

We're REALLY hitting the filler now, with six episodes before the next definitively story-based episode. So, you know what that means! Double feature time again!

## Synopsis

So, it's a bit of a scorcher, the twerps are out of water and then Ash is all "Hey look! A pipe has apparently materialised in front of us, as we really should have spotted it way earlier!" and then this protagonist of a steampunk Jrpg shows up and the twerps are all

And she's all "Well you could come back to my house for a drink, but if you're really hankering to drink unfiltered water from a dirty pipe, go nuts" and Brock's all "You can drink from MY-" "BROCK, NO"

So yeah, even after my joke they do! They do fill their canteens with unfiltered water from a dirty pipe! I guess Ash will get to meet the rare pokemon E.Coli later!

All right, so apparently the water's from a mountain spring, so it's less likely to be diseased but they didn't know that at the time! We also meet the star pokemon of the village who are introduced here in a pretty relatable way.

Yep, that's pretty much me around extroverts too... But guess what? The most important event in this town is just around the corner, what are the odds, etc. The town has a competition to ascertain who in the town has, and I quote, the best sunflora.

“What makes it the best, though? It seems somewhat subjective....”

“Well Ash, we decide through the time-honored tradition of judging their looks based on our own human definition of superficial beauty! It's really the only fair way.”

“Yep, can't argue with that!”

To continue the air of subtle skeeziness, Brock then tells the grumpy sunflora to smile so that it will look prettier to him.

Yes, I know he's just trying to cheer it up, but that's just an unfortunate choice of wording. Then night falls and James uses his previously established lock picking skills to get in.

Aw, no declaration of his profession this time? Well anyway the rockets plan to rig the contest as the prize for having the best Sunflower-type pokemon is... a years supply of ramen?

I mean, I'm no marketing expert, but I would have thought bottomless fertilizer or a paid water bill would be more appropriate but har har, poor people joke, why not. So James utilises his wealthy background and innate camp to pick the best Sunflora.

“Girl, you want that ramen, you better work!”

Meowth then sets off the alarm and gets... caught in a net WHY WAS THAT NET SET UP AT THE ALARM BUTTON? Ideally that would have been pressed by the owner, was the net to make sure they stick around to testify in court? Well, silly nitpicks aside Team rocket fail to procure a prize pokemon and meowth is left behind.

“What's a cat?”

Then...

What on earth are they doing? This is genuinely intriguing, what possible use could they have for meowth? Even he seems blue-screened by the whole business. Oh, and hey snubbull, kind of out of nowhere but at least you aren't jigglypuff. So then...

That's... actually brilliant. Honestly it's about time Meowth's insanely OP ability got some more attention, heaven knows it could have solved more than this problem in the past. Not to mention it actually shows the kids being smart rather than as observant as a zubat with cataracts so I'm really digging it. Too bad he's literally roped off as soon as we establish that it just misses it's friend that got traded. Ignoring the implications of trading breaking profound social bonds as we must for our sanity, the duo is reunited and... conflict over, I guess? Well now what?

Oh yeah, the contest. Actually, this is almost literally the case as the event plays out much the same as pokemon contests would play out later. But before that, FRIED CHICKEN. FRIED. CHICKEN. I'll just leave that to fester as Cyrus brings out his Totem Sunflora in yet another preview for a future generation, although Brock doesn't seem to think this is the case.

This implies SO MANY THINGS, but I can't dwell on it too much as my brainspace is now filled with the image of sunflora-meowth's blind-mudokon face.

"I hurt."

But of course Snubull engages in its purpose of creation, the team is rumbled, and snubull is all “I guess this is my life now...” Then they over-saturate the pokemon with sunlight to a rather disturbing effect to put them out of action as they steal the noodles. But unfortunately team rocket once again forget the fact that other pokemon exist and may indeed be held by other trainers in the audience, to their downfall once again.

“HERE COMES THE SUN, MOTHER-”

Oh and I’m pretty sure you don’t need me to tell you but the sunflora we’ve been invested in wins. Though it really should be obvious in hindsight, oversized produce does tend to dilute the flavor. \*slurps\*

“This can’t happen to me. The world will pay. I will bring about a new world without biased judges and upstart rookies. All will soon fear the name Cyrus...”

Thoughts

It’s a shame this one meandered as it did, as with a little tweaking it could have been great.

The main problem I see with it is that it sets up an intro, conflict and resolution and then just leaves the actual

competition, which SHOULD have been the emotional culmination of the story, to dangle off the end of the episode, hurriedly given significance by a shoehorned extra rocket plot. Yes, they couldn't have just NOT shown the contest, absolutely, but that just draws more attention to the fact that they just crammed extra conflict in since they couldn't organically integrate it with the earlier stuff.

However, what was there was surprisingly engaging for the most part. Having Meowth as the solution rather than some contrived game of charades was brilliant, and even having snubbull come into play wasn't too jarring (though we'll see how long that lasts). The animation was inoffensive and the solarbeam was actually pretty intense, I loved it.

Perfectly average, with enough flecks of sunlight to make it stand out just enough. That's a Great ball.

## Trivia

Meowth's Sunflora disguise might seem like a throwaway gag as per usual, but it actually joins the ranks of Jessiebelle and the freaking tickle droid as an element no one expected to return, enhanced by the fact it happens

SIX. MORE. TIMES. I guess meowth in extreme pain is just something everyone can latch on to.

But aside from that, the only other trivia I can think of is that this sunflora, although seeming somewhat... distasteful, is actually engaging in a popular counter-culture fashion movement in Japan known as Ganguro. I've mentioned it before in a previous episode, but ganguro was meant as a push back at the inescapable asian standard of beauty at the time of bone-white skin and jet black hair by going in the exact opposite direction, it's actually really cool in that way and to be honest that sunflora stands out way more than any of the others, it should have gotten a shot!

So that's one episode in the ground, what'll we unearth next?

Synopsis

We start off strong with this one, with a battle in progress in an interesting location. Though I do have some concerns about their battle strategy...

"Glasgow handshake! Again! Again!"

After that though we get some good hits in but chikorita is acting distinctly stropopy!

“Oh, no, not ANOTHER strong pokemon who disobeys me! Does Arceus have a quota for me or something?”

And either the sun goes down really fast in this part of the world or this goes on for HOURS, which is hilarious. So Megaman’s human form has to head home to Dr. Light, and ONLY THEN does chikorita allow itself to be returned, what a troll! Distraught, Ash reflects upon his past experiences, considers the many relationships and conflicts he’s had with many different types of pokemon, and-

“Professor help me my pokemon won’t listen again and you’re the only adult I have any kind of meaningful connection with!”

“Wow, Ash, what about your smoking hot mother?”

“Would you really consider my relationship with her relevant to my current life situation? Honestly, you’re more of a dad than my dad by a long shot!”

“Oh. Well, I- Oh my, it appears I’m being smothered again! Isn’t that something?”

“bye, professor.”



Yeah, I guess the Oak call was a bit of a mislead, as he didn't contribute to the chikorita situation at all. Speaking of which...

"No talk me. I angy."

Then this apparently super qualified Joy appears, you can tell by the coat and glasses, and she's all

"DOCTOR Joy, thank you. Please don't lump me in with those nursing school plebs."

Then we get one of Ash's dumbest lines ever, and need I remind you, that's saying a LOT.

WOW. That's up there with wondering what a carnivore is. Though I do kind of hope that we get a pokemon named Therripy in a future gen just to mess with this. Dark/Psychic, obviously.

So then Joy's all "If you're willing we talk about what's bugging chikorita, and then maybe we can move on to your abandonment issues if we have time!" and ash is all

\*I don't have a problem\*

"Debatable."

Then Ash, amazingly, outdoes himself within the same episode.

WOW.

“WOW.”

“WOW.”

“WOW. Do you think we could have these sessions more often?”

And after Brock is all

“...And that’s also abandonment issues, I’m guessing mother, judging by his severe need for intimate connection? You know, I would actually recommend at least some counseling for all of you-”

“Can it lady, and make with the head-shrinking so I can better improve my pet’s fighting skills so I can be the greatest Pokemon master and dad will finally come home! Wait, I mean-”

“Hmm...”

“Not a nurse, but yes, Chikorita needs to be comfortable for now so it can become mentally healthy.”

“But I thought it became Bayleef!”

“Oh, Ash...”

So Chikorita stays the night in a comfortable, safe environment and Pikachu, the source of her distress,

decides to invade it for no given reason. Geez, what a jerk. So Chikorita, quite understandably really, runs off and gives Pikachu the slip so it can finally find a space it doesn't have to confront its anxieties, which in this case is an abandoned warehouse. Honestly, same. Unfortunately the place is occupied by... a Pokemon street gang I guess, and here we go, now Pikachu is going to come charging in and rescue her and she'll realise he's not so bad, it's so contrived and honestly not a very healthy-

Oh! Wow, I... Okay, that's freaking awesome! Chikorita don't need to be rescued, them punks need to be rescued from Chikorita! Meanwhile after reviewing the footage Joy's all

Um... OR, she was running away from Pikachu, heck she really didn't look defiant when she ran out, it honestly seemed like she was just going to take a walk until Pikachu butted in. So the twerps search for them with the Rockets in hot pursuit, while Pikachu finally stumbles onto the hideout where Chikorita is having none of it.

Then when Team Rocket show up, she uses her gang to assert dominance! Then they're all

Um, pretty sure that's not reverse psychology, that's just plain old intimidation. Luckily, Team Chikorita aren't afraid of anything!

So then Team rocket join Chkorita's clan, which grows in power and influence until it spreads to the farthest reaches of Johto! Long live the pear of power! No, much as I wish that happened, instead they bring out this giant lo-fi IG-88 which, being made out of tires, cannot be shocked. So Ash, being the bastion of brains that he is, orders Heracross to fastball special him to the antenna so he can destroy it.

“YES! THERE IS NO OTHER WAY!”

“Bulba? Bulba...”

“I NEED TO DO THIS! I MUST LAUNCH MY DELICATE, PINK, POWERLESS BODY AT THE MICHELIN MAN'S JUNKIE COUSIN! THERE IS NO OTHER OPTION!”

“Buuulbaaa...”

“MUCH AS I WISH THERE WAS ANOTHER SOLUTION, I SIMPLY MUST ENDANGER MYSELF FOR THE GOOD OF MY POKEMON! IT'S NOT LIKE ANY OF THEM CAN FLY! DO IT, HERACROSS! MAYBE USE YOUR WINGS AS A BOOST! ALL RIGHT YOU GLORIFIED ERASER! COME AND GET MEEEE OH SHOOT THIS WAS SUCH A BAD IDEA”

So after failing what could have perhaps been his greatest body check, Ash survives the three story fall and immediately sets up another! Luckily Chikorita catches him and he's all "THANKS CHIKORITA! IF YOU HADN'T CAUGHT ME I'D HAVE FALLEN THE EXACT SAME HEIGHT AS BEFORE!" Then she pulls ash up to the antenna - no other way, huh, ash? - and after he breaks it the robot, instead of shutting down or stopping in place since it's not receiving any further commands, goes haywire and after a god-tier pun from meowth:

They get blasted off. Then the episode just kind of ends with a ton of questions unanswered, somewhat exemplified by this exchange:

"Well thanks ash, but to be honest if you couldn't pick up that Chikorita was envious of Pikachu, I really think you might be in need of some counselling of your own."

"Well if I catch any on my journey, I'll be sure to let you know! Thanks again, Nurse Joy!"

"NOT A NURSE! Eight years of college, a three year residency and everyone still calls me NURSE! I really need to write a harsh letter to the hive mind one of these days..."

BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO CHIKORITA'S CLAN? She clearly gave them orders, what did she say?

“Go. Gather, recruit... and wait.”

Thoughts

There were some niggles in this one but I WAS HAVING WAY TOO MUCH FUN TO CARE.

Neat character building, cool new concepts, awesome moments, great (if not exceptional) animation and neat, different locations really made this one stand out to me. Before, Chikorita was basically just Bulbasaur 2.0, a cute toughy with a heart of gold, but thanks to some really neat foreshadowing in previous episodes and some freaking amazing power moves I am on the fanwagon! The whole episode did a great job of keeping me guessing too, with the potentially insanely lame possibility of pikachu “fixing” chikorita’s issues by saving her life soundly roundhouse kicked out of the arena by Don Leaf over here!

Chikorita doesn’t need help in that area, she wants attention from those she feels deserve her respect which is a rare character archetype to see. It’s not all wrapped up in a bow by the end, either: she still has to struggle with her envy, but she’s willing to allow more wriggle room. It’s very true to how slowly people can change in real life,

which connects well to the cool theme of counselling helping as well. Dr. Joy knew what chikorita needed: a safe, comfortable place to sort out her thoughts, and the episode in general was good at showing that psychiatry, therapy and counselling aren't things to fear (or pokemon). It's just sweet and smart writing about a strained family relationship so YEP IT'S TAKEGAMI-SAN! WHO ELSE?

So fun, awesome, clever and slightly educational. That deserves a master ball... IF ASH WASN'T SUCH A BRAIN-DEAD LUNATIC! Takegami-san is a seasoned writer for this show, why did he suddenly make ash as thick as two crustle stuck together? THERAPY AND ENVY ARE... NO OTHER OPTION... sigh. I know, ash is dense, and I know it's one of ash's defining traits. He's dim almost by necessity so that he can learn with the audience. He makes up for it with emotional strength and tenacity, and a willingness to learn. But... but this is something else entirely! It was distracting and unnecessary, ash can easily be humorously clueless without making it sound like his head would steal your soul if you looked into it, and the characterisation just pulled me out of an otherwise absorbing story.

There were a couple of other niggles too, the scenes went overlong at times, I really wish dr. Joy got a bigger role

and WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CLAN? But the glory of chikorita outshone it all. Here's hoping they don't spoil her in the future, but for now this is a great true introduction of her worthy of an ultra ball.

### Trivia

Only a couple of notes here, but one of them is particularly cool as it's something I only learned today, too! You'll notice that the werps and even Joy herself use Jealousy and envy interchangeably.

I always thought they meant pretty much the same thing, but no! Apparently jealousy is when you think something will be taken from you, and envy is when you want what someone else has. So chikorita should only have been referred to as envious. Now, I'm not suggesting to be some kind of snob about this, languages change and evolve all the time, ESPECIALLY english, so as long as the intended meaning gets across in casual conversation it's fine. I'm mainly just pointing it out because it's neat to know and you should probably get it right in a medical context, JOY...

Also as a little tidbit since we're focusing on Chikorita, did you know it's one of the only pokemon to receive a drastic color change between games? Well I say "drastic", it's just



another shade of green but compared to the tiny changes in others it's pretty big. See, in early concept art and in the actual game of Gold and silver, Chikorita has a much more chartreuse body, almost yellow. But in the official art and in all games from crystal onwards, it has it's usual light green. This was especially weird as it meant the sprites in Gold and silver were inconsistent with the official art. Maybe they changed it before release but forgot to flip the switch, so to speak? I do like the more contrasting colors of the early version, but I also get the change. It wasn't as cute and it was a rather unpleasant shade of yellow.

## Patrons

And so, Suede, pledging his undying loyalty to the clan of chikorita, moves forward to what seems like brighter skies. But who knows how things will continue... you can plan a picnic but you can't predict the weather...