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# Pokémon

Nintendo’s worldwide phenomenon JRPG series about a kid that sets off to be the best, that no one ever was. There’s also a lot of collecting of monsters, though the “raising” aspects of the series are very, very sparse in comparison to virtual pet games. There’s a pseudo-arbitrary “happiness” value but that’s about it (turns out, Pokémon like being in your party and not fainting).

It has a lot of resemblances to trading card games in the fact that there are many different Pokémon and strategies in which you can use them. This might be related to the fact that they did actually make a trading card game based on it.

## Variable Innate Attributes (Initial Values/Personality/Abilities)

Individual Pokémon, at the moment of generation, have a series of hidden values assigned to them called Initial Values, ranging from 0 to 31, which effectively state how much growth that particular stat has. Because these are hidden from the player, it’s impossible to tell whether you got a “good” one or not until after you’ve already committed to raising it (though savvy players may be able to tell the difference by looking at the stats of a freshly-caught one, since it won’t have any Effort Values yet).

Personality serves as a second layer to this that actually is visible to the player – there’s a grid of personality types, and each one explicitly increases one stat by 10% while reducing another stat by 10%. There are also five neutral ones, that have no statistical change at all (aligned on a grid, they fall into the categories of both increasing and decreasing the same stat).

Abilities are another layer, however, these are determined by the species of the Pokémon in question and may not actually be variable. Abilities are passive effects that are typically not stat-related, though they may be under some circumstances, but otherwise confer some sort of attribute or property in combat that players can use to their advantage or disadvantage (e.g. The Pokémon Spheal can have either Ice Body or Thick Fat as its ability: Ice Body causes it to regenerate 1/16th of its HP per turn while the weather effect in play is Hail, whereas Thick Fat increases its resistance to both Fire-type and Ice-type damage, causing it to take half-damage and eighth-damage against them respectively).

## Effort Values

Effort Values are a hidden stat growth system in Pokémon games from Generation III onward, replacing the original stat EXP system. Your Pokémon gains Effort Values by participating in combat against an enemy Pokémon, which contributes to one or more of its stats raising additional point(s) when it levels up. Effort Values cap individually at 255, allowing a total of 512 for a given Pokémon, and are determined by which Pokémon you fight in combat, as each individual species has a set number it contributes to one or more (usually one or two) stats’ Effort Values.

This is primarily a means of making growth dynamic, while also allowing players to specialize their training by only having their Pokémon fight enemies that give the Effort Values they want to have maximized on them.

## High-Variety/Collectability

As evidenced by the Gotta Catch ‘em All catchphrase, Pokémon’s initial appeal to players is the fact that there are just a ton of the things to collect. Initially starting with a mere 151 (which was a significant number back in the day, in 1996 JP/1998 NA), there’s now 649 as of the Generation V games (Black and White, and their sequels Black 2 and White 2) with that number very likely breaking 800 with the upcoming Generation VI games on the 3DS.

## Evolution

Pokémon are capable of evolution under various circumstances depending on the species – this can happen based on level most commonly, though some require being equipped with a certain item, traded to another player, leveling up with a certain amount of Happiness, day or night conditions, or in one upcoming case, leveling up while holding the system upside-down (I’m not even kidding about that).

Evolution is the process of one Pokémon transforming into another. This typically always signals an increase in base statistics but then proceeding to learn new moves at later levels compared to unevolved forms. Pokémon may change types, species, move learning patterns and abilities as a result of evolution, though most species are only capable of evolving in one way. A handful of them, however, are capable of evolving in multiple directions based on circumstances (e.g. Kirlia is capable of evolving into Gardevoir by reaching level 30, or if it is a male and given a Dawn Stone, it will instead evolve into a Gallade).

## Battles

The primary component of Pokémon is battling. This is when two Pokémon go head-to-head in turn-based RPG-style battles until the battle ends, generally by one side’s Pokémon becoming knocked-out (reduced to 0 HP). Though the actual interface and flow is very simplistic, there’s a rather deep set of mechanics and math that goes behind a lot of the actions, as well as quite a bit of strategy and mind-games, considering how simplistic the actual battles end up being.

## Competitive Balance/Metagame

Pokémon is designed to be played competitively, and has been from the start. As a result of this, there’s a somewhat-haphazard approach to competitive balance taken by the game designers: Only a rather small subset are actually viable for use in equal-level matches, and some of them are outright banned due to unique traits and circumstances (or lack of balance entirely, like with most Legendary Pokémon). As a result of this, Pokémon are structured into tier lists, with various types of build and battle roles put into play based on the types and unique strengths and weaknesses of each individual Pokémon.

## Repurposed Combat Moves in Minigames

In various Pokémon games, there are minigames in which you can use moves, normally used in combat, for some other purpose. Super Contests were instituted in Generation III and were designed to appeal more to female players, where you could decorate your Pokémon and use moves with different properties (the same moves used normally in battles) in order to appeal to the aesthetic senses of the in-game judges. It puts a dual purpose to the existing list of moves. These were also included in Generation IV.

In Generation V, there are two more variants of this in sidegames and activities, where moves used in battle are repurposed: the Pokéthalon (an athletic competition) and the Pokéstar Studios (where you participate in mock battles with your Pokémon playing the role of a star in a short film).

## Cooking

Featured in Generation IV, you could cook food using in-game items called berries (normally items that can be consumed automatically by a Pokémon in combat under certain conditions) to create food you could feed to a Pokémon to increase its Contest statistics. Because this was tied directly to Super Contests, it could be speculated as also being intended to appeal to the female player demographic, despite how horribly-stereotypical of a thing it sounds like.

## Breeding

Players are capable of breeding two of their own Pokémon together, presuming they’re physically compatible (same breeding group, as well as having one male and one female – or one of either and a Ditto). The mechanics behind this state that the species is based on the mother, while it inherits Individual Values from the father, and can know certain moves from birth based on its parents knowing them (which can lead to moves that could uniquely only be learned by a Pokémon through breeding, and in some circumstances, chain-breeding a specific move from a parent originating in an earlier game when newer versions do not allow the parent to be able to learn said move, making for some rather ridiculous logistics and a lot of investment from the player to get this to happen).

## Starter Mon Choice

One common thing all Pokémon games have done is giving the player a choice between three Pokémon to be their very first one. Generally-speaking, these are always between a Fire, Grass and Water type, as they form a neat rock-paper-scissors weakness/resistance triangle to each other. Naturally, your NPC rival always picks the one with the type advantage over yours (i.e. if you pick fire, he picks water), but this is a great way to introduce players to all sorts of mechanics in the game, such as type effectiveness and the different kinds of strategies each Pokémon can be built toward.

## Mon Acquisition: Catching

Pokémon has a unique method of acquiring new monsters: You go out into the wild and catch them. To do this, you encounter a wild Pokémon (not one owned by an NPC or other player) and throw a device called a Pokéball at it. The chances of catching a Pokémon in this way vary due to myriad circumstances: The innate catch rate of that species of Pokémon, the type of Pokéball you’re using, how much HP it has remaining and what status effect it has at the moment. This can make for a rather intense and engaging exercise in cherry-tapping a sleeping wild animal so you can catch it easily.

## Travel-Based Growth (Pokéwalker)

The Generation IV remakes of the original Generation II games included pedometer device called a Pokéwalker. You could use the IR communications built directly into the game card in order to transfer a Pokémon from your game into the device, and then have your steps measured. This device is almost like a Tamagotchi or Digimon sort of thing, in that it has a monochrome, low-resolution LCD screen on it representing your Pokémon, as well as a step counter and access to minigames, which costs points accumulated through steps. When you return the Pokémon to your HeartGold or SoulSilver game, it gains experience points based on how many steps you took.

**Hardware Note:** Though not Pokémon, there is a game that uses a similar approximation of this using modern cellphone technology. Crimson Dragon: Side Story for Windows Phones features a GPS location feature, where you accumulate gems (in-game currency) by checking in with the app and then calculating the distance traveled from your last check-in and awarding gems based on that.

## Storage

This is a unique feature to Pokémon compared to other pet-centric games: You can store your Pokémon within any PC in the game. Due to the collectivity of Pokémon within the series, this is basically necessary in order to allow for players to actually Catch ‘em All.

# Digimon / Tamagotchi

Digimon and Tamagotchi are two series of virtual pet toys by Bandai. Digimon was originally designed to be a version of Tamagotchi aimed at boys, due to the addition and emphasis of battling and training for battle. Fun fact: There’s a psychological phenomenon named the Tamagotchi Effect – where humans establish emotional attachments to inanimate objects and software constructs. It is apparently a fitting name.

## Hardware-Determined Starter Mon

Digimon and Tamagotchi both start you off with an egg, which then hatches into a baby of some sort. This is always the same based on the hardware of the device you’re using – that is, you’ll always start with the same one, no matter how many eggs you hatch. However, its evolutionary path is determined by other circumstances.

## Mon Acquisition: Hatching

You’re given an egg, which hatches into a monster after a few minutes of real time. Note that in these, you are limited to one mon at a time, so this is basically the start of a new game.

## Real-time Growth and Maintenance

Mons grow in real-time and require care and attention. This ranges from simple interactions of playing/training, to feeding, to cleaning up after them.

## Evolution based on Care

A feature somewhat-unique to Digimon and Tamagotchi, your mon will evolve into new forms throughout its life cycle – however, past the first two forms, its evolutions will branch out based on how well you cared for it, resulting in about eight different potential final forms, based on the evolutionary path taken by it.

## Injury from Battle

Digimon are capable of participating in battles with other Digimon, and as a result, can sustain injury from which they will require additional care to recover.

## Death/Expiry

Digimon and Tamagotchi are capable of death due to neglect or natural causes over time. In Digimon, your mon is capable of succumbing to death as a result of injuries from battle, or even as a direct result of battle with another Digimon.

# Monster Rancher

A niche series by Tecmo, originally for the PlayStation, wherein the player could raise a monster to do jobs, participate on expeditions alongside adventurers and fight in tournaments. Notably, it features a rather interesting monster generation system, allowing you to take data from any CD-ROM and use it to procedurally generate a monster unique to that disc.

## Mon Acquisition: Generation

Monster Rancher has a unique method of creating new monsters, though you can only have one actively in your care at a time: You generate monsters based on another CD-ROM. When prompted, take out the Monster Rancher disc and insert another disc into the system, close the tray, and confirm. It reads some data, and plugs this into an algorithm to generate a monster based on it. Notably, it would always generate the same monster from the same disc, so certain discs would be important for your collection, for the purpose of generating monsters from them.

The GameBoy Advance entry in the series used a text entry to generate monsters, due to the fact that there was no hot-swappable media available for the platform.

## Mon Jobs

Monsters could be temporarily employed by individuals or companies needing work done, and your monster’s ability to keep working and complete the assigned jobs would be based on its stats. Generally-speaking, these pull in a significant amount of money, and give your monster a moderate amount of growth as well. These are non-interactive and completely determined by some randomness and the conditions of your monster.

## Mon Training

Training is similar to taking a job, except that there’s no monetary gain from it, but you often get much more statistical growth out of it. Outside of the monetary/stat growth differences, these are handled almost exactly like jobs.

## Mon Expeditions

Expeditions are similar to jobs for a monster. Your monster accompanies an adventurer out into some area (generally exploring ruins or climbing a mountain or something) for a set amount of time. This is an extended period of time (several weeks in-game – note that the series has never operated under real-time constraints) in which your monster is out of your care, in the care of someone else, and out in the wilderness. It’s usually pretty dangerous, and can result in injury or death of your monster in particularly unlucky circumstances.

## Tournaments

Tournaments are this series’ take on battles. Battles play out in real-time with the player taking active control over his monster, with how responsive it is to your controls being based on how much it likes you. The monster will attempt to battle on its own to some extent, though it’s generally not a good idea to let this happen. Up to four moves can be known at a time, and usable based on distance from the enemy. Tournaments, predictably, follow a tournament format in a series of battles to determine the champion, and come with various rewards based on the reason for the tournament (usually money, but can sometimes come with fame, rankings or qualifiers for new licenses).

## Player License System

Monster Rancher features a license system as a means of measuring the player’s progress. New games start the player with a low-grade license, as if they were just freshly qualified to start raising monsters, and opportunities to qualify for a higher-grade license will occasionally surface, allowing for the player to participate and, if successful, acquire a better license. Higher-grade licenses contain various benefits, but most commonly these are access to raising rare or particularly-difficult monsters, and the fame and trust of new clients for jobs and expeditions and more opportunities for entering tournaments.

# The Sims

Dollhouse simulation game by Maxis that is excessively popular, allowing players to create humans that live in virtual environments, adhere to their own schedules and have a predisposition to lighting their kitchens on fire. Not really a “mon” game, but still has a lot of simulation elements that are worth looking into.

## Mon Acquisition: Character Creation

The Sims features a full character creation system, wherein you can customize aspects of your simulated individual or family from the start of the game, including name, sex, age and various personality traits.

## Simulated Living Environment

The Sims places characters (Sims) in a virtual house where they have to live and actually navigate to and use the various facilities placed about. This makes the layout very important for usability, and also offers players a very, very high level of customization for the environment.

## Autonomy

Each Sim is AI-controlled and has its own personality traits, wants, needs and impulses. You as the player can monitor all of these as well as control what they do, though they will go about their own business after they’ve done what you tell them to do.

## Architecture Design

One of the major points of The Sims is the player’s ability to completely customize the house of their Sims by planning out the entirety of their architecture and designing it from the ground up (literally).

## Multiple Characters at Once

The Sims also allows you to have multiple characters inhabiting a house at once, all part of a family which you control.

## Relationships

Sims can form relationships with other Sims they meet, to the point of being able to move in and start families together.

## Chaos and Disasters

Similarly to Sim City, random chaotic events and disasters can readily happen in The Sims, likely due to how funny some of these events can be. These can range from mundane accidents like lighting the kitchen on fire, to robberies, to psychological problems such as nervous breakdowns. Some of these are triggered by other events, while others can happen at seemingly random intervals.