



Why Pokémon Is The Perfect Fandom Gateway Drug

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Before I knew what fandom was, I knew what *Pokémon* was.

During elementary school recess, while everyone else was playing soccer or four square or basketball, I would sit on the field with my best friend, talking at length about *Pokémon* characters and furiously writing about those same characters in our notebooks. Even though we didn't trade *Pokémon* cards and were only casual players of the *Pokémon* video games, we both loyally followed the *Pokémon* television show and never tired of talking about Pikachu, Brock, Misty, May, and Ash's long list of other companions for hours on end.

I didn't know it at the time, but those in-depth recess discussions would prepare me both for my Tumblr-scrolling high school days and my TV-binging adult days. Watching and talking about *Pokémon* was almost certainly my first brush with fandom, and there's no doubt in my mind that I wouldn't be nearly as passionate about *Star Wars*, *Community*, or even John Hughes movies if it weren't for *Pokémon*.

And this past weekend, the *Pokémon* television show turned 20 years old, with episodes of its current season airing on Teletoon. Even though I don't watch the show anymore, I thought this was the perfect opportunity to talk about why *Pokémon*, even 20 years after its television premiere, is still the perfect fandom gateway drug not just for me, but for dozens other burgeoning super fans looking for a nerdy outlet.

1. Convergence of Platforms

In addition to the TV show, there are *Pokémon* games, toys, movies, apps, and, of course, trading cards. People can easily enjoy and get the gist of what *Pokémon* is just by watching the TV show or playing the video games. But *Pokémon* fans can also, if they choose to do so, completely immerse themselves in a pop culture world that exists both on and off screen.



2. Convergence of Genres

One of the reasons why I think *Pokémon* (as a TV show *and* a franchise) remains so popular is because it has a little something for everybody. You want action? Sit back and watch a *Pokémon* battle or two. You want humour? Jessie and James, the perennially unsuccessful antagonists of the show, provide more than enough of that. And if you want drama, *Pokémon's* got a little bit of that, too—remember when Ash decided to release Pikachu into the wild so that he could roam around with the rest of its little Pikachu friends?



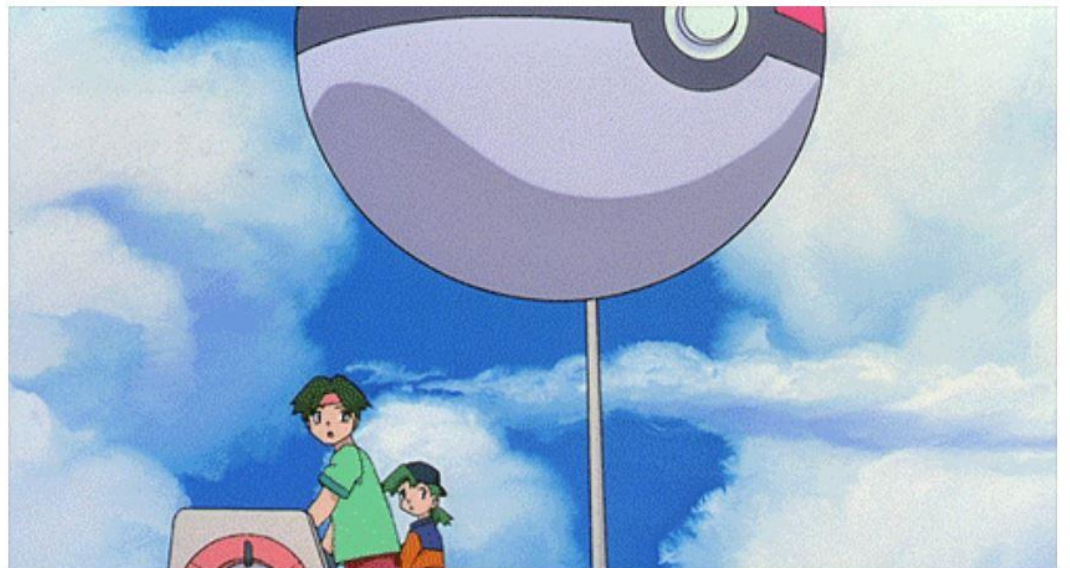
3. Unique Terminology

Let's be honest, one of the best parts of being part of a fandom is looking down on anyone who's *not* in that fandom. Giving a fandom its own sets of words and terms can help facilitate the separation between "insiders" and "outsiders," and even though *Pokémon's* terminology is generally pretty easy to understand, knowing that a gym leader isn't just a fancy way of describing a phys ed teacher still made 10-year-old me feel pretty cool.



4. Interesting, Complex Characters

Even though the *Pokémon* characters never actually age (yep, Ash is still 10 years old), some of them are actually written with quite a bit of depth and dimension. Plus, whether you're a hopeless romantic like Brock, an intellectual, analytical type like Max, a feisty tomboy like Misty, or something else altogether, *Pokémon* has introduced so many different characters over the years that you're bound to relate to at least one of them.



5. Easily (And Endlessly) Parodied

Pokémon can sometimes be too sappy, wacky, or outright weird for its own good, meaning that transforming parts of the show into memes, "abridged" video series, and more is usually super easy. And isn't more fun to be part of a fandom when you can create and share personally made videos, clips, and pieces of art with other fans?

