wobbuffet being utilised properly. Again, take it in...

But unfortunately Wobbuffet still doesn't know Mirror Coat as they manage to get past with an electric attack. Then Ash returns to the... waiting trainers HEY WAIT A MINUTE WHY DIDN'T YOU GUYS GO WITH ASH? JUST A MINUTE AGO YOU WERE ALL

Ugh, well then Benny is all "Sweet, I got a Lickitung! It's too bad I had to lose Wobbuffet though, I'll never forget it!"

"Wait, if you liked Wobbuffet so much why were so desperate to trade it?"

"Well Ash, the answer's very simple!"

Thoughts

Well I guess it's appropriate that this episode introduced Wobbuffet because after watching I'm making the same face as one! This was just a mess, man...

To start off with, it was so clearly two plots clumsily rolled together that it was embarrassing. Now Two-plot or even Three-plot episodes can be fun, like pallet party panic, but at least in that one they were somewhat organically connected. It was like three mini-episodes that flowed from one to the other well. Whereas trading I MEAN BULLFIGHTING I MEAN TRADING AGAIN WHAT BULLFIGHT did not have the same feel.

It's a shame too as both of the plots in and of themselves could have worked well. A pokemon version of the running of the bulls coupled with a pokemon tournament consisting of only one type of pokemon was a prime foundation for a fun episode, and an episode centred around trading would be great as despite it being one of the main draws of the game, the anime has been really skittish and even antagonistic to the concept so far. Though to be fair, after this episode I'm beginning to see why.

It just seems ludicrously hard to reconcile the idea that you're collecting lifelong friends to go on adventures with, only separating with a tearful goodbye, except sometimes when you want a better friend so you trade it to a stranger. Couple this with the clear sapience of the pokemon and it starts to raise the ugly spectre of slavery, which is absolutely not intentional but hard to avoid. Now let me stress that trading CAN be portrayed in a positive light. Like that you're registered as a sports team and you're just transferring players, or maybe with close friends who you know the pokemon would have a better connection with. Heck, even ranches like the laramies make sense as kind of adoption centres but yeah, I just feel like they missed the mark here in that regard.

Weirdly though, you'd think the writer of this episode would improve in this regard considering Yuki Yoshi Ohashi also wrote the other episode centred around trading During the SS anne! Yep, he brought back the character he created in the magikarp seller for this episode, that's actually pretty cute. He also wrote Bye Bye butterfly, so you'd think he'd be better at writing proper goodbye episodes, especially when it comes to lickitung! Seriously, they build up lickitung as being useful in the last two episodes and it's gone in the most anticlimactic way possible, same with Heracross! Considering how freaking iconic Wobbuffet is now, it's shocking how weirdly it joins the team, huh?

So all in all, it's just too clumsy to be outstanding, and the questions put forward by the narrative will leave grown-ups and more discerning kids frustrated. But it's still gorgeous with endlessly appealing animation by the dream team (even if they repeat a few times) and it definitely isn't boring with great pacing and fun scenarios. So I guess since I still enjoyed watching it in spite of itself I'll have to give it a great ball, But know the rating doesn't necessarily reflect all the nuances of my opinion.

Trivia

Hooray! Wobuffet is here! Although the similarities to a punching bag or dummy are obvious, and I love the fact that it's heavily implied it's tail is the actual pokemon while the blue part is just a very prehensile tail, the main appeal of wobuffet in Japan is actually the fact that it's a tribute to a very famous Rakugo comedian named Hayashiya Sanpei. His catchphrase was "sonansu" roughly equivalent to "that's just the way it is" and that's wobuffet's japanese name. This is why it always says wobuffet at the end of the motto, in japan it's basically another "that's right!" This also made it awkward when Wynaut came out, who's name more closely matched it's japanese name of sonano, which means "really?" and the two names just didn't match up. They should have just called it Wotteva or something similar but I guess it's too late now...

Funny thing is that Sanpei was also famous for putting his hand to his head when he said this and wobuffet of course does this too, but funnily enough in gen 2 wobuffet didn't have this element, even in the animated crystal sprites! So it's possible the anime added this element to the pokemon's design and then it was added back into the game. I always find those kind of convoluted origins fascinating...

Lastly, we should probably address the real world parallel that's about as subtle as a bull in a china shop: the town in this episode, Pompona, is clearly based on the real world spanish town of Pamplona, most famous for its annual San Fermin festival and it's central event... the big head parade. No, of course I mean The Running Of The Bulls, Where six bulls are released down the well-fenced streets and people wanting to prove something I personally don't understand see how long they can last being chased by them until they jump the fence or are gored.

A cool extra parallel to the event is that in Spain the destination of these bulls is the arena where they will take part in bullfights, much like the bullfights the trainers take part in in the episode. The difference of course being that in the pokemon world, it's a friendly competition whereas in the real world, it's a horrific form of public animal torture where an animal is forced to fight for it's life while stabbed in at least four places and

slowly bleeding to death, only receiving an end to it's suffering after it's provided sufficient entertainment to the audience.

Full-blooded bullfighting is illegal in most countries due to it's clear and unashamed animal cruelty. Some bloodless forms have been developed, but in Spain it remains legal as animal cruelty for the purposes of entertainment is apparently part of their cultural heritage, which means in their eyes it should continue. I think I've made my thoughts on this pretty clear, but let me just end on this: Heritage is always worth remembering, but it is not always worth preserving. Bullfighting is disgusting and should not be legal.

Patrons

And so, Suede trades this confusing episode for the next, hoping for a good exchange. Will it reignite his passion in the series? Well, even if not, that's just the way it is...