

# Patluck

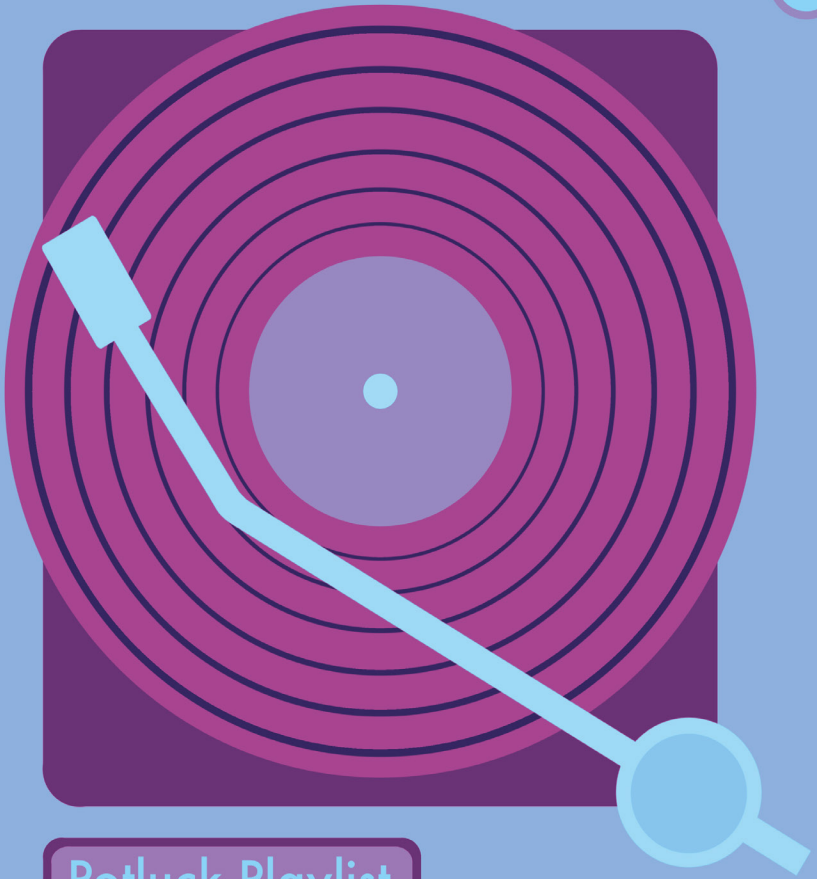
January 2024

**Evaluating Fantasy  
Analyzing Artifacts  
of the Genre**

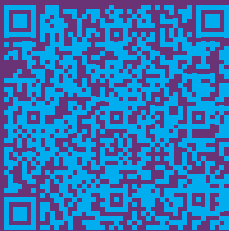
**Pokemon GEN-1  
Retrospective  
Exploring Kanto  
(Again)**

**Holiday Matsuri 2023 Photo Essay  
Cosplays as Cool as the Weather**





## Potluck Playlist



### Winter Wonderland Playlist

A soundtrack perfect for exploring the new year. As another year passes, we want to celebrate our past as well as our future to party into the New Year!

# **The World of Vala: Frozen Love**



## **An Adventure in the Mountains of Love**

**On the trail of a vile criminal, the PCs become stranded in a frigid mountain range home to a legendary lost mine and an unaging wizard seeking newfound glory.**

## A Cold-Hearted Killer

On the trail of a vile criminal, the PCs become stranded in a frigid mountain range home to a legendary lost mine and an unaging wizard seeking newfound glory.

### Tier 3 Drudic Contract

Assigned to Juniors and Seniors. They are missions anticipated to involve combat with other magic users. Examples are guarding people, espionage, or killing.

### Adventure's Purpose

The adventure is set near the northern border of the Land of Luloba, deep in the cold peaks of the Mountains of Love. The PCs join the expedition to search for a nefarious kidnapper and villain, but the expedition meets its doom after getting ambushed by a war party of mountain tribes that were just forced from their homes by an immortal wizard who seeks revenge on his old cult. Players can use their own adventurers from a different quest or adventure to go through this adventure.

### Adventure Summary

The unexpected battle was over. Corpses of druids, adventures, and tribesman sprawl motionless on the frozen ground. Dozens of people lay mutually annihilated in the freezing Mountains of Love.

The battle had started when the city of Drake had finally tired of the villain. Nayte Cloven, who was notorious for the murder and kidnapping of dozens of good folk over the years. But that was enough when he kidnapped Duke of Drake Alder Dupree's wife-to-be just days before the wedding. The Duke put out a massive bounty, which only caused Nayte Cloven to murder the duchess and proclaim that he would never be caught in the Mountains of Love. That proclamation did not stop dozens of adventures and druids from heading into the mountains to track them.

Unknown to the groups sent after Nayte Cloven, the mountain tribe known as the Children of the Titan had recently been forced from their underworld home - an ancient mine known as the Fractured Chasm. They were chased out by an immortal wizard, Obsidian Snow, who was subjugating them with his experimental magic and forcing them to mine mana-infused ore within the Fractured Chasm. Fearing a potentially harsh winter and thinking themselves under attack by the southern towns,

4 a large warband of tribesmen set upon the adventuring parties. The two

sides annihilated each other in the battle that occurred.

Nayte Cloven is delighted by the cruel violence that had just occurred and sees the battle as an opportunity for new hostages and found wealth. He's also gotten wind that the tribesman fled from the Fractured Chasm and seeks to discover the location of it for himself.



Meanwhile, the wizard Obsidian Snow is readying his own plan of vengeance. Having long feuded with The Wizard Collective, an organization that he founded. He has decided to create an artifact that will finally topple their hidden headquarters. He aims to create a gargantuan titan laced with rare arcanite and bring the construct to life. According to his research, this titan would be able to walk through the very earth itself. It would be child's play for the construct to find the hideout of his enemies. Then, he could use the construct to cause havoc among the settlements above and below ground, inevitably taking control of Luloba and starting his own order of wizards.

### Adventure Stat Blocks

The following stat blocks contain the important NPC's and enemies for this adventure.

#### Nayte Cloven

Nayte Cloven hails from Gyo, where he was apparently revered as a legend, making a name for himself as a highly-capable enforcer,

assassin, and cutthroat. Nayte was eventually arrested, and in exchange for amnesty for his crimes, he became a member of the Legion of the Abyss. In the Legion, he fought against hordes of unknowable horrors in defense of Gyo before slitting his watch captain's throat, fleeing his duty, and going to Luloba to continue his caravan of slaughter.

### Nayte Cloven Stats

Level 7 Medium Siren

**Armor Class.** 17

**Hit Points.** 84

**Mana.** 50

**Speed.** 45 ft., Swim 75 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

### Nayte Cloven Traits

**Oceanrunner.** You may walk over water as if it were solid ground, as well as dive below, gaining a swim speed equal to your land speed.

**Marine Recovery.** If you complete a short rest while fully submerged in water throughout, you can regain extra hit points equal to your level.

**Deep Diver.** You are well-adapted to the harsh, cold environments of ocean depths. You have resistance to cold damage.

**Sea Adaption.** You can breathe underwater and gain a pair of gills.

**Child of the Sea.** You have inherited the affinity for the sea. You gain an additional 30ft to your swim speed.

**Calm and Tide.** You put yourself into a deep rest in mind, and meditate for a period of time equal to a short rest. This grants you advantage on your next attack roll, saving throw, or ability check. You must complete a long rest before using this trait again.

**Water Mastery.** Siren's have an inherent advantage with water spells. They utilize half the amount of magic and take half as long to learn water techniques.

**Warrior of the Deep.** The users weapon attacks are magical. When it hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 2d8) water damage (included in the weapon attacks).

### Nayte Cloven Actions

**Multiattack.** Nayte makes two attacks with his weapon.

**The Cleaver.** Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. On a hit deal 2d8 + 5 slashing damage. When you hit with an attack using this weapon, the target takes an extra 2d6 cold damage. If you hit the same target again on your next turn, the creature must succeed on a

DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be Paralyzed. At the end of each of its turns, it may repeat the saving throw to end the effect. A creature that ends the effect in this way becomes immune to it for 24 hours.

### Nayte Cloven Spells/Runes

**Spell Name:** Dazzling Flare

**Description:** You create a bright flash of glittering lights around a target's face. The target must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw to look away or close its eyes. If it fails to do so, it takes 1d4 Radiant damage and has disadvantage on the next attack roll it makes before the end of its next turn.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 60 ft

**Tier:** 1

**Mana Required:** 4

### Spell Name: Wolves Avalanche

**Description:** An Avalanche of snow pours out from the user's feet and reaches high into the air before falling onto the enemies in said space. On the downwards crash they form into wolf-like apparitions and tear into the enemy, causing them to make a DC 18 constitution save if failed they take 20d8 cold damage and are immobilized for 1 turn if passed they take have damage. May only be used once per long rest.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 40 ft by 30ft

**Tier:** 5

**Mana Required:** 40

### Nayte Cloven Reactions

**Frost Armor (5 Mana).** When the user is targeted by an attack, they gain a +5 bonus to their AC until the end of their next turn.



## Obsidian Snow

Obsidian was a bastard son of an ancient Zebar King. Anthony Atlas. Obsidian was tall and powerful, with his house's classical black hair and red eyes. An unparalleled battle commander and seasoned warrior, Obsidian wields a weapon he calls Kinslayer and is a frightening opponent. He was ruthless, cruel, proud, charismatic, violent, capricious, defiant, and dangerous, easily resorting to combat and waging a personal war across the World of Vala with his Wizards Collective with the intent to root out a kingdom of his own, though it was well known that he personally desired the Zebar Throne held by the Atlas family. Obsidian was a ferociously daring young man, going so far as to ride a dragon without fastening himself to it, and relied as much on cunning as on skill in combat, both of which he had in spades. Obsidian was a womanizer, a warrior, an adventurer, a commander, a schemer, and a self-proclaimed conqueror who constantly fought with his father and antithesis. In fact, he was so quarrelsome that he even made enemies of the Wizard's collective.

### Obsidian Snow Stats

*Level 10 Medium Human*

**Armor Class.** 18

**Hit Points.** 127

**Mana.** 150

**Speed.** 55 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

### Obsidian Snow Traits

**Super Darkvision.** Your Darkvision has a range of 120 feet, instead of 60.

**Flame King.** You gain resistance to fire type damage.

**Evasion.** When Obsidian is targeted by an area effect that lets him make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, such as a fireball, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails the save.

**Null Orb.** The user has 1 Null Orb. As a reaction whenever he would take damage, he may reduce the damage he takes by the amount of damage he chooses to have his orbs take. Each orb has 100 hit points. If an orb is reduced to 0 hit points, it is destroyed and disappears.

**Null Orb Manipulation.** As a bonus action, the user shapes one Null Orb into any mundane object with an area no larger than a 15 ft. radius sphere, including weapons. Alternatively, he can shape it into a flat surface up to 10x10 feet in size. Pushing, dragging, or lifting the orb requires 600 lbs of force. The User may manipulate the orb up to 60 feet from him as a free action or bonus action, they have an AC of 18, and have a movement speed of 60 feet. Orbs can not occupy the same space as a creature. If such a situation occurs, they must attempt a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, they are pushed to the closest edge of the orb, take 4d6 elemental damage, and are knocked prone. On a success, they are pushed to the closest edge of the orb.

### Obsidian Snow Actions

**Multiaattack.** Nayte makes three attacks with his weapon.

**Kinslayer.** Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. On a hit deal 1d10 + 5 slashing damage. When you make an attack roll with this weapon and hit, if the target is wearing armor or holding a shield, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the armor or shield takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to the AC it offers. Armor reduced to an AC of 10 or a shield that drops to a +0 bonus is destroyed.

### Obsidian Snow Spells/Runes

**Spell Name:** Incinerating Flare

**Description:** The user forms a large ball of heat that looks like a sun. The user then throws it at the enemy which then violently explodes with enough force and power to incinerate a large

area around it. When this happens, steam can be seen emitting from the area. This attack is a Constitution save, on a failed save the opponent takes 5d8 fire damage and gains a level of exhaustion, they take half as much on a success and don't gain the level.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 35 ft.

**Tier:** 4

**Mana Required:** 29

**Spell Name:** Zebar's Fall

**Description:** The user exhales a meteor-sized sphere of fire that carries the enemy away and causes a massive explosion on impact. The enemy takes 15d10 fire damage and they make a constitution save, on a fail are considered immobilized for a turn from most of the moisture in their body evaporating, save they aren't immobilized.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 35 ft.

**Tier:** 5

**Mana Required:** 40

**Spell Name:** Spell Absorption

**Description:** One creature within 5 ft. must succeed a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, their total mana points are reduced by 2d12, and the user regains a number of mana points equal to the amount absorbed.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 5 ft.

**Tier:** 4

**Mana Required:** 3

**Obsidian Snow Reactions**

**Fire Armor (5 Mana).** When the user is targeted by an attack, they gain a +5 bonus to their AC until the end of their next turn.

**Atlas Dodge.** The user imposes disadvantage on one attack against them. The User can use this 3 times, regaining all uses at the end of a short rest.

## Victorino Fury

A Rookie druid, despite the name Victor Fury has proven to be a kind and caring individual. Not only the nature he was trained to protect but all of the mortals of the land. Victorino was born to a wealthy Lulobian family he is an honest, kind, and positive man whose life is fraught with tragedy. After the death of his parents he transformed their souls into spirits bound to him. That constnatly attempt to protect him with the power of the land around him.

## Victorino Fury Stats

*Level 5 Medium Drakekin*

**Armor Class.** 15

**Hit Points.** 52

**Mana.** 17

**Speed.** 40 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

## Victorino Fury Traits

**Darkvision.** You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

**Claws.** Your unarmed strike deals 1d6 slashing damage.

**Dragon Breath.** You can use your action to exhale destructive energy. When you use your breath weapon, each creature in the area of the exhalation must make a dexterity saving throw. The DC for this saving throw equals 8 + your Constitution modifier + your arcana bonus. A creature takes 2d6 damage on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. This spell costs 10 points of mana to use.

**Cranial Horns.** Your horns act as your means of perceiving surroundings to minute details. You have improved hearing and spatial awareness compared to other races because of this. You are proficient in the Perception skill and you always know what cardinal direction you are facing.

**Draconification.** The Drakekin is known to grow more dragon-like as it ages. Your sharp teeth can be used to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with it, you deal piercing damage equal to 1d4 + your Strength modifier. When you reach 5th level, you grow a pair of dragon wings on your back, gaining a flying speed of 30 feet.

## Victorino Fury Actions

**Multiaattack.** Nayte makes three attacks with his weapon.

**Kinslayer.** Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. On a hit deal 1d10 + 5 slashing damage. When you make an attack roll with this weapon and hit, if the target is wearing armor or holding a shield, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the armor or shield takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to the AC it offers. Armor reduced to an AC of 10 or a shield that drops to a +0 bonus is destroyed.

## Victorino Fury Spells/Runes

**Spell Name:** Incinerating Flare

**Description:** The user forms a large ball of heat that looks like a sun. The

user then throws it at the enemy which then violently explodes with enough force and power to incinerate a large area around it. When this happens, steam can be seen emitting from the area. This attack is a Constitution save, on a failed save the opponent takes 5d8 fire damage and gains a level of exhaustion, they take half as much on a success and don't gain the level.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 35 ft.

**Tier:** 4

**Mana Required:** 29

**Spell Name:** Zabar's Fall

**Description:** The user exhales a meteor-sized sphere of fire that carries the enemy away and causes a massive explosion on impact. The enemy takes 15d10 fire damage and they make a constitution save, on a fail are considered immobilized for a turn from most of the moisture in their body evaporating, save they aren't immobilized.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 35 ft.

**Tier:** 5

**Mana Required:** 40

**Spell Name:** Spell Absorption

**Description:** One creature within 5 ft. must succeed a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, their total mana points are reduced by 2d12, and the user regains a number of mana points equal to the amount absorbed.

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 5 ft.

**Tier:** 4

**Mana Required:** 3

**Victorino Fury Reactions**

**Fire Armor (5 Mana).** When the user is targeted by an attack, they gain a +5 bonus to their AC until the end of their next turn.

**Atlas Dodge.** The user imposes disadvantage on one attack against them. The User can use this 3 times, regaining all uses at the end of a short rest.

## The Beginning

Mountains of Love in the nation of Luloba a peaceful hamlet by the name of Ana thrives. Within Ana people are generally left alone and feel safe. Yet lately they have been having an issue with local beasts seemingly losing control.

### The Beginning

8

The adventure begins immediately after the bloody battle. The PCs are lost

without their guides; they know they are days from the nearest town. They are cold, wounded but alive. Their comrades and fellow bounty hunters lie dead or mortally wounded around them. Each PC must make a DC 10 Constitution roll to have successfully endured the ambush. A failure indicates 1d12 of general battlefield damage.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Nature) roll will have local spirits reveal that a dark storm is brewing to the north. A DC 15 Wisdom (Nature) check will indicate that storm will hit in two to three hours. It's going to be a freezing snowstorm, no doubt, and one that will be difficult to survive without shelter.

### Search for Survivors

If the PCs search for survivors, they will find few who are hardy enough to walk on their own off the battlefield. There is also the danger of half-dead tribesmen still stabbing out at them in hatred and spite.

A Perception roll will find one siren that may live. He's a druid named Victorino Fury, and except for a stubborn, bleeding head wound (which a healing spell or DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check will stop), he will survive his injuries. If the PCs are helpful, he'll agree to stay with them. Otherwise, he'll stubbornly set out into the wilderness on his own.

*LM's Note: If some or all of the PCs are lower than level 2, Victorino will make a helpful companion in the adventure.*

### The Arrival of the Storm

The storm brews quickly, and shelter becomes a necessity. Players can roll a DC 15 Wisdom(Nature) roll to ask the local spirits to build a shelter. A Survival roll will assemble one from the snow and rocks gathered at the base of the mountains. A DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check will locate a cave a dozen yards up, high on a rocky cliffside. A closer look will reveal that an old wooden ladder drops from the cave, though it ends at least five yards from the ground.

Getting to the ladder requires some rock climbing or a magical solution. A single DC 15 Strength (Athletics) roll will suffice for rock climbing. A DC 13 (Wisdom Nature) roll will help build a ramp of relevant materials up to the ladder. The ladder, however, is old and fragile. If a large creature grabs onto it, it will begin to tear free from the wall. If a PC falls, they will fall several yards to the hard snow below for 1d10



damage.

## The Old Cave

The cave is dark, strewn with rubble, but warm. It stretches back sixty feet into the rock. Examining the cave will discover two things – there are ancient runes set into the rock, and the cave is partially carved. A DC 12 Intelligence (History) check reveals that these carvings are typically found in ancient mineshafts built before the first war with Vano, the God of Destruction.

Anyone with a point in Wisdom (Runes) can read chunks of the inscription, which describes the duties of the workers who used this entrance.

Two carts of two mortals worth of ore. Every two weeks, leave here for the second crew to haul to the Fractured Chasm.

Another DC 15 Intelligence (History) check will reveal that the Fractured Chasm was a legendary Arcanite mine. According to the old stories, workers would haul out arcanite without end from these mines. Magic users from all across the land would pay greatly for the Fractured Chasm chains and brooches that would hold the magic-storing arcanite ore.

After the PCs have made some noise in the cave, a guttural growling sound will be heard from the back of the cave. This cave is home to two territorial and vicious Fujins!

Near the Fujin lair, amidst the rubble of what looks like an ancient cave-in, the PCs will find the remains of several mountain men, whose meat has been picked clean from their bones. A search through the rubble will reveal several interesting discoveries:

- A DC 5 Wisdom (Perception) check will discover a solid gold bracelet on the floor. An intelligence check concludes it is worth at least 6 Gold.
- A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) uncovers an ancient axe tossed amidst the rubble, inlaid with jewels and decor coated in brilliant arcanite. A DC 12 Intelligence (History) check reveals that the axe is at least 10,000 years old. Any person who studies the item will see that it is pure arcanite, an utterly rare element. It is named after ancient runes on its handle, which translate to “Omen.” Appraising the axe and making a successful DC 12 Intelligence (History) reveals that the gems in the axe are worth at least 20 gold!

Omen does 1d12 slashing damage. Furthermore, the axe is enchanted to draw and store mana with every strike. This enables the user to siphon points of mana equivalent to the damage that is dealt.

- A brazier made of polished metal attached to a stone pedestal on the floor. Around the pedestal are more runes: “Collapsed Beacon.” Lighting this beacon with fire will cause a great mechanical, hammering sound to emanate from the cave. PCs who look from the entrance to the cave will see a second fire lit in the distance. This fire marks the entrance to the legendary mine of the Fractured Chasm.

If Victorino is with the PCs, he will stammer excitedly about how the party has discovered one of the old entrances to the lost, legendary mine of the Fractured Chasm and, if they can find another entrance, how a vast pile of arcanite awaits them – not to mention a mighty reputation for locating the site!

## Journey to the Great Mine

If the PCs are following the lit beacon, a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) roll finds a path that leads to it. The entrance to the mine is an eight-hour walk to the north. Navigating this journey requires a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check to survive the harsh conditions; failure indicates 1d8 damage from various mountain and wilderness injuries.

## The Wizards Outlook

After several hours of journeying, the PCs will find themselves in a strange mountain pass. Six unusual, humanoid statues of ice dot the snowy landscape. A DC 10 Intelligence (History) check recalls a local legend. According to the story, wizards who fail the final test of the Wizard Collective cult are banished and turned into ice statues – cursed to protect the Wizard Spire, their hideout, for eternity.

As the PCs cross this area, the statues begin to move and creak, like the sound of glass slowly breaking. Slowly, the statues point at the PCs, and the ground underneath the PCs begins to crack and turn fragile. The PC must make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) save to leap to safety as a crevasse form underneath them. Fortunately, the crevasses are not that deep. They average about 20 feet deep (up to 2d10 damage).<sup>9</sup> Climbing out requires a DC 12 Strength

(Athletics) roll, which is difficult due to the slick, snow-covered rock.

After six crevasses have been created, the statues grow still again. The statues have 60 hp (resistant to piercing and slashing) if the PCs wish to destroy them. However, destroying these statues alerts their presence to the Wizard Collective. Within a few hours, they will find themselves being followed by a strange, red-eyed snowy owl. While this event has no effect on this adventure, the PCs may encounter the wizards at a later time (or gain a new enemy if the PCs are particularly destructive to the statues).

### Nayte Cloven's Hideout

A second successful DC 10 Wisdom (Nature) check enables the PCs to find a well-worn path. As they walk the path, a 13 Wisdom (Survival) roll will discover fresh, hours-old tracks in the snow. A DC 10 Wisdom (Nature) check will identify the markings as mountain men and also allow the PCs to follow them.

*LM's Note: Note that if the PCs miss this encounter, they'll miss their chance at finding Nayte Cloven. This may be perfectly acceptable to the LM, as Nayte Cloven doesn't play a big part in the finale of the adventure, especially now that the PCs have discovered the Fractured Chasm. If the LM prefers to have the PCs confront the outlaw, they can either make the tracks more obvious or plant one of his mountain men in the path, who immediately runs back to Nayte's camp to alert him to the presence of the adventurers.*

As the PCs follow the tracks, they will hear several distant screams of anguish and pain. The path winds and tightens and then opens into a cliffside encampment, one of Nayte Cloven's mountain shelters.

Six mountains who have survived the battle have taken shelter in a makeshift hide tent, along with their boss, Nayte Cloven. Delighted at having escaped the manhunt, Nayte is now looting corpses and searching for victims to sell back to their loved ones. The band has captured two survivors from the hunters and are gleefully torturing them for information until they get bored and will ransom them off.

If a mountain man guard sees the PCs coming, he'll shout to his comrades. Two of the mountain men have crossbows and will train them on the most dangerous-looking PCs.

captain will drag out a hostage and threaten to toss her off the sheer 300-foot cliff unless the PCs give them all their currency and back off. If Nayte thinks he has the advantage in any way, he'll order his henchmen to capture the PCs.

The hostage, Lazor Lemon, was a moogie knight who helped lead the groups into the mountains. A second hostage, a human, Drake noble named Count Sarro Oakvale, lies in pain in the back of the shelter. He was critically wounded during the battle and probably will not survive the night... especially since Nayte had the mountain men amputate one of his arms during his torture. He's at one hp and is mortally wounded; he will die within 30 minutes unless someone succeeds a DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check or heal them for 75 HP with a spell.

If rescued, Lazor will accompany the PCs. She has grown weary of the mountains and wants nothing to do with the mountain men anymore. She's heard of the old mines, however, and will agree to visit the mines before guiding the PCs back to civilization. Lazor is a level 4 character. The LM should feel free to develop her role as an NPC, especially if the PCs need additional survival or area knowledge skills. She is a capable tracker and survivalist and relies mostly on her knight skills. More importantly, she knows the way out of the mountains and can show the PCs the way back to the city.

If the PCs save Count Sarro, he will be grateful and offer them a reward of 10 gold if they escort him to a nearby town. If the PCs impress the count, they may earn his long-term patronage (LM's discretion). Traveling with him will likely slow the PCs down unless they do an utterly amazing job healing him

### The Fractured Chasm and the Titan

As the PCs summit the lip of a valley, an awesome sight will render itself – a three-story statue of a great, bearded man made of marble and veined all over with grooves. A few hundred yards behind the statue is the entrance to the Fractured Chasm itself. The mine's great doors are detached and lay buried in rubble and snow, cracked and fallen. Dozens of ancient mine carts lay turned over and broken near the entrance to the mine as if vomited up by the mine itself.

A scaffold surrounds the great construct, and half a dozen enslaved thralls climb the scaffold carrying chunks of rock, depositing them in a large cauldron at the top, which burns with blue fire. Elsewhere, more thralls push mine carts of rock to the base of the statue.

At the top of the scaffold, a tan-skinned red-eyed, robed man, wearing an iron crown and white fur robes silently watches the procession. He occasionally gestures at his cauldron, heating it to just the right temperature. This is Obsidian Snow.

All around the statue are dozens of thralls, mostly a few mountain men and other adventurers. Some are even dressed in the uniforms of the militia that set out to capture Nayte Cloven! Their eyes are pure white, their minds gone (making a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check will identify this as some kind of variation of a druidic contract. Instead of making an equal bond, the warlock is the main castor essentially enslaving spirits to their whims.). Some haul rocks away from the base of the statue, and others use picks and hammers to mold the marble statue into greater detail.

PCs who study the area may notice a few additional details:

- A DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check successfully identifies the statue as a mechanical titan. A roll of 18+ lets the PC recognize that Obsidian plans to use the pure arcanite as a part of the titan to give it some kind of special ability. A roll of 20+ deducts that the pure arcanite will allow the titan to move through any other mineral.
- A DC 12 Wisdom (Nature) roll identifies the chunks of rock as those that carry metal, likely arcanite. A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) roll notices that the strange blue fire seems to be smelting the arcanite into pure arcanite.
- PCs who study the scaffold and make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will observe two large-sized frost spiders nesting in the structure. A DC 12 Wisdom check reveals that the scaffold is not especially well-made (130 hp) and could perhaps be collapsed with enough damage to a single main support (30 hp).

If the PCs try to interact with the thralls, the thralls do their best to ignore them and carry on their work. If, however, a PC is violent or intimidating towards a thrall, the thrall will run up the scaffold to inform Obsidian of the PC's presence.

A clear thought spell will break a thrall from their daze. A tribesman thrall will take advantage of his freedom to flee into the mountains. An

adventurer thrall will beg the PCs to run and help them escape. They all fear Obsidian, and know little of his operation other than he hates the "False Wizards," as he calls them, and that he is preparing arcanite for a powerful spell when the statue is complete.

Obsidian is too focused on his pure arcanite to pay much attention to the PCs, unless they do something to obviously catch his eye, like harming a thrall or materially interfering with his operation. If he does see them as a threat, he will confront them and try to use his dominating magic to capture or enslave them.

Obsidian will avoid using his thralls as combatants (preferring to lure PCs near the frost spiders, who he allows to eat weak slaves), but will order his laborers into combat if he becomes desperate (the LM should treat them as unarmed, average people but with only 2 hp as they are weak from the cold and hard labor).

If the PCs tarry too long, within an hour, Obsidian will begin pouring the pure arcanite into the golem. The thing slowly comes to life, veined with the shining substance. Fighting this creature will likely be a lost cause for all but the most powerful or clever adventurers.

## The Finale

There are several possible endings to this adventure. The PCs can confront Obsidian and attempt to slay him – his death will release the minds of his slaves. They can also attempt to destroy his statue, either before or after it is animated, but this will take some clever plan or powerful magic.

Lastly, the PCs can retreat, alerting the nearby towns to the danger of the wizard. However, within a day or so, Obsidian will test his golem on a nearby settlement... before tasking it with destroying the wizard cult he despises.

# Dragon Quest the JRPG Juggernaut



Derrick Jean-Baptiste  
Staff Editor

My discovery of the Dragon Quest franchise was a remarkable happenstance. For years, I convinced myself that the JRPG series wasn't for me. But then I Played Dragon Quest V on the DS and realized I'd been missing out on a gem of a series.

But I'm not going at it in any specific order. I'm playing whatever Dragon Quest I'm most interested in next and can reasonably get my hands on. Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride was the first on my list.

First off, I was happy to be playing such a classic JRPG.

12 And I'm not talking about its historical reputation.

Playing a 16-bit-era JRPG with sprite-based characters, turn-based combat, and a giant overworld to discover was terrific. I'm not one to lament about the state of modern JRPGs. We still get some great games. But I do miss the old staples that used to define the experience.

I was also surprised by Dragon Quest V's narrative. My understanding was that most Dragon Quest games are light on story. I know that Dragon Quest XI is one of the exceptions. Well, it turns out Dragon Quest V is another one. The tale takes time to establish some interesting characters, especially your potential wives and even includes some dark twists. After playing a short intro, your hero character becomes a slave and is forced to

spend the rest of his childhood doing forced labor.

And, yes, you get to pick a wife. Aside from monster recruiting, that's the other big hook of *Hand of the Heavenly Bride*. You have three choices. Who you pick doesn't have a monumental impact on the game, but it's still fun getting to choose. Your wife does become a party member, and each has different strengths (one is best at physical attacks, another is more of a mage, and the third is somewhere in-between). Your wife will also dictate your children's hair color. Yes, your children eventually join the party, which is another fun twist.

Aside from family members, monsters make up the rest of your party. The last monster you beat in a battle has a chance of asking to join your caravan. Those odds can be low for some, requiring you to grind a good deal before recruiting the monster you want. And I love that. I know it's not for everyone, but I enjoy grinding. It is relaxing, and it usually leads to some big payoffs. Here, it means being able to create your ideal party.

Even early on, you can find some strong monsters to join your caravan. I had a Slime Knight in my party for a good chunk of the game because of his prowess at attacking and healing. And I had fun looking through guides and learning about what other monsters I could add to my group.

I'm still mad at myself for giving up on trying to recruit a Metal

Slime in my party. They only have something like a 1-in-1,000 chance to join your group. I do like my grinding, but even I have my limits.

*Dragon Quest V* is an easy recommendation for any JRPG fan. I know many people love 16-bit adventures like *Final Fantasy VI* and *Chrono Trigger*. For me, *Dragon Quest V* fits within the Hall of Fame along with these other games and deserves its reputation.



# Final Fantasy 7 and the Shackles of Fandom



Josander Ramos  
Staff Writer

‘With the upcoming release of Final Fantasy VII Rebirth, we thought it was time to look back at Final Fantasy VII’s remake. To say the FF7 remake was divisive, I would be slightly underselling it. Even today, many people are unsure what to make of it. I don’t see enough discussion around the meta-narrative and what it says about gaming.

FF7 grapples with the game’s identity and reason for existing in a way I honestly did not expect it to. Fans clamored for a remake of this game for years, while they were simultaneously ready to pounce on any imperfection, real or perceived, to a potential remake. Square Enix (SE)

had to grapple with characters who had been Flanderized and whose fandom personalities bear little resemblance to the characters in the original story (SE itself is also to blame for this, with how they handled the characters in the extended universe.) For example, in the fanon of FF7, Tifa, and Aerith seem to resemble the Madonna/Whore paradox (Women being either pure motherly beings or promiscuous sexual creatures). The problem is that their personalities have been swapped in the collective minds of fans. If you play the original games, Tifa, despite her more “assertive” character design, was the demure, almost shy character. At the same time, Aerith was the loud, boisterous woman who started flirting with Cloud the second they

met to get what she needed from him (protection from the Turks.). Aerith is the woman who plainly talks about her past boyfriends with her “hired” bodyguard, whom she is paying by dating. I firmly believe that the reason their character’s personalities have seen such a flip in the fandom is due to their character design, and Aerith’s untimely death.

These characterizations are just one of many problems that SE had going into this remake. Is Cloud the tortured loner who wants to push everyone away and take the

world’s weight himself, or the cold mercenary who doesn’t care? Not really, and the original game makes it clear. For lack of better words for him, OG Cloud was goofy. He was a character who unironically used the word mosey, whose bluff of a cold, unfeeling character was obviously seen through by literally every character in the game (Look at those original Avalanche scenes.), and even he admits it’s a front to a degree. He is in the midst of a mental breakdown, but that darkness doesn’t consume him. He’s not the character that



you would expect just from cultural osmosis.

The plot was the next big issue. People wanted the plot to be expanded, but they also wanted it to be true to the original, which hampers the devs. Before the game was released, when we saw scenes of Jesse's expanded story, there was a lot of harrumphing of "Why waste time on Jesse? we know she's gonna die early on." People wanted a full game out of Midgar, but they also knew Midgar's essential story beats, so any changes would be seen as padding to the runtime. It was an impossible game to make, and I can understand why they had so many issues deciding how to tackle it.

In come the ghosts. In my opinion, these ghosts are an

excellent distillation of the fandom. They show up whenever the game threatens to go too out there or stray too far from the plot. "No, Cloud, you need help with the second reactor mission. It is what you do. It is how the story goes." This culminates with them literally bringing Barret back to life. "No, Barret can't die now. That doesn't happen!". They channel the aspect of obsessed fandom personified by Annie Wilkes in *Misery*, where things must be done the right way, the way they should be.

I can understand why this kind of meta-narrative was only sometimes popular with many members of the fandom, but I love it. I think FF7R works well as a behemoth company looking at a piece of media they do not







have control over, that they cannot remake in a way that any considerable portion of their fandom would come to a consensus over, and instead of trying to thread that impossible needle, saying “We are going to show you why we aren’t going to do what you want in the future. You want the full Midgar game? Fine, we will give it to you, but you’ll need to reexamine why and what you expected it to be.”

Regarding media, I don’t particularly care about adherence to “Canon.” It leads to creatives having to execute someone else’s vision rather than their own at best and a study in mediocrity at worst. The original book/movie/game will always be there, I want to see what a creative mind can do with the world and setting I love. I think this is why *The Shining* or *Jurassic Park* or *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* work so well. They

don’t force themselves to keep to the original story for the sake of “it’s canon”.

When the remake was first announced, I told all of my friends that what I wanted more than anything was for Cloud to save Aerith from Sephiroth, and die in her place. Take one of the most iconic gaming moments, change it up, shake the game from the safety net of the original game, and tell a new and interesting story. While they might not have done that (Yet!) , I do think the changes made make for a much more interesting story coming rather than the same story I can play whenever I want. SE has, through their meta-narrative, freed themselves from the shackles of their fandom and expectations, and I’m super excited to see what comes next.

World of Vala



**HEIR**

of  
Veleno Mansion

# Jade Empire - Bioware's Forgotten Classic



Mia Paul  
Staff Writer

It took four attempts, but I've finally finished and enjoyed this lovely piece of classic BioWare magic. My previous attempts to get into Jade Empire all ended up in me giving up reasonably early on, primarily due to my mixed feelings about the combat. However, the one element that always brought me back was the wonderful setting inspired by Chinese history and mythology and the bright and colorful art style used to bring it to life. Think of your favorite classic Kung Fu movies; there's a whiff of all of them (yes, even Kung Fu Panda).

The combat is where I had the most problems. This was BioWare's first attempt to switch to action-

oriented gameplay; the results are mixed. The biggest issue is the 3rd person's camera locked behind the character's shoulders, which could be better when fighting multiple enemies, incredibly when close to a wall or when you need to constantly dodge and jump around to avoid their attacks. I found it especially problematic to judge the distance between my character and the enemy, resulting in too many missing attacks. The combat is too fast-paced for that, and having the camera independent from the character's movement and moved to a higher vantage point during combat (like The Witcher 3 or Batman Arkham games) would've been much better.

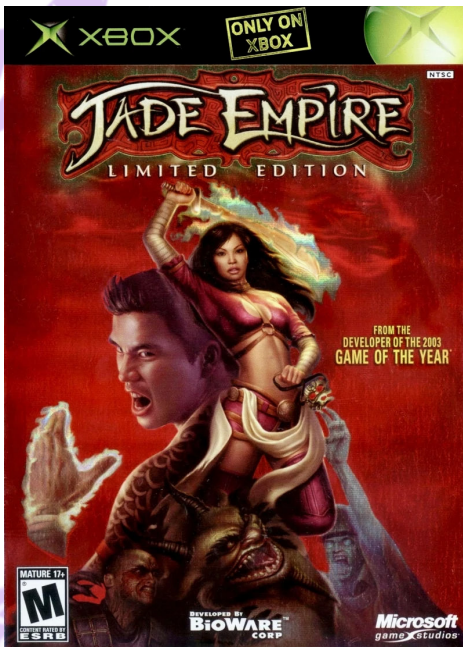
There's a great variety of combat styles, both physical and magical, but although the

game initially seemed to encourage you to switch between them depending on the situation and chain some combos, in practice, you only start getting enough points to specialize in a few of them far too late in the game, which means that for most of it you will restrict yourself to one or two, and some of them are so insanely overpowered that you won't ever need anything else. To be fair I haven't tried the highest difficulty so I can't say how the balance is affected in that case.

What Jade Empire is great at, unsurprisingly, is the narrative. Remember, this game was the bridge from KotOR to Mass Effect, and it's pretty amazing to see how BioWare's writing chops have

evolved over the years. The plot is good, despite a few contrivances. As I mentioned before, the setting is fantastic, and while the dialogue is at times a tad juvenile, it never really bothered me that much because of how well the lore was woven organically into every line. The cast of followers is also pretty good, a funny and colourful bunch with a few standouts, but sadly none are as memorable as other BioWare creations, and to my dismay you can only ever bring one along at any time (but you may change at will). The music is the cherry on the cake, evocative but never imposing, the main theme especially.

It's sad that Jade Empire never spawned a franchise. Maybe the setting isn't popular enough, but to me, there's a lot of untapped potential there; the setting and lore are fantastic, and such a colorful art style would work well today, but the way things are going with BioWare and EA in recent years, I'm not sure I'd want a sequel, to begin with.



# One Piece and it's Theme of Freedom



MinatoQ90  
Staff Writer

Numerous anime incorporate themes of fights, struggles, and the glory of freedom in their stories with great success, but very few do it as sublimely as One Piece.

One Piece has become one of the most coveted and decorated anime and manga series of all time. One of the central themes of the series is freedom and independence. This is exemplified by the character of Monkey D. Luffy and his crew, the Straw Hat Pirates, who have their individual grand ambitions and are determined to fulfill them against all odds.

Luffy, in particular, is a strong advocate for freedom and independence. He is determined to forge his own path and follow his own rules, even if it means going against the norms of society. He

is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve his dream and not let anyone else dictate his actions.

This determination and commitment to freedom are also seen in the other members of the Straw Hat Pirates. Each of them has their own reasons for wanting to become pirates, but they all share a common goal of achieving true freedom and independence. They are willing to put their lives on the line to defend their beliefs and protect their crewmates.

Throughout the series, the Straw Hat Pirates encounter many other characters seeking liberty. Some of these characters are pirates like themselves, while others are civilians oppressed by powerful forces. In every case, the Straw Hat Pirates are willing to help those fighting against oppression, even if it means risking their own lives.

The series also explores the concept of freedom and independence on a larger scale. The history of One Piece is shaped by power struggles, suppression, and denial of freedom. The world is divided into different nations, each with its own government and rules. Some of these nations are free and open, while others are oppressive and tyrannical. This is further compounded by the strong grasp the World Government, one of the series' main antagonistic factions, holds over these nations and the general masses, which often renders them void of free will.

The Straw Hat Pirates often find themselves at odds with the governments of these nations and sometimes the World Government directly, as they seek to defend the freedom of their own crew and those oppressed by the authorities.

In doing so, they often challenge the established order and risk the wrath of the powerful forces that seek to maintain their control.

Even though their actions are driven by their will to progress and aid the oppressed, their actions coincide with the historical prophecies of sovereignty, thus forming a connection of the crew with the narrative of the lore.

Overall, the themes of freedom and independence are vital to the story of One Piece. They not only play a crucial role in shaping the actions and motivations of the characters but are also pivotal in advancing the storyline. Through their struggles and triumphs, the Straw Hat Pirates and the other characters in the series showcase the importance of freedom and independence and the lengths that people will go to to achieve them.



# Greedfall doesn't Understand Colonialism



Rain Omega  
Staff Writer

Greedfall is a Eurojank RPG that dares to ask, “What if instead of setting the game in a generic Medieval West Europe with magic, we set the game in a generic New World European colony with magic.” And that’s honestly not a bad idea. The standard fantasy setting is so tiresome at this point that I welcome any divergence from the formula.

Now, due to its Eurojank nature the game comes with some serious holes. Regular glitches, unbalanced combat, and having only 2 old-man faces that get used for every male character over the age of 40. All of these things can be understood as inevitable when working with a limited budget. However, one thing is not the result of lack of funds but clumsiness, and that’s

its mediocre handling of story and worldbuilding

Let’s first ask ourselves why was colonialism bad anyway? In real life colonialism was a horrifying institution that certainly caused a lot of suffering all over the world. In particular, the New World colonial projects that inspired Greedfall’s setting came with a pile of what could be described as crimes against humanity.

Most of which are completely absent from the game. The colonies in the island of Teer Fradee don’t have any equivalent to the Trail of Tears or the Encomienda system, slavery is explicitly against the law in all the colonies and those who try to engage with it are promptly prosecuted by concerned authorities.

Greedfall has managed to completely remove the fundamental aspects

of exploitation that made the colonization of the New World a horrifying process. Instead, it frames the entire thing as a series of competing colonial powers trying to take control of the island of Teer Fradee (totally-not-America) in the search for a cure to a plague that has decimated their homelands.

And I know what the obvious rebuttal to this observation is “This is a fantasy game, they don’t have to replicate real world history”. And yes, that is true. Greedfall is a game about managing your loyalties in various factions, an approach that more or less demands a “nothing is black and white” setting. Real world colonialism has a very unambiguous bad guy and that would hurt the game. So it makes sense to make a fictional world that superficially resembles colonial America but doesn’t have a true evil faction. But that’s not

what they did. Greedfall somehow wants to not have its cake nor eat it.

It turns out the colonists are still super evil, but for the dumbest reasons.

First, go with the nation of Thélème, a theocratic government of Christians. Well, fantasy Christians, in some weird aesthetic mix of the catholic church and Puritan pilgrims. Their entire identity revolves around being an evil religion that does evil because they are Christians, and Christians are evil.

It’s actually hilarious how cartoonishly evil they are. Your first introduction to the faith in the colony itself is an evil priest literally strangling a native in the middle of a public square as he demands he converts, which the native can’t do anyway because he is being strangled and it’s a bit hard to say how much you love not-Jesus when you can’t breathe.





Thélème has no other defining cultural elements as a nation; they are an evil cult, and that's about it. Which makes their proselytism in the colony an absurd comedy. Every Thélème related mission in the game will be related one way or another to their attempts to convert the natives. The hilarious thing is that in the entire game, you will not find a single native that has actually converted.

At one point the game stumbles by accident into what could have been an interesting conflict by presenting a native town of converts that has been divided because certain members became intolerant to the converts. This could be the setup for an interesting dilemma about whether the freedom of religion and expression that allows religious proselytism to happen is worth the potential tension that it may generate in native communities; this is a dilemma that is very relevant to the world even today. And then the game shoots itself in the foot by making it clear that none of the natives actually believe in the religion at all and they only "converted" because the evil religion of evil was doing evil things to them and only stopped once they accepted the forced baptisms. The devs actually wrote an entire religion so absolutely evil that they can't imagine anybody actually converting to it.

It feels like some clumsy adaptation of the worst parts of the Spanish Black Legend, as seen

by an edgy teenager. For a moment you may even believe that the game is anti-religion. But no, it's only anti-Christian. We will get into it, but first.

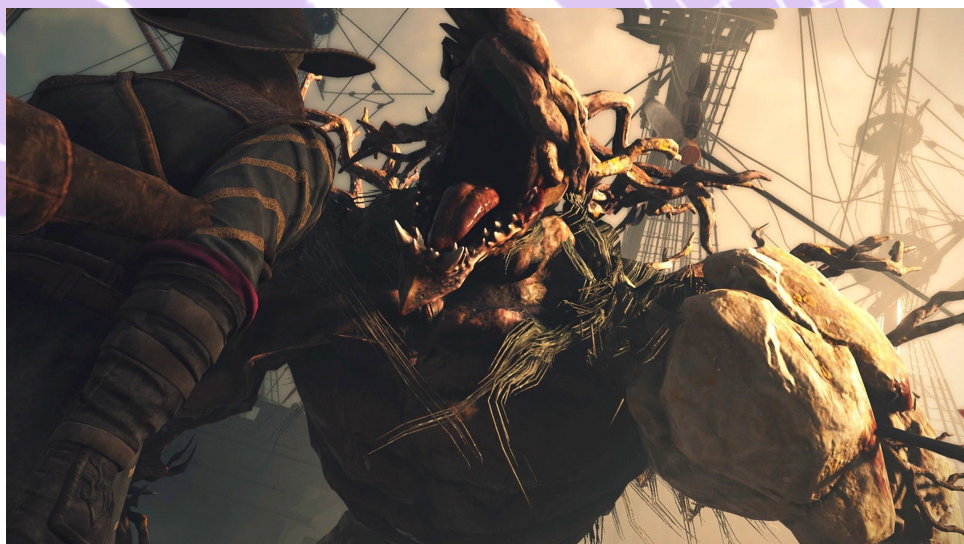
The Bridge Alliance is the other evil faction, which is defined entirely by the most evil invention in the history of mankind... the scientific method. It's pretty much that one Futurama joke, but unironically.

The Bridge Alliance is in constant conflict with the natives, not because of clashing economic interests in the management of land or anything logical like that, but because they can't stop kidnapping random people for their evil experiments.

This could be seen as the beginning of a ham-fisted but at least somewhat curious conflict about the limits of experimentation. "Do the results justify the means?" and all that baby's first philosophical dilemma. But the game can't even offer that because there are no results, the human experimentation doesn't produce a single useful thing and it all boils down to scientists are evil.

The game also has a bizarre anti-civilization view, as it presents the process of urbanization in the colonizer nations as the cause of the plague. It's a FernGully approach in which if you do the industrial thing, an evil environmental spirit will show up and kill you.

Except there are no industrialized nations in



the setting of the game. We are explicitly told by in-game dialogue that all the manufacturing in the game is done in workshops and there is no sign of an industrial revolution anywhere. Greedfall managed to stumble into writing so Luddite that it would make Ted Kaczynski blush.

Name one stereotype about Native Americans, literally any; we got them all. The Natives of Teer Fradee are a bunch of hunter-gatherers with no understanding of metallurgy, cattle herding, or agriculture (but also a sedentary culture... somehow?). They are a bunch of three-hugging hippies that dress in animal pelts and wood. They are also superior to everybody else by any measure.

I don't know if the game is purposely primitivist, but it's at least an unintentionally primitivist bit, which is very bizarre for a videogame.

operate purely on noble savage stereotypes, they are automatically better than everybody else by virtue of living like cavemen. Their medicine is superior to the actual science users because... they have ancient wisdom or something. Their religion is also better than the totally-not-Christians. In fact their religion is so superior that they literally managed to convert the founder of totally-not-Christianity.

The way their culture works is also baffling; they seem to have some strong sense of ethnonationalism and a literal magical blood and soil guiding principle (which the game seems to think is actually a good thing), and any inter-native clash is presented as a result of the evil Christians or evil scientists introducing their evil ways and ruining the peace-loving hippy natives. The natives of Teer Fradee have somehow managed to reach 1940 Italy levels

of nationalism and utopian levels of pacifism even though they are literally an alphabet society of people living with stone age tools.

The game tries really hard to make you like these guys as an entire culture of Disney's Pocahontas that are pure and perfect. Which, in my personal case, made me hate them; by the end of the game, I had gone full Winston Churchill out of nothing but spite. I can't feel any empathy for the natives because they don't act like an actual human society, they act like an outlandish luddite morality lecture.

So we established that the game has no subtle or morally ambiguous actions, so they already failed at taking advantage of the biggest plus from deviating from the real world history of colonization. Is it then any good at realistically portraying colonization? No.

Greedfall doesn't care about real colonialism, it has no interest in portraying the colonization of the new world in a way that would make the player understand the historical process. Because there is one thing that Greedfall loves even more than rambling about the the Industrial Revolution and its consequences, and that something is capitalism, or as the game would put it "trade". While the evil christians and the evil scientists spread their evils of Jesus and penicillin, one faction of colonizers remains pure and noble: The Congregation of Merchants,

because these colonizers are motivated only by trade.

Now, if you know something about colonialism you may recognize "trade" as the entire engine of the horrors that would spread from Europe to the world since the beginning of modernity. It was "trade" that motivated all the worst parts of the colonial project, from slavery, to encomiendas to the East Indian Company privatizing the colonial project itself. But to Greedfall, colonial trade is good actually, and it brings no negative consequences whatsoever.

And I think it is here that we find the root of Greedfall's hot takes on colonialism and lack of interesting writing. Imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, but the writers seem to be in love with capitalism. So how do you reconcile your deep devotion to the almighty power of the invisible hand while simultaneously engaging in platitudes about "colonialism bad" ? Well, by ignoring the actual roots of the colonial evils and just engaging in silly and infantile takes on christianity and positivism. Greedfall is a game about colonialism by people who don't understand colonialism nor want to.

# Pokemon Generation 1 Retrospective: The Journey's Just Begun



Derrick Jean-Baptiste  
Staff Editor

Name a bigger intellectual property than Pokemon? I prompt you to even try. You cannot. Pokemon Red & Blue was released almost thirty years ago, in 1996, prompting the biggest frenzy amongst children across the globe that has carried on to this very day. Pokemon Red & Blue, shockingly, are still the best-selling Pokemon games to date, despite dozens of entries to the series since its inception. In this piece, I will start my first retrospective of all the generations of Pokemon games by examining where it all started, Pokemon Red & Blue Version.

Let's explore the plot. Despite not being the deepest element of the games, Pokemon always requires the player to get through a story on their

adventure, usually following the lines of stopping an evil team. In Red & Blue, this concept began as the trainer (you) is required to obtain all eight gym badges and defeat Team Rocket on your way to becoming the Champion of the Kanto region.

Given that this is the first game that held this concept of an evil team, Red & Blue did well with what it had. To this day, Team Rocket still has a simple and direct motive. It makes an excellent and easy-to-understand evil team for a Pokemon game.

The characters of Red & Blue were probably the weakest the series has ever been. Obviously, due to this being a new concept and Pokemon just being born, characters and stories were not the focus; rather, the Pokemon themselves were supposed to be seen as the characters. Possibly

the only consistently mentioned character throughout Red & Blue would be your rival, Blaine, who is still one of the best rivals for me. Arrogance combined with a realization in the end that arrogance gets you nowhere. Exactly what a Pokemon rival should be.

In regards to Gameplay and Balancing, this is an area where Pokemon Red & Blue fall away compared to the modern games. But, once again, context is essential. The idea of having 151 different and unique characters to choose from in an RPG in the 90s was something revolutionary. Despite how much the repetitive button-mashing nature of Red & Blue has aged, that original premise and innovation can never

be taken away from it.

However, there are clear balancing issues in Red and Blue. There are few options when it comes to various moves, which means for every battle you'll most likely be mashing the same move over and over again. Balancing is also an issue when it comes to Pokemon typing. In Generation 1, Psychic Pokemon are literally gods. Due to the only common ghost move is lick, which is absolutely useless. Along with all of the bug Pokemon being useless with no worthwhile moves, this also leaves almost all Psychic Pokemon completely invincible. Obviously, this was a significant oversight and not something intentional, but it is game-breaking.

Other moves, such as bind and



wrap, can create gameplay loops in which you cannot attack for up to five turns; this, combined with status effects, can lead to many battles where you are wiped out without even having a say in the battle.

The difficulty of Red & Blue does seem somewhat artificial. If you do enough grinding, any element of the game can feel a breeze. I rarely found myself in a situation where tactics or strategy needed to be used, with most issues requiring a simple conclusion of simply needing to go off and grind on wild encounters a bit more. Although nowhere near as easy as the modern games, Red & Blue is far from a difficult challenge.

Graphics and general art design are tricky topics, so I'll keep this one straightforward. For a game on a handheld in 1996, Red &

Blue are a product of their time that technically should avoid criticism as a result. Holding them to modern standards, they are certainly a product of their time, and the Pokemon sprites are definitely something that have not aged the best, with many sprites being ridiculously odd-looking.

Music is something that seems to never age in the Pokemon world. Red & Blue, despite their age, have some of the most iconic sounds in the franchise, with the themes of routes, Pallet Town, and gym battles, for example, are all still themes that sound great in the modern day. This is an area in which Pokemon excels regardless of the quality of the game the songs are within.

Somewhat controversially, especially for gen winners, Kanto produces some of the most bland



and boring Pokemon in the history of all nine generations. Of course, they are the most iconic, but that is more due to them being the first of their kind rather than their unique and creatively thought-out designs. There may be many, but when it comes to stand-options that I just HAVE to have in my team, they are few and far between in comparison to the generations of Pokemon that followed.

However, one of the most famous things about the original Pokemon sets was their legacy. They encouraged interaction with real-life people. You'd go into school and discover that your friend found a Pokemon you didn't even know existed. Sometimes they even made up Pokemon that didn't even exist factually, but you'd believe him anyway out of the sheer wonder of the game. This interaction has become somewhat obsolete in modern times with the internet, however this genius level of interaction that was encouraged in the original games was something that blew Pokemon to heights like never seen before.

Of course, despite all the judgments I have said, it is important to recognize that Red & Blue were the first of their kind. They remain the highest-selling games to date, which is quite the odd achievement, so obviously, that is all for a reason. Red & Blue may have been the first of a long dynasty of success. However, their age is still there for all to see in almost every capacity. I think for

anybody who has joined Pokemon in the modern-age, they will definitely struggle to get through Red & Blue if they decide to try the ancestor of the franchise.

Red & Blue birthed a juggernaut. Pokemon is what it is because of these games, with many of the elements in the modern Pokemon games being the same as Red & Blue or being only slightly tweaked; whether this is for the better or the worse is a different argument. However, it does show the influence and power Red & Blue has upon the circumstances and history of the franchise and its future titles. Despite this, it would be wrong to pretend Red & Blue's age isn't obviously shown, with the games being a product of their time in almost every capacity. Despite the slog that they are, though, the fact that they were once innovative and unique will have to be taken into account when concluding their final rating.



# Holiday Matsuri 2023 - Photo Essay

Photos by: Emily G., Assia A., & Samantha S.V.

Holiday Matsuri 2023 had it all from jaw dropping cosplays to amazing special events. Reminisce on Holiday Matsuri's last year at the Orlando World Center Marriott.

























