Ryan Moncrief

Mr. Utter

Game Review I: Gotta Catch ‘Em All

Pokémon is one of the most well-known game series in the entire industry, and for good reason. It is a clever RPG that requires the player to befriend creatures to fight for them, rather than leveling up their own stats or gear. In one of the most well known and well played parts of video game history, Pokémon Red and Blue start by having the player stop by good ol’ professor Oak’s lab, and picking one of three Pokémon: Bulbasaur, Charmander, and Squirtle. While it may seem like a simple choice, the game has an incredibly clever way of changing the difficulty curve for the player based on this one decision. The first hour or two of Pokémon Red and Blue help teach the player what the world of Pokémon is all about, and before they send the trainer out to become champion and stomp team Rocket, they’ve got a few things to learn.

Right off the bat, once you pick your Pokémon, your rival, let’s call him Gary, picks the Pokémon with the exact type advantage over yours. Regardless of your pick, this battle is more or less a glorified game of rock, paper, scissors. If you can attack each turn, maybe boosting your attack, or dampening theirs, you should be able to wipe the floor with Gary. Beyond teaching the basics of battle, this early encounter shows that type advantage isn’t everything. Training and strategy wins battles, but having type advantage doesn’t hurt either, but more on that later. Eventually, the player will have to make a couple trips to and from Pallet Town through the dreaded route 1. This is where the difficulty curve may have a slight bump. If you picked Charmader or Squirtle, congratulations! You have probably already breezed through the route without issue. Unfortunately, the Bulbasaur friends may have a bit of trouble. Pidgeys, one of the two pokemon that can be encountered on Route 1, are flying type. Most of these little birds should not be a problem, but if one happens to unleash a peck attack on our little grass-type friend, he will be in a world of hurt. This is probably the first sign that our Bulbasaur players see that you might have to read the box a little more carefully. “Gotta Catch ‘Em All” isn’t just a catch phrase, it’s how the game is played. Having this immediate disadvantage will encourage Bulbasaur players to grab a rattatta or even a pidgey to help them along, and keep them from losing to flying types. Once you have finished up Route 1, made a pit-stop in Viridian city, and headed out north through Route 2, you’ll encounter the next big challenge for the trainers: Viridian Forest. If Charmader was your pick for this one, you’d be lucky again, because Viridian forest should pose little threat to fire types. As long as the Charmander is a little bit leveled up and has learned at least 1 fire type move, the bug and grass type pokemon should be no problem. Squirtle, on the other hand, will probably be set back a while. In a similar situation to Bulbasaur on Route 1, both Bulbasaur and Squirtle have Bug and Grass type disadvantages, respectively, in this area. If Route 1 was an indication for Bulbasaur players, they should already have a sizable team to take on the forest, and get through. If not, then this serves as a great reminder for them, and a place to learn about team management for Squirtle mains. After they come across a few Kakunas or even a Pikachu, they will be given a sore reminder that not one Pokemon does a trainer make. So, now our trainers have gone through the first few routes, and are ready to take on the next gym, mostly.

Arriving in Pewter city, freshening up for the battle, and heading to the Pewter gym to take on the aptly named Brock is the next step for any aspiring Pokemon trainer. Lucky for our Bulbasaur and Squirtle friends, they have a serious advantage over the rock and ground type Pokemon that the gym throws at them. However, by this point, these trainers will have already gone through some tough spots to learn about Pokemon types, and strategic battling. For our fire types though, this is their first real challenge, and if they rushed through the game up to this point, they will surely be slammed into the dust. Their fire type moves do next to nothing to Brock’s Pokemon, and without any assistance or serious leveling, they will surely fail. This sends the player back into the forest to find a new strategy and new Pokemon. Over the course of the first parts of Pokemon, each respective player is given a taste as to how the game should be played, some earlier than others. This is done in a brilliant fashion: forcing the players to lose *because* of their choice, forcing them to adapt and evolve new strategies and teams. It subconsciously sets up a guideline on how to approach the much more complex challenges later on in the game, and encourages the player to try out new things, and as always, catch ‘em all.