I never thought I’d be reviewing Gen 1 again to be honest. I thought that 25 years on, I and everyone else have probably had said all that there was to say about these games. Most people have already made up their minds about them anyway. There have been enough memes, enough infographics, enough popular folklore and phrases that everyone has seen for there to be two commonly accepted assessments of these games. They are simultaneously extremely overrated and easily the worst of all Pokemon games by most of the fandom’s estimates, and at the same time such a reliable way to grab back the OG fans no matter what stage of life we’re at that they get used this way by GameFreak over and over and over again. And it’s not like I don’t see why people are fed up with them. In a lot of recent Pokemon games and media we can’t seem to stop getting a lot of pandering to the crowd that for the most part only interacts with Pokemon when it references the most heavily nostalgic aspects and then refuses to stick around for anything else. So most people are sick to death of Pokemon Red and Blue and tired of them being brought back up constantly, and I get it. At the same time there’s a large group of people who obviously see them as a point of nostalgia and can really only look at them through the lens of childhood and how we experienced them back in the day, refusing to hear any criticism. So much like Gen 2, the Red and Blue conversation has been boiled down to hyperbole, they’re overly criticized because so many people have seen them as these perfect games through rose colored glasses for so long that people feel like the only way to cut through the bullshit is to blow everything out of proportion. That’s honestly kind of sad, because it means that despite being easily the most discussed Pokemon games over the last two decades, ultimately what isn’t being talked about is content of the games themselves removed from that context. No one is really looking at what they were trying to accomplish with the set of mechanics they chose and the formula they were building from scratch. So I guess that there is still a little more to add to the conversation, and I’ve been thinking about these games a lot lately. People have decided they know these games and that they’re not worth another look, or that they don’t deserve another look because of how many times the same story has been revisited now. But I don’t think that’s true, so I guess it’s up to me to school you dummies.

The main reason I was thinking so much about Kanto lately was that recently, my FireRed LeafGreen review was received as somewhat controversial by the audience. And mind you I don’t take back my criticisms of those games, I stand by what I said. But there were some aspects of them that I mostly glossed over on account of them being remakes, namely that most of what is good about them can be attributed to them being remakes of good games. And yes, I really am coming out here in 2021 claiming Red Blue and Yellow are good Pokemon games. I know, so brave, so controversial. Anyway a few people were disappointed that I didn’t give Kanto the heavy analysis treatment that I gave Hoenn and Johto, and I figured to do that I would need to start at the source and take a look directly at Red & Blue rather than some kind of muddy watered down version of it that changes a bunch of stuff and adds a bunch of stuff on top. We need the pure unadulterated version of the story. And hey since it is the 25th anniversary of these games this year, what better time to do it? Get ready for some hot juicy analysis you nerds.

PART 1

Storytelling

In my last video I talked about how Kanto is mostly perfunctory, a lot of the space for world building is used teaching the player how mechanics work and big picture stuff about the world that Pokemon takes place in. They were the first games in the series, they had a lot to set up and not a lot of room to do that, so it makes sense that they are fairly basic in that regard. In case you missed that video, what I mean is compared to later games in the series, most of the dialogue given to NPCs around the Kanto region mostly exists to teach you basic things about the world of Pokemon, how the mechanics work and what different stats do. Whereas other Pokemon games might use this space for worldbuilding or to elaborate on the theme or message in some way, Kanto has to use this space to get everyone on board with the premise and set up a basic framework for a bigger universe to be built upon. In future installments we have benefitted from Pokemon being established as a franchise with material in other mediums that might supplementarily teach the player about this stuff, the gyms, the typings, the different creatures, things like that, but at the beginning there wasn’t anything they could rely on that could be used to do that job at that point. Red and Green, the very first iteration of Kanto on which all other gen 1 games were based, were built before the anime and the bigger franchise existed where kids might be exposed to some of these concepts in other places. So Kanto has a specific job to do and it does it well for the most part, and that was the point I made the last time I talked about it. But I didn’t go a step deeper and really ask a lot of questions about what kind of framework it does set up. What is the very essence of the world that Pokemon, the entire series but especially Pokemon Red & Blue, takes place in?

Well the first thing to consider is what kind of perspective we are taking this information in through, and Red and Blue establish that Pokemon takes place from a child’s perspective, not just in that it is designed to be played by children but also in the way the world is set up. It’s sort of a subtle thing, but there are some ways in which the game is framed that indicate we’re seeing the world from a kid’s point of view. Children seem small from an adult’s perspective but in Pokemon, children are roughly the same size as adults, the way we see ourselves at that age. Just as capable and with as much ability, blind to our own inexperience and limitations. Things like the government, the economy, are largely absent from this world because they’re not things that children really understand as part of their daily life. If you have ever wondered what the system is, why there are gyms, how you become a gym leader, who is in power, you can keep wondering, because your perspective is the same as a kid that doesn’t understand the broader world yet. Kids are still asking these kinds of questions too. The only times these things are relevant is when they intersect with your daily life. If there is a cop in your way, there is evidence of the state. If there is something you need to buy, there is evidence of money. But the larger systems that produce these things are absent, abstract, undefined. So whatever age the player is, the game is experienced through the lens of childhood, and that’s important to how the game handles its conflict.

All Pokemon games since the very beginning also more or less center around the same conflict set up in this one, which is human progress versus preservation. What things of value are lost or left behind when we advance as a society? As we all know very well by now, the concept of Pokemon was based on the loss felt when Satoshi Tajiri’s home in the Tokyo area became urbanized in the 80’s and all of the natural scenery he grew up in and experienced childhood in was paved over. The social and economic progress during that time period created more room for people in the crowded city of Tokyo to live, but at what cost? In the past we examined this conflict through Hoenn, which represents this through the lens of preservation of natural resources versus expanding space for a growing society. But there are less on the nose ways this theme appears in the series as well. In Sinnoh this conflict was represented by preservation of tradition vs scientific progress and the ability to “play god.” What can we learn from traditions and how can science be a tool we use to help ourselves rather than harm ourselves? And of course, Kanto, even with limited traditional story and character dialogue does introduce this conflict. This time through the way the space itself is used.

It’s interesting, looking back through development information about Red and Green, while games like Gold and Silver would see extensive map overhauls throughout its development cycle, the region of Kanto was more or less already decided on in the first original pitch for what was then called Capumon. It is after all based on the real life greater Tokyo area and Kanto region of Japan, which is the area where the staff grew up and lived and worked. There were a few areas that never got worked into the final game or changed shape in one way or another, but Kanto itself is very much the bedrock that the rest of the game was molded around, staying consistent throughout development. Telling the story of Tokyo was obviously very important to them, it was their home, where they experienced both loss and success. And it ends up being basically the most important character in the game, telling the story that dialogue and scripting alone could not.

Kanto takes you through an increasingly urbanized landscape. In Pallet Town buildings are spread out and sparse, there are long empty routes with few people, and nature is evident all around in woods and mountains. As you progress, you start to see more and more buildings rubbing up against the natural landscape, and more of the dungeons move indoors. More towers and underground hideouts and abandoned buildings contrasted to the natural woods and caves earlier in the game. The routes get denser and full of people. And as that happens you start to see the ways in which nature is lost or destroyed. Pokemon themselves are creatures that kind of personify nature in a way, and help illustrate the way that the environment is being impacted by human presence. Earlier in the game there are more natural, animal-like Pokemon in the wider less urban spaces. Bugs, rats, birds, rocks, bats, snakes, all with very basic designs that are familiar to us as wildlife and natural scenery. But then as you get into the densely populated areas like Celedon City, Grimer show up, polluting the water. Pokemon start looking more like monsters or have man made appearances. Doduo with two heads, Magneton with its metal body, ghosts made of poisonous gas, whatever the hell Ditto is. The only natural looking Pokemon in the late game are in captivity in the Safari Zone. Why would there need to be a nature preserve like the Safari Zone unless nature itself is threatened?

And if Pokemon themselves are emblematic of nature in this story, they’re also the vehicle through which human characters directly interact with nature. Humans have a relationship with Pokemon that can either be beneficial or parasitic, and Pokemon don’t really get a say in that. It is up to us to decide what role nature plays in humanity. All people use nature for different ends. Some to get richer, some to live side by side in harmony, and some study it. Team Rocket is a stand in for humanity’s greed and how it disrupts and destroys in the name of capital. They’re obsessed with using nature to become more wealthy, even to the point of blatant destruction, hurting people and Pokemon, best illustrated by the Marowak in Pokemon tower that is straight up killed by Team Rocket, or the hostage situation and takeover at Silph.

It’s actually kind of interesting to think about Mr. Fuji in this context. He’s found at Pokemon tower and living in Lavender Town caring for orphaned Pokemon, and that’s how he’s first introduced to you, working to help heal nature damaged by humans. But there is text indicating that he founded the Pokemon lab in Cinnabar, which implies that he may have once owned the abandoned Pokemon Mansion, which has journals talking about the discovery of Mew and creation of Mewtwo. At some point the mysterious Mr. Fuji may have abused human progress in science to try to synthesize a powerful Pokemon, presumably in the pursuit of power itself. Though Mewtwo is never explicitly referred to as a weapon, it does have some parallels to the kaiju stories that inspired GameFreak originally. Godzilla for example is a narrative metaphor for man’s hubris in creating the atomic bomb. Perhaps Mewtwo is a smaller version of the same concept. Mr. Fuji atones for what he did by leaving his past behind and in the present trying to protect threatened natural life. But the lab itself still runs, and still actually creates synthetic life. The lab in Cinnabar is supposedly the origin of Porygon and it is still where you can revive fossils. But perhaps this sort of thing is not thought of an abuse of power so long as it is not done in the name of power, considering Porygon is not particularly powerful and the fossil Pokemon were beings that nature created. Maybe they were just throwing a bunch of concepts at the wall to see what stuck and they weren’t all ideas that were fully working together, but it is interesting to consider non the less the way the game juggles ideas of progress as an abuse of power and progress as a positive for creation and restoration.

Speaking of Mr. Fuji, the incompetence of adults is everywhere in this game. It’s in your parents that let you wander into strange cities far from home all alone. It’s in your teacher who asks you to do work that he can’t do because he’s too old. It’s in Giovanni and Team Rocket and how their misguided plans are foiled by just one kid. And it’s in the largely absent state that does not hold bad people accountable for doing bad things, leaving the job up to the very type of person it should be protecting in the first place.

At the very beginning of the game, you are not asked to collect all the badges and become the champion. Instead, Professor Oak asks you to help him study nature. Remember how we established you’re playing from the viewpoint of a child? Well, he asks you, the next generation, to become curious, explore and understand the world. In a way the very game itself is built that way, to force you to use the part of your brain that learns about things, takes in information and solves problems. From the very first town you reach in the game, you find a locked door. As you progress, every time you find one way to move forward through the landscape, you will reach countless new dead ends. If you open one locked door you will find three more behind it. Roadblock after roadblock, dark tunnel after cuttable tree after unidentifiable ghosts after sleeping Snorlaxes. There are so many dead ends in this game, virtually every location becomes important because you have to spend so much time in each space trying to figure out the one thing that will open up your next path forward. I often forget playing through as an adult how much time I had to spend solving these problems and getting past each roadblock on my first playthrough. The world you live in is full of obstacles and things to learn and the only way forward is to do just that. As you travel there are item balls, areas, secrets that are just out of reach everywhere, and the world wraps around so you often find yourself re-exploring these areas you traveled through earlier before you found the tools to help you progress, to reach these things that were once dangling just out of reach. It rewards you for coming back to acknowledge how far you’ve come and celebrates your progress with you.

It's simple but it is a story from a child's perspective after all. One in which the child grows and gains more understanding of the world they live in than even the destructive adults around them. The game asks you to be curious, learn, grow and discover adults aren't always right even in positions of authority. Learn how to be better than the adults that raised you. That's what makes this story, which in a way is part of all Pokemon games, so timeless and why we keep coming back to it despite its simplicity. Learning to be a better person than the example you were molded by is difficult and it’s something you never stop learning to do even in adulthood.

PART 2

Functional design elements

Kanto is not only the basis for storytelling through its environment but also a big player in the flow of the game and even how the game is balanced. After all, once the Team Rocket stuff is resolved, the game doesn’t end. There’s still a lot more to discover through exploration and getting into every nook and cranny to find every Pokemon. Remember, your job isn’t actually to solve the problems of incompetant adults, that is just dumb adults doing what dumb adults do and wasting your time by making their problems your problems. Your job is to learn about Pokemon and to do that you have to find them all, and that doesn’t end once Team Rocket is out of the way. This game did take collection much more seriously than the rest of the series, they really wanted players to try to catch them all.

As you’re exploring Kanto and looking for all those hidden mons in crevices and caves, you might notice that there are actually more dungeons in this game than there are gyms, and it feels fitting to call them dungeons because the traditional JRPG influence is more strongly felt here than anywhere else in the series. Gen 2 may have perfected this concept by really tying all of the ideas together and presenting them more neatly than before, but Gen 1 was very heavily inspired by the games that the developers enjoyed playing and wanted to throw in as many traditional elements as they could fit. You might have multiple different areas to clear before you can even move on to the next city, and though not all of them have Pokemon to catch they do all have their own puzzles and gimmicks. Most dungeons will have a unique environmental obstacle like darkness or spinning floor tiles and almost all of them have an item hidden inside them that you need to get access to other parts of the same dungeon or even access to other dungeons entirely. For example the whole middle of the game revolves around getting up to the top floor of Pokemon Tower. You need the Silph Scope to get past the ghost that is blocking your way to the top floor, so you have to go to the neighboring city Celedon, find a secret switch to open a door to Team Rocket’s Hideout in the Game Corner, then navigate the environmental puzzle of the spinning floor tiles. Then you need to find a key to the elevator in order to get to the deepest level and battle Giovanni, who gives you the Silph Scope you need to get through the tower. What’s your reward once you finally get to the top of the tower? A Pokeflute, used to wake up sleeping Snorlax's that block your path to the West and South. Keys to keys to keys to keys. You know how in later games there’s a section of the bag called “key items?” Well in this game you understand why, because if you don’t drop a ton of items off in your PC after you finish each area you are going to be carrying a ton of literal keys around with you and not have room for loot. While I again would not call this game difficult, because people have weird hangups about calling anything difficult and everyone seems to have a different definition of difficulty itself, I will say that it at the very least leans harder on the problem solving than pretty much any other Pokemon game, isn’t afraid to make you stop and grind even as early as the first gym, and wants you to get stumped and slow down pretty often. For a game that is asking you to learn about the world around you by introducing obstacles that you have to think about and overcome, it does a good job of mounting a challenge that a kid can figure out by exploring enough and gathering enough context clues. Exploration is the answer every time, and while the game often pushed me as a young child to be brave and try things I wasn’t sure I would succeed at, like getting through Rock Tunnel in the dark, it taught that perseverance really can overcome pretty much any obstacle.

-it’s cynical that now the games completely lack these sorts of challenges entirely. They expect so little of their audience

-not only did kids finish these games, more kids played them than any game until sword and shield

Of course your reward for beating the Elite Four might be bragging rights and a credits roll, but your actual in-game reward is access to yet another final dungeon, one so confusing to navigate that they had to redesign it three times. At the very end of this dungeon is that powerful Pokemon Mr. Fuji made, Mewtwo, the Pokemon that was made out of a selfish lust for power. So Mewtwo has to be super powerful somehow to drive that point home, and this is where the game’s balance comes in. You see, having typing was actually a unique idea to JRPGs at the time, most other series focused on building up a small set of party members through better gear and leveling up. But this game had so many different characters and party options that each needed some unique role in a party. One way they accomplished that was by giving each Pokemon a type that would be strong against and weak against other types. So try to keep in mind that this system was designed from a single player standpoint first, that they wanted each Pokemon to have a role in your journey, not necessarily multiplayer. And they needed some types to be stronger than others as a whole to accomplish that.

See, the two most overpowered types on paper compared to the rest in the game are set up basically solely as boss encounters. Before you fight Lance at the Elite Four with his Dragonites, you have scant few opportunities for an ice type. They are only available in Seafoam Islands, a completely optional dungeon that some players might skip, or you are given a single underleveled Lapras that is so far below you by the time you get it that it is basically unusable without deliberate effort. You also have very few opportunities to ever see a Dragon type before the end of the game, and both of the chances you do have are non-traditional encounter types, there’s one you buy at the Casino and the other you can catch in the Safari Zone. I know this is hard to imagine now, but in these days before everyone knew what Dragonite was, they really set it up perfectly as a surprise boss and went out of their way to make it unlikely that you would know how to counter it. It resists the strongest attacks of every starter and the game makes it so that you’d have to have gone out of your way to have raised an ice type by this point for 4x damage. Dragon might be in theory stronger than other types in the game but it is that way on purpose. Imagine what a shock the Elite Four Lance fight would have been in 98 before anyone knew anything about Pokemon.

And Mewtwo is much the same. There’s nothing to counter it because it is supposed to blow you away, it is the tragic atomic bomb Pokemon, created by man and hiding away as far from civilization as it can get. The only other Pokemon that can manage to live near it are strong Pokemon that you also can’t find in the wild anywhere else. Psychic is a slightly more common type than Dragon but there aren’t actually a ton of really big powerhouse Psychic types in the game besides Mewtwo. The closest you’ll encounter is Sabrina’s gym, which is one of the last gyms you’ll fight, or Lorelei’s Slobro. Misty’s Starmie doesn’t know Psychic that early in the game. So it isn’t a huge problem during the story that Psychic is so beefy but it makes for a memorable secret final battle with a one of a kind powerhouse Pokemon, whose power reinforces the message behind its lore.

Of course some might argue that since multiplayer battling was designed as part of the original pitch, they should have taken it into account when designing the types and that it’s still bad game design to have an unbalanced game. And I guess that is a fair complaint, but as someone who has spent a lot of time battling in Gen 1 outside of the main story, I don’t ever notice the typing being a serious issue. What is more of a realistic problem someone might have are some of the mechanics like how critical hits work, some unfair or poorly implemented move mechanics like Hyper Beam, Toxic, Leech Seed, or things that were seemingly designed to be bullshit on purpose, like 1 hit KO moves and wrap.

But in my opinion, there’s actually something fun about how bullshit and unbalanced the battling is. Sure not everyone will feel that way, and that’s understandable, but after playing through all of Stadium 1 with my in-game teams, including Round 2, it has unique strengths compared to later games. For starters, it is super lethal because of the way crits are tied to speed and the fact that so many of the best Pokemon have heavy hitting moves but low defences. That’s exacerbated by the fact that special is a single stat, so any Pokemon with high special, like the scarier Pokemon like Alakazam, are typically super weak physically, which is what every single other Pokemon you’re likely to use is good at, because almost all of the Pokemon with high enough speed to crit are physical attackers. It’s all about speed really, and because of this battles tend to move really fast unless you get tangled up in someone’s intentionally irritating stall gimmick. Crits and 1HKOs make speed management essential, so you end up needing a decent electric type to spread Paralysis, and with some of the most reliable and hardest hitting physical moves being ground types that also means you have a good reason to carry a ground type to counter. To deal with the inevitable ground type you’ll need a water type, and so on. So though the objective “best team” is 6 Mewtwos, take a look at some of the teams that ranked in regional contests in Japan at the time or even some of the prime cup teams in Stadium. There’s a surprising amount of variety in top teams for something so “badly balanced.” There are a ton of different gimmicks to take advantage of here, and while a lot of it is still bullshit and unfair and that might not be everyone’s thing, in my experience it’s the perfect mix of simple hard hitting fun and variety in strategy that makes for a great time. Sometimes gimmicks are fun to use and while they’re not fun to be on the receiving end of, they really spice things up in what would otherwise be just a slamfest. I don’t think that they weren’t thinking about it or totally inept buffoons that don’t know how to balance a game, I think that the final outcome is working pretty much as designed, with the exception of some glitches...

PART 3

Is it a good game? Does it deserve criticism?

So I have been mostly on the defensive so far about this game, and part of that is because I feel that this game has been somewhat unfairly cast in the role of worst Pokemon game ever by virtue of being the first and obviously least polished. It’s also certainly the most annoying maybe next to Sword and Shield in terms of the way the fandom talks about it and the Pokemon company treats it. If you wanna know my feelings about it, personally I don’t even necessarily enjoy replaying Gen 1 at this point just because I have had to do it so much for footage over the last 14 years that I am completely out of team combinations I can make out of the limited 151 in the game, so I am like I said in the last video kind of in the camp of being a little sick of Kanto at this point. But what bothers me more than being personally bored with the games after replaying them way more times than they were ever designed to be is seeing people be dumb and wrong about them on the internet, and I have to say the prevailing narrative about them being bad games seems pretty dumb and wrong. Red and Blue definitely have some problems, but people way overstate the impact that they actually have on play out of frustration about stuff that has nothing to do with the actual design of the game and I get frustrated by how people will just parrot talking points about how unbalanced and buggy it is without actually thinking very hard about the actual practical outcomes of those things in-game. So let’s cool off, acknowledge that there are some legitimate reasons to be frustrated about these games, but then actually take a minute to unpack how these things people complain about function in-game, shall we?

For example, let’s address the most often repeated line I hear about these games, which is that they were held together by “duct tape and wishes.” Some internet famous boy must have said this somewhere because of how often I hear this exact phrasing regurgitated. Of course I have to acknowledge that this is pretty true, this is an extremely buggy game, but I do think that it is unfair to pretend that the bugs ruin the game in any meaningful way or that it ended up this way out of sheer incompetence. Sure GameFreak were inexperienced, and had a very small staff to be working on something of this scale at this point, but a lot of people who played these games either did so as their first video game ever or are returning to an era just for this one title that they otherwise have no experience with. So no one is really looking at the context of what games were just like back then when they call these games the buggiest ever.

When you consider the platform as a whole, the GameBoy library is actually kind of insanely buggy, especially other games of similar scope. Legend of Zelda Link’s Awakening is an extremely buggy game that I never hear anyone give it shit for the same way people rag on about Pokemon being buggy. I even ran into some glitches in the DX Version, the re-release on the GameBoy Color that was supposed to be designed to patch most of the really egregious stuff out, without even looking for them. The Final Fantasy games for the GameBoy, which would arguably be Pokemon’s closest peers, also have serious glitches that can according to this wiki, “render the game unplayable.” The reason for the prevalence of glitches in more complicated Gameboy games of this era was that they were all coded in Assembly, a programming language that is heavily dependent on where things are stored in memory and programmers have to be very careful in how each bit of data is routed and how much memory is used when they had so little to work with. So yeah the GameBoy Pokemon games were buggy, but it is actually kind of a miracle that a) most of the glitches you have to really go out of your way to find and b) almost none of them have any potential to softlock your game or damage your save data, again unless you really go out of your way to accomplish that. The average player in 98 had no idea how buggy the games were until Missingno. became a playground and internet rumor, because you can play the whole game without ever realizing something isn’t working as intended. Of course when people did find out, it was pretty much just fun and games trying to see how far we could push it and how much we could exploit each opening.

It actually makes the Gen 2 games even more impressive in hindsight with how many of these holes they were able to close in the code and how few glitches there are compared to the original games considering they were running on a modified version of the first engine. I don’t think these games ended up this way out of a lack of care or effort, just that what they were trying to do was really difficult with what limited resources they had to work with. It says something that instead of continuing to release buggy unpolished games forever the same way other developers like Bethesda have, they immediately made a concentrated effort to make the follow up games cleaner, to the point that the bugs from that point on have been even more minor and out of the way. There might even be more documented glitches for Pokemon than other titles on the same system just because by now there have been hundreds of people dedicating decades to finding and documenting every possible unintended outcome and oversight in the game. No one gives a shit about anything else on the GameBoy anymore so nobody is spending this amount of time and energy digging up every broken thing they can find in every other game.

The only time the glitches really ever get in the way of having a good time with this game without intentionally trying to exploit them is when you run into in battle glitches, like the Hyper Beam glitch for example making Lance extra lethal or getting locked into endless wraps by the NPCs on the rare occasion that they pull something like that off. That I will say is a justified criticism of the game, but again given the context of programming for the GameBoy at all in this era, I think they’re pretty small problems in the grand scheme and far from game ruining. It really astounded me to see so many people saying that FireRed and LeafGreen absolutely needed to exist in the comments of my last video on the grounds that Red and Blue were too buggy. I find it hard to believe that any players see the glitches as anything but a bonus activity to enjoy at this point. The games are buggy and yes that technically means GameFreak messed up and that we all get to sit here and feel smug for being children back then noticing and exploiting the failings and incompetence of adults, but like it’s pretty disingenuous to argue that Red and Blue are without value and needed to be wholly discarded and rebuilt from scratch on that basis alone. The glitches don’t take away from the experience on any meaningful level and anyone who has actually played the games would know that. Actually in a weird way the glitches kind of reinforce the message that adults aren’t perfect right? They told us to be curious and explore and in doing so we found all of their mistakes and took their game apart. I hope if anything they see that as a success, that they really encouraged us all to learn this stuff about how the game itself works. Tama said glitches are a positive, credibility ruined. Genwunner scum.

Now when people say that the games have aged poorly on the basis of quality of life and graphical polish, that is really the only one of these arguments that holds any water. The monochromatic color scheme, the simple sprites, things just barely graphically representing what they’re supposed to be in the overworld, that sort of thing can be off putting if you are used to more modern games, even other 2D games. Things like having to open the menu to use items or HM abilities, not being able to tag anything to the select button, having very limited bag space and the PC menus being kind of confusing, I get it. Even going back to these games if you just played Gold and Silver, you notice things like not being able to just walk up to water and press A to Surf. Obviously I can’t claim that I am in no way influenced by nostalgia or have no bias, because I played these games extensively during a period of time in my life where I had the patience and time to deal with some of their more “poorly aged” aspects, those things aren’t going to be a roadblock for me the same way they would be for a newer player. I tolerate them now just as well as I did back then because I know what to expect. This sort of thing is ultimately just subjective in the end. I guess actually all of this is subjective. But this is especially the sort of thing that is going to be impacted by what your experience of gaming was formed by and what your expectations are and is going to vary from person to person. When I played these games as a kid, I had no expectations. I started here. If you started somewhere else it makes sense that you might prefer something a little prettier or less tedious. Or maybe even if you started here and then saw how much more improved a lot of this stuff got it is fine to prefer modern installments. But in my subjective experience there are a lot of games that are much harder to go back to than this.

I can’t finish Tomb Raider for example. Still, as an adult. I love Tomb Raider for the Playstation and those games are insanely nostalgic to me, but to me they aged poorly. The tank controls really make getting anywhere so much of a chore that by the time I have solved all the puzzles in a level and finally got to the end, I put the game down because all of that is just so much tedious effort, just maneuvering Lara Croft to face the direction you want and praying that you land your jump, it exhausts me. I have never been motivated to persevere and finish any of those games because it’s too much work to me. Or for example, it is really hard for me to go back to Dragon Warrior on the NES having not grown up with it. I hate having to open a menu to use doors and stairs, I’m not used to that unintuitive clunky control scheme. It makes me laugh at people who say Red and Blue lack quality of life, because oh god they could have made it so much worse. Or Earthworm Jim, there are things about it that just aged so badly. First of all the creator turned out to be a real asshole, and then you play the games with that in mind and realize that they thought it was funny and edgy and cool in the 90s to have a level where you just kill a bunch of puppies. Wow how 90s and in your face. At least Pokemon… well you know what before I praise Pokemon, they did have Jynx. And some of those whips are questionable. So I guess I gotta agree that they aged poorly in that respect. So like I get it. I have had similar experiences with other games from the same era that I can agree aged poorly. I just subjectively don’t have anything in Red and Blue like that that really gets in my way. I just don’t ever use Jynx.

In terms of speed though, I think people often misremember how fast the game plays. This is fine. This is 100% playable. It’s actually fairly speedy even, esp compared to later Gens like Gen 4. Like if you compare the “fastest” Gen, Gen 3, if you compare FRLG to this, I think FRLG might actually be slower. Your walking speed = running speed and oh god is the bike slow in FRLG. In this game the maps are much smaller compared to the remake as well and the time it takes to cross a screen worth of space is smaller because the screen is smaller. It’s actually a fairly fast adventure, there’s nothing really slow about it other than that your character doesn’t have more than one walking speed to choose from. Also the bike is actually usable in this one.

But anyway even if we take for granted that they’ve aged badly or even if you still insist that the balance ruins the game or some other dumb thing, I still wouldn’t call them the worst Pokemon games, not by a long shot. Not when Gen 4 and 6 exist. It’s hard to fail as spectacularly as those games when these games simply could not be as ambitious given the restraints they were under for the time period and also just the fact that they were building the entire conceit for the whole franchise from scratch. It’s kind of amazing how much of what is here is still in the games today, they really haven’t ever felt the need to say “you know what we didn’t get it right 25 years ago, let’s try something else.” Except Gen 7 but given that that didn’t even last, y’know. I guess what I’m saying is I don’t agree that these are the worst way to experience the first gen today, because what you get here is really like the unadulterated experience, a time capsule of what was important to the people who made it when they made it and the genesis of everything we care about today. If you prefer other games with more quality of life improvements, sure I understand, but I hope you understand a little bit more about why these games were the phenom they were at the time.