

This episode was made possible by my generous wonderful and unbearably attractive supporters on Patreon. Welcome to my new patrons this week, Tanner Vogelgesang, Bdaybear30, Neil, and Errantbubble, you all sound like the last words of a dying chatroom.

Synopsis

It seems the fluke of last episode is over and we're back to unnecessary recaps that seem to exist only for 4kids to display their admittedly impressive pun game!

Seriously, the only thing that happened last episode that was worth mentioning for context was MAYBE that Gary got booted out and he doesn't get so much as a passing comment! Well to be fair, the way things are unfolding these past few episodes I almost feel like it's the writers saying "Please stick with us, we HAVE had some good battles, honest! See? Look at this tiny referee!" Either that or there's almost no battles at all this episode and they're just sticking this here so we don't feel as ripped off, but surely they'd never do something like THAT this close to the end of the season, right? Right?

Well, there's no point dwelling on it, what am I even doing critiquing a recap, is this my life? As the show to it's credit quickly moves on to the story proper. What adventures and tense situations will emerge?

Wait, stalling the league battles everyone's craving to pursue the stuffing of your faces? We've done this before literally two episodes ago! You're seriously going to REPEAT FILLER CONTENT two episodes before the season finale? Well, at least it seems harmless enough and 4kids mercifully hold back on the localising.

Seriously, after that disgusting display in the evolution solution I was half expecting Ash to be all "Man, I'm starving! Who's up for a buffalo wing and nacho pizza?" Then it seems that Delia and professor oak were waiting at the bunkhouse for them to return so I suppose it's a good thing that they didn't head out immediately. Delia's all

And ash is all

"I mean, obviously these huge cabins have any kind of cooking facilities! What are you going to do, hijack a restaurant?"

And so of course that's what she does, with the house chefs more than a little put out by the sudden redundancy.

“That... that is the antithesis of a restaurant, madame!” “Yeah, well your accent is the antithesis of subtle.” “...oui, touche.” “Honestly, why cook at home when you can get an underpaid wage slave to do the dishes for you?”

Then as sit down to their delicious spread of chocolate cheesecake, banana chimichangas and poached Tangela, Professor oak gives ash a pep talk while we DAWWW they're sitting in the kiddie high chairs that's freakin' adorable!

Then ash is all, “Well, if I leave out the one who hates me, I have a grand total of one pokemon to switch with, so it's really not much of a headstratcher if you catch my drift.”

“Ash, don't you have like 30 tauros?”

“Yeah, but Natures and IVs aren't really a thing yet, so I might as well just count them as one.”

“well then why don't you just release the others?”

“SO professor, any more sage wisdom for me?”

“I'm pretty sure trying to win was implicit in doing his best, Delia.”

“Let's not do this in front of the boy, Samuel...”

“Well if you weren't trying to undermine my authority as a mentor figure-”

“Excuse me? You're the one replacing him as a FATHER figure!”

“Oh thank bouncing baby mew, Come on in, kid!”

So then this kid with a suspiciously unique outfit catches a ride with the others and it seems he's pretty good at not being burned internally using techniques he probably learned from a certain beauty salon in Hop Hop Hop town and Delia's all “Wow, he's so good with pikachu! Ash, is he your twin brother?” But before I could come up with a snappy comeback to that reference the power cuts out, so badly in fact that even the intercom isn't working! So what's left to do? Well Professor Oak is all

And Richie's all “We COULD do that... OR we could rip and strip a couple of cables from the wall and run an unstable current through them while I hold them in my tender, peach coloured hands!” “Brilliant” “Sensible!” “What a resourceful and still living young man!”

So pikachu jump-starts the elevator because apparently it runs on an internal combustion engine (yes I know he's just generating current, but that not what the dub says!)

And after they arrive at their destination safely, leaving a fine mess for those called in afterwards, The wunderkind reveals his name as Ritchie and takes his leave, with everyone else left in a state of worshipful contemplation.

THEN Team Rocket realize they're overdue and burst into the plot like

And so they rock up to the pavillion where of course a squadron of Jennys are waiting to take them into custody after an official heard that bogus announcement and reported it OR they launch unobstructed into a pater that would make a herbal remedy email chain blush. Ash and - oh hi again Ritchie! - Actually display some healthy cynicism for once...

But luckily Team Rocket have an ironclad logic bomb to ease their concerns.

Boy, muggers in this world must have an easy time of it! "Give me your wallet and unlock your phone! NOW!" "What? No!" "Your reluctance is understandable, but if you don't I'm afraid I'll have to place you under arrest!" "Oh my! I'm sorry, here!"

Yes, they actually pull off a heist for once, only blowing their cover at the very end and apparently actually learning from their mistakes in the opening ceremony and actually booking it with the haul without sticking around! Ash and Ritchie and NONE OF THE OTHER TRAINERS, REALLY!? - give chase and find themselves at a tricky conundrum.

"Look, mr. 'I'm going to conduct live electricity through naked wires in the hope that it won't disable the brakes or blow the fuses or melt my skin' I really don't think you have a leg to stand on here!" "fair enough, but what are going to do if you lose control?" "Why I'll die of course!... you coming or what?" "Sure, why not." Then they run down the hill, Ash doesn't realise how close he is to using sky attack, Ritchie tackles him and RIDES HIM HALF A KILOMETRE down the hill, to which Ash reacts with somewhat less than gratitude.

"Look, granted going off that thing would have been risky but are you seriously saying grinding me along a hillside like some kind of meat snowboard wasn't just as bad? I'm surprised my nipples haven't been buffed out!"

But the duo can't argue with the results as they manage to cut off Team Rocket and WHAT IN THE WIDE WORLD OF WOBBUFFET ARE YOU TWO DOING?

"Don't worry! Team Rocket would never actively try to kill me while I stand directly in their way! Moltres will save us!" "Moltres WHAT-"

Luckily team rocket are a bit more skittish about non-flamethrower based homicide and head into the woods with the guys in hot pursuit. They then set up camp so they don't get lost, with ritchie even bringing a spare sleeping bag, dang!

"I hope you don't mind using the madcatz bag, it's functional but I'm sorry about the cheeto dust."

So they spend the night bonding in some pretty neat and scenes that help us know what kind of person Ritchie is. Aw, and Ritchie actually took the spare for himself, that's a nice touch.

"Oh no, he's more obsessive than I am! I'm doomed if I battle him! Quick, engage in hyperbolic compensation!"

"Yeah, well I'm going to be the greatest in the MULTIVERSE!" "Well I'm going to be the greatest across all known DIMENSIONS of the multiverse!" "Well I'm going to be the greatest across ever single FANON in every dimension in the multiverse!" "...You win."

SYMBOLISM!

The next day they continue along the river and find team rocket's camp. SERIOUSLY?

"All right, I think we lost the twerps, should we keep driving til morning by taking shifts at the wheel?" "Nah, I'm craving s'mores." "Weird, me too"

So they grab the bag only for Team Rocket to... lock them in? That is the worst thing you could have done! Wait for them to exit the trailer, smokescreen, grab the bag, done! But no, instead they engage in abduction, I guess you could do that to. Meanwhile Ash and Ritchie hit a roadblock in their escape.

Then ritchie's all "it's okay! In a move that will doubtless inspire future generations, I customize my pokeballs! On a side note, isn't it weird that there are literally no great or ultra balls in here?"

Luckily Ash hits the freaking jackpot as pikachu sniffs out bulbasaur, which unfortunately does nothing of consequence, then Ritchie brings out his charmander and ash is all "You have a fire type? Why didn't you melt team rocket's tyres when we were in front of them?" "Never mind that! Zippo, rip the van apart!"

“OR he could have done that! You seriously dropped the pokeball on this one!”

Then Ritchie brings out his own OC Pikachu, together they blow up the cab and then this happens.

“... wait, this is less than ideal.”

So they grab the balls, use their Pokemon (including Pidgeotto somehow, maybe Pikachu was still sniffing) to slow their descent, and return the pokeballs. So now it's time to see who Ash is facing next through the sophisticated medium of carnival game. “Seriously? We have to fish for our opponents?” “Well, it was electronic but some punk fried the grid by pumping 10,000 volts through some hotel elevator!”

“Ha ha, yeah what a punk. So who am I facing?”
And it's RITCHIE? *DUN DUN DUNNN*

Thoughts

Hmmmm... Yeah it's all right.

Okay, well obviously that's my opinion of the episode as a whole, not on the rather polarising public opinion on the Ritchie development, which I'll get into in more detail later. Taking this episode as a self-contained whole though and... yeah, it's all right.

Now, don't for a second think that this isn't a compliment, though! On paper this thing should have crashed and burned, especially considering the pacing. We're fresh off of a decent episode consisting entirely of Pokemon battles after a couple of bizarrely battle averse episodes set in a tournament and the writer's first instinct with **THREE EPISODES TO GO** is to write **ANOTHER FILLER** with only one brief battle? Not to mention the animation was inconsistent, Team Rocket's plan relied way too much on every single trainer in this **NATIONAL TOURNAMENT** being simultaneously stupid and cowardly to not only be fooled by the scheme but also not give chase, and the voice work could get really janky at times...

So what about this made it work? Well, as I've mentioned before, if the pacing is done well, it becomes a lot easier for the other elements to slide into place. There was a real sense of momentum to this one as soon as we leave the restaurant. We get a tense scene in the elevator, a sudden rush to the pavilion, a car chase on foot, a well-placed breather and then a fantastically kinetic and creative battle sequence taking place entirely in a moving truck. It may have been filler but it was engaging, fun and really good bang for your 20 minute buck.

Not only that but there were a couple of decent character moments thrown in there too, even if they were somewhat sparse. They all revolve around Ritchie in some capacity too so okay, let's talk about his introduction. Yes, the kid is basically a Marty Stu. Everyone instantly takes a shine to him, he knows his way around pikachu, he keeps two sleeping bags in his pack just in case, his charmander is somehow almost as powerful as Ash's charizard and he knows how to jumpstart an elevator. But as I mentioned in the last episode, overpowered characters can work in stories, as long as they oppose the protagonist. Because ash is very flawed on his own, probably the most ideal place to learn how to improve himself is from... an improved version of himself.

Unlike Gary, Ash doesn't want to get better to spite Ritchie, he wants to get better to become more like him. It could almost be viewed as a message to the kids about where to draw your inspiration and drive from: if it's from a place of malice or one-upmanship, you end up unsatisfied and push away those who could help you since beating them is something only you can do to be satisfied. But if it's from a place of real, mutual respect and drive to be better in general instead of just better than this one particular person, then you're more open to constructive criticism, such as maybe not running off a cliff. Ash resisted Ritchie's help there, but because he knew how much Ritchie cared about his pokemon, it was a lot easier to self reflect and hear him out. It also prevents that feeling of emptiness when you accomplish your goal, when the goal can always move in an organic and healthy way. Remember when Gary got kicked out? Ash was so disoriented that he briefly considered quitting even though he had done what he'd always wanted to do: be better than Gary. So in that way, I like what Ritchie represents even if his execution can be a little over the top. We'll see where this goes.

Now if it were up to me, I actually still don't think I would have brought Ritchie into the story at this point. I would have either brought him in way earlier or not at all. Heck if it were up to me, we would have seen him in a series of cameos throughout the season. But alternatively, you know what I think would have been interesting? If they just replaced Ritchie... with Gary. Gary shows off strengths that Ash is able to see a bit easier now that he's got the rage blinders off and Gary's been humbled, Gary cares enough about his pokemon that he follows ash into the woods and they butt heads while sharing the same moment where ash realizes Gary is just as passionate, and wants to have the same strengths he does without the arrogance. I'll leave my final judgement on both Gary and Ritchie for the finale, which is getting scarily close, but for now, that's my take on them.

Oh yeah, the episode! Right, so it was a well-paced episode with some great gags from team rocket

Even if some glaring flaws in the story and production drag it down and it's only really memorable for Ritchie's introduction, I still had fun with it. Another solid Great Ball.

Trivia

Well, now that we FINALLY have pokemon nicknames apart from like the five or six times they were used earlier that no one remembers, let's take a look at how Ritchie's names are different between regions. Sparky is actually named Leon in Japanese, which is perfectly fine if a little random. I can understand 4kids changing to something a little more thematic, even if I still think it's a bit pointless. Now Happy is a little weirder, and in Japanese it's called Papi. Most likely short for Papillon, the French word for butterfly. I mean I guess they felt Papi was too obscure so they just changed it to something similar for lip-flap convenience, but then why not just call him flappy? Where it gets downright bizarre, though, is in the pokemon that 4kids didn't touch: Zippo. Yep, both in Japanese and English, Ritchie's Charmander is named after a popular brand of refillable cigarette lighters. Leon? Too weird, change it! Papi? Who's going to get that? Change it! The brand name of a product that we took great pains to edit out in an earlier episode? Sure! Why not? A little consistency, 4kids, please! (check out my review of episode 46 for more details on the lighter removal)

Not only do his pokemon have a weird history with their names, Ritchie himself has some etymological eccentricities of his own! Well not his western name, which got a typical 4kids Americanisation, but his Japanese name actually holds some significance. Most reasonably big fans of the anime know that Ash's Japanese name, Satoshi, is a reference to Satoshi Tajiri, the creator of the Pokemon concept and director of the first two generations of games. It's also reasonably common knowledge that Gary's Japanese name, Shigeru, is a reference to Shigeru Miyamoto, who needs no introduction and acted as a mentor to Tajiri-san. So, why do I bring this up now? Well. Ritchie's Japanese name is Hiroshi, which also happens to be the name of the then president of Nintendo, whom Satoru Iwata replaced, Hiroshi Yamauchi. So I guess the triforce is complete!

Going back to 4kids though, when team Rocket are driving the van during that awesome action scene, some of you may have noticed something was a little off. Not me though! Because by golly that's the RIGHT side of the car to put the wheel on, both literally and figuratively! I never trusted you yanks with your left-of-centre views on steering column placement... but this raises the question of why 4kids didn't just flip the scene? Easy fix with the added bonus of alienating your British, Indian, South African

and australasian viewers, right? There's even precedent in other dubs like sailor moon!
Well, there's one problem with that...

Yeah, re-painting the "r"s in every single shot would have been a bit of a nightmare. Still, nice to see a bit of representation, no matter how brief.

While we're on that chase scene though, I just have to point this out as I couldn't unsee it once I did: The action sequences in this episode are loosely the same as the movie Speed! Not exactly, to be sure, but the fact that it opens with a tense elevator rescue sequence, and then moves on to a high speed conflict on an increasingly decrepit large transport vehicle seems a little too much of a coincidence to me. It came out 6 years earlier so it's definitely a possibility, at least.

Patrons

Okay, this week we'll try something a little different, I'll do a simple 2/4 rhythm here and I'll say the patron's names, but I have to put the emphasis on the down beat. Let's see if I can get through it without any edits! If I have to do over ten, my patrons will have to decide my punishment.

Jon

Joelle Young

POB

Joel Schooler

Graymorality

Allison Bennett

Jonathon Powell

Matt Storrs

Sigh

Goos Riezebos

Calvin Atkinson

Cartoonkitsune

Christian Larsen

mitchell henkelman

Colene

Henry H

Jacob Sullivan

Wesley Foxx

Ginko

Daniel Waldron
Lucas Neumeyer
"The" Dom Smith
Tyler McMann
Colin Raiden McRae
Deep Cover
Thomas Haugen
Ryan Koller
Kiseki77
David31
Brandon A. Hole

Trey McGowan, biker rooster,
Mark Dean, green haired duelist
Grant Gangle, stone cold lich king
Colleen French, rocket rampage
Loomsie96, scarlet ranger
Tekking101, straw hat pirate
Ryan Griffin, back-in-timer
Andrew Welsh. A man at rest
Zachary Taylor, fallen leader
Superbunnybun, cute with no peer
Steven walker, trenchcoat brooder
Darkmage0707077, magic weilder
Thedarkmaster, dragon tamer
James Nicholson, anchor sailor
And Wheels, unsafe chairman

with

Jonathan Johnson
Cameron McLoud
Joe
Sean Ryan
Adam1i
Evan bao
Oliver
Kyle Brackman

Yosef Strimling
Fusionater
Frankly Ima Person
DeathAnimated
William L Reese
Ian
Curtis Charles
Winter's king

As those who'll get there art real soon. Phew!

And so, Suede dusts himself off after a brisk interlude, ready to join ash in his final battle. How will it end? Everybody wants to know, but maybe this sleeping dragon shouldn't be tickled...