**Introduction:** Welcome to my new series of posts, where I intend to look into every single line of Pokemon in Platinum Version and discuss their “unit feel” across normal gameplay. Before I dive into the analysis, I’ll go into a couple things about my background as a Pokemon fan, what I get out of playing and replaying these games, and explain how and why I’m going to be looking into the Pokemon in Platinum version. Feel free to skip ahead to the first Pokemon if you want.

**Background about me:** As a little background, I have been playing every Pokémon game, starting with Ruby and playing all the way to Violet. These games captured me at age 6 but even at age 24, I find myself enamored by these games and its wonderful world of creatures. I completed a Living Dex up to gen 8 before burning out in gen 9 as well, so I’ve had at least some experience training up most of the Pokemon in the series. I’ve also played numerous Pokemon fangames and ROM hacks that experiment with the formula (if you recognize my username you might also recognize the in-depth guides I’ve written for Pokemon Reborn and Pokemon Rejuvenation, for example).

However, I realized a few years ago that I had become somewhat disillusioned with Pokemon games. Most of this, I realized, stemmed from mechanics like forced on Exp. All, the removal of set mode, and my general belief that open world gameplay is a less interesting system than linear gameplay for Pokemon, especially when it just boils down to a familiar linear level curve… that is just obscured from the player this time. Simply put, I no longer felt like I was building relationships with Pokemon as strongly as I once did, and the magic of the series was diluted for me. After taking a break for a few years and getting really into other RPG’s like Fire Emblem, I came back to the Pokemon series, replaying games from Gen 1-5, hoping to really pay attention to the strengths of the series that have afforded it it’s endurance and popularity over time.

**What is the Pokemon RPG Formula**? This isn’t a post about my opinions on recent generations however – I mention this just to highlight the positives of what I think is a brilliant core gameplay loop established in Gen 1 that has continued throughout the series. Pokemon is a simple formula: as you explore the world, you get access to numerous new Pokemon that you can choose to use in your team. Along this journey you fight other trainers as you build your team, hoping to defeat the champion eventually. You get to choose Pokemon that you like – maybe you’ll build a balanced team, or maybe you’ll pick favorites. Your team choices can be to fill a short term role for specific fights or long term roles in a team. With never fewer than 150 Pokemon in a regional dex per game, the player is allowed to experiment endlessly by using new Pokemon, or even using the same Pokemon but differently thanks to being able to choose different moves or a different ability.

Yet you’re still confined by the relative space afforded to you by the game at any point. You only have the lines: a starter, Pidgey, Rattata, Caterpie, Weedle, Spearow, NidoranM/F, and Pikachu to defeat Brock in Gen 1 for example, with their relatively weak moves. You have access to almost every Pokemon to fight the Elite Four, and by this point they’ve gotten better moves and you have more options with TM’s. Each sequence of the game is like a puzzle, but you get to choose from a bag the pieces to fit into it and with each other. This basic idea forms the foundation that makes Pokemon so fun to replay for me personally and what motivated me to talk about, well, how each Pokemon line feels to use!

**What is “unit feel”?** In the Fire Emblem community, YouTuber Professor Bopper describes this term as the following: “how good a character is at telling a unique, dramatic gameplay story to make them feel more exciting or interesting.” See his video here for an overview of the term as it relates to Fire Emblem: https://youtu.be/RJIofIwVH2w?si=raXIhweIyGb63UZQ

I think this term can translate to Pokemon fairly easily – how good is the Pokemon line at telling a story as a party member as you play through the game? As we’ll get into with the first few entries, this means that starter Pokemon generally have some of the best unit feel. Unlike something like Roy in FE6 – your first character with perfect “availability” almost always will be good at telling a dramatic gameplay story thanks to its strong stats, two evolutions that help it spike in power, good movesets in almost every case, and ability to gain EXP quickly and snowball. On the flip side, I think something like Chimecho in Gen 3 has sorta poor unit feel. It doesn’t get to evolve, you get it really late into the game, and it doesn’t really stand out meaningfully or have any niches that aren’t covered by Gardevoir or Alakazam, for example.

One other thing that I should bring up is that I will NOT be ranking Pokemon or directly trying to state how “good” they are. I’m much more interested in the story that a Pokemon can tell as a member of the team, but there is regardless going to be significant overlap. In general being available earlier, having access to moves and strategies that aren’t as widely available, relatively unique typings, notable stats and abilities, the potential for evolution, and things of this nature are generally what is on my mind when thinking about unit feel for Pokemon, but it’s really subjective at the end of the day.

**What is being considered about Pokemon**: I’ll be honest here – I think Pokemon is a very muddied game series that commits to too many goals. On one hand is the original motto: it is a game with a numbered list, nudging players to embark on the long, expensive (and sometimes LITERALLY IMPOSSIBLE if you’re going for mythicals, but that’s an issue for a different series of posts lol) journey to collect them all. The gameplay itself is a simultaneous hybrid monster of a PVE RPG, and a PVP competitive game, both of which are very fundamentally different experiences and require very different skills. Of course, over most of Pokemon’s history the official competitive format occurs in Doubles while 90%+ of the battles in each game take place in singles. While things like IVs, Natures, Egg Moves, and (paying attention to) EVs matter a lot in competitive, they don’t need to be major considerations in the basic RPG gameplay. To get really into the competitive scene, basically all the choices you make during the main campaign are meaningless, though GameFreak does seem to be on a general trend towards letting you competitively “fix” your in-game teams now more than before. Still, it seems like a weird stilted hybrid of systems to me… but thankfully the RPG gameplay still manages to be worth playing on its own!

I am going to be considering Pokemon as “units” in the RPG game: generally from the earliest point in the game you could add them to your team, and potentially up until you’ve completed the story content of the game. I will not be discussing how well they fare in competitive nor battle facility contexts here. In general, what’s “reasonable” for a in-game run through Pokemon will be level-up moves, choice of ability, TM moves that are obtainable in the game, tutor moves, and move relearner moves as soon as that is available. Held items obtainable through normal gameplay are fine to discuss if they’re notable as well. Since egg moves are entirely obscured from the player and almost always force a Pokemon to be stuck behind in Exp due to breeding, I won’t generally consider these. After basically looking at all the options a Pokemon has over the course of the game, the next task will be to look at how these options might fare against the story fights of the game, not from an efficient planned run perspective, but from a unit feel one.

**Why Pokemon Platinum?** Put simply, I think Platinum (B2W2 is probably a close second) is probably the best choice to discuss what I’m going for. It is viewed highly by the community, it doesn’t really have level curve issues, and the cast of playable Pokemon is robust but not absurdly large. I don’t have to dive into paired version nonsense (much) with Platinum as well. It comes after the Physical Special split which ultimately helps give more Pokemon unique identities of their own, I think. Oh, and whether you love ‘em or hate ‘em, I get to talk about how HMs add or detract from unit feel especially for Gen 4. I think there are interesting analyses to be made of the other 2D Pokemon games (at least) but I decided to roll with Platinum for now.

**Some “Rules” I am going by**: Here’s the thing about Pokemon – you can literally overlevel one Pokemon like a starter and have 1 guy who covers its weaknesses and win everything. You can also easily buy things like X Attack, Revive, and Full Restores to blast through the games. Pokemon hasn’t really figured out yet how to mitigate this (Gen 5 exp scaling gets close-ish?) but in my opinion this discussion becomes significantly less interesting without some ground rules. Don’t feel like by participating in the unit feel discussion you’re stuck playing personally by these rules or anything, but for my discussions I’ll generally consider them. Here goes:

* Set mode is on. Unit feel of tanky Pokemon that can be switched in doesn’t matter if you can always have an advantageous matchup.
* I am going to take the “Hardcore” from “Hardcore Nuzlocke” – analysis will be conducted as if your Pokemon are never exceeding the next gym leader’s (or Champion’s, with 8 badges) highest level Pokemon. I.e. Lv. 14 for Roark, Lv. 22 for Gardenia. YouTube videos have proven that basically any non-gimmick Pokemon can solo the entire game with enough levels, which doesn’t make them feel that unique, eh? It also will make it easier to talk about if I know exactly the moves Grotle will at best when fighting Gardenia since it won’t be over Lv. 22, for example. (Note: I don’t like Nuzlockes and will not be considering Pokemon in the context where fainting = death)
* No items from the bag will be used in this analysis. Again, a Pokemon that is able to raise its stats or recover HP loses some of its unique qualities if you can pull things out of your bag to achieve the same effects.
* This kinda goes with the level cap thing but I am assuming the player uses a full team of six Pokemon. This allows discussion of how a Pokemon can fit into a full team.
* Trading evolutions are kind of a mess, but since I do want to talk about things like Scizor I will allow them. I’m only really considering trade-trade backs here, and not assuming a second game will be used to trade in anything else. I also will allow the item ones only when you get the item (so Scyther is considered until Metal Coat becomes available, for example.)