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# **The Politics of Pokémon**

## **Socialized Gaming, Religious Themes and the Construction of Communal Narratives**

Marley-Vincent Lindsey

### **Abstract**

Twitch Plays Pokémon presented a unique opportunity: sixty to one hundred twenty thousand players aimed to complete a single run of Pokémon: Red Version. Oppositional identities, based on differences in strategy were created, and a player-driven narrative began to form, codified by specific Pokémon and items. Rather than employing a secular theme to navigate a secular space, the moment of confrontation was imbued with religiosity.

This paper seeks to account for the construction of a communal narrative, revolving around the alignment of religious themes with Pokémon through two sources: the transcript of the chat where religious identities were assigned to Pokémon; and the subreddit of the same. The framework of this paper combines threads of research on social media, seriality, anthropology of globalized phenomenon and the specifics of internet gaming and connectivity to analyze the primary sources of this phenomenon.

### **Keywords**

Digital games, Multitude, Seriality, Twitch Plays Pokémon, Iconography, Competition, Convergence,

## **1 Introduction**

The central focus of this paper will be on the role of seriality in producing communal narratives. At heart is an engagement with postmodern modes of communication, and the production of new forms of media and their influence in the development of “Many Input, One Output” games to quote Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux (Boluk & LeMieux, 2012). In the particulars of the case at hand, religion became a mode by which organization could be molded from chaos. Antonio

Gramsci, in *The Prison Notebooks*, noted the role of the intellectual religious classes in developing modes of cultural norms, in order that society might function as an ordered set (Gramsci, 1971). While the more salient aspects of “cultural hegemony” find themselves embedded in discussions of politics within the post-colonial state, it is also useful for identifying such organizational purposes wherein religion is the main tool (Chakrabarty, 2007 Guha, 1997 & Spivak, 1999). It is the experience of the game through time, and its exchange through a global audience that made a basic religious soteriology the easiest way for order to convene itself.<sup>1</sup>

The game in question is a particular run-through of Pokémon, called *Twitch Plays Pokémon* (henceforth, TPP). The innovation of TPP was the use of Twitch.TV’s chat platform as the controls for the game, allowing anyone watching the channel to participate in the game by typing in commands, such as “down” “up” and “A”. After a brief delay, these inputs would be translated into in-game actions that the Pokémon trainer, Red, would follow. While the programmer of this game imagined it might catch a few hundred people, the highest number of observers (and thus, “players”) reached over one million players (Prell, 2014). As such, it is a case study in how the “multitude” to use the terminology of Hardt and Negri, engage with online media (Hardt & Negri, 2001).

The game of TPP was less about Pokémon and more about the attempts of players to coordinate their efforts at live speed in attempts to finish the game. Through this attempt, an in-game religion developed as a means to communicate order within a historical perspective. In order to produce a meaningful discussion on this phenomenon, as well as develop the importance of TPP to both game and religious studies, a couple of things are needed. First, a historical description of *Pokemon* as a game is needed to understand its value to the programmer as something of interest to a number of people, as well as situate it as a form of media that moved between the 20th and 21st century modes of communication. Second, a number of comments given on the notion of seriality by Jean-Paul Sartre will give a means to understand the importance of repetition. Finally, using the archive of the game’s chatlogs, and a number of images, a connection must be given between the mode of repetition from the game, and the role of religion in ossifying a narrative. The narrative in question is not one with huge stakes—people are not crucified for following not following it—but it serves as an interesting case in the development of spreadable media (Jenkins et. al., 2013). The first section of the paper will attempt to draw connections between each of these ideas within the context of recent work within Game Studies, and its intersections both with new modes of producing games and religious ideology.

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1 I offer my deepest thanks to my peer-review readers, as well as Scott Zeng and Jamie Keener for their careful reading and comments.

Part of the benefit of such a large number of participants in a game means that the scholar has more sources available than is normally the case. The sub-Reddit /r/TwitchPlaysPokemon, is incredibly useful as a home base by which one can engage with the real-time history of TPP as it took place<sup>2</sup>. The transformation of this active region of communication into an archive of historical inquiry brings innovation to the problem posed by English Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm, 1959). In the context of his work, Hobsbawm attempted to show the politicization of the English peasant was necessary prior to its incorporation within the proletariat class. Part of the influence of Subaltern Studies was a direct challenge to the concept of the peasant as “pre-political”, part of which found its argumentation in the utilization of archival sources to demonstrate an active political consciousness within modes of Indian peasant rebellion.

In a similar sense, the “multitude” of TPP gains – perhaps not political, as the stakes are not that high – but certainly a readable form of consciousness.<sup>3</sup> In order to “read” this consciousness, I will be limiting my argument to what can be argued through the iconography found on these pages, as well as the transcript of text and commands given in the TPP run. Where these sources come from, as well as a discussion of several examples will take place in the second part of the paper. In order to emphasize the role of religion as organizational, I will be emphasizing three moments in the TPP run, where explanation for events was given by modes of religious understanding.

Even after all this is said and done, there is something that needs to be said about whether there is value in discussing religious constructions within a secularized environment. This is something the editors of *Playing with Religion in Digital Games* points out, in the problems of discussing religious narrative within gaming communities (Campbell & Grieve, 2014). The last section will be dedicated to showing how meaning might be successfully described, through a somewhat comparative approach within the community of TPP and that of an actual church, whose engagements stretched across multiple levels of media and reality.

As such, the usefulness of this paper lies in contributing to a new and evolving discussion about the role of what might be borrowed from Adorno as “mass culture” within game studies and digital media more broadly (Adorno, 2001). The first drafts of this paper were written in August of 2014, during which the advent of Gamer Gate was crashing upon mainstream game media and development (Hathaway, 2014). While the movement is still ongoing, and there are many political repercussions to what it has or has not “accomplished”, I invoke it less for its specifics and more for it being situated around the hashtag #Gamergate, in which anyone with access to an internet

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2 <http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon>: Sub-Reddit “Twitch Plays Pokémon” Last Accessed: September 29, 2014.

3 I connect “multitude” and “peasant” both as substitutes for the political guise of “proletariat.” While each category has its own set of implications, they also serve as subjects unbound by historical circumstance. See Chakrabarty, 2014.

connection and a Twitter account could contribute. TPP serves as another case in which patterns of the multitude might be more broadly derived and understood.

## 2 Methodology and Scholarship Overview

The division between late 20th and early 21st developments in technology and communication are staggering. There have been major changes between a system like Pong, the development of the arcade, and the current day in which Twitch.tv serves as a medium by which ideas and developments in games are rapidly exchanged (Kent, 2001). To highlight the present case, one only need look at the world record set by Cosmo for *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* in July, 2014 (McWhertor, 2014b). Where a decade earlier, this run would have existed only within his memory and the memory of anyone physically present, it now was recorded, and streamed live for an audience of seven thousand people. The notion of “game completion” itself has also fundamentally changed. Cosmo’s speedrun clocked in at just under 19 minutes, which is impossible unless one makes full use of the game’s glitches. These glitches have become easier to communicate in the era of Twitch. Where easter eggs and hidden glitches took individuals a longer period of time to figure out, the connectivity of the Internet has made the process of sharing such glitches a more efficient process, resulting in more developed competitions (Whitehead, 2014). Indeed, one of Cosmo’s central contributions to the speed-run community is one of the first websites and forums dedicated to hosting speed-races, in order to further the process.<sup>4</sup>

Peter Cowhey suggested an important connection between the nascent Internet of which he wrote and that of the old Roman highways.<sup>5</sup> Both were novel forms of network, who have shown very different results than their initial creators intended. For the Romans, this included the development of new vocabulary: *latro*, *latronis* became a noun that was specific to the concept of “highwayperson”. For the present, it has meant modes of interconnectivity by which old paradigms of capital and resistance have been re-configured time and again. In a similar sense, the Internet has fundamentally changed the old paradigms of games. Where the conception of a gamer, locked in a basement, spending time with a glowing screen begun, we now see gamers as cultural and national icons. As an example of this transition, we might look at one of the very first novel engagements with gaming in the early 21st century. A mockumentary series, entitled “Pure Pwnage” (pronounced “ownage”), followed the antics of a hardcore pro-gamer whose handle was “teh\_pwnerer”. In

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4 <http://www.speedrunslive.com>.

5 Peter Cowhey, “Building the Global Information Highway: Toll Booths, Construction Contracts and Rules of the Road” in William Drake ed. *The New Information Infrastructure* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1995) 175-204.

Episode 4, viewers are introduced to teh\_pwnerer's trainer, "teh\_masterer."<sup>6</sup> Teh\_Masterer is shown dressed in a ninja outfit, playing four games at once and beating them in record speeds. It is later said in the series that teh\_masterer's ninja outfit was the result of fifteen years in a basement, where the only light he received was that from the output of his computer screen.<sup>7</sup> As a result, his skin was super sensitive to any form of light.

Contrast this to the representation of a professional gamer later on in the series. In Episode 15, we are introduced to the character Terrence "T-Bag" Brown, who is a professional Halo player and whose success has endowed him with six figure salary and claims to have Bill Gates on his favorite contacts<sup>8</sup>. As the transcendence of "urban" as "cool" will not be covered in this essay, I will leave my description at Terrence's cockiness, attitude and wealth is reflective of a professional athlete's work in her prime. As such, we see the description of video games shifting between old and new modes of production within narratives, even in the short span of a couple years. There is also a layer of connectivity engaged. Teh\_Masterer is a solo gamer, who interacts with others sporadically, but spends most of his time alone. Terrence hosts parties, "talks trash" to other players on Xbox live, and uses his credentials to improve his social standing. The impact of Internet and connectivity on the games we play has had long-term effects for how we perceive the construction of gamer identity and networks.

This evolution of connection within the context of all gaming spheres has now influenced the development direction of gaming practice itself. TPP reflected such connection through Reddit and Twitch, two sites whose inspiration was drawing together like-minded individuals based on their commitments to gaming. Unlike purely competitive modes of gaming, there is also something specific to the engagement of *Pokemon*. It had initially been constructed as a method of engaging the world prior to the full development of connectivity via the Internet. As we will see later, it evolved with cards, games, magazines and TV in order to assist in building the world in which *Pokemon* resided. Such world-building meant that *Pokemon* existed in a slightly different context than the games featured on Pure Pwnage.

As the boundaries of TPP are so porous, scholarship has also been helpful in giving them some more definition. Richard Ferdig's conceptions of "player capital" and "game challenge" become re-oriented such that they completely overlap. The challenge comes from the massive number of players attempting to complete the run *simultaneously* (Ferdig, 2014). Rachel Wagner's development of the "earnest" gamer allows us to separate those who play to beat this game and those who play to stall it (Wagner, 2014). TPP was able to bypass the inevitable number of

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6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aku3rA7Im78>, 9:20.

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTBC4AQ67-M>, 26:00

8 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8st\\_3a3ZQY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8st_3a3ZQY), 10:50 is his first appearance. His description about his life starts at 12:00.



“cheaters” and “triflers” that may have stymied progress, but even the perfect game run would be inevitably surrounded by repetitive commands (Prell, 2014). As such, the network of TPP players separated the individual experience of playing the game from the communal one. Something innocuous, like selecting an item once, means little for a single player. Selecting that same item thousands of times an hour, between seventeen thousand players, however, becomes significant in the development of assigning order to chaos.

Within any game, there are a continual number of “ordinary activities”, primarily concerned with the physicality of the game. In Pokémon, I use the D-Pad to signify where I would like to move. I hit “Start” in order that I might select items. I hit “A” so that I can confirm my selections. When I operate on my own, such a performance hardly qualifies as meaningful since the “accidents” – perhaps going the wrong direction – have no power within them. On the other hand, when sixty thousand individuals are continually hitting “Start” and selecting the “Helix Fossil”, then the power of the ordinary action begins to interfere with the progress of the game on the whole. In other words, the key to these actions becoming significant is their becoming redundant. In this regard, it becomes important to discuss the seriality of such moments within the TPP run. As explored by Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux in a paper entitled “Hundred Thousand Billion Fingers: Oulipian Games and Serial Players”, the question of seriality is one of generative content (Boluk & LeMieux, 2012). Here, the authors are concerned with the application of seriality into metagaming practices within video games on a whole:

Instead of executing the game in a discrete, sequential order, these examples convert the player’s labor into a visual cacophony as hundreds of Marios simultaneously follow all possible paths as they traverse a level. McClure sees this ‘Mario cloud’ as an emblem for the multiplicity of potential action suggested by the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics. In the Many Worlds Emulator, the struggles of one hundred playthroughs are collaged within the same frame. (Boluk & LeMieux, 2012, page 29)

TPP uses this particular approach, replacing a single input with that of thousands. And while there is only one *recorded* output (the movement of the character), the transcripts of TPP demonstrate how many people were involved in the development of that one output (Archive, 2014). As a result, it answers the question posed by Boluk and LeMieux:

But what happens when the reset button is removed? When in-game actions are not only recorded and analyzed, but also reorganized into new forms of play? What happens when the metagame is fed back into the system? (Boluk & LeMieux, 2012, page 17)

Jean-Paul Sartre, as cited by Boluk and LeMieux, has written extensively on the concept of seriality as paradoxically isolating and communicative (Sartre, 2004). This is taken in the example of the newspaper: a series of individuals waiting for a train reading a newspaper both reflect the feelings of increased isolation, while participating in an institution that subconsciously enforces the notions of nationality. In *Pokémon* a similar comparison might be made to the number of hours required to read, to watch and to imbibe every aspect of that world. However, it is not simply the relationship between the knowledge of the individual player and the society of players in which she resides that constitutes this seriality – it also exists in the relation of each player to each other player. To quote Sartre's discussion on seriality as it relates to anti-Semitism testing the idea of the Jewish subject:

Thus, for example, if there is an outbreak of anti-semitism, and Jewish members of society are beginning to be accused of 'getting all the best jobs,' then for every Jewish doctor or teacher or banker, every other banker, doctor or teacher will constitute him as dispensable (and conversely). (Sartre, 2004).

The exchange between players themselves saw the negation of their experience, but also their dispensable nature when compared to the thousands of other players engaged within the run. The processes by which the connection between players are understood is covered in detail within Anne Allison's work on the ways in which *Pokémon* represented not only a game, but a world. This was reinforced by the composition of materials within which *Pokemon* took place. In the words of Allison,

*Pokémon* is a media-mix complex – of electronic game, *manga*, television *anime*, trading cards, movie and character goods – where the basic concept is an imaginary universe inhabited by wild monsters that children capture, then keep in balls in their pockets. (Allison, 2006, page 196)

Players within *Pokemon* are not simply players. They represent, in some very basic sense, world-builders. To participate in catching *Pokemon* or playing its games meant joining a community in which *Pokemon* was a lifestyle. Thus, in the case of *Pokémon*, the magic circle transitions to envelop not just the solitary process of the game, but also the interactions and relationships in which the game is engaged; thus, head designer Tajiri Satoshi's inclusion of particular *Pokémon* who could not be obtained without trading between players (Allison, 2006).

This creation process could be extended further into a discussion of players as subcreators, demonstrated by the communities that developed around TPP. I will refrain from the larger question of the relationship between play and creation (Hemminger, 2014). For me, it is enough that play, in regards to the overlap between players and challenge, becomes distinctly "creative". From this

generative space, we are given exploits and glitches in single player games. We are given perfected strategies, cleanly executed in multiplayer games. Each of these is brought home by the viewer of such a performance, and attempted in her own play, which creates a new tree of possibilities of engagement between player and game.

In a globalized world, such creative power has become more oriented towards and produced by consumers. Jenkins, Ford and Green explore this relationship extensively, using the example of Susan Boyle's audition. Their argument for media's spreadability relies on the distinction between consumers and producers becoming more blurred. As a more recent example, the rise of "doge" came from a relatively unknown consumer in Japan, whose collection of Shibe Inu photos was released onto the internet. From this, its discovery and codification as human expression led to a successful circulation of the image as a globalized icon, having real-world effects (Chappell, 2014.) The evolution of *Pokémon* from the insect typography of Satoshi to the inspired collusion of one hundred twenty thousand people across the world is the story of a world created in the image of late modernity, to one of postmodernity. (Allison, 2006 & Bogost, 2006). To capture this transition and the appeal of religion as an organizational tool is a valuable discussion.

### **3 Pokémon: Game and World.**

*Pokémon: Red Version* was initially released in 1996, by 4Kids Entertainment. It would serve as part of what Anne Allison has referred to as the globalization of Japanese culture (Allison, 2006). Shows like *Dragonball Z*, *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* and *Sailor Moon* gave a context in which *Pokémon* as a show, card game and video game would prove successful. The engagement with this wave of culture in the late twentieth century were as much commentary on the relationship between states as they were between individuals. Allison traces the history of Japanese gamemaking to before, and immediately after the Second World War. Japanese toys had become known for both their quality and relatively low prices. American GIs, within the first decade of Japanese occupation would pass on leftover deposits of tin, and other metals, the Japanese would then use to create toy trucks, soldiers, and other war toys (Allison, 2006, 35-39). While there is a fascinating commentary on subjugated power in this regard, it is more interesting in my mind the general theme Allison sketches in regards to the tradition of Japanese toymaking. Even the first generation of cultural exports, *Godzilla*, becomes a battlefield between which the cultural distinction of the minority had to be appropriated and re-oriented to match with the desires of the colonial masters. Thus, *Godzilla* transitioned from a costumed character, whose origins in the nuclear aftermath of Hiroshima had

left him with a deep mutation of both mind and body, and distinct Japanese character, became the mindless killer with little development on the side of the Americans (Allison, 2006, 47-49).

Pokémon was one of the first games that was capable of refusing this tradition of cultural transformation. While some aspects of it were still localized—for example, the expansion of player versus player Pokémon battles—it remained relatively untransformed. Satoshi, the game’s designer, was committed to keeping the game in its origins as a means of social interaction. Upon interest in expanding Pokémon into a global brand, Nintendo first proposed a similar mode of appropriation for the Pokémon brand, in order to turn it into something familiar with American audiences in particular. The narrative that Allison tells of Pokémon contrasted starkly with that of Japanese game exports in the past. Rather than seeking to align itself for an easier assimilatory process, the game had no intention of ever leaving the domestic market, and was not easily translatable from *kawaii* to *cool*. Nor did the designers desire such a translation. From their perspectives, Pokémon had to remain a chiefly Japanese export (Allison, 2006, 236-241).<sup>9</sup>

A history of *Pokemon* is essential to understanding what aspects of the world would be of interest to such a large player database. The ease by which one was capable of learning the games, and the wide variety of characters meant that Pokémon was a game that would necessarily appeal to a large audience. However, it was a game that largely escaped the globalization process.<sup>10</sup> Rather than the global markets transforming Pokémon, it was Pokémon that transformed the global market. Each element of gameplay transcended its localized origin; so long as the player had access to the medium by which the game was played, it could be played in a uniform sense. Much as chess players do not need a common language in order to discuss the best play in a situation, Pokémon players were equally flexible in regards to their associative and communicative prowess. Within the first month, every earnest player knew which Pokémon had to be traded in order to ensure the evolution of those Pokémon, and language would not prohibit such a communication from being made, if the possibility arose.

In a similar vein, we might ask as to whether the imposition of religious order within TPP distorted the initial project of *Pokemon*. This hearkens to one of the many debates of the cultural turn, in which we ask whether Western categories are the best way to approach non-Western subjects.<sup>11</sup> However, even as the game retained its Japanese identity, it still participated in the global language of capital.<sup>12</sup> As briefly explored in fields that range history to literature, we may

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9 Anne Allison, “Gotta Catch ‘Em All” Millennial Monsters, 236-241.

10 This is to differentiate from the process of *localizing* games. Rather, globalization refers to the process by which games seek to fit the specifics of Western paradigms, rather than the individual influence of particular markets. For localization, see Peter Likarish “Filtering Cultural Feedback” in Campbell, *Playing with Religion*, 170-190.

11 McKinnon, “Sociological Definitions”, pages 74-76.

12 Here I refer to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s discussion of capital’s potential to “universalize” particular aspects of history and culture. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*.

understand that these distortions are introduced by capital's ability to exploit and use marketable commodities from a variety of origins. In this regard, I use religion as a category to analyze the game of Pokémon that was globalized through the transmission of capital. Any such distortion, thus, existed prior to the application of Western categorization, and using such categories to discuss globalized products ought not be nearly as questionable a proposition, should one ascribe to such regional conceptions of inquiry.

In 1998, when Pokémon first broke onto the global stage, the Internet was still in its infancy. So were the individuals to whom Pokémon was most aggressively marketed. The author of this paper was six during the year, and remembers first playing through the game and cards as an immersive experience. While he had played *Tetris* and *Super Mario*, Pokémon marked the first moment in which a game became a world for him as a player. Nintendo executives noted this as part of the initial interest in the game. And it transcended the limits of normal games by marking itself with a TV show, with toys and with cards, all of which could be used in turn to build social relations. The connectivity of the Pokémon world allowed for a successful orientation in which this generation of children spent a large number of hours creating and maintaining presence both within and outside of the game world.<sup>13</sup>

Such connections existed to further our engagement in the Pokémon world or to continue making the world a reality outside of the game. It would be an exhaustive procedure to give a list of such behaviors. As a few examples: link battles/trades, getting up to watch the show, going to Pokémon card events, going to releases and Pokémon Centers, discussions of Pokémon and button smashing during battles and attempted captures. Each of these actions made for a successful immersion into the Secondary Reality of Pokémon's Kanto region. Magazines were published with the intent of disseminating information about strategy. Players continually discussed methodologies and preferences for certain Pokémon based on assessed goals.<sup>14</sup> It took less than a month to understand the Psychic type in generation one was broken, since there existed no Bug Types powerful enough to keep the legendaries, like Mewtwo and Mew in check. This engagement was continued with the release of later card sets, seasons of Pokémon, and games, each of which expanded on the mythological cartography, known dataset of Pokémon themselves, and added further mechanics.

This first wave was largely the first generation of what Hardt and Negri call postmodernization. In this process, "information replaced industry." What was important in the development of the *Pokemon* world was less the materialism of the cards and the toys and more the

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pages 16-20.

13 Something alluded to by scholarship, see Allison, 206-215.

14 This somewhat parallels Henry Jenkins' discussion of *The Matrix in Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).

information they conveyed in developing the *Pokemon* world. The Internet's maturation only sped the process by which information became the dominant paradigm. Websites and forums like *Pokemonshowdown* and *PokeWiki* were focused not on the collection of toys and books, but on giving participants the information they needed to continue being involved. New children became indoctrinated into the Pokémon world, and demand for a continued narrative increased. Thus, by 2014, there were six generations of games, sixty sets of cards (with two others never released in English), and more than two generation of kids who had engaged with the game in a significant sense. Even more interesting were the sorts of competitions that developed. The World Pokemon Championships this past July were the culmination both of the large interest in such a project and the importance of information.<sup>15</sup> *Pokemon* battles were determined by the amount of information each player could retain on statistics for attack and defense, as well as what moves each Pokemon could know, and against what they were strong and weak. By these means, consumers became basic forms of producers. To quote Jenkins et. al.,

This shift from distribution to circulation signals a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of preconstructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined. (Jenkins et. al., 2013, page 3).

In February, 2014, one such consumer began to reframe *Pokemon* media. Where *Twitch.tv* had been constructed for players like Cosmo to connect to other players looking to develop their skills and watch the latest matches, an anonymous programmer saw an opportunity. By using Java to build a connection between the input of *Twitch.Tv*'s chat function and an emulator playing *Pokemon Red*, Twitch itself became the mode for a game (McWhertor, 2014a). The game was not only a global phenomenon, but its controls were also incredibly simple. When the player begins, it sets you to control one trainer, named by default "RED". After receiving the first Pokémon (a selected choice between three Pokémon, only available at this point), the player is given a Pokédex, which operates as an encyclopedia for the Pokémon seen and captured. The player then has her first battle against her computer rival, who conveniently takes the starting Pokémon that is a direct counter to the Pokémon of the player. After this first engagement, the journey begins properly, and the player navigates the land attempting to complete two goals: defeat the Elite Four, and capture all different types of Pokémon. With clearly defined controls and goals, the game was optimal for the programmer's experiment of crowdsourcing a single-player game. The controls were implemented through a d-pad, with "start" "a" and "b" to navigate conversations and menu. For this social

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15 Unknown, "A Monumental World Championships!" *Pokemon.com*, July, 2014: <http://www.pokemon.com/us/pokemon-news/a-monumental-world-championships/>, last accessed: September 29th, 2014.

experiment, the programmer used the “chat” function of a *Twitch.tv* channel to log commands for the game. Thus, someone observing the run of Pokémon: Red could control the game by sending words such as “up”, “left” and “start” into the chat channel. The experiment was to see whether a larger number of players would be able to finish the game.

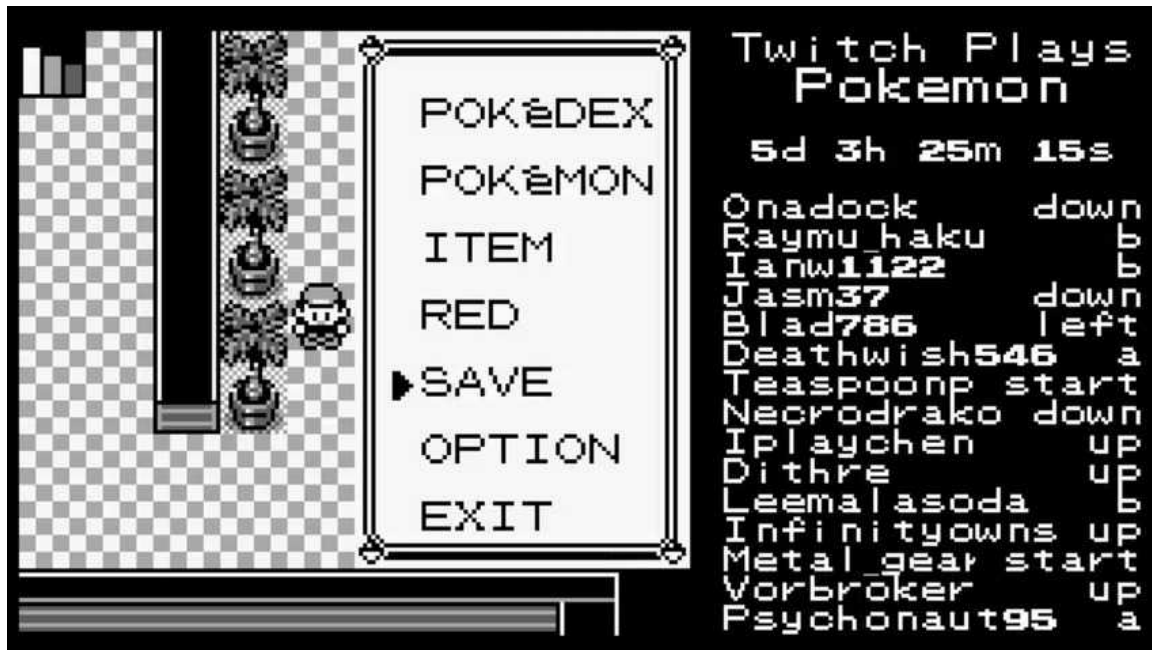


Figure 1: A sample of the stream that was visible. Day 5. Hour 3, Minute 25, Second 15.

The programmer had conceptualized doubted the popularity of the game would extend in any meaningful sense (McWhertor, 2014). The sheer number of players gave the TPP experiment a different feel than any sort of game or runthrough that had come before. Indeed, the only thing that might draw comparison was Gary Kasparov’s match against the world, in which an online forum, moderated by a panel of Grandmasters served as “the World”, with the conception that anyone with an Internet connection could feasibly contribute to the match<sup>16</sup>.

As a final note on the game, I would like to draw a connection between the discussion of seriality and the specifics of Pokémon. Early in J.Z Smith’s essay, he makes a significant point in a definition of religion:

There is a thin line, as Freud most persuasively argued, between the neurotic act and religious ritual, for both are equally ‘obsessed’ by the potentiality for significance in the commonplace. (Smith 1982, page 56)

16 For a firsthand source, see Gary Kasparov Kasparov Against the World (New York: KasparovChessOnline, 2000).

This is not to suggest a direct relation between ritual and action, but it does give a means by which to understand the basis of religious modes of organization in the endlessly redundant commands. A number of items and Pokémon became potential targets for religious worship, specifically owed to the transition between individual and collective selection. On an individual level, each player had the experience of selecting items, and reading Oak's response, or capturing certain Pokémon in certain areas. On a collective level, these experiences were subject to the randomization of serial input. At certain points, items were discarded, and Pokémon were released. One of the most popular, rare Pokémon, Charmander, would be released by accident. Pokémon and items that sought long-term places in the rapidly developing soteriology would need to survive each successive purge. Two examples best exemplify this survival, and subsequent deification: The specific item of the Helix Fossil, and the Bird Pokémon, Pidgey.

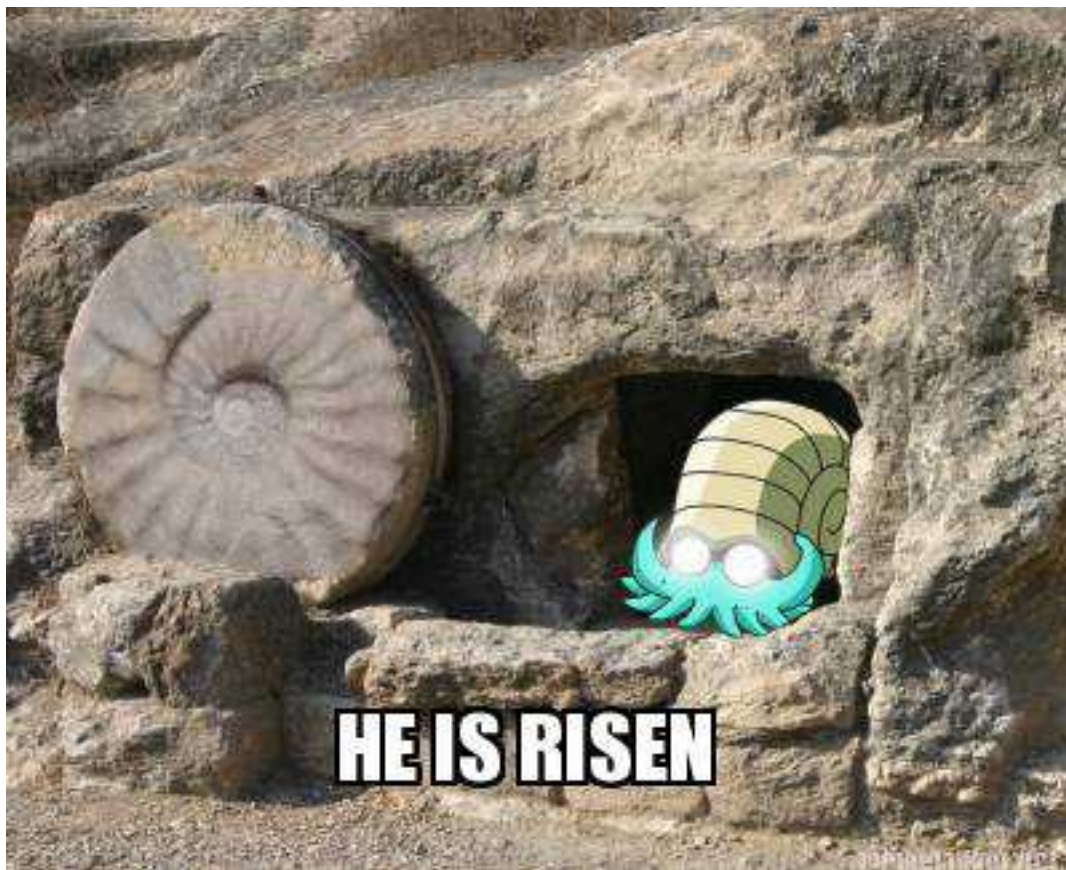


Figure 2: Omanyte rises from Helix fossil. Source: <http://imgur.com/gallery/vpRj4X9>



Giving a narrative created by the hundreds of players required an item or Pokémon that was continually selected throughout the game. That players focused on the Helix rather than the S.S Anne ticket, or a number of other objects, was the result of several factors.

First, the Fossil belonged to a class of item we might call ‘semi-permanent.’ In this class are items that could not be taken out of inventory. When a player attempts to “sell” or “toss” the Helix, she instead receives a message from the Professor exclaiming “This is too important to [sell or throw] away!” When she attempts to use it, the Professor shouts “This isn’t the time to use that Red!” The Helix Fossil thus survived purge after purge until it could be used properly.<sup>17</sup>

The second factor was its role as a late-game object. The function of the Fossil is to become a Pokémon. This can only happen just before the battle for the seventh badge, when the player is almost done with her commitment to the Gym Leaders, and is about to move on to the Indigo League. Thus, it is not simply a semi-permanent object, it is a late-game object, something that usually signifies power.

Third, it was part of a dichotomy. When the Helix Fossil is selected, there is another option: the Dome fossil. The narrative of both these items state they were part of an ancient sea, from the beginning of time. The selection of the Helix was not simply an acceptance of Helix; it was also rejection of Dome. In this regard, it parallels nicely with several facets of religious organization, in which practitioners often have to make a plurality of choices that fundamentally stem from the words of Augustine,

Thus, to forsake God and to exist in oneself—that is, to be pleased with oneself—is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come closer to nothingness. (Dyson 2014, page 609)

In the particulars of Christianity, this is the choice between good and the absence of good. Indeed, as early as the Ledge, we begin to gain a sense of this dichotomy:<sup>18</sup>

2014-02-15 13:51:56 <tendo28> IF WE WORSHIPPED THE DOME FOSSIL THIS WOULDN'T BE HAPPENING.

Pidgey was less secure, and this was reflected in the history of the narrative. As any good Pokémon trainer knows, the mythology of the Starting Pokémon is typically dominant. Any of the three Starters tends to have stronger stats than the wild Pokémon, and there is only one chance to obtain a Starting Pokémon: at the beginning of the game. The choice of one eliminates the others. On the

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17 Unknown, “Pokémon Red and Blue/Mt. Moon.” StrategyWiki.org: [http://strategywiki.org/wiki/Pok%C3%A9mon\\_Red\\_and\\_Blue/Mt.\\_Moon](http://strategywiki.org/wiki/Pok%C3%A9mon_Red_and_Blue/Mt._Moon), last accessed: September 29th, 2014.

18 Transcript, February 15, 2014

other hand, Pidgey is available widely at a variety of levels. Pidgey's only significance is often being one of the first few Pokémon captured, alongside Rattata and Caterpie or Weedle. Pidgeys and their evolutions are often used in multiples by a variety of trainers and battles. As a result, a number of other Pokémon were also given narratives alongside Pidgey, and there would have been less unique about Pidgey in this narrative had it not endured as a Pokémon that was never accidentally released. As we will see later, Pidgey would receive its deification as being able to defeat a Gym Leader on its own.

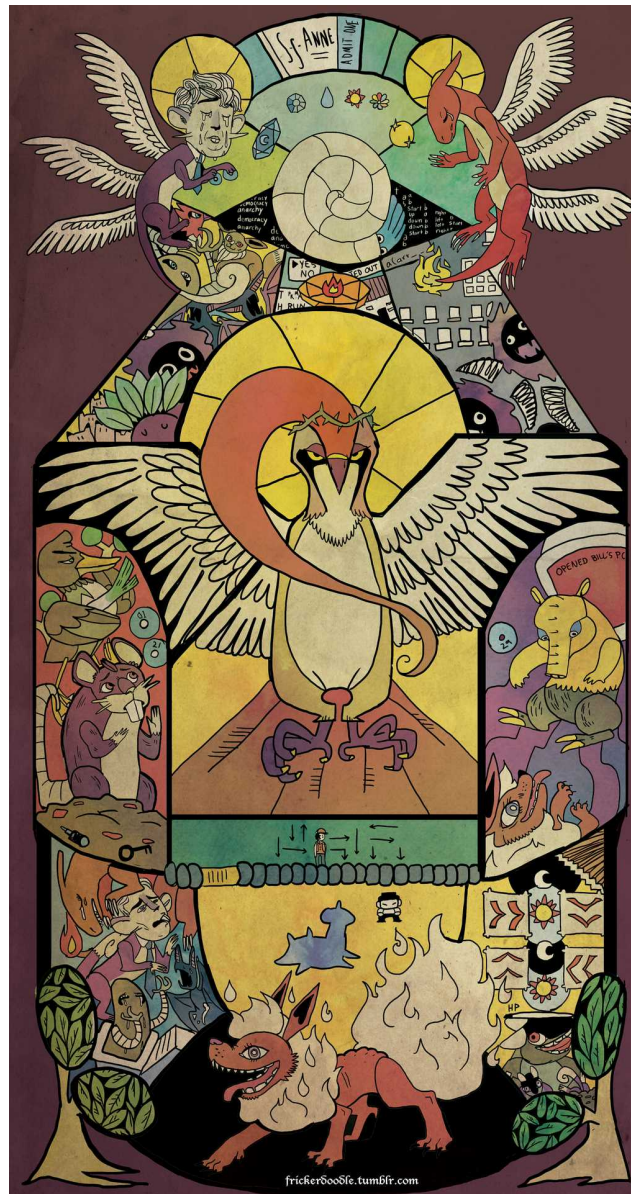


Figure 3: Source: <http://shyree.deviantart.com/journal/Twitch-art-437345748>

Here, we see the eventual place Pidgey will take in the narrative: as Bird Jesus. Front and center is the third evolved form, Pidgeot, surrounded by a number of Pokémon who had been released throughout the journey, with the badges acquired at the moment of Pidgeot's deification. At the bottom, we see Flareon, the false prophet as a demon, something we will explore later. Thus, the answer to the questions of Boluk and LeMieux seems to be a desire to craft order from chaos. The narrative was largely self-built, within real time, where if one takes a cursory glance through the number of images and words, seemingly from randomized instances of action. Perhaps owed to other social reasons, this order found itself in an explicit mode of religious re-production. And as it continued to be inscribed, the religion reflected "human desire to impose order on a chaotic earthly environment," (Wagner, 2013). The relationship between world-building, and to that extension, sub-creating, in creating order has been explored by Peter Berger most prominently (Berger, 1967). As such, religion and order continued to feed each other within the context of 21st century media.

#### 4 The Ledge

The Ledge Problem arose early in the game run. After the defeat of the third Gym leader, the players encountered a ledge. Within the game, ledges are jumpeable lines. Once jumped, they cannot be crossed over until the player encounters a path for such a purpose. Thus, jumping off a ledge is a semi-permanent decision, since getting back above it can take time and effort that was otherwise unplanned.

In this case, there is one particular Ledge, noted with a capital L. This Ledge runs for about two game screens, as part of an extraordinarily narrow pathway. In order to proceed, the player must walk, and maintain her position above the ledge throughout the entire length of the two screens without jumping off. If she does, she has to walk back, and start again.

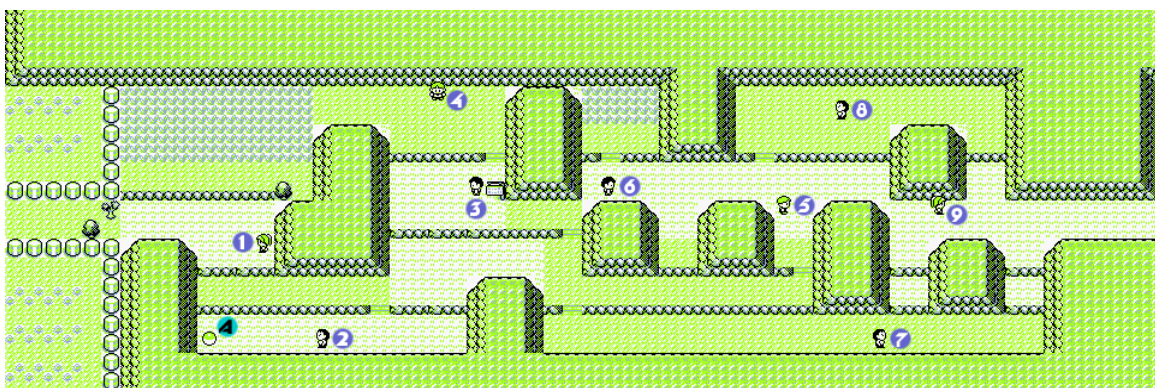


Figure 4: The Ledge is on the bottom.

Source: [http://cdn.wikimg.net/strategywiki/images/b/b0/Pokemon\\_RB\\_Y\\_Route09.png](http://cdn.wikimg.net/strategywiki/images/b/b0/Pokemon_RB_Y_Route09.png)

In the individual experience, the ledge presents very few problems. The dexterity is a difficult requirement for a run with seventeen thousand people.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it seemed like every time the players approached the ledge, they were bound to jump off. As it happened, the subreddit began to circulate a series of threads about the people who were jumping off the ledge. It was believed that it was a set of trolls from 4chan was jumping off the ledge in order to frustrate progress. The logic for this trolling, if it existed, may never be known without a deep analysis of the 4chan archive. However, it seems a safe projection that Wagner's categories of non-earnest gamers would apply here: any individual who saw no point in the run, or decided against achieving the goals set out by the majority of players would fit neatly into her classification (Wagner 2014, page 203-204). Thus, the Ledge became a strategic battle between "earnest" and "other" players.

The solution was a strategic innovation, one that put into effect the new modes of mass communication. On Reddit, a number of players had pointed out that there was a 30 second delay between when a player input something in the chat, and when the program accepted the command, creating a bottleneck of sorts.<sup>20</sup> It was further pointed out that however many trolls were involved, they could not be more than the number of earnest players. Based on these points, it was proposed that players encourage the stream to spam "START", which opened the menu. This would allow the earnest players to coordinate with each other, and immediately begin spamming "right". The idea was that the number of "right" would overwhelm the number of "down" and that the stream would clear the ledge before the ledge could be jumped. To this end, there began a stream of players attempting to convert others to the plan:<sup>21</sup>

Shurtagal (2014-02-16 4:23): check the progress on reddit.

Indigo\_prophet (2014-02-16 4:48): Shiet, we're on the front page of Reddit!

Chalkypink (2014-02-15 13:59:27): Can someone link the google doc

Ambit\_sja (2014-02-15 13:59:37): [provides the link]

Chalkypink (2014-02-15 14:00:27): Can someone link the google doc

Zombi (2014-02-15 14:00:35): [provides the link]

Mizion2012 (2014-02-15 17:02): start is god

Teosihier (2014-02-15 17:03): STRATEGY MEETING GUYS [reddit link]

Ianthesoupdude (2014-02-15 17:03): STRATEGY MEETING GUYS [reddit link]

Veterandawg (2014-02-16 17:15): reddit is why there's more people today

19 Dein\_nomos2 (2014-02-15, 16:59): WHY DON'T WE ALL SLOW DOWN AND PRESS START, OH WAIT THERE'S 17000 OF US.

20 Alex\_Rose "The Metra Strat or How We Beat the Ledge." Reddit.com, February, 2014:

[http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y1ee8/the\\_meta\\_strat\\_or\\_how\\_we\\_beat\\_the\\_ledge/](http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y1ee8/the_meta_strat_or_how_we_beat_the_ledge/), last accessed: September 29, 2014.

21 Transcript, February 15th-16th, 2014.

There are countless other examples of players pointing to the Reddit and its Google Document with the proposals to counteract the strategies. The spreadability of Reddit was used to defeat the “player challenge” of the trolls. This isn’t to say there was complete overlap between the Reddit population and players on a whole—indeed, there were some earnest players who were missing the point of Start.<sup>22</sup>

Sintsuke (2014-02-16 4:30): I’m paying 100 bucks for every person you kill that says start.

Eventually, the strategy succeeded. After just over twenty-four hours of struggling with the problem, TPP successfully navigated past the ledge twice in seven minutes. And within the aftermath of celebration, there was a common thread:<sup>23</sup>

Skletoner (2014-02-16 7:25): AVE HELIX AVE HELIX AVE HELIX AVE HELIX [cont.]

Consult\_the\_fossil (2014-02-16 7:26): OUR FAITH HAS BEEN REWARDED.

This had been briefly coming in and out of the chat prior to this moment, but it was also focused immediately after the successful completion. And such outbursts made sense. The community of players had successfully navigated against a serious challenge and overcome it. Some players knew it was a successfully premediated strategy. Others thought it was blind luck. It resulted in the continued insistence of the Helix Fossil as divinely ordained to guide the players through the seemingly nonsensical movements and selections of the multitude. As one might imagine, with thousands of players, mundane items had the capability of transforming into extraordinary relics of the imagination. I have found mention of the Helix Fossil as a deity as early as Day 2, and it probably existed prior to the transcript.<sup>24</sup>

The Ledge thus, provided a first test, both of faith and of strategy. It tested to see whether the TPP players could successfully coordinate to defeat the perceived non-earnest players, and it tested to where reddit attributed its success. Although the latter test was not conclusively proved, it would be in an instance where the encounter was one where strategy could prepare little for the moment.

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22 Transcript, February 16th, 2014

23 Transcript, February 16th, 2014.

24 2014-02-15 13:39:30: From now on, I will praise the Sun no more, only Helix Fossil.

## 5 A Test of Faith

I take this encounter from the fourth Gym battle. As background to this encounter, the TPP chat had been unsuccessful in its attempts to avoid the Trainers available prior to the Gym Battle. TPP had to battle each trainer, and due to the randomization of commands, they lost nearly all their Pokémon before the Gym Battle.<sup>25</sup> To heal their Pokémon would obstruct progress, for a tree blocked the entrance to the Leader. Much like the Ledge, the tree represented a moment of dexterity easily overcome for a practiced individual player, but not the crowd. The process of removal for this tree required standing in front of the tree, selecting a Pokémon with a move called Cut, and successfully picking Cut. In this instance, they had done it in twenty minutes, but an earlier tree had taken twelve hours. If they left at this point, it could be an additional twelve hours of agony. Thus, they moved towards Erika, and had one Pokémon with which to combat her team: the third evolved form of one of the very first Pokémon captured, Pidgeot.

Unlike the Ledge, this was an encounter in which little strategy could be implemented – there was no way by which to coordinate every single attack in the time they had, so Reddit and the rest of players, both earnest and non-earnest had to wait and see what Luck had in store. Fortune smiled on the battle, as Pidgeot was able to defeat the entirety of Erika’s team. And it is here that Pidgeot is first referenced as “Bird Jesus”, while the cult of the Helix Fossil took on a new meaning. Throughout the battle, it was continuously consulted, and this was taken as a sign that Helix’s will was being affirmed. Thus, the continued repetition of actions and connectivity became focused in these single acts of praise:<sup>26</sup>

2014-02-17 03:09 <zettosanji> PIDGEOT IS A GIFT FROM HELIX HIMSELF  
 2014-02-17 03:07 <luckyest3> PIDGEOT OUR SAVIOR  
 2014-02-17 03:06 <firemoose123> PIDGEOT BASED GOD OF WIND  
 2014-02-17 03:05 <fisshgold> PIDGEOT ALONE CAN SURPASS THE ALMIGHTY HELIX  
 2014-02-17 03:05 <deschain1> U ARE THE GODSEND WINDMASTER  
 2014-02-17 03:03 <jay\_leno\_the\_rattata> PIGEOT GOD  
 2014-02-17 03:03 <punkphantom> if helix is our god then pidgeot is our jesus  
 2014-02-17 03:01 <reggie339> ALL HAIL THE JESUS BIRD!  
 2014-02-17 03:01 <game2590> pidgeot is a freaking hero  
 2014-02-17 03:01 <sgarv> pidgeot will solo erika

25 Image available via Bulbapedia.net: [http://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/File:Celadon\\_Gym\\_RBY.png](http://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/File:Celadon_Gym_RBY.png), last accessed: September 29, 2014.

26 Transcript, February 17th, 2014.

2014-02-17 03:01 <zlod> PIDGEOT OUR LORD AND SAVIOR  
 2014-02-17 03:00 <turtlykun> PIDGEOT IS THE TRUE PROPHT  
 2014-02-17 03:00 <musicexam> PIDGEOT LET THE HELIX FLOW THROUGH YOU  
 2014-02-17 02:59 <kappa1> YOU'VE ANGERED OUR WIND GOD (יְהוָה)  
 2014-02-17 02:59 <runfools> I do not believe in SS ticket or helix fossil. there is only pidgeot.  
 2014-02-17 02:58 <adonids> THE JESUS BIRD STRIKES AGAIN

These transcripts are also supplemented by interactions with moments in which the game transcends its locality as existing exclusively in virtual reality. For example, one viewer placed Bird Jesus within Jerusalem on Google Maps:<sup>27</sup>

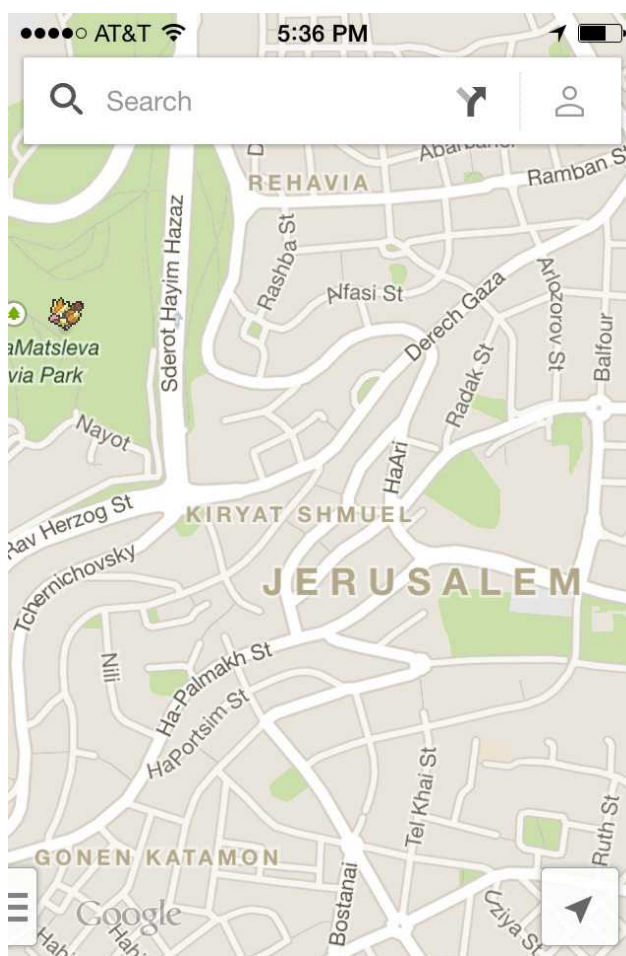


Figure 5: Bird Jesus in a park near Jerusalem

27 Adam\_Hernandez “Bird Jesus Sighted Right Where He Belongs.” Reddit.com, March, 2014: [http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/21v63w/bird\\_jesus\\_sighted\\_right\\_where\\_he\\_belongs/](http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/21v63w/bird_jesus_sighted_right_where_he_belongs/), last accessed: September 29th, 2014.

Even Pidgeot's least respected moves, such as Sand-Attack became glorified, both in iconography and the transcript:<sup>28</sup>

2014-02-17 02:58 <bobbylumpkin> MORE SAND

2014-02-17 02:58 <rapidfir3pho3nix> saaaaaaaaaand

2014-02-17 02:58 <abcdefghijklkappa> POCKET SAND Kappa

2014-02-17 02:58 <manefyre> SAND

2014-02-17 02:58 <filsk15> Of, course sand attack

In this sense, divine intervention becomes a parallel for the moments of miracle within TPP. These moments are numerous, but this one stands out for its importance in the development of Pidgeot as a central character in the soteriological understanding of the world that players continue to create. Divine intercession has its role in giving agency to the lack of power each individual player feels in their futile attempts to shift the action of Red.

## 6 The False Prophet

The team would soon need a Water-Type Pokémon, capable of learning the move Surf. As Cut allows the player to get rid of trees, Surf allows the player to travel on bodies of water. This was essential for later progression. The team had five Pokémon already, which meant there was only room for one more before Pokémon were sent to the PC box. In order to claim Pokémon from the PC, the character would have to deposit another from the team in order to access it. However, this is also where Pokémon may be released permanently. And with the actions of thirty thousand people, the risk of losing Pokémon to this release was higher than normal.

For this last slot, there were two candidates. One was a classic in the Pokémon series: Eevee. Eevee was unique with the number of evolution paths it could take. At the time, this was three, and now it is up to seven. The plan with Eevee involved obtaining Eevee by talking to a CGI, who yields Eevee at the end of the conversation, buying a Water Stone from a specific store, designed to imitate a large department store, and using that Stone on Eevee. If this succeeded, the team would end with Vaporeon, the Water form of Eevee, who would be ready for Surf. The other was less traditional, but more pragmatic. It was a Water-Type Pokémon available in the next city: Lapras. The plan with Lapras would involve obtaining Lapras by talking to another CGI, who yields Lapras at the end of the conversation. After that, Lapras could learn Surf, immediately.

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28 Transcript, February 17th, 2014.



In a game where thirty thousand individuals are issuing hundreds of commands a minute, it seemed like the easy choice, strategically speaking, ought to be Lapras. Nevertheless, TPP opted for Eevee. The end result was a complete failure to evolve Eevee properly—it became the Fire Type, Flareon, instead—and, upon attempting to deposit Flareon, the permanent release of both the starting Pokémon and the first Pokémon Twitch had caught. This event led to some of the largest fall-out within the Reddit subforum. Through each step of the mistake, it exploded with a variety of interpretations. Some saw Flareon as a new prophet, one to take over from where the Starter had begun. Others conceived Flareon as being set up by the true culprits for the ire of the masses. The largest demographic, however, viewed Flareon’s imposition as malicious, one designed to punish and test the loyalty of Twitch. This was made clear both by archival record and iconography.



Figure 6: The Pokémon, Flareon as listed the False Prophet. Source:

[http://fc01.deviantart.net/fs71/f/2014/059/3/a/the\\_false\\_prophet\\_by\\_ry\\_guy176-d78bfda.jpg](http://fc01.deviantart.net/fs71/f/2014/059/3/a/the_false_prophet_by_ry_guy176-d78bfda.jpg)

## 7 Interpretations, Soteriology, and Religious Meaning in Secular Contexts

I develop this part of the narrative because it was integral to the first division between earnest players: that between the Helix and Dome faiths. The followers of Eevee continued to insist it was for the right reasons that Flareon was summoned, while the Helix contingent blasted them for

heresy. It is also here that Flareon becomes most commonly associated with the Dome Fossil. And much like any religious schism, there were a variety of claims to the truth of these events.

Members of the Eevee contingency often stuck to their choice, claiming it was ordained in a variety of ways. Some members claim the traditional role of the rejection of the Dome as the moment of inception. Others go so far as to state Flareon was sent by the Helix as punishment, much like some Old Testament act of faith. Even others tried to communicate the agency of Flareon itself, a Pokémon caught within something akin to the curse of the old Greco-Roman demigods, where it was a product of forces beyond anyone's control.

The many productions of the community's narrative all share one common theme: they are answers. They look at a series of incidents and events that had been occurring for over a week, and tried to understand how what and why they were happening. In the absence of any meaningful study, like the strategies of Reddit, they turned to a narrative in a region they knew best: doctrinal inspiration for supernatural interventions. This is perhaps best exemplary of such a religious hierarchy: Why does it matter that this division occurred? Even further, what religious significance can we attach to a narrative largely generated in a space whose loudest participants are proud members of the atheist tradition? In the introduction to J.Z Smith's short collection of essays, he states the following:

Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy. (Smith, 1982, xi)

Taking his queue, I would propose the main generators of the religious functions within TPP were engaged in creations of world-building. Wagner notes that "Religion is a very effective mode of world-building" (Wagner, 2013), suggesting that the second, organizational, order of world-building, and the second, reflective, order of religion are not mutually exclusive. One can imagine a social form of religion in which its participants simply exist as members of a community, as suggested by Durkheim (Durkheim 1995).<sup>29</sup> We might say that each member of the sub-Reddit acted as a student of religion, attempting to organize and categorize the varying moments they both experienced as players, and then studied as observers. The promulgation of this religion does not take as its litmus test the pious belief of its student, but the earnest efforts of her project (Wagner, 2014).

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29 This is broad generalization about the particulars of Durkheim's argument for functional interpretations of religion. However, scholars have interpreted it as such in the past. For example, see McKinnon, 2002.

The world-building also falls into our own, as the development of its religious hierarchies become more and more complex. In the twenty-first century, this form of engagement is far from the average. Iconography and religious doctrine have a way of showing up in a plurality of sources. Much like alternate-reality and transmedia games benefit from players interacting through a series of medias and stimuli to better achieve a connection with the real world, so too do major themes in Twitch Plays Pokémon. As a brief example, here are three that clearly engage elements of worlds unrelated to the Pokémon universe.



Figure 7: Source: <http://www.funnyjunk.com/Makes+sense+i+think/funny-pictures/5025438>



Figure 8: juz\_4t “It Was a Massacre.” Reddit, February, 2014: [http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yq1nn/it\\_was\\_a\\_massacre/](http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yq1nn/it_was_a_massacre/), last accessed: September 29, 2014.



Figure 9: Source: <http://imgur.com/gallery/AS6gC0G>

The first two images are referential to other aspects of popular media. The first plays off a popular song by Kanye West, whose lyrics appear in the cartoon. The second refers to a climatic scene in *Star Wars III*, where Anakin Skywalker slaughters young Jedi. Both of these images refer to specific aspects of the game—the first, to the organized relationship between the varying entities, the second, to a day later known in the narrative as “Bloody Sunday” in which an occurrence, similar to the third one I discussed happened on a larger scale, releasing twelve Pokémon, three of whom were central to the narrative (Transcript 2014).

The third one engages the real world. It is a literal manifestation of the religious iconography transposed on the everyday reality of people. This is one of several such images, in which Helix believers across the world allowed their engagement to stretch past the defined boundaries of an Internet community. Other engagements included drawings, graffiti and even preaching. This influence is separate from the spin off influence we might expect of a game, and is more similar to the cosplay narrative, or engagements like Orlando Studio’s *Harry Potter World*, which seek to find a place in the realities we exist for the locution of our imaginations.

Indeed, the centrality of the player is another avenue in which TPP shows the importance of intersection between the individual and the multitude. This is, after all, a game about Red’s journey, and his progression through the game, against all odds and the voices. A number of final images seek to place Red where he belongs: as the main protagonist.



Figure 10: Trainer Red, flocked by his Pokémon friends, the ones who made it, and the ones who did not.

This may evoke comparisons to Alternate Reality Games, in which a series of mediums are used to deploy a narrative for the purpose of the game. I am unsure if such a comparison is helpful, however, as the main point of an alternate reality game is that it engages a plethora of media for the game. Citing the earlier references of the anonymous Australian programmer, there is not likely any sense that this game would have transcended the Internet, certainly not as a religion. Rather, I would tentatively propose that this connection to the real world is a result of the sub-creative process.

## 8 Concluding thoughts

I have tried to show that the seemingly random satirical religious elements of communal narrative development in TPP were not so random when one considered the broader perspective in which TPP resides. *Pokémon*, used many aspects of twentieth century technology to create a world for its players. In contrast, TPP was a product of twenty-first century social and technological aspirations. As such, this case presents a unique intersection in which both the game and media surrounding it evolved with its initial player base. This is not an exhaustive study by any means, but as is being studied, there is a large amount of overlap between the action of playing video games and social religiosity. Thus, this may be seen as not simply a case study of material, but also of methodology. As the editors of *Playing with Religion in Digital Games* noted, the claims of virtual mediums not reflecting reality are becoming increasingly less clear (Campbell & Grieve, page 5). Even as court cases rule in virtual worlds as non-real entities, increasingly understand the interaction between reality and virtuality to be more involved than simply the projections of one onto the other. Virtual space has begun to exist on its own, creating a variety of communities and exchanges that are specific to the Internet. And these exchanges can have results on the real world. For example, the use of a pseudo-cryptocurrency to send a bobsled team to the Olympics, or race a car on competitive circuits. We often use words like “satire” or “Internet humor” to explicate this connection, but at what point does humor start having results similar to serious enterprise?

There is also an element of temporality. As *Pokemon* straddles the 20th and 21st centuries, players who experienced the selection of their starters, or certain battles at certain moments in their lives may also reflect on these moments during the communal production of TPP (Allison, 2006). A more exhaustive analysis of these connections may be able to produce a map of sorts in which the relationship between the player and innovation reveals a variety of experiences associated with those mechanical discoveries.

That each of us became indoctrinated with the language of play individually was only confirmed by gameplay within TPP. The selection of Eevee is only interesting when one asks why it

is important to the game that Eevee be part of the journey. Eevee was a Pokémon that was essential for most players, much like the decrease in viewership that was associated with the release of Red's Starting Pokémon. These individual characters, generated by tiny bits of memory become associated with a theology of the game, in which no study is complete without certain components.

Since the advent of TPP, there have been a variety of follow-ups for many games. While this is excellent for individuals interested in the relationship between seriality and narrative, it also means that the target audiences have diminished rapidly. There has not been a *Twitch Plays X* game yet that reached the same numbers of TPP<sup>30</sup>. Nevertheless, sample studies and polls are often drawn from much smaller groups than ten thousand. Perhaps by bringing in some of the methodologies involved with poll-sampling, future students of religion in games might be able to make arguments with similar certainty from fewer numbers.

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