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Pokémon: The Design Process



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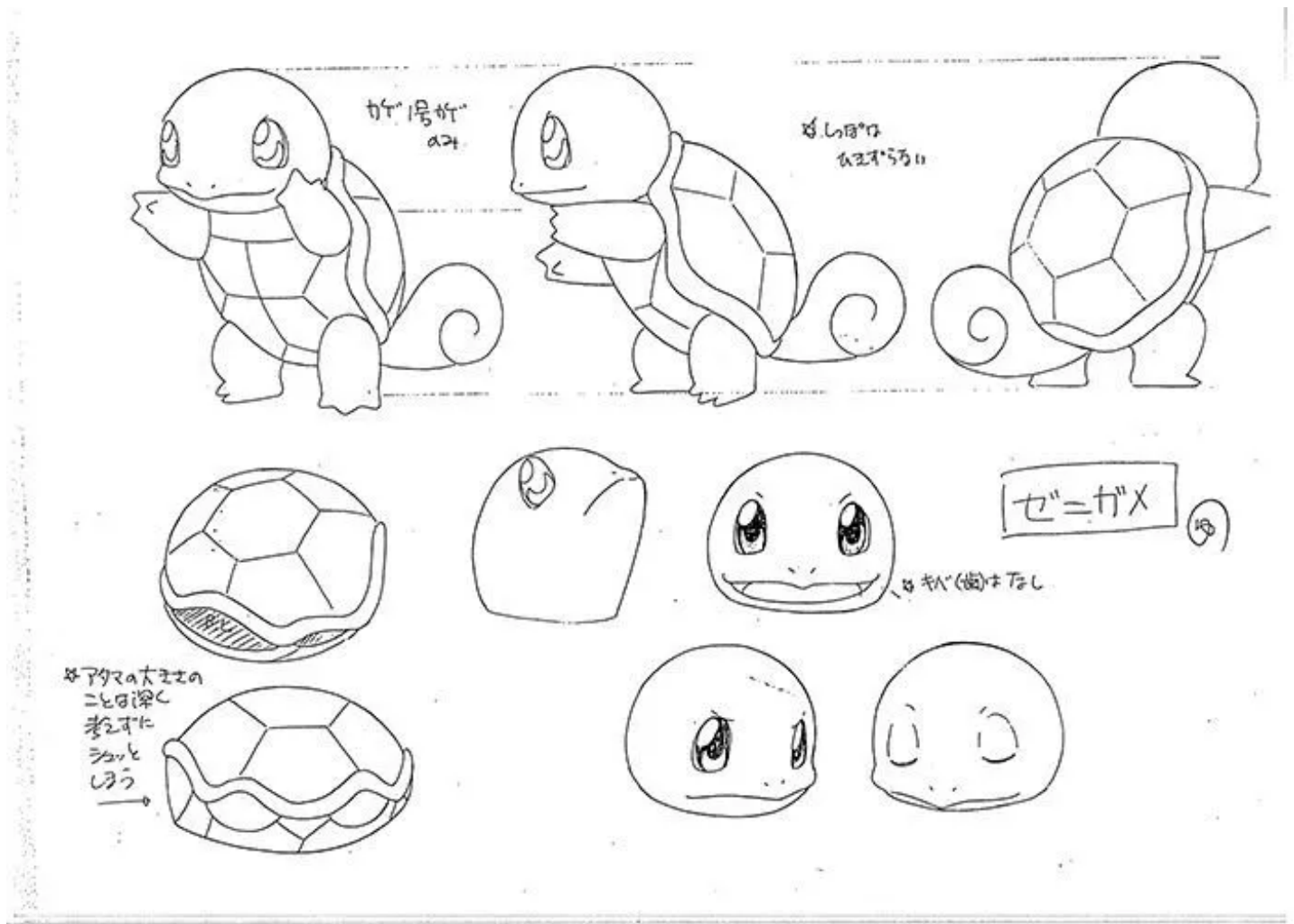


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Going into Game Design, I take inspiration from a lot of different popular game series. The biggest source of inspiration to me has to be Pokémon. Since it's inception in 1996 Pokémon has grown into a massive franchise of games, television series, plush toys, and all other kinds of media.

Of course, Pikachu wasn't made in a day, so I wanted to take a look at how the designers at Pokémon have made well over 900 clever and unique creatures we all know and love today.



Squirtle, the Tiny Turtle Pokémon.

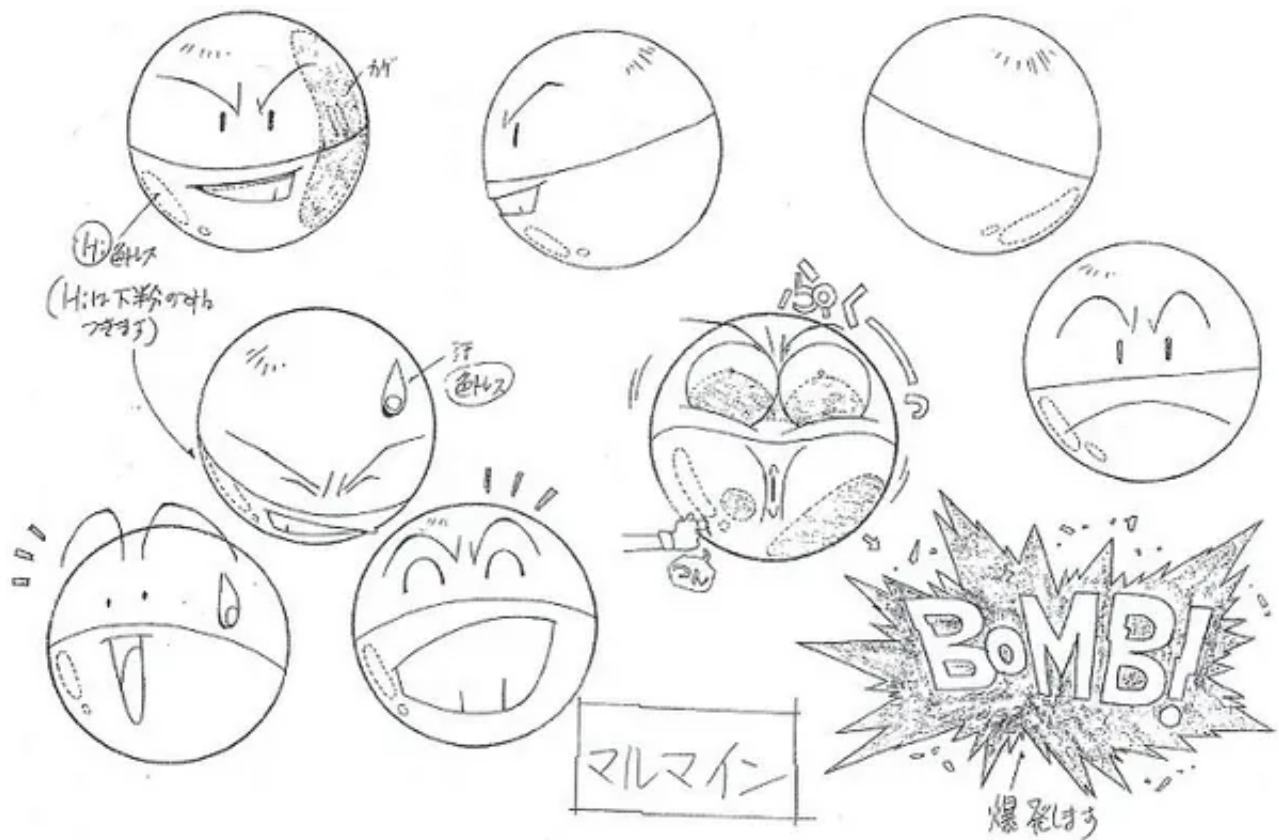
The Design Process takes on many shapes and sizes, but each one starts with a problem. When creating a Pokémon, this problem could come from a variety of places.

In an interview with Game Informer, Pokémon Director Junichi Masuda had this to say:

“The graphic designers are obviously going to be the ones finalizing the look, but it’s not just the graphic designers who come up with ideas or draw the Pokémon,”

Masuda mentions that sometimes a Battle Designer wants to showcase a specific move in the game and needs a Pokémon to own it. In the games, we see lots of Pokémon with weird signature moves, like the special Z-Moves in Pokémon Sun and Moon. It's not tough to imagine that some of these wild moves came before the Pokémon who use them.

Masuda goes on to talk about Pokémon being made for story purposes, such as the Legendary Pokémon featured at the end of nearly every game. Sometimes Pokémon's problem comes from wanting to use an animal they'd never turned into a Pokémon before!



Electrode, the Ball Pokémon.

So, we have our problems, what now?

Typically, at this point in the Design Process, we need to research.

“One thing we always really pay attention to is treating them like living creatures so you have to try and imagine where it would live in the environment and why it looks the way it does, what would it eat? For example, when designing Pokémon, and not just from a graphic design perspective, there must be a reason for why it looks the way it does and you have to think about why it might live in the Pokémon world.”

As Masuda said, designers at Pokémon need a reason for a Pokémon to exist. When designing a Pokémon after an animal, designers would research those animals, think about where they live and what they eat, and use those details to refine their designs.

Which takes us into another step of the process, refining your sketches. At Pokémon, they have a team of designers to look over each design and decide whether or not it should be made into a Pokémon, similar to a classroom critique.

In the interview with Masuda, he goes on to hastily design a poorly drawn three-headed cat Pokémon.

“Even if I said I really wanted to make this, I would probably get shot down.”

From this point on, the Design Process gets tricky.

If we have a finished Pokémon at this point, we’re done! (Kinda...)

If not, we either start over or continue to refine our designs until we have what we want.

In the end, some finished designs even end up getting refined.

In the previously mentioned Sun and Moon, we see old characters like Raichu and Vulpix redesigned as new Pokémon to better fit the environment of the games!



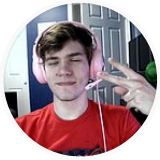
Alolan Raichu, the Mouse Pokémon.

We can see here how Raichu was redesigned as a surfer, riding on its tail. This works as the Alolan Region, the setting for Sun and Moon, is based on Hawaii!

Through this interview we can clearly see that even on a much larger scale, designers use the same processes we do.

Read it yourself here!

<https://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2017/08/10/heres-how-game-freak-designs-pokemon-creatures.aspx>



Written by Matthew Sinclair

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