# From Chaos to Creativity:

# Storytelling Practices in TwitchPlaysPokémon

By

Angela Christine Lindsay Alberry

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Program in Cultural Studies

in conformity with the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

September, 2024

# Abstract

TwitchPlaysPokémon should have failed. With thousands of players trying to control a single-player game, participants could have quit in frustration, but they didn't. Instead, the community created a rich story around the game. This use of creativity in the face of chaos meant that the TwitchPlaysPokémon community adopted several key practices which enabled them to create a story far beyond even the original programmer's imagination. In the initial storytelling approach, the community developed a scaffolding structure to support their work. This structure was aided by emergent leadership in a community that still retained communal control. Expanding beyond the community's original written account, visual artists used conceptual ideas, specific forms of adaptation, and accessible knowledge and spaces to continue the spread of TwitchPlaysPokémon's story. Building from our understanding of these storytelling practices, we propose a three-part lens through which the community's motivations can be better understood. Focusing on the human tendencies to seek understanding, use imagination, and replicate what is enjoyable, this final chapter addresses the question of "Why did the community use creativity instead of quitting?"

# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge and thank both my mom and dad for their support throughout this turbulent adventure. Thanks, should also go to Amy and Taylor for celebrating the highs with me and talking me through the lows; you two are some sharp ladies! To my supervisor Dr. Nick Graham, I have nothing but praise and respect for coming on board with this idea and helping it grow into what it is today. Thank you for always supporting me. Thanks go to Dr. Kibbons, Dr. Brison, Dr. Kennedy, and Dr. Randall for an exciting defense that filled me with future plans! For everyone who offered feedback on this project, you also have my thanks.

# Contents

# List of Tables

# List of Figures

# Glossary

Pokémon Terms

**Nintendo Gameboy** – a video game system from 1989that is handheld and uses only 4 buttons and directional pad

**Pokémon** – made up monsters that are captured and fight against each other, developed by Nintendo

**Level** – the amount of skill each Pokémon has. Begins at Level 1 and improves through combat with other Pokémon

**Evolution** – when Pokémon grow strong and change into different more powerful monsters

**Types** – define what powers Pokémon have and what they are weak against ex. Water or Fire

**Moves** – attacks and actions Pokémon can perform

**Protagonist** – the main character of the game who is controlled by the player

**PC** – Personal Computer, a system which holds Pokémon for the player

Twitch Terms

**Live stream** – video of someone playing a game which viewers can watch in real-time

**Streamer** – the person performing on a live stream (often the player of the game)

**Chat box** – section of a live stream where viewers can comment and talk in real-time through typing

**Lurker** – someone who watches live streams without communicating with the streamer or other viewers

**Troll** – someone on the internet who purposefully tries to upset and annoy others

TwitchPlaysPokémon Terms

**Anarchy** – original play mode for TwitchPlaysPokémon in which all commands inputted into the chat box are executed in-game

**Democracy** – added play mode where the command with the most votes in 30 seconds is executed in-game

**Helix Fossil** – God-like figure in TwitchPlaysPokémon mythology, a fossil selected and carried by the protagonist

**"Praise Helix"** – common chant when things went well in-game

**Dome Fossil** – A fossil not selected by the protagonist, became the antithesis of the Helix

**Pidgeot/Bird Jesus** – A bird-like Pokémon that was powerful and thus praised by participants

**Eevee/Flareon/False Prophet** – a dog-like Pokémon which was supposed to be evolved into a water type but was, instead, evolved into a fire type. Considered a follower of the dome

**Drowzee/Keeper** – a specific Pokémon left in the PC to supposedly guard against the False Prophet's escape

**Zapdos/Battery Bird** – an electric bird-like Pokémon that is rare and powerful

**All Terrain Venemoth** – a moth-like Pokémon nicknamed AATTVV

**Red** – default name for the main protagonist, the character controlled by the players

**Hivemind** – name given to the participants controlling the game by the participants

themselves

**Ledge** – common obstacle in-game but difficult for crowd-control navigating

**Start9** – when entered into Democracy the start button will be pressed 9 times, repeatedly opening the game's main menu. Used to protest changes in the game as it halted progress

**Bloody Sunday** – an event which occurred when streamer Destiny took control and began releasing Pokémon (which removed them from the game and was considered killing them). 12 Pokémon were released on Sunday February 23rd 2014.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Neil Gershenfeld, a professor at MIT, pointed to the root of creativity within human nature when he said “Give ordinary people the right tools, and they will design and build the most extraordinary things.” (Gershenfeld,2015) However, what happens if you do not give them tools, but a mass of confusion and chaos instead? In 2014 a programmer set up a Twitch stream where the chat box became the control stick of a Pokémon game. Suddenly, all viewers could play the game together and news spread to the point where thousands of players joined in on the fun. With thousands of people entering commands simultaneously, the stream of commands to the game were absolute nonsense as they were inputted, canceled, and contradicted. The game took sixteen days to complete. And from it arose a story about a god, Bird-Jesus, the False Prophet, and an All Terrain Venomoth. No approach to storytelling had been provided but tell a story they did. This was TwitchPlaysPokémon.

In the face of complete chaos, the TwitchPlaysPokémon participants developed ways to approach that chaos and make it something understandable through telling a communal story. By adapting structures outside the game, the community built up its unique set of approaches for dealing with the confusion the game produced. The fact that the community came together to produce its own story shows that the co-creation common in video games (Banks, 2013; Wallace, 2014; Fullerton, 2019) is possible within a self-structured community.

## Thesis Statement

I argue that by identifying the storytelling practices utilized by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community we can more clearly understand how and why the community responded to chaos with creativity. These practices are a system of initial storytelling, an extension of storytelling through artwork, and an explanation of why the community performed such work.

## Research Aims and Contributions

In exploring the details of TwitchPlaysPokémon and how it developed its story I aim to uncover both the How and the Why of TwitchPlaysPokémon. The discovery of the How will be found through careful examination of the story content produced by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community and how components of this content interacted with each other. I separate writing from visual art in order to better understand the particular role that artwork of TwitchPlaysPokémon took in the communal storytelling space. Written work served as the primary source of content during the playing phase of the first TwitchPlaysPokémon run-through and this work developed a system that helped to structure community-wide creativity. Much of the artwork came later in the TwitchPlaysPokémon lifespan, serving as an extension on how TwitchPlaysPokémon developed a full story. Toward the end of the thesis, I will consider broader human tendencies and how these were displayed by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, and

through this propose a possible lens through which the Why of TwitchPlaysPokémon may be examined.

My research offers a perspective on how a communal story may be developed through play and creation independent of a structured approach to text creation. Primarily, Game Studies and Fan Studies view the story as a direct element of the media scripted by a structured approach to storytelling. While fans may produce texts in response to this original text, they do not overwrite the original in any meaningful way. On the other hand, TwitchPlaysPokémon stripped large areas of previous storytelling away by changing how the game is played (multiple players with a single avatar). Storytelling became the work of the community when, without their involvement, the game would have been nearly unreadable. Through examining this spontaneous game and storytelling, I will consider how elements of this communal work can be understood on a larger scale.

## Reasons for this Research

Turning to the literature on TwitchPlaysPokémon, one can find a variety of interesting perspectives.

Marley Vincent Lindsay (2015) wrote on the Christianized aspects of the playthrough. His focus considered the immediate connection between religious language and the story development. Lindsay's work helped to shape my understanding of the religious element of TwitchPlaysPokémon's language from which I expanded to recognize the internet's position as an additional language source.

Michael Aiken (2014) wrote more directly on the political perspective of the game. This approach stemmed, again, from language adaptation. The community denoted the play styles as Anarchy and Democracy and James approaches the relationship between the borrowed terms and their political roots. While my perspective on Why TwitchPlaysPokémon formed does have some political connections I have selected to focus more directly on the development of the story rather than the playthrough directly.

Max Mallory (2014) and Michael Margel (2014) both consider the consequences of attempting to play a single player game with multiple players. Mallory's work focused more heavily on the play-element of the game while Margel considered the social interactions that were occurring around this play. While the difference in play-structure is at the center of the TwitchPlaysPokémon phenomenon I stepped back to consider the related discussion spaces where more in-depth discussion could occur. This work is, perhaps, most closely connected to Eric Andrew James' (2018) consideration of sacrifice and Ramirez, Saucerman, and Dietmeier (2014), who pair gaming together with capital-G Gaming.

James' work on examining the theme of sacrifice takes the closest look at how the story developed. His work considers how moments of failure within the game became moments of spiritual triumph within the pseudo-religious story the community was telling. I have broadened this approach by removing the examination of specific themes to focus on the storytelling practices that were adopted by the community overall.

Returning to Ramirez, Saucerman, and Dietmeir (2014), capital-G Games and Gaming refer to the meta-aspects of a game in which further social interaction and mastery can

occur, an approach that has implications in wider Game Studies but, in this instance, is used to discuss TwitchPlaysPokémon directly. This relationship allows players to articulate how they play the game through discussion and strategizing. It also explains fan creations such as fanart or fiction. Even still, Ramirez and his colleagues do not go so far as to dissect the online spaces in which story development occurs. This dissection is needed to understand how the story-creation process operates at its core. What happened when no story-telling tools were available and they built a story anyway?

TwitchPlaysPokémon has its tenth anniversary in 2024 which provides the opportunity to reconsider how this new style of gameplay brought so many creative participants together. This reflection on a 10-year-old event does comes with the key question of why? Why is TwitchPlaysPokémon important to talk about? TwitchPlaysPokémon is important because creativity, even in the face of negative emotions such as frustration, is important. The need to learn to cooperate and grow as a global community is important. Play is important.

TwitchPlaysPokémon stands as an example of how each of these play elements can be brought to bear on a situation that was not built as a shared creative space. The game could have been so frustrating that play stopped. Such a game should have discouraged creativity from the players and denied the players the chance to build off the game. But that is not what happened. Thus, even in situations detrimental to creation, communities can develop the approaches needed to create anyway. TwitchPlaysPokémon demonstrates this approach within a small, newly formed community, showing that even in frustrating situations, communities can seek out creative spaces.

## Positioning Myself in the Research

Qualitative research is mediated through the self of the researcher (Holmes). As both observer and often participant in the production of research, the researcher must be aware of their own cultural and academic baggage. This is, perhaps, doubly important for myself as I witnessed the TwitchPlaysPokémon event in-person. I was, what internet slang would call, "a lurker,"[1] somebody that does not directly interact with the event but watches it without comment. I did not participate as a player in TwitchPlaysPokémon nor as a story-maker within the community. Yet, I wanted to understand what happened and how remained with me for the intervening ten years. I was intrigued by the divergence from more traditional styles of gameplay and storytelling and approached with the perspective that TwitchPlaysPokémon could serve as a case study as to how communal play was possible. It had been both fun and different and I wanted the opportunity to better understand how it came together. I had been an observer, but I wanted to better understand the active systems which operated below the surface which prompted an exploration such as this.

## Research Objectives

There are several specific research objectives which prompted this project. First and foremost, I wish to illuminate the key structures that the TwitchPlaysPokémon community developed which allowed them to work together. Secondly, I aim to understand how

[1] This term was developed in the 1980's due to people plugging up phone lines to access discussion boards but failing to post something themselves. Academically it remains an interesting counterpoint to the participatory nature of fandom as defined by Henry Jenkins.

different areas of TwitchPlaysPokémon creation work within these structures and how they ultimately come together to allow various forms of storytelling. These two objectives allow me to understand how these systems work within a creative community and what works were created through that system. Thirdly, I wanted to explore how important artwork was to these storytelling elements and how it was positioned within parts of the community. Finally, I wanted to present a possible explanation for why a newly formed community would become involved with such in-depth and creative story development despite the lack of meaningful gameplay to build from.

## Method

To understand the TwitchPlaysPokémon phenomenon I approached the community's large corpus of writing and artworks via content analysis (Berlson, 1952; de Sola, 1959). Since there is only a select number of academic works focused on TwitchPlaysPokémon the use of primary sources enabled me to explore the TwitchPlaysPokémon community from the perspective of those within it. Initially, I considered interviews to expand my data pool but, as is the nature of online communities, there was a clear amount of identity drift that would have had to be accounted for. Since participants are only known through online pseudonyms locating participants from the original *Pokémon Red* run would have proved overly time-consuming so I focused instead on works produced at the time of the original playthrough.

My primary approach was qualitative analysis with a focus on both manifest and latent data (Kleinheksel et al.) with four main steps to my method as seen in Figure 1.1.

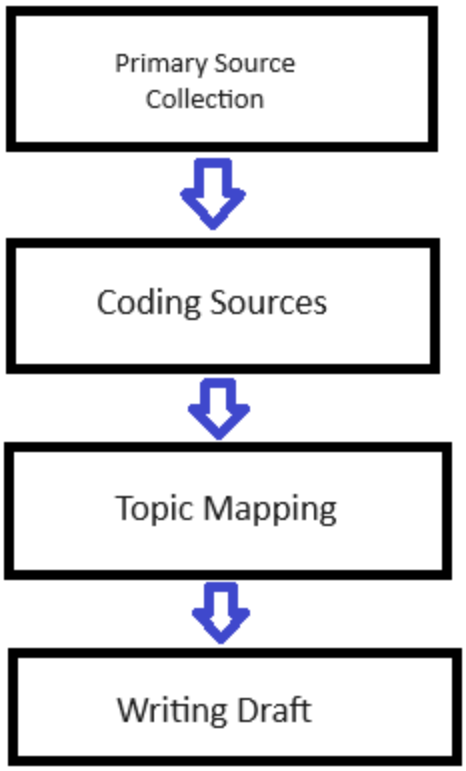


*Figure 1. 1 A flow chart showing the main steps of my method*

My first step was to collect the primary sources from which I would be working. I focused my attention on the discussion platform Reddit where the TwitchPlaysPokémon community had created a discussion board (called a subreddit) about the playthrough.[2] On this subreddit, many participants were able to make posts that contained writing, imagery, and links and other participants were able to engage with these posts through comments. I located these posts through a system called a Wayback Machine[3] which allows someone to search a subreddit for older archived posts. This usage was required because

[2] https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/
[3] https://web.archive.org/

TwitchPlaysPokémon has been continued since its original playthrough and the subreddit has remained in use. Rather than attempting to scroll through ten years of posts, I elected to use the Wayback Machine to find posts that focused on the original run of TwitchPlaysPokémon. Working from several hundred posts spread across the 16 days of the playthrough and shortly beyond I located several summarizing posts. These posts, which summarized aspects of the game, allowed me to work through various discussions, artworks, and written accounts primarily on Reddit, but I also followed these links to other websites such as image hosting sites Imgur[4] and DeviantArt.[5] Links to these posts, alongside a selection of other posts found through the Wayback Machine, are located in Appendix A. This Appendix is designed to show the wide range of sources from which I worked and allows for further investigation more easily. All posts that are quoted directly will additionally be cited in the specific chapter's Works Cited under the internet pseudonym of the person quoted.

Key summarizing posts included "Explanation of Everything Thus Far"[6] by u/johnnyhavok2, "The History of TwitchPlaysPokémon" by u/pureownage75 as well as the Red Archive Google Doc[7]. There were also two useful fan-made Wiki pages for TwitchPlaysPokémon called TwitchPlaysPokémon Wiki[8] and Helix Wiki[9] which provided clear explanations on characters and events. From these sites, I worked my way through comments, discussions, and fan works focusing solely on the original *Pokémon Red*

[4] https://imgur.com/
[5] https://www.deviantart.com/
[6] https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y90kl/explanation_of_everything_thus_far/
[7] https://sites.google.com/site/twitchplayspokemonstatus/red-archive?authuser=0
[8] https://twitchplayswiki.fandom.com/wiki/Twitch_Plays_Pok%C3%A9mon_Wiki
[9] https://helixpedia.fandom.com/wiki/Twitch_Plays_Pokemon

playthrough. This is the only restriction I made. I did not limit myself to text-based sources since content analysis as a method has come to encompass “textual data, visual stimuli…and audio data.” (Stemler, 2015) Written posts and artistic work were the two largest areas of data that I worked through.

The second step was to code the primary sources I had located. Coding is done by reading through the texts one is analyzing to locate shared themes across those texts. I used what Stemler calls emergent coding: “[O]ne may approach an analysis without a particular theory in the first place, but then use the data under investigation to develop a theory. This theory is then applied to the subsequent data.” (Stemler, 2015) This system of coding without first forming a theory became prevalent in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) but has found a firm connection to qualitative content analysis where it is also called inductive coding.

Before I began coding, I examined a wide range of primary sources to find the themes that the community focused on. This led my coding process to center on community work, leadership roles, and artworks. I began my theorizing here, from primary sources, and focused on making sense of the chaos. This resulted in my attention turning to how the TwitchPlaysPokémon community developed such an in-depth story as well as why they may have done this. Once my codes were established, when primary sources were found and read, I sorted them by topic in separate documents. Sources that fit two or more topics were copied into all relevant documents with their cross-posting noted.

To understand these codes in a wider context I moved to step three: topic mapping. Topic mapping is a process in which the coded texts are arranged and re-arranged to better

understand the relationships between the texts. Topic mapping allowed me to view the TwitchPlaysPokémon data through a variety of patterns and connections. Mapping exercises were done both on paper as well as posting cue-cards to see broader patterns. Focus was placed on how the artifacts were related to each other to understand how the broader community built on top of previous players' work. This allowed for consideration of broader systems that operated between players and the content they were producing. The results of each round of mind-mapping were recorded and the topics were added to and reused in further rounds to better understand the interconnections between various pieces of content produced by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community.

It is in the topic mapping stage that I fully developed my theory of storytelling practices in the writing of the TwitchPlaysPokémon myth, extension work done through artwork, and a lens through which this work could be examined. I sought additional data from the same community spaces to ensure that the mapping resulted in a set of theories that played out throughout the community.

The final step of my method was to present this structure that the community had developed. This was primarily done through writing using primary sources to highlight how the work within the community was done. At this stage exterior sources, such as previous work done on TwitchPlaysPokémon and experts in Game and Fan Studies, were brought in to better situate TwitchPlaysPokémon in the wider context of studying fandom. By presenting TwitchPlaysPokémon as a case-study for how communities can approach storytelling without internal structure it is possible to understand fan-created story creation from a communal-based approach.

## Chapter Division

This work is divided into three sections comprising seven chapters. Part 1 provides the background of both the playthrough and this research, Part 2 discusses the various structures of the TwitchPlaysPokémon community and how they developed, and Part 3 closes the work with some reflection on the how and why of TwitchPlaysPokémon.

Specifically, the first section, encompassing Chapters 2 and 3, provides the necessary background to understand my research. Chapter 2 contains a literature review that covers areas ranging from play and community to how Game Studies has approached experimental gaming. This information provides a trail that leads to TwitchPlaysPokémon as an ideal case study in community storytelling in gaming spaces. Chapter 3 goes into the specifics of TwitchPlaysPokémon by discussing the systems that enabled it to function as well as provide a summary account of the events and the story created around them.

Part 2 of the work addresses TwitchPlaysPokémon directly across three chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6). Each of these chapters explores a selection of interrelated practices which operated in the community of TwitchPlaysPokémon which resulted in a full mythology being created by a community of hundreds. Chapter 4 approaches the aspect of communal building of the story, considering the scaffolding and leadership necessary for the completion of such a widespread project. Interestingly, this chapter is complicated by the retention of control by the community through their movement from individual player to community member. Chapter 5 considers the artwork of TwitchPlaysPokémon. These visual elements of the story have applications which assisted those within the community

by clarifying the story but also encourage outsiders to seek knowledge on what they are being shown. This dual use is examined by breaking down the visual applications into their parts to better understand how artwork is used by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community. Finally, Chapter 6 widens the scope through the consideration of a framework: the Tripartite Lens. This lens breaks down three perspectives that help to illuminate not only TwitchPlaysPokémon but also community storytelling as a whole.

The last chapter makes up the third and final section of the dissertation: the conclusion of the work. Chapter 7 completes the full work by taking a step back from the 2014 TwitchPlaysPokémon event to consider the key importance of this case-study ten years later in 2024. This discussion concludes that important communal narratives are needed beyond moments of leisure.

With the road laid out, it is now possible to forge ahead into the event that was TwitchPlaysPokémon with an eye on the storytelling that occurred. While the game and its creative potential were complicated through the system of shared control, this did not prevent individuals from participating and growing the game into something much bigger than itself.

# Part 1: Groundwork

# Chapter Two: Literature Review

Before we consider TwitchPlaysPokémon as an event it is important to lay out a foundation of existing work. Cultural Studies, Fandom Studies, and Game Studies all have aspects that are critical when examining how storytelling operates within online spaces. To articulate these critical connections, I will break down key arguments from these areas of study with a focus on elements of each that underpin the TwitchPlaysPokémon phenomenon. This literature review will begin at the intersection of culture and play to highlight the position of play within society. From there, I will consider how aspects of play have developed into subcultures of their own with a particular focus on fandom as a subculture. Following this, I will consider a range of work within Game Studies which directly speaks to TwitchPlaysPokémon as an experimental storytelling experience in the form of a new way to play a video game. This will form the basis from which I will begin my discussion of TwitchPlaysPokémon where I will consider literature directly analyzing TwitchPlaysPokémon.

## Culture and Play

Culture and play have a vital connection that centers play as the source from which many cultural aspects arise. Play, at its core, is “unserious” (Huizinga, 1949, 1) and focuses on interaction between players in a space separate from the everyday. This space, primarily called the “magic circle” (Huizinga, 1949, 1), provides a space where new rules can be established and explored independently of traditional rules and boundaries. This

exploratory aspect of play helps to form the basis of social interaction beginning in childhood and expanding into adulthood.

When unserious play becomes serious, elements of that play become incorporated into cultural practices used beyond play, such as different art forms and education (Frissen et al., 2015, 9). This movement between serious and non-serious gives play a double meaning which highlights the cultural development of play as a cultural tool (Frissen et al, 2015, 20). Due to this double meaning, play remains critical in its continuing unserious form as leisure activities remain key to self-exploration and identity discovery.

Play operates as a way of understanding (Mäyrä, 2008, 14) through which the participants can come to better communicate with each other and themselves. This communication and acceptance of shared social and cultural space becomes the focus of the magic circle (Zimmerman and Salen, 2003). There is much debate about the usefulness of the term 'magic circle' since it must be recognized as a porous structure where forms of unserious play can result in more serious developments among players such as altering how they relate to the world (Stenros, 2014). By sectioning off play into organized, and often competitive, spaces the magic circle becomes more porous still. Rather than helping to remove play from everyday life this rule development centers an expectation as to how one will act even in play. Seriousness incorporates play into itself.

When thinking about TwitchPlaysPokémon the magic circle helps to articulate the creative spaces which the community developed. Rather than limiting their play to the game itself, the community expanded their play through writing, artwork, video making, and other forms of creation and thus expanded the magic circle as well. This expansion

highlights the use of the magic circle in the development of TwitchPlaysPokémon while also recognizing that there were serious elements to that play. The boundary between the real world and the play space remained porous throughout the 16-day playthrough.

Historically, this form of communication via play has been considered available only to children and certain groups of organized players (such as professional sports teams or amateur players). This has further limited play spaces by requiring structure and organization to divide play from 'real life'. However, this limiting of access has been challenged with the adaptation of play as a leisure activity. Online spaces and related technologies have furthered this experimental space into third spaces that can incorporate global access (Lewis, 2008). Third spaces are spaces which are not home or work/school and thus are available for purposes outside the basic needs of life. With the internet providing a global third space these non-necessary purposes may be done by many people together.

TwitchPlaysPokémon's approach to experimental play through the utilization of this global third space meant that the community that formed was free to respond to their game via story creation. Play, in both game and story forms, creates connections between the participants while reinforcing an identity as a player within this specific game (Lindsay, 2015). I will argue that TwitchPlaysPokémon helped to formalize participation within the fandom through interactions within the community which can be seen in the formation of a storytelling system that I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Play is meant to be designed into video games from their inception (Zimmerman and Salen, 2003; Fullerton, 2019) as the central focus of games is leisure. While other elements

are included in this design goal, such as the improvement of skills through failure and success (Juul, 2013), play remains at the center of this form of entertainment. TwitchPlaysPokémon shows the continuing draw towards play as a form of leisure through the demonstration of creating forms of play among participants when the play design of the game is limited. TwitchPlaysPokémon's player-produced forms of play, which included the multi-person control of the game as well as the various storytelling approaches which resulted, were alluring enough to result in the setting aside of and taking up of other forms of cultural activity in favour of TwitchPlaysPokémon. (u/brocky1495, 2014, "Seen on my college campus"; u/pareil, 2014, "Spotted at a basketball game at my college")

Play is a fluid and unstructured concept that can be adapted to a range of interactions (Upton, 2015). TwitchPlaysPokémon's reach across even non-internet spaces shows that culture and play remain deeply interconnected. In TwitchPlaysPokémon, play operates in both serious and non-serious ways resulting in the development of cultural practices with playful elements attached such as the fan activities discussed below.

## Subcultures, New Media, and Fandom

Since we have seen that TwitchPlaysPokémon fits into a cultural understanding of play through the adaptation of a porous magic circle which allows for various forms of non-serious and serious elements, it is now possible to discuss the phenomenon in relation to other forms of cultural play. The most common areas of cultural play are pieces of media designed for leisure such as video games. These media objects, it can be argued, form magic circles of their own in which a medium develops play around itself called fandom.

These pockets of play can be understood as cultural points of connectivity through which serious cultural work is done (Reysen, Plante, and Chadborn, 2017; McInroy,2020).

Traditionally, culture is divided into subgroups, called subcultures, which, through time and interaction, move towards a state of hegemony (Hebdige, 1979, 14). Hegemony is the term for the shape of a culture in which one subgroup is dominant and in control of subordinate subcultures and how they form thus resulting in general cultural conformity (Hebdige, 1979, 14). Control breeds conformity and conformity reinforces control. Even once a state of hegemony is achieved, Hebdige argues that the cultural formation of society remains structured through subcultures operating under the umbrella of the primary culture (1979). It can then be understood that these subcultures can center on various aspects of that primary culture such as elements of leisure, education, and even food.

Subcultural approaches, including play, operate as a means of understanding and communicating one's view of the world. While wider cultures have this meaning defined by the portions of the population with power, specific subcultures, even within the subordinate class, cooperate through a shared approach to their cultural focus (Hebdige, 1979). These cultural focuses can narrow the subculture significantly depending on their size and cultural effect. For example, TwitchPlaysPokémon fans operate as their own subculture while simultaneously existing under the umbrella of both New Media and Fandom, which are in turn subcultural subsets of leisure, i.e. a group within a group.

New, or digital, media allows for the formation of subcultures that no longer rely on geographical location (Harries, 2002). With the invention of the World Wide Web,

subcultures have entered the online third space I mentioned earlier, allowing for subcultural development on a global scale. Identity and shared language have become elements available around the world and thus open the ability to share culture on a wider scale (Fornäs, 2002). Digital media became both a source of cultural context as well as a means to disseminate that context across a wider range of people.

Subcultures that operate around the enjoyment of entertainment, in the forms of both old and new media, are called fandoms. This term originates from the use of the term "fan" about someone who is "fanatical" about some cultural context (Jenkins, 1992). Originating from the religious idea of fanatical, the term fan – much like play – has a double meaning of serious and non-serious as the fan both enjoys their media while also actively incorporating that media into their life. That is, a fan is a media consumer while also being a producer of their own media in response (Jenkins, 1992). The fan not only enjoys the media they choose but also adapts that media to their understanding of the world and themselves. This can often take the form of media production through a process called textual poaching in which they develop into participatory agents of culture (Jenkins, 1992, 23). By adapting the text into their own production style, fans are able to express not only their enjoyment of that media but also their relationship with other media consumers.

When fans come together, they form fandoms through which they express themselves and "broad[en] the fields of meaning that circulate around the primary text" (Jenkins, 2006, 140). Larger participatory fandoms can develop into unified cultural agents with the ability to affect the greater culture through unified action. For example, K-pop fans have become well-known as cultural interrupters when engaging in human rights protests, often hijacking

lines of governmental communication (Jung, 2012). Subcultures, such as fandoms, can change the current balance of a dominant culture through cooperative works while remaining ultimately individualized through "unique social spheres, interpretive stances, and forms of creativity." (Lamerichs, 2018, 232) Fandoms are specialized spaces in which collaborative work can occur.

TwitchPlaysPokémon was a space of collaborative storytelling because the community provided support to creators. While the community was required to cooperate within the game and, at times, struggled to do so, the story creation process remained open to additional work throughout the 16 days of the original playthrough (Lindsay, 2015). Just as there are subcultures within culture, there were subgroups within the TwitchPlaysPokémon fandom which approached play in different ways (Mallory, 2014). However, rather than limiting who could create within TwitchPlaysPokémon spaces, the community widely retained shared control which allowed individuals to develop their own spaces within the wider group (which I will discuss further in Chapter 4). Unified individual work created a shared space focused on the playthrough and its related story. Subgroups affected the formation of the TwitchPlaysPokémon fandom and developed overall hegemony through the acceptance of individual work.

## Fan and Academic Identification within Fandom

New Media, and the fandoms within it, provide a space through which someone may self-identify. The recognition of self as a fan means that the person has come to understand themselves in relation to the media that they consume. This adaptation of fan

identity has been found to produce a space of co-creation between the fan and their media (Khajeheian and Ebrahimi, 2021). This co-creating is particularly prevalent in the video game industry (Banks, 2013) and can take on many different forms. One lens that is popular is understanding fan identification and creation as an element of secular-religion.

The secular-religiosity of fandom – the use of religious activities in secular fandom situations – is most often connected to media and activities which the fans produce such as writing and artwork. While the connection between religion and fandom is not a one-to-one mirror, looking at fandom as a neo-religious practice allows for an understanding of the drive to produce works related to those they enjoy consuming (Hill, 2000). By enjoying and celebrating the media one consumes, even separate from academia, the fan becomes part of the story surrounding that media through the development of relationships with producers and other consumers based on shared identity. Some fan practices have extended more directly into the religious aspect of fandom through the practice of fandom pilgrimages. These journeys to the real-world spaces around which their chosen text is based step fandom out of the online third space and into geographically shared spaces (Bickerdike, 2016). By highlighting the connection between globalized fandoms and geographical locations, fans position themselves in relation not only to their community but to the wider world as well.

This religious aspect of fandom is particularly apparent in TwitchPlaysPokémon where the story told by the community draws heavily on Christian archetypes (Lindsay, 2015). By centering the story around god and Jesus figures, the TwitchPlaysPokémon community invoked a well-known cultural language to help explain the game they were playing (James,

2018). Within TwitchPlaysPokémon, this use of Christianized language was done in a tongue-in-cheek manner and was never meant to be considered a legitimate religion. I would argue this is true of most fan practices which reflect religious elements where the assumption of religious language allows fans to communicate more fully with each other without assuming the holy aspects of real-world religions. This mimicry of religious trappings provides an easier way into co-creative elements of identification and fandom.

Understanding the co-creative aspects of media consumption is particularly important when considering the shared identity of a fan who is also an academic. This unification of academics and fans results in a unique way of approaching these texts both as a consumer and producer of stories. There are two ways of approaching this coming together of identities which are of particular interest: the unification and the definition. The unification of identities can be seen in Henry Jenkins' use of the term "acafan" (Jenkins, 2006) which offers equal attention to both the academic and the fan. This approach admits that, despite some calls for objectivity, the academic can not be separated from the fan-ish aspects of their interests while the fan aspects of one's personality are liable to appear in their academic work (Jenkins, 2006). In recognizing this fact, subjectivity must be not only permitted within academic spaces but understood as an irrefutable part of them. The coming together of identities affects how an acafan may interact with their community and the work they are liable to produce within that community (Garner, 2021, 2.13). The unified identity works together and thus must navigate both academia and fandom together.

Alternatively, there is the definition style of identity put forth by Matt Hill. Hill divides the shared space between fan and academic in two ways: the scholar-fan and the fan-scholar

(Hill, 2002, 19). The fan-scholar is primarily a scholar who develops their interests in fandom into scholarly work while the scholar-fan focuses on producing fan-works using their academic knowledge to assist them (Hill, 2002, 19). By providing these two definitions Hill splits the academic fan into two categories largely defined by one aspect of the dual identity. One is either an academic or a fan first and foremost and the second part of the identity is used to feed the primary identity.

Both the acafan and the fan-scholar/scholar-fan identities offer the opportunity to someone to position themselves within two broad communities: academics and fandom. This positionality and how it affects one's relationship with others in the community are important to know when approaching storytelling as a form of communication. The ability to connect over fandom with an eye on the scholarly nature results in the ability to both criticize and construct stories at all levels of society (Hetrick, 2018). This ability for the academic community to play with their textual interests results in a cultural understanding that is multilayered and adaptable within new and old forms of media.

To understand my own positionality within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, I have adopted the approach of the acafan. As my interest in TwitchPlaysPokémon has grown, that interest has been both an interest of leisure as well as an academic interest. I do not consider one ruling the other and thus have adopted Jenkin's unified terminology.

However, it should be noted that fan identities are not limited to academic or religious-echoing practices. While these two identities are key to the greater discussion of this document, it must be said that fan identities are often as individualized as all other aspects of a person's identity. One can still identify as a fan without having academic or secular-

religious connections to that identity. For example, the original creator of the Pokémon games had good memories of catching bugs as a child and wanted to share that identity with others (Tobin, 2004, 6). Identities are fluid and prone to change as one interacts with other elements of culture and this change can result in new forms of cultural productions.

## Game Studies: Ludic Elements

One form of cultural play and production that lays a lot of groundwork for what would become the TwitchPlaysPokémon event is video games. The study of video games is Game Studies, which serves alongside Fandom Studies and New Media Studies. The theoretical perspective from Game Studies is key to better understanding how the TwitchPlaysPokémon phenomenon fits into academic spaces since TwitchPlaysPokémon began as an experiment of playing a single-player game with multiple people in control.

Video games are made up of two specific elements: ludic and narrative elements (Zimmerman and Salen, 2003). Ludic elements are those aspects of the game that make it a participatory medium. These aspects of the game which make it a game are necessary (Fullerton, 2019). No ludic elements, no game. The narrative elements (which I will speak about in the next section) are how games tell a story and are often intertwined with a game's ludic aspects to become a ludonarrative experience.

Games at their core rely on play. Play operates at the center of gaming structures as the focus of most games because playing is how one operates the game. Play brings life to the ludic elements (Zimmerman and Salen, 2003). With this in mind, it is necessary to remember that play operates outside of everyday life; it is a “temporary activity” which

satisfies “in itself” (Huizinga, 1949, 9) which is represented in video games as a leisure activity. However, just as the concept of the magic circle is weakened by the recognition of serious and non-serious elements, here too are issues.

While play operates as a temporary interaction that follows its own rules, it is impossible for someone entering into play to separate themselves from the world completely. Their experiences, senses, and biases remain with them even in play (Juul, 2011). Rather than creating a wholly separate place, the game sets limited rules and goals for the player to navigate. These rules and goals are generally separate from the constraints of society (Juul, 2011) but can reflect aspects of the real world onto the player. Games and playing those games, then, become ways of reflecting and navigating the world in a safe manner (Murial and Crawford, 2018).

Gaming and play not only reflect the world but they can also, ultimately, help to change the social context in which they exist (Murial and Crawford, 2018, 5). Players are cultural actors who can help dictate both how they interact with a game and how they apply the consequences of their play to society. This fact, echoed in the subcultural effect of fandom, means that gaming needs to be studied to understand the effects of games and players on society (Mäyrä, 2008). Cultural context cannot be removed and so must be interpreted: “Defining gaming culture as something distinct and separate from a constructed mainstream culture encourages us to only study those who identify as gamers, rather than more dispersed gaming. That is, we should look at video games in culture rather than games as culture” (Shaw, 2010, 416). Studying games within culture

recognizes that events such as TwitchPlaysPokémon have cultural effects that can be negotiated by cultural participants of all types.

Within Game Studies, there is a divide over how to study gaming while taking into account these cultural participants. Some studies focus on people who identify themselves as gamers – what Murial and Crawford termed “hardcore gamers” (2018). However, the recognition that players exist outside of this specific definition has expanded the field of Game Studies. Casual players and consumers of gaming content have their own effect on both the gaming industry as well as gaming culture (Juul, 2009). This widening of player types enables thinkers to recognize the co-defining element between players and games. One cannot exist without the other and they thus modify each other through their interactions with each other (Juul, 2009, 9). TwitchPlaysPokémon highlights this co-creative element with the inclusion of many different player and creator types involved in the modification of the game, the creation of the story, and what both meant to them as a community.

Co-creation of video games is not unique to TwitchPlaysPokémon as both material and immaterial labour are necessary for the flourishing of gaming in culture. Material labour surrounds the actual production of the game, but it is the immaterial elements of labour dictate the relationship between the game and the player and thus must be considered by the producers of the game (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009). The player must be coaxed into a relationship of identification with the character on screen (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009, 5) or with the other players of that game.

Once some form of recognition is made, it is possible for the players to invest into the game their own identity as player. Players of TwitchPlaysPokémon needed to recognize a bird monster as Bird Jesus to understand their relationship with the monsters on screen. This is especially true when it comes to TwitchPlaysPokémon because the second half of the game equation, the narrative, tends to help build this relationship within traditional games. Since the original narrative was interrupted in the case of TwitchPlaysPokémon so more extreme work was necessary by the community to fill in the gaps. This work is further explored in Chapter 6.

Along with the use of gaming space as a means of recognition and identification, video games, especially, operate as spaces in which failure is common but not consequential (Juul, 2013). This ability to practice failure and success in a safe environment without real-world repercussions allows players to improve their relationship with success and failure in general. And thus, Juul argues, elements of video games become tools which the player can use in their cultural spaces. Additionally, the willingness to continually fail but to persevere anyway is particularly apparent within TwitchPlaysPokémon where the community often became stuck and delayed but chose to push forward with the playthrough anyway.

Both of these elements do have actual consequences which must be considered when looking at game-players' effect on society. The major issue that arises in connection to player/game identification is that it can lower identification with other members of society in certain circumstances. Called "deindividualization", this effect, resulting from emotions surrounding success and failure, can produce a "can't see me effect" (Madigan, 2016, 9).

When a player merges into a crowd of other players they can operate in a sense of anonymity, particularly in online spaces where names are not traditionally used. When combined with a system of meritocracy that can distort a player's sense of what they deserve to say or decide (Paul, 2018), players can develop a toxic environment.

Due to TwitchPlaysPokémon's use of a communal control system, there was a broader chance of deindividualization taking place. However, the move to a specific subreddit where individual players could participate independently from the rest of the community, meant that TwitchPlaysPokémon operated in a space where identity became fluid. As I will discuss in Chapter 4: one's identity could be connected to the whole community, select parts of the community, or wholly independent at any time. Ludic elements became related not only to the new narrative but also to communal identification.

## Game Studies: Narrative and Video Games

"At heart, all games are stories in which people can participate as opposed to passively reading, watching, or listening," (Gillespie, 2022, 3) which shows that storytelling and video games are often unified. However, there is debate about the necessity of narrative within video games. Traditionally, video games are necessarily made up of actions that the player can perform in the game, the ludic elements discussed above. While not necessary to create a game, narrative elements are often shaped by and help to shape those ludic aspects (Dille and Platten, 2007). The interactive elements can lead to fascinating stories being told through ludonarrative experiences. Even TwitchPlaysPokémon, which severely limited the narrative elements of the game due to its new control system, resulted in the community surrounding it developing their own linked stories about it.

In using the term ludonarrative, which denotes the cooperation between participatory elements and story elements of a game, it is important to mention the most common use of the term is ludonarrative dissonance. Ludonarrative dissonance arises when the ludic aspects do not harmonize with the narrative (Grabarczyk and Walther, 2022). A common example is when something is done in the narrative parts of the game that the player cannot replicate in the ludic sections. Such dissonance can move a player out of their magic circle and may make re-entering the game difficult. Ludonarrative dissonance could have been a problem for TwitchPlaysPokémon given the delay with commands and the multi-person control scheme. However, by merging their own story to interactions in the game the TwitchPlaysPokémon community no longer relied on the game to provide that ludonarrative balance.

This adaptation of one's own narrative to ludic elements is not limited to TwitchPlaysPokémon. In fact, many communities, often smaller communities such as teenage students (Chen and Chuang, 2020) and Indigenous groups (Outi Laiti et al., 2021) have begun using gaming spaces as ways to tell their own stories. The use of games as storytelling spaces means that all types of producers and consumers can share their culture (Arnott and Martin, 2012). TwitchPlaysPokémon differs from this perspective through the size of the community as well as the short time in which that community was formed. Rather than entering into a narrative space, many TwitchPlaysPokémon participants did not predict how the narrative would be explored communally but ended up participating anyway. The communal aspect of this narrative creation warranted the

development of a storytelling system within the community, more of which I will discuss in Chapter 4.

## Game Studies: Community Experimentation

TwitchPlaysPokémon worked in an interesting space that straddles two areas of Game Studies. While the event drew in hundreds of thousands of players, the game was not designed to be played by multiple people at once. This centers TwitchPlaysPokémon at the intersection of large online gaming communities and smaller communal gameplay which traditionally occurs between small groups. Each of these perspectives offers insight into how TwitchPlaysPokémon became so successful through the maintenance of community cohesion (Mitchell, 2018).

Work in studying community formation within larger online communities is traditionally done through ethnographic exploration of shared online spaces. This style of work helps to articulate players' approaches to these spaces depending on where the game is in its life cycle. Since player interaction changes due to where the community is hosted, where the game is advertised, and the focus of the existing players these communities can take on many different forms.

One study of the entire lifecycle of an online game focused on the *Faunasphere* (Consalvo and Begy, 2015). This online game was centered around players collecting pets and breeding them together. While there were other activities within the game world the first wave of players focused on their pets specifically. The game went through several groups of players entering the game which disrupted how the players interacted with each

other. With a limited number of in-game activities, much of the game interaction was left to the players to decide. This resulted in the production of different community events and activities as well as a specific approach to member interaction. Later groups of players did not abide by previously community-decided rules and thus often upset older players of the game. When the online game came to its closure many players had to come to terms with the loss of gaming aspects which had become very personal.

Interestingly, another well-known ethnographic study of gaming communities also considered a community that had to come to terms with the loss of its original game. Focusing on the migration of a community from the defunct Myst to Second Life, this study considered how the community was adapting to its new online environment (Pearce, 2009). Much like the community of the Faunasphere the Myst community developed their own way of navigating the new gaming space through the invention of new environments, approaches to communication, and games. Choices surrounding the design and playing of characters were considered alongside a community that had grown close enough to meet in person.

Both of these games provide the background of self-run communities. Both the Faunasphere and Myst communities showed that, as long as lines of communication were kept open, community members were able to produce their own approaches to the game. This move from community member to individual player and back shows that adoption of new styles of play is common even with limited tools provided in-game. TwitchPlaysPokémon echoes these communities through its own development of game-based knowledge in the form of a pseudo-religious story. With no one dictating how the

players were meant to interact meant that players had space to experiment with how they wished to play. However, this experimentation could only go so far and discussions of what type of play was in good faith occurred throughout the original run of TwitchPlaysPokémon.

Types of shared play do not always rely on online spaces. Play via offline friends offers gamers a positive connection within their communal play which, while shared with online friends, offers a comfortable space in which to play (Perry et al., 2018). These bonds between online and offline players can lead to experimentation in asymmetrical play. Asymmetrical play is when two or more players of a game have different elements of play that they are involved in. These experiments can consider the use of two characters with different skill sets (Harris et al., 2016) or situations where one player controls the game while another offers instructions (Lee and Jung, 2020). These different forms of play articulate how people can interact both with the game and with each other.

The growing popularity of Twitch as a viewing platform has helped to elevate another way to interact with gaming content. Rather than the asymmetry revolving around gameplay, on Twitch it affects game interaction. Rather than having multiple players the most common form of gameplay on Twitch is a single person streaming their gameplay and everyone else serves as an interactive audience (Glickman et al., 2018). In order to have the most audience interaction the player must not only be a good player of the game but also a source of further entertainment and interaction (Scully-Baker et al., 2017). While this can form a player-heavy style of game a strong streamer can successfully draw out the audience for a wider range of participation (Hamilton et al., 2014) primarily through the chat box.

Each of these gaming communities and their corresponding experimentation show that TwitchPlaysPokémon is not a one-time fluke, but, in fact, a new style of participatory gameplay towards which people are progressing. While much of this design work on games and their shared spaces is still reliant on the game builders and streamers, the position of the audience is growing in importance and power. The move to something like TwitchPlaysPokémon and past it, to a more improved system, is the direction that many online spaces are moving, even though the Triple-A Industry may push back.

## Conclusion

Through these sections of considered literature, it is possible to trace a line of intersection between each scholar. This line of research speaks to TwitchPlaysPokémon in the ways that it has not been considered, or even acted as a case study, for much of the literature. First, TwitchPlaysPokémon roots itself in culture through the connected aspects of the internet and the new globalized approach to society and culture today. Due to its creation being a widely popular one on the internet with English-speaking players from around the world, gaming and thus TwitchPlaysPokémon must be considered a result of this developing cultural perspective. Narrowing this perspective further, one can place TwitchPlaysPokémon into a subculture of youth and gaming spaces which have adopted and transformed New Media into a space of both fandom consumption and production. Storytelling within these spaces draws out both the individual and community aspects of subcultural activity, enabling a space for TwitchPlaysPokémon as a gaming social experiment to be overly successful.

The academic approach to this phenomenon is through the focus of Game Studies and thus much literature is required to place TwitchPlaysPokémon into the wider web of gaming spaces. To consider the literature neatly, it has been divided into several areas, each covering a key aspect of TwitchPlaysPokémon. First, the basics look at how gaming has been considered as both culture and subculture within academic spaces. Additionally, this area has also considered the development of games as tools which affect the world in which they exist. TwitchPlaysPokémon loops through this section as a globally-created gaming experience that both overruled and replaced traditional gaming perspectives with a new way to approach the game. This new gaming style requires academic study as a new form of communal gaming on a global scale.

Secondly, some work on gaming as a storytelling space has opened up the trail from focusing on TwitchPlaysPokémon as a solely gaming experience to that of a story-creation event. This literature addresses the key aspects of communal storytelling in game-based situations as key progress in the collection, retention, and dissemination of history, morality, and even academic disciplines. By providing these spaces to minority groups and young people, there is the possibility of not only learning from these accounts but also the production of their own in response to them. TwitchPlaysPokémon, as a literal account of storytelling from games, fits into this area of academic consideration cleanly while still maintaining differences from previous case studies.

Thirdly, there is the literature on gaming through the lens of community experimentation. These works consider how communities within game spaces grow and operate under different conditions and how those conditions affect the player(s). With much focus on

Twitch as a gaming community, this literature shows a clear line of progression from purely performative spaces to those of wider participation at which TwitchPlaysPokémon stands at the pinnacle. By highlighting this development in audience approach and communal cooperation, this literature can make space for TwitchPlaysPokémon as not only a case study for these participatory spaces in traditional minimal-interaction environments but also as a target for which these developments may be aiming.

The thread of TwitchPlaysPokémon follows as such: communal cultural and subcultural spaces, particularly in the globalized New Media need to be considered. To do so, fandoms and fans must be considered not only as consumers of media but also as producers in their own right. Much of this production can be located in storytelling accounts either within those medias or about them, many of which take on a religious angle. Since TwitchPlaysPokémon is a game, Game Studies as an academic space must be introduced into the accounts of cultures, subcultures, and fandom through, not only the basics but also community experimentation and storytelling, all direct aspects of TwitchPlaysPokémon's movement from game to story.

Finally, with the literature leading to TwitchPlaysPokémon completed, the literature about the event must be examined for missing pieces of information that could help explain how the community came together to turn thousands of commands in a single-person game into a religious and political account of Pokémon as gods, saints, and angels. The missing information, the approach used to produce the story fully, will be examined to the degree that they hold importance within the grand TwitchPlaysPokémon scheme. To do

so fully, it is important first to reconsider the beginning of TwitchPlaysPokémon in regards to its creation and popularity.

# Chapter Three: The Chaotic Background

The event named TwitchPlaysPokémon resulted in a game that not even the original programmer expected. Curious but not overly ambitious the programmer sought to understand how a chat box controller might work. The number of players that ultimately became involved was unexpected and resulted in chaotic gameplay and enough creativity to give that chaos meaning.

In this chapter, I will break down the event of TwitchPlaysPokémon which will enable me to examine the practices that supported the story-building in the coming chapters. First, I will outline the critical pieces of TwitchPlaysPokémon: the original *Pokémon Red* video game and the Twitch website. Following this I will discuss the coming together of these pieces and how play differed from a traditional form of gaming. Finally, I will discuss the key elements of the game which resulted in the story development: the gameplay issues, how these issues were responded to, the concept of noise as borrowed from Zimmerman and Takinbas (2003), and the patterns resulting from this noise. At the very end of the chapter, I will outline the key events of the TwitchPlaysPokémon story.

## Pokémon Red

Released in 1998 for the Nintendo Game Boy hand-held game console, Figure 3.1, Pokémon Red was a game about catching creatures called Pokémon and then fighting other creatures with them: “In most games, the player takes on the role of a young Trainer whose journey involves traveling from place to place, catching and training Pokémon, and

battling against other Trainers' Pokémon on a quest to become the Pokémon League Champion" (Parent's Guide, Pokemon.com). One such 'battle' is shown in Figure 3.2.


*Figure 3.1 A Gameboy system with buttons labeled*


*Figure 3.2 An example of a battle between two Pokémon*

Winning battles allows one's Pokémon to become stronger through gaining levels. Achieving certain levels, among other factors, means that the Pokémon transform into more powerful creatures through 'evolution': "With respect to real-world phenomena, Pokémon evolution is more similar to metamorphosis than evolution. Evolution is…

triggered by external factors, such as gaining experience in battle or being exposed to certain items" (Evolution, Bulbapedia). Figure 3.3 shows three evolutionary chains, each with three forms.


*Figure 3.3 The evolutionary chains of three Pokémon with types labeled underneath*

Also shown in Figure 3.3 are 'types', which appear under each of the nine Pokémon. Types, which are usually based on elements such as fire or water, dictate what actions ("moves") each Pokémon can perform ("Types", Bulbapedia). Some types are more effective than others which results in players carefully planning which Pokémon to use at which time. This strategy is necessary because the player is limited to only having access to six Pokémon at once. Additional Pokémon may be kept in the in-game Personal Computer (PC) and swapped out through accessing the PC. The PC also allows players to

release Pokémon and this, along with switching Pokémon, creates different gameplay approaches.

Controlling the game was done with a series of button presses which are labeled in Figure 3.1. A directional pad was used for up, down, left, and right movement. This controlled the character as well as navigated menus. The start button allowed access to these menus. The A button was the 'Action' button which allowed most decisions to be made. The B button served as a way to back out of menus.

The main focus of the game is making one's Pokémon stronger to beat all challengers. By keeping the story basic, the game was accessible to most ages: "Although it creates a complete fictional world in the manner of role-playing games aimed at older players…it effectively leaves children to imagine much of the world themselves" (Tobin, 2004, 15). This means that players can provide their own reasons for going on an adventure or even play with no particular reason.

Most of TwitchPlaysPokémon is rooted in *Pokémon Red*; from its visuals to the language to the actions that could be taken by the players. This open nature to the story created a space in which the community of TwitchPlaysPokémon could build their own story on the bones of the original game. There was simply little in the way of that creative approach.

## Twitch

Twitch is an online video hosting website where creators perform for an audience through live videos identified as "live streams" (Hamilton et al., 2014). While a variety of activities may be performed live, playing video games is extremely popular with 91% of all

game live streaming happening on Twitch (Epstein, 2021). Twitch streaming stands out through their focus on two important interactive elements: the performer's commentary and the audience's response. These interactive elements create connection between the streamer (the person playing the game) and the viewers who are watching the performance:

> Streamers deliver their performance by streaming their gameplay with or without verbal comments, including sharing tips on playing the game, demonstrating their skills, delivering personal style, and introducing and reviewing new games. These behaviors and others are likely motivated by the streamer's desire to meet the expectations and demands of their audiences. (Lin et al., 2019, 3)

The performer must remain aware of what the audience wants to see and cater their performance to that audience.

Figure 3.4 shows a typical Twitch channel from an audience's perspective. While the game is kept front and center as the largest part of the channel the two interactive spaces are off to the sides. The player with their commentary and gameplay response is in the upper left corner. On the right is the chat box where the audience may interject their own response to the game and performance. Each of these parts are important to the overall interactive nature that live streams boast of since communication can occur in both directions: "As audiences interact with streamers – usually (at least with current platforms) through text-only chat – streamers receive these comments during gameplay, potentially incorporating audiences' feedback into the upcoming performance." (Lin et al., 3)

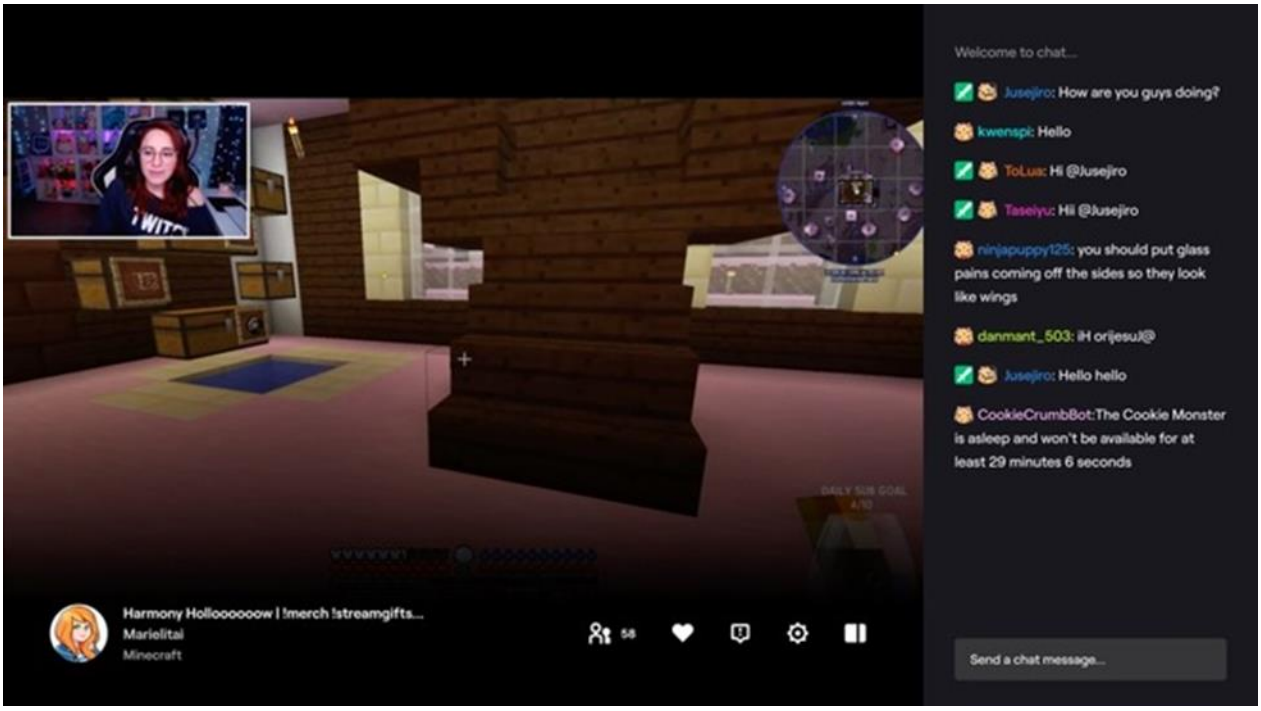


*Figure 3.4 A typical Twitch perspective with the game front and center, the performer with video in the left upper corner, and the chat box to the right*

This system makes live streaming a co-created experience where both the streamer and the audience participate in the creation of the performance. All three elements, the live gaming footage, the streamer's commentary, and the audience's chat box participation, are crucial for the experience. However, TwitchPlaysPokémon changes this balance by completely removing one aspect of the experience: the player and their commentary.

## TwitchPlaysPokémon

Initially, the combination of Twitch live streaming and *Pokémon Red* the video game sounds like an average gaming live stream. However, the programmer of TwitchPlaysPokémon approached the gaming space with a new perspective in mind; he removed the need for a player by converting the chat box into a gaming controller. This was

done by typing in-game control commands such as ‘left’, ‘right’, ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘Start’ (Chen, 2014).

Along with changing the set-up of a Twitch channel, the chat box controller also changed how a game of *Pokémon Red* is played. Usually, *Pokémon Red* is a single-player game which is to say that a single person controls a single in-game protagonist. By converting the audience into players this 1:1 formula is interrupted as the player number increases (Chen, 2014). Instead, all players entering commands have them played out through the singular protagonist, as compared to the usual play style displayed in Figure 3.5. Once the audience for the game grew past the limit for easy cooperation the influx of commands started producing nonsense actions in the game.

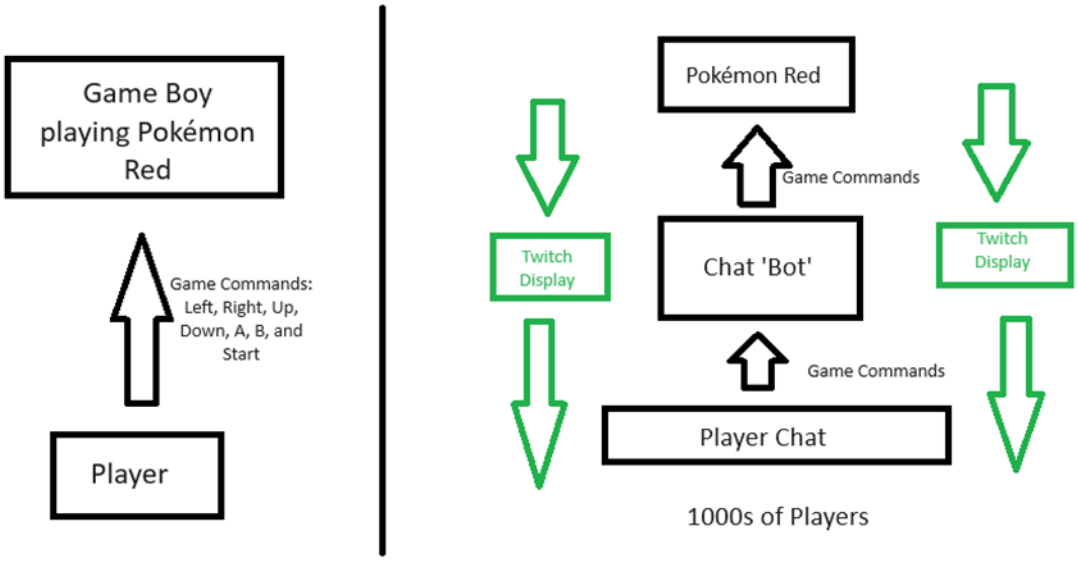


*Figure 3.5 A visual representation of how TwitchPlaysPokémon (right) compares to a traditional game of Pokémon Red*

## The Playthrough

February 14, 2014, was the date when the programmer[10] uploaded his system onto Twitch in what was originally called a social experiment. The stream was live for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It took 16 days to complete *Pokémon Red* thus ending the first 'season' of TwitchPlaysPokémon on March 1st. While the first day and a half of play was not recorded for posterity, reports agree that, in those first hours, there was generally 50 consecutive players (Chen, 2014). This group appears to have been able to cooperate well enough that they successfully completed the first sections of the game[11]. News of the playthrough attempt spread through discussion sites such as Reddit, image-sharing sites such as Imgur, and online news sites such as the BBC (Rice, 2014). With the news spreading, more and more players joined the TwitchPlaysPokémon channel and thus produced more competing commands for the game to play through: "Thirty-six million views. 1.16 million unique players, with 120,000 connected simultaneously at one point." (Stevens, 2014, Intro) These numbers ultimately caused a significant problem: how to successfully beat the game with so many players sharing control?

## Gameplay Issues

Trouble arose on several different fronts when it came to successfully beating the game. With so many simultaneous commands being entered it could take all of one wrong command to derail the entire game. This issue was particularly destructive around

[10] The programmer, while identified as Australian has remained anonymous to this day, resulting the use of a title rather than a name.
[11] Though this is not without hiccups in control sharing. For example, their first Pokémon was named ABBBBBBK, a nonsense name that the community developed into Abby or Abby-K (Helixpedia.com).

unavoidable difficult parts of the games such as mazes and blacked-out caves but even supposedly easier tasks caused problems:

> In Pokémon, ledges are one-way barriers, which the player can jump off but not climb up. One particular ledge, encountered three days after the stream began, was just below a wall. To get past, all the players had to do was press right for a few seconds to walk twelve paces east, then up. Pressing down at any point would send them back to the start. It took them seven hours to walk those twelve paces. (Hern, 2014)

Not only was crossing the ledge generally difficult because of the need for very specific commands, it also brought to light the issue of the trolls.

'Troll' is the common internet word for people who enjoy disrupting other people on the internet in negative ways (Stein, 2016). In gaming, they tend to try to impede success and get other players frustrated. Thus, while there was a delay in the stream which caused commands to be played at inopportune moments, many trolls likely caused additional frustrations throughout the playthrough. When communication and cooperation were key there were players who interfered with gameplay such a Retnaburn in Figure 3.6.


*Figure 3.6 A screen capture of TwitchPlaysPokémon showing the (highlighted) down command which made the character jump off the ledge*

These issues were pronounced enough that Albert Haque, a computer scientist, established a machine-learning system which could identify the trolls within TwitchPlaysPokémon gameplay (2014).

The troll concern was heightened by the issue of too many players playing a single character and that issue was strong enough to prompt the programmer into action. On the fifth day of the playthrough, the programmer changed the control system. Rather than every command being played in order of input as was the original command system, the programmer created 'Democracy'. Democracy mode "meant that the most popular command entered over 30 seconds would be chosen." (Rice, 2014) The name produced one of the largest divides in the TwitchPlaysPokémon community: Democracy vs. Anarchy (where "everyone's command was applied immediately.") (Rice, 2014)

This new system was meant to enable better community teamwork by selecting the most appropriate command together. The programmer, speaking in an interview, recognized that this change would likely upset people, but he saw it as a necessary development: "I expected a negative reaction; people don't like change. Early on in TwitchPlaysPokémon's life, I realized that the movement was too imprecise for parts of the game to be possible – something needed to change" (Stevens, 2014, Q-4). Many players were upset and found a way through the new system that they could protest the change.

Democracy allowed players to vote on the most appropriate move, but it also let players vote on the number of times that move will be played in a row. By placing a number (1-9) behind the command (right6) the players could tell the game to walk right six times. Angry at the gameplay change a percentage of the playing population began to vote for Start9.

Start paused the game and opened a menu. No play could be done until the menu was closed (using 'B') and start 9 times in a row simply ground the game to a halt ("The Start Trolls"). Recognizing the need for Democracy but also the community's want for Anarchy the programmer reinstated Anarchy and a vote bar: which ever play mode got the most votes would be the play mode currently in use. In the long run, the players had won against the programmer but the push and pull between Anarchy and Democracy would affect the rest of the game's playthrough.

## The Noise

The removal of the original game mode meant the general loss of something that the players ultimately found important and fun (u/Darkell, 2014, "This democracy system has just ruined this experiment"). This missing component was precisely the chaos that made the game so difficult: the noise which the programmer removed with Democracy. I have adopted the term noise from Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman as it is used in their game design text *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (2003). Originally a mathematic term, Zimmerman's and Salen's "noise increases the uncertainty of the signal, and therefore the amount of information it contains." (2003, 196) The more information a gameplayer receives, the more that player must learn what information is important enough to pay attention to. The rest of the information is simply noise in the system until it becomes important.

Zimmerman and Salen note that there are games where the noise of the signal is part of the game itself, such as Telephone.[12] This is true regarding TwitchPlaysPokémon where the additional information, created through the overflow of commands, game responses, and attempts to cooperate or troll, helped to create patterns to which the community was giving meaning:

> The phenomenon of noise as a desirable component of a game system is a function of the lusory attitude, the state of mind that players take on to enter the magic circle and play a game, the shared attitude that accepts the paradoxically "inefficient" means for achieving the goals of the game. (197)

Without the situations of selecting objects at the wrong time or jumping off ledges, the players would have little to build off of since the game would be a slower version of a traditional playthrough going one command at a time. The noise centered their own communal creative energies which they used to explore patterns they located in that noise.

## The Patterns

With the noise of the excessive number of commands being inputted, there were often times in the game when unintelligible actions were made. A particular pattern that appeared was a tendency to select items in the game that were only meant to be used in a single specific moment. The game would remind the player "This isn't the time to use that" (Pokémon Red) and cancel the attempt to use. However, the selection of these objects

[12] Commonly a children's game where the children sit in a circle. The first child thinks of a phrase and whispers it once to the next child. The child whispers to the next child who whispers to the next child until it completes the circle. Usually, the phrase is badly mangled by the end as a result of the children not hearing it correctly as it traveled.

continued to happen since the community was not utilizing Democracy to avoid these issues (Aiken,2014). Achieving specific actions took effort on such a large scale (Mallory, 2014) and that effort wasn't always successful.

Without a reduction of noise, the players decided to approach these noisy moments with their own explanations for them. One major example of this explanation development is the Helix Fossil and the attention it gained. Usually, the fossil is selected from a pair and towards the end of the game will be changed into a Pokémon. This duality alongside the continued selection of the Helix Fossil resulted in the creation of a, at first very small, story in which the protagonist was consulting the fossil. Consultation developed further into the concept of godliness because this explained both the selection of the Helix and the difficulties the community faced in gameplay: trials of the faithful. "Praise Helix" became a common reaction when complicated aspects of the game were eventually overcome (Saucerman and Ramirez, 2016).

With this initial religious response to the game, the players began developing a story using the broad strokes of the Christian religion. Having made small connections, the community sought to bring in other aspects of religion to "reconcile" the chaos with the original game (Saucerman and Ramirez, 2016). Religion served as a communal touch point, despite the exaltation existing in jest, allowing more players to mold the story through mimicry of Christian mythos.

## The Story

Since the story was built by the players while playing the game, there is some disagreement over specific details. Some possible reasons for discrepancies in the story are offered later in this work but for now, I will provide the broad strokes of the mythos.

In the beginning there were two gods: the Helix and the Dome (the second of the two fossils). The Helix sought out believers through the use of the Hivemind (the players name for themselves) in order to connect with the protagonist Red. Red set out to spread the word of Helix and revive him from his fossilized slumber. Along the way Red gained Pokémon who helped him on his journey, such as Bird Jesus. In need of a water Pokémon to navigate the ocean Red attempted to evolve their Eevee (a small dog-like Pokémon) but they evolved into a Flareon (fire-Pokémon). This Flareon tempted Red toward the Dome and thus was cast out (placed into the PC) as the False Prophet. In order to atone for his actions and become powerful Red sought to capture Zapdos (flying lightning Pokémon) but doing so cost the lives of 12 Pokémon (released from the game). That day came to be known as Bloody Sunday. Red successfully awakened the Helix and defeated the final opponents in his way, rising to the top.

All of this was completed over 16 days as the players responded to and continued to develop the story at the same time. This balance of creation and play was achieved, I argue, through the use of two critical storytelling practices that underline the creative community of TwitchPlaysPokémon. One of these practices was the emergence of a system that allowed for the response and development of a dual approach to the

TwitchPlaysPokémon event. The second centers the artworks produced by community members as key elements to the creation of the TwitchPlaysPokémon mythos.

# Part 2: Storytelling Practices

# Chapter Four: TwitchPlaysPokémon System Dynamics

I argue that the story development in the TwitchPlaysPokémon community operated through the use of an emergent (or unplanned) system. While the first steps of storytelling occurred through the relation of noise and pattern (Mallory, 2014; Lindsay, 2015; James, 2018), I argue that these first steps led to a system that encouraged communal creation which aligns with the goal of consumer production as outlined by Henry Jenkins (1992).

Two words here need some definition. First, let us consider the use of the term emergent. Emergent serves a dual purpose as both a definition as well as an observation. The literal definition of emergent is applicable to the TwitchPlaysPokémon community as "the process of coming into being" (Oxford Languages). This means that the system that I will be discussing was not planned by the community but arose naturally as a way of organization. Additionally, emergent behaviour, as it is understood in agent-based systems as "any behavior of a system that is not a property of any of the components of that system and emerges due to interactions among the components of a system" (Li, Sim, and Low, 2006). Emergent behaviour forms through the interactions, or dynamics, of a multi-agent system.

Here then is the second word that must be defined: system. A system is "a set of things working together as parts of an interconnecting network" (Oxford Languages). There is, then, a system of "things" working together within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community which both arose naturally while also not being fully understood from its parts alone. To clarify further let us turn directly to TwitchPlaysPokémon and explore the system which formed within the community. There are three nodes to this particular system: community, leadership, and structure in the form of scaffolding. Each node contributed to the

formation of the system which allowed it to function and grow. Thus, the emergent dynamics within this system are of particular interest.

When discussing community cooperation, these three elements (community, leadership, and structure) form the backbone of any successful community project whether that project exists within fan communities (Baym, 2000; Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith, 2001) or in broader communities around the world (Hiller, 2002; Rowley, Kupiec-Teahan, and Leeming, 2007). The leaders of the community set up a structure that will allow the community the ability to work together to produce their desired outcome. The community, through the use of that structure, worked towards the goals of that community.

Within entertainment communities such as fandoms, the goals can be smaller such as participation in the community via the production of fanworks (Jenkins, 1992) or bigger goals such as forming conferences in which to discuss and celebrate that fandom (Kington, 2015). Where TwitchPlaysPokémon diverges from standard group dynamics is that neither the leadership nor the structure were explicitly chosen. Within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, both the leaders and scaffolding structure were emergent and formed naturally within the community when the support was needed.

This emergent aspect to the system means that while the three elements within the system are shared across fandom communities, the specific system dynamics of TwitchPlaysPokémon are more easily identified due to the timeframe of the community. Since the community formed and peaked over a 16 day period these dynamics emerged quickly and efficiently proving to be enlightening. The dynamics within the system are best shown here in Figure 4.1.

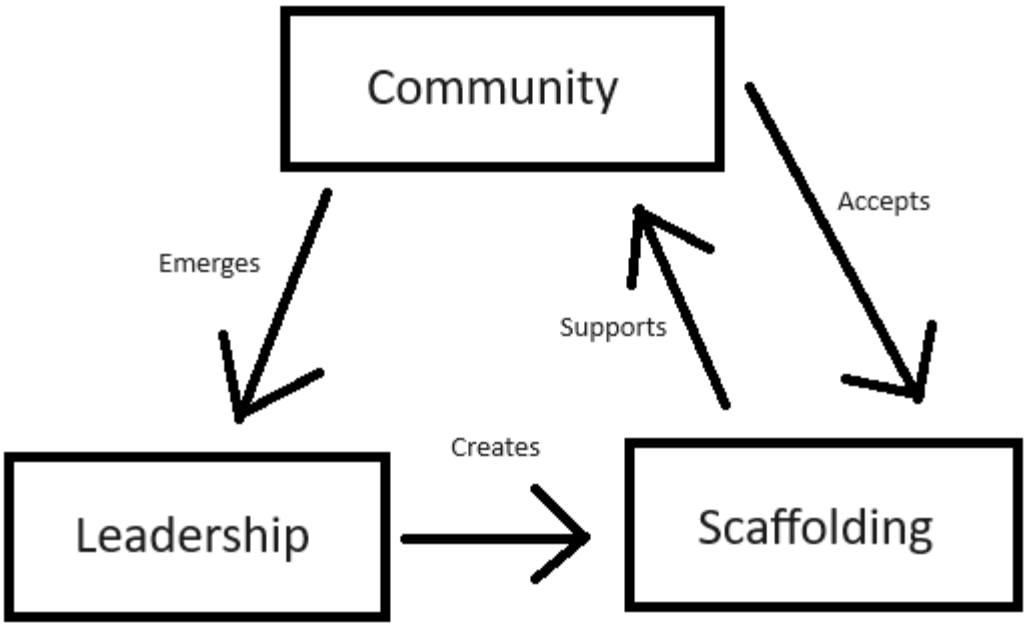


*Figure 4.1 The emergent dynamics of the three-part TWITCHPLAYSPOKÉMON system*

In this chapter I have been able to articulate how these emergent elements affect the dynamics among the participants of TwitchPlaysPokémon. This allows me to consider TwitchPlaysPokémon as a case study into community work formation and its particular dynamics in a situation that did not provide interior tools for collaborative work such as narrative structure or control designs.

The first dynamic I will discuss is the *scaffolding structure*. I have borrowed the term scaffolding from two fields. The first is that of architecture where scaffolding is a series of platforms that allow workers to work at increasingly higher levels. This term helps to explain the layers which the TwitchPlaysPokémon participants ascended through in their production of the TwitchPlaysPokémon story. However, this term has also been adopted into education and centers a student's mastery of the subject. Teachers provide a series of

approaches to a topic that scaffold off each other and allow the student to learn and master a topic (Supalla, 2014). This use of the term is particularly interesting when considering late comers to the TwitchPlaysPokémon community who had to "catch up" to where the playthrough was in order to participate. The use of scaffolding within the community allowed those interested enough to master the subject through a variety of layers. This subject learning appears across fandoms and is notably important for new participants entering a longstanding fandom. While retaining focus on TwitchPlaysPokémon, I will break down the scaffolding structure to each of its four layers to examine them more closely. At the end of each layer's discussion, I will briefly consider how these layers appear in other fandom communities to show that TwitchPlaysPokémon works as a scaled-down version of many different types of fandoms.

I then introduce the second dynamic of how TwitchPlaysPokémon's *leadership naturally arose*. Rather than being elected or promoted to leadership roles a variety of TwitchPlaysPokémon participants took on critical roles throughout the community voluntarily when those needs arose. These leaders, of which I will highlight three – the Rebel, the Informer, and the Creative – helped to create the scaffolding structure by assisting in crossing the layers of scaffolding. Each type of leader concerned themselves with gameplay and story-development that ultimately assisted the community in both playing the game and creating a related story. Again, to understand these positions in relation to larger community formations, I will offer examples of each of these three leader types first within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community and then outside of it. These exterior

examples will help to provide a broader application of leadership within a variety of communities.

Finally, I will look at the community aspect of the TwitchPlaysPokémon system with a particular focus on how TwitchPlaysPokémon participants *retained communal control*. While leaders assisted with the development of structure, the majority of TwitchPlaysPokémon's success[13] is due to the community remaining in control throughout the playthrough. As I will show, this allowed them to not only control the game but also to create story elements through voting as well as reincorporating schism groups that formed. Following this discussion, I will break down how this dynamic differs strongly from other, longer-standing, fandoms because TwitchPlaysPokémon resulted in an immediate and collaborative group that did not have to keep cohesion beyond the 16 days required to complete the game.

With that overview, it is now possible to approach each of these dynamics in more detail. First, I will discuss how these dynamics of scaffolding structure, naturally arising leaders, and community control appear in TwitchPlaysPokémon and how they suited the community without actively being established. Then I will briefly consider how these system dynamics can appear in other communities both online and off, highlighting TwitchPlaysPokémon's position as a case-study for broader community formation.

[13] Success here can be defined as several things when considering TwitchPlaysPokémon, but two particular types of success are the largest. First, being able to complete some aspect of the game (and ultimately the game itself), particularly around aspects which the community struggled with. Secondly, the development of a storyline that communicated the important parts of TwitchPlaysPokémon and allowed the game to become understandable if still chaotic.

## Scaffolding Structures

In my study of TwitchPlaysPokémon's scaffolding structure, I identified four layers. Each layer represents activities and information that participants incorporated into their understanding of the game and its community. The four layers are shown in Figure 4.2.

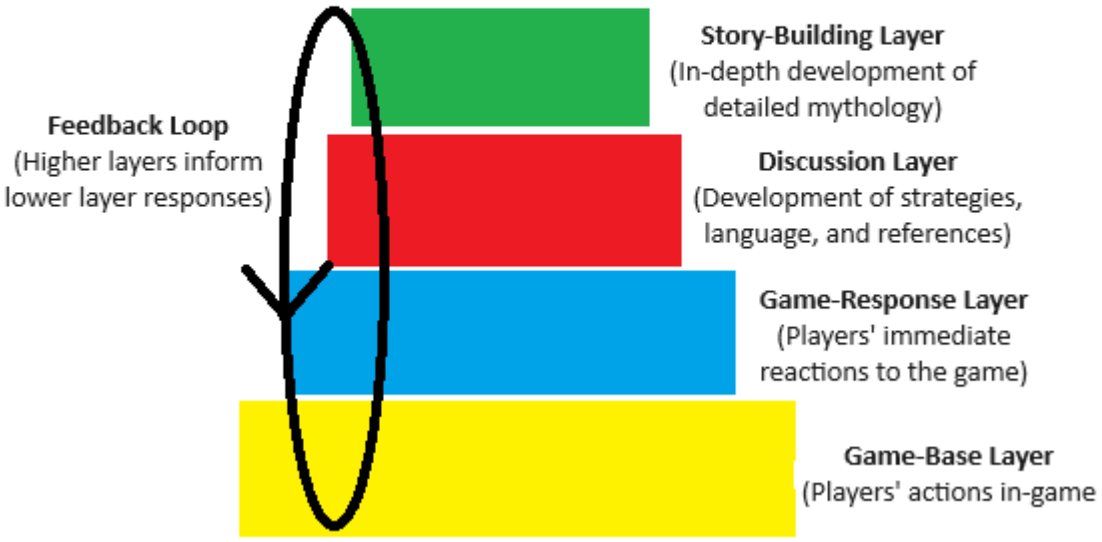


*Figure 4.2 A visual representative of the scaffolding structure of TwitchPlaysPokémon*

These four layers I have labeled Game-Base Layer, Game-Response Layer, Discussion Layer, and Story-Building Layer. At each layer, the TwitchPlaysPokémon community interacted with the game and the knowledge and artifacts the community produces in response. These interactions form the basis on which higher layers are developed, allowing for more and more complex interactions. A feedback loop is created among the layers because the community work at higher layers affects the participants' responses at lower layers.

## Scaffolding 1: Game-Base Layer

In fandom, the first layer of scaffolding forms from the original text which people will consume and eventually respond to. This base layer provides the initial knowledge the community will work from. In the case of TwitchPlaysPokémon, this base layer is slightly different than traditional video games. The basic element of TwitchPlaysPokémon is the video game *Pokémon Red* but there were changes made to it, particularly around how to control the game. This means that, since the once single-player game could now be controlled by thousands of people, the Game-Base Layer of TwitchPlaysPokémon was a revised version of *Pokémon Red*.

The base game did have one barrier to entry which was the need to know the correct commands for playing the game. Without knowing what to type, it would not have been possible to play. Since the programmer had made some adjustments to the game to allow for communal control, these also factor into the mastery of the Game-Base Layer of scaffolding. The player's view of the game can be seen in Figure 4.3.


*Figure 4.3 The visual players of TwitchPlaysPokémon would have seen with the game to the left, command line-up to the center and chat box to the right*

The image shown in Figure 4.3 shows the original format for players to see and play the game. The players could see the commands both on screen (center) and the chat box (right) where the commands were being inputted but the chat box also contained direct responses which will be discussed below. By having a list of only the upcoming commands the players did not have to pick out the upcoming commands from the multipurpose chat box.

The base layer is the easiest layer to spot in communities outside of TwitchPlaysPokémon since it is the primary text that begins the community. There is a base layer for any community using a scaffolding structure because the structure needs groundwork to build from. In fandoms, like the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, the base layer is the primary text that people are consuming. For example, the Star Wars fandom's base texts are the movies while comics are the base of many Marvel heroes and their fans. From these base texts, the community can understand their relationship to both the text

and other members of the community (Jenkins, 1992). Eventually, in responding to these base texts the community will move up the scaffolding to the second layer: the Game-Response Layer.

## Scaffolding 2: Game-Response Layer

The Game-Response Layer is where the immediate response to the base-layer occurs. It forms closely to the first layer as it is directly connected to the base-text. The Game-Response Layer is where the community of TwitchPlaysPokémon first reacted to the game they were playing and how they were playing it, meaning that this second layer was important for the participants because it was where they became more involved.

The easy accessibility to the chat box by all participants meant that the players of TwitchPlaysPokémon had a space in which they could immediately respond to events happening in the game. Marley-Vincent Lindsay examined the transcript from the chat box and recognized that significant decisions regarding the story were being made within this immediate space (2015). For example, Lindsay located the creation of Bird Jesus within the chat box responses to a particularly difficult Pokémon battle:

> 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. (Lindsay, 2015, 125)

Pidgeot's great moment of victory was intense because it beat all of a gym leader's Pokémon with very little health left, a theme that would continue throughout the playthrough. Previously, Pidgeot had not been a particularly important character, but this level of success raised its importance in the eyes of the community. Following this first

major victory for an otherwise unimportant figure participant Punkphantom commented: “if helix is our god then pidgeot is our jesus” (Lindsay, 2015). This religious association is then taken up by commentator Reggie339 who responded “ALL HAIL THE BIRD JESUS!” (Lindsay, 2015). With a religious perspective already attached to the game, reliance on this mimicry prompted quicker game responses. Additionally, once this type of name association occurs at the Game-Response Level there is little opportunity to change it in the latter levels. The players got the first response and thus set a precedent that the higher levels must have taken into account.

The Response Layer is also common for all different communities and, in fact, occurs even outside of groups. When a person has a response to a piece of information or media they are on this layer of scaffolding. The stronger their base layer knowledge is the more expansive their response can be. In Fan Studies and Game Studies, many subgroups are formed through the wish to share their response to a piece of media, such as guilds in online roleplaying games (Ducheneaut et al., 2007) or the community that formed around Myst diaspora (Pearce, 2011).

## Scaffolding 3: The Discussion Layer

The third layer of scaffolding is the Discussion Layer. This layer is where the community begins to establish a shared foundation of knowledge surrounding the text the community has formed around. This shared knowledge can include discussions about the text, about the fans, or about artifacts produced by those fans. These discussions allow a fandom to become more coherent and understanding of themselves as fans of a particular text.

The Discussion Layer was particularly important to TwitchPlaysPokémon participants as it moves the community into new spaces of knowledge development. The Game-Response Layer relied on the use of the chat box as both controller and comment space. However, this came with a major issue; the chat box had so much information passing through it that it became very difficult to read (u/LukP99, "We need a TPP chat room"). There needed to be a space where wider conversations could occur without being too difficult to keep up. The community response then expanded beyond the boundaries of Twitch and into other online spaces. The most significant of these was the TwitchPlaysPokémon subreddit on the discussion forum website Reddit. A subreddit, a dedicated discussion board for a specific topic, would allow more people to work together. Since the subreddit was not immediately connected to the TwitchPlaysPokémon playthrough, the layer of scaffolding is separated from the Game-Response Layer into a more general Discussion Layer.

Kim Yong-Chan and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach highlighted that a person is far more likely to invest time into a community when they are linked into that community's storytelling network (2006). Like the scaffolding I located in the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, this network works at multiple layers while continually linking back to the individual and their positionality in the network. For the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, this style of network began to grow at the Discussion Layer as the community members sought to establish a shared language and understanding of the game they had gotten so involved in.

Initially, this subreddit was utilized to specifically discuss strategies for the playthrough. A call for a "strategy meeting" would be sent out in the chat box and would direct players to the subreddit for discussion (Lindsay, 2015, 123). Early discussions remained close to the

game such as u/phan7om's logical response to the loss of several items to the personal computer (PC) in the game: "THERE IS A WAY TO GET THE ITEMS BACK! Red's PC in Pallet Town is an ITEM ONLY pc. We have to get back there to get Surf and Strength" ("Live Updates Day 11"). However, this move from the Game-Response Layer to the Discussion Layer, indicated by the change in online location, allowed the game and discussion about the game to occur in their own spaces. This also allowed the discussion to move away from direct responses to the game and into more detail with a specialized language within the community. Rather than responding immediately to what was happening the community now had a space for retroactive considerations.

In creating the language of TwitchPlaysPokémon the participants drew on two language foundations: Christianity and internet culture. Once a religious connection had been made at the Game-Response Layer, the community began to adapt common Christian tropes into their account of TwitchPlaysPokémon. Some references, like Bird Jesus, directly reference the Christian faith while others were much broader. For example, the comment "In his slumber, he was at peace. At his resurrection we will witness the apocalypse" (Anonymous, Reddit), uses Christian language but does not copy the story directly. In general, these comments were made humorously and, while they suited the story the community was telling, they focused on the absurd use of Christianized language when talking about Pokémon (u/Hypolol, 2014, "The Moment I Knew Bird Jesus was the Chosen One"; u/no-terrain, 2014, "The Moment I Knew Bird Jesus was the Chosen One"; u/the-soggy-taco, 2014, "The Moment I Knew Bird Jesus was the Chosen One").

The tongue-in-cheek nature of these discussions made language development particularly easy when it came to the Internet. Specifically, many of the connections made by participants were funneled through the development of memes. A meme is defined as "a humorous image, video, piece of text, etc., that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by internet users" (Oxford Dictionary). Memes are a shared language on the internet (Cadwell, 2021). Once one understands the language of a meme, it becomes possible to replace aspects of that meme to change the context. This style of language development allowed for an understanding of the meme even if one did not understand the full context of TwitchPlaysPokémon. For example, Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show two memes.

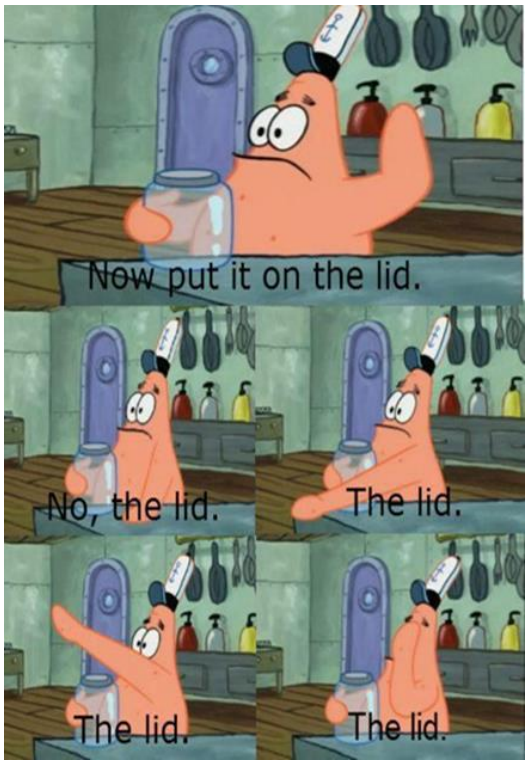


*Figure 4.4 The original Patrick meme*


*Figure 4.5 The TwitchPlaysPokémon version of the Patrick meme with Red unable to locate the tree*

Figure 4.4 shows a series of screenshots from an episode of the children's cartoon *Spongebob Squarepants*. In the images, Spongebob's friend Patrick is unable to locate the lid of a jar he needs to open. In Figure 4.5 Patrick's face is replaced by that of Red, *Pokémon Red*'s protagonist, and the jar is replaced by a tree. Without knowing the full playthrough of TwitchPlaysPokémon it is still possible to understand the joke: the players had difficulty finding and cutting down a tree in-game.

Knowledge of the playthrough became easier to gather through the community's use of a variety of memes. The further the memes went in creating a shared language for TwitchPlaysPokémon, the more niche the memes themselves became. This was particularly true when the language of memes became married to the Christian aspects of the playthrough, such as Figure 4.6.

*Figure 4.6 A meme of Helix exiting the tomb of Jesus*

Rather than relying on the knowledge provided by the meme template, these Christian/ TwitchPlaysPokémon memes focus on the story of TwitchPlaysPokémon as the community as written it and served as inside jokes for those in the know.

When one looks at the Discussion Layer more broadly it is apparent that TwitchPlaysPokémon is not the only community that has such a layer. In other fan communities, this layer is heavily used in the development and acceptance of a shared

community language. This language development can stretch from decisions regarding what the fans call themselves, such as the fact that “true fans” are called Trekker while “basic” fans are named Trekkie discussions in the Star Trek fandom (Jenkins, 1992). Language discussion can even focus on minute decisions such as placing communal recognition before the individual in the K-Pop fandom’s use of the term “we” (Lee et al., 2020) rather than I when discussing positive aspects of K-Pop. These types of discussion can even span across fields of study such as Will Wright’s note that Game Studies and the game industry has been developing a “shared language” that is “allowing both sides to speak about games” (2014). This step towards a gaming-wide vocabulary shows how critical the Discussion Layer is to the scaffolding structure of a community.

The original language development done in the Discussion Layer can be hard to locate in older fandoms where those discussions occurred well in the past, though I have included some examples above. In TwitchPlaysPokémon’s case, the discussion period for the original run-through was limited to the 16 days of gameplay rather than, say, the span of a full television season. TwitchPlaysPokémon’s shorter lifetime also meant there were clearer discussions which moved into story-building.

## Scaffolding 4: Story-Building Layer

The final layer of scaffolding is where the most original production occurs. The Story-Building phase focuses on the writing texts and visual texts the TwitchPlaysPokémon community produced once the basics of the story had circulated. Decisions about the mythology, memes, and language that happened in lower layers culminate in the work done at the top.

Within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, the final layer of the scaffolding structure centers on story-building. This, like the previous layer, mainly occurred on Reddit through posts to the TwitchPlaysPokémon subreddit. Story-building relied on the language and discussions that occurred at the third level of scaffolding and worked to expand the discussion into a fuller mythology. Those doing the work at this top layer relied on all three of its underlying layers in order to have sections of story accepted by the general population of the community. Some of this process can be seen in posts like the following from u/Johnnyhavok2 where they provide two accounts, a representation of the game and a representation of the story:

> [Reality]
> [T]he PC HAD to be accessed to deposit some Pokémon to make room for Lapras. This is where things went terribly. When the PC was accessed the Pokémon Abby K and Jay Leno were released back to back. From this most horrible of events, the Pokémon Eevee became known as the False Prophet due to it's [sic] existence causing the need for the PC in the first place.
>
> [Narrative]
> Red, tormented by the rising chaos in his mind, relented to the Dome and gave room to Eevee in his party. Eevee, lead of the Dome, inspired Red to make due sacrifice to the Dome of his enemy's (The Helix) followers. Abby K and Jay Leno had to go. And so Red accessed the PC, gave one pause to fanatically praise the Dome, and destroyed the pokeballs of Abby K and Jay Leno, giving them up to the Dome God. (“The Release of Abby K and Jay Leno”)

Here, u/Johnnyhavok2 is able to approach the story through the community response happening on the lower scaffolding layers. In fact, the u/Johnnyhavok2 themselves admits to this reliance, posting elsewhere: “I'm just reciting what I've read and surmised from the hivemind[14] at large”. Since the story was the final polished product produced by the

[14] A reminder that the Hivemind is what the TwitchPlaysPokémon community called themselves. u/Johnnyhavok2 is saying here that he relies on the community for his story work.

TwitchPlaysPokémon participants it sits as the top layer of scaffolding. This is true for many fandoms where production is commonly done in response to some primary text.

While I named the final layer of TwitchPlaysPokémon scaffolding the Story-Building Layer, the name could change when considering the structure of other fandoms where Production Layer may be more appropriate. That is to say that it is here at the top of the scaffolding where fandom participants become producers of media in their own right which occurs in all types of fandom. This production work can be artistic in nature such as artwork of fanfiction but it can also encompass spaces of community work such as charity work or other types of civil engagement (Jenkins, Peters-Lazaro, and Shrethova, 2020). I have selected the more specific term of story-building not only as a reference to the primary type of production seen from the TwitchPlaysPokémon community but also the recognition that it is usually through this type of work that a community builds a story about themselves in relation to the work (Williams, 2015). Story-Building, even when stepping back from TwitchPlaysPokémon, is important to a community.

## The Scaffolding Feedback Loop

The neat and clean version of the scaffolding structure would have the participants stepping up each layer together one at a time. This may even be possible for a small community. However, TwitchPlaysPokémon was not a small or particularly well-structured community, which meant that there were participants on all levels of scaffolding at different times. This lack of organization from within could likely be seen as to why the community developed an emergent system that assisted in organization.

Since the scaffolding could not be scaled one layer at a time by the large community another aspect of the structure was developed. The feedback loop allowed participants at lower layers to get information from the higher layers and enfold it into their layer. For example, we can return to Bird Jesus. Since the religious aspect of the story had already been developed and disseminated at the higher layers, players on the Game-Response layer could play into that religious perspective. What once was just a Pokémon gained story relevance without the need for discussion at either of the two upper layers. This can even be seen in the story-development by u/Johnnyhavok2 that was just discussed. The "reality" description already includes elements of mythologizing when calling Flareon the "False Prophet".

## Understanding the Scaffolding Terminology

As mentioned in the introduction, scaffolding as a term, calls up two different areas of knowledge. First, it is the name of a piece of construction equipment which allows builders to work higher on their project in the literal sense. Secondly, education uses the term as a teaching technique where students are offered a variety of approaches to a subject to encourage mastery. The first of these definitions, the literal scaffolding structure, offers a strong metaphor to how the community of TwitchPlaysPokémon originally approached play and story formation. Once there is a lower level of production – in business, charity, or fandom – it becomes possible for more community members to expand and create at higher levels. By building on top of this previous knowledge the participants were able to create and share more and more related products.

Meanwhile, the educational term of scaffolding serves as a strong theory which assists with another group of participants within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community: participants who were not part of the playthrough from the beginning but wished to be part of the community anyway. These players, having a delayed start, had much information they needed to know to actively participate within the community: TwitchPlaysPokémon became a subject they needed to master.

The central position of educational scaffolding development is concerned with a person's "conceptualizing and reasoning" (Wood, 1991). This means that new learners approach the information being taught to them at various levels and may be assisted towards mastery through different means (Bliss et al.). Within communities, the use of educational scaffolding can allow either a new central community or newcomers in longer-standing communities to learn at a faster pace. Cooper and Johnson highlight how scaffolding knowledge enables better group cohesion over shared learning (2014) as well as creating "concrete references students can rely on for support as they attempt to complete new and complex tasks" (Cooper, Johnson, and Bell, 2003). Understanding the organization of a community and its goals means that members can participate to a greater degree than they would have should the scaffolding structure not have been there.

Within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, the emergent scaffolding helped to address how complex the TwitchPlaysPokémon event had become. With so many players, commands, events, story elements, and chaos the TwitchPlaysPokémon space was extremely hard to navigate even for those who had been there from the beginning. The use of stacked layers of participation and knowledge creation allowed the TwitchPlaysPokémon

community to organize what was happening more meaningfully in a short amount of time. This immediacy is what sets TwitchPlaysPokémon's scaffolding structure apart from fandoms which also may use a scaffolding system but have had a longer lifespan to develop it.

With the scaffolding structure, including its feedback loop, uncovered I expanded my research to include aspects of the network that worked alongside the scaffolding layers. This allowed me to investigate two crucial details which would help complete my system of communal storytelling: naturally arising leaders, and retention of community control.

## Natural Leadership

Our next section addresses how the layers of scaffolding were climbed. That is, if the community could not scale them together because of their continued work at the lower layers, how was there any organization at the various layers? This prompted me to examine the production of content on each layer to find what brought the community together. In doing this, I was able to locate and identify a series of naturally arising leaders who worked within each part of the community and made space for others to cross between scaffolding layers.

Dennis Rea, in his examination of leadership as an adaptive approach, argues that "Leadership requires creativity and demands responsiveness, flexibility, and emotional and strategic risk taking, underpinned by key personal attributes like critical judgement, sensitive communication, and collaborative execution" (2014, 108). Traditionally, these attributes would be recognized in a person and either those higher up would move that

person into a leadership role or the person would be voted there by the community. Natural leadership, as I define the term, considers how people may step into these leadership roles without an official election, promotion, or placement there by someone while still being strong forces within the community (He et al., 1991).

TwitchPlaysPokémon never elected a leader, but certain participants stepped up into roles they saw needed to be filled. To examine how these leadership roles served the community I have split the leaders into three types which were important to in the playthrough. I will examine one example from each of these types to illustrate further. The three categories are the Rebel, the Informer, and the Creative which can be seen summarized in Table 4.1.

| Type: | Activity: | Scaffolding Layers: | Example: |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Rebel | Plays game in opposition to the majority | Game-Base to Game-Response | Destiny |
| The Informer | Consumes and then summarizes for an audience who cannot keep up | Game-Response to Discussion | ItsTyrellYo |
| The Creative | Creates a significant amount of story content | Discussion to Story-Development | Johnnyhavok2 |

*Table 4.1 The three categories of leadership and their definitions*

*The Rebel Leader* approaches his situation counterintuitively and against many people. In TwitchPlaysPokémon there was only one Rebel Leader, but he caused a large enough interruption to the game that many players took notice of him. The player used the name Destiny online and has his own Twitch channel. Because of actions taken by Destiny and his audience, many TwitchPlaysPokémon players banded together to fend him off and thus

assisted in the movement from the Game-Base to the Game-Response Layers. The Rebel leader, through his contrariness, united others in opposition to himself.

*The Informer Leader* approaches their role with the intent of sharing information with a wider audience. Within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community there were several Informers because many people who were interested in the game could not spend hours watching it. These folks opened a need for updates on the subreddit that participants could rely on, thus these leaders spanned the space between the Game-Response and Discussion Layers. While several participants held Informer positions, ItsTyrellYo will be our example.

Finally, there is *the Creative Leader*. The Creative Leader focused on work between the Discussion and Story-Development Layers. As the name implies, Creative Leaders produced a lot of the story and art within the community. We have already met one of the most prevalent Creative Leaders, Johnnyhavok2 who introduced much of the mythology as it is known now.

## The Rebel Leader

We define Rebel leadership in the TwitchPlaysPokémon community as those who made major decisions about how gameplay should be performed for their own reasons rather than the communal goal. This type of leadership was unique, with only one clear example, as controlling the game was distinctly difficult even when the community was collaborating. Destiny, through having his own followers from his Twitch channel, was the only leader who clearly had a supportive base going into TwitchPlaysPokémon. The majority of his support came from his own audience which followed him onto TwitchPlaysPokémon

and had thus already elected him as someone they would follow. Within TwitchPlaysPokémon itself, Destiny became a Rebel Leader because the natural role he stepped into was as an enemy who needed to be defeated.

Destiny was excited about TwitchPlaysPokémon and was curious about a different way to play the game. He enlisted his own audience to move with him to the TwitchPlaysPokémon channel and from there began to take control. He first aimed to release Bird Jesus so that he would be lost from the game forever. His 2000 supporters were successful at accessing the PC, where additional Pokémon are stored, and began releasing those Pokémon. While the community prevented the loss of Bird Jesus, 12 other Pokémon were released. The community viewed these releases as the death of the Pokémon and so, named the ordeal "Bloody Sunday" and incorporated it into the story as a sacrificial event (James,2018).

The community, once they realized what was happening, began to coordinate efforts to prevent the loss of their important Pokémon. Rather than working independently, many players started working together to oppose Destiny. Michael Aikens summed up the rally to defeat Destiny as: "Perhaps the greatest lesson learned from this game is the true strength of collective purpose-that thousands of unrelated individuals working on a seemingly unimportant goal will rally together when the collective purpose is threatened" (2014). The entire game of TwitchPlaysPokémon centered the idea that even a loosely connected community could successfully overcome obstacles and beat the game.

There was not much discussion of Destiny's role until the event was over. There was a split of opinions as to whether Destiny's approach was within the spirit of the game. An

agreement was reached when Destiny was active, earning his leadership role when the players teamed up against him. In the aftermath, the community became more divided on Destiny and his style of play. Some players considered him a "douchebag" who did the inexcusable (u/Synchrotr0n, "Thoughts on Destiny") while others admitted he was a "douche" but within the spirit of the game because he did not "use bots",[15] "hack",[16] or change the game in any way (u/ThePokebard, "Thoughts on Destiny"). There were also arguments over whether Destiny was ultimately good for the game because it showed "we could come together to deter an outside threat" (u/pikminlover72, "Thoughts on Destiny") or whether he didn't matter at all (u/MarkRowen, "Thoughts on Destiny"). These various discussions help to highlight the position that Destiny ultimately took on as the Rebel Leader.

## The Informer Leader

Proper leadership requires a clear line of communication between the leader and the rest of the community. This communication serves "as an act of transmission and negotiation" within that community (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014, 401). Information sharing is critical for the understanding and development of shared knowledge within a community. This is particularly true when the community, like TwitchPlaysPokémon, is so fast-paced that these lines of communication can become difficult to track.

[15] Bots reference the tendency for one person to run multiple accounts with the help of a computer system. It allows them to approach an issue as a 'group' and not just one person (Pedrazzi and Oehmer, 2020).
[16] Infiltrating the coding of a site or game to change it or mess it up (Beavers, 2022).

The TwitchPlaysPokémon stream ran 24 hours a day. While this had the advantage of allowing all time zones to participate in the game, it also meant that one often missed whole sections of play. Since there were very few people who could monitor the game around the clock, there was a need for participants to be able to catch up to where the gameplay was at any given time. This need signaled that there was an issue for many participants in moving between the Game-Response Layer and the Discussion Layer because without knowing what happened at the game level it became difficult to participate in any discussions about the event.

From this issue arose a collection of leaders within the community who spotted a space that needed to be filled. These leaders were of the Informer variety whose focus was to keep players up-to-date on what was happening. The Informer Leader works to provide key information which enforces the ability for others to do their jobs at a high level (Willis et al., 2023). This type of leadership was critical within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community as the higher levels of scaffolding relied on the majority of players being informed about the gameplay.

These Informer Leaders began posting live updates on the TwitchPlaysPokémon subreddit which would keep all participants up-to-date on gameplay. While many of these posts are no longer visible, it is possible to see how key they were for the community through the comments other participants left. While several people held the position of Informer during the playthrough, the person who held it the longest was u/ItsTyrellYo who will serve as the key example in further discussion.

u/ItsTyrellYo's posts centered the crossing point from the lower levels of the scaffolding (Game-Base and Game-Response) into the higher levels of Discussion and Story-Development. This was done by primarily focusing on keeping players updated and players appreciated this to the point of suggesting adjustments that would make the information clearer: "Can the live update have the current objective (or objectives) stickied to the top? That way when revisiting after a 'break' it's easier for everyone to get back on track with what the current strategy is" (u/Djank1, "Live Updates Day 8"). Other times, strategy discussions happened in direct response to these updates: "THERE IS A WAY TO GET THE ITEMS BACK! Red's PC in Pallet Town is an ITEM ONLY pc. We have to get back there to get Surf and Strength" (u/phan7om, "Live Updates Day 11"). These spaces were needed to allow everyone participating to do so fully and well.

However, there was another element to u/ItsTyrellYo's work that enabled full participation by the players. Alongside the key gameplay information, these Informer Leaders also included insider references and jokes. This meant that the Informer leadership was paying attention to aspects of the game which the community had given meaning to. Jokes such as checking the Pokedex – "Well, the Bulbasaur cry is doing alright. We should probably check on that Bulbasaur cry" (WhiteChocolate12, "Live Updates Day 8") – allowed fuller participation in the event because it kept the randomness of the entire playthrough intact. By balancing important and fun information, the Informers showed a level of care to the community as a whole.

This care meant that more participants could find ways to participate in the community. They could fill out the scaffolding structure and produce content at a variety of layers. The

absence of the Informer leadership and its updates would have resulted in community members have issues due to lack of information. With the scaffolding feedback loop also working the information participants got encouraged full interaction with the lower levels of the scaffolding just as much as the higher ones (such as a player understanding the current objective and knowing what commands they need to input into the game).

The Informer Leadership smoothed the system's progress by keeping the majority of participants open and understanding about what the community was experiencing. The movement between the various of layers of scaffolding, but particularly between the Game-Response and Discussion Layers, allowed information to pass between players and thus enabled a greater scale of interaction.

## The Creative Leader

The final type of leader I uncovered during my investigation of TwitchPlaysPokémon was a type of leadership that moved the discussion into a creative space. I directly called this type of leader the Creative Leader. Creative Leadership is fairly common outside TwitchPlaysPokémon where they serve their communities through the development of stories, art, and other forms of creative energies (Ellen Mathisen et al., 2012). Within the gaming space, the Creatives are recognized as a unique leadership style that develops from the space between video games and the physical world (Hewett, 2022). Just like their external counterparts and their leadership within other games, the TwitchPlaysPokémon Creative Leaders focused on the construction of story elements through either writing or

art. One of the more prolific Creative Leaders within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community is u/Johnnyhavok2 who has been discussed previously in this chapter.

The Creative Leadership of TwitchPlaysPokémon worked primarily between the Discussion Layer and the Story-Building Layer as they produced the story through their creative media. This move brings the community to the highest layer of the scaffolding structure, but, with the feedback loop functioning, the story became more firmly incorporated into the Game-Response layer as well. Their work was shown to the community and often prompted others to produce works of their own. Additionally, the Creative Leaders relied on information made important by the community as well as communal discussions.

u/Johnnyhavok2's largest addition to the TwitchPlaysPokémon community was a Reddit post titled "Explanation of Everything Thus Far". It includes information not only on the game itself, such as key Pokémon terminology and an explanation of how the chat box as the controller works, but also story-related information such as key Pokémon and major events. This bringing together of information and the creation of much of it highlights how these Creative Leaders had stepped up to organize the community and share their work.

For example, under each of the event links on the "Explanation of Everything Thus Far", u'johnnyhavok2 provides both a recap of the events as they occurred in-game as well as a mythologized narrative of those events. Once posted on Reddit these posts became communal spaces where other participants could comment on the work and other critiques or suggestions:

> In the Gods debacle don't forget that if it weren't for anarchy there wouldn't be any gods. Because we would never start spamming endlessly praying

> sessions to an item. The whole narrative created in the game came from the complete mess that was anarchy. With democracy can we win faster? yes, but without anarchy everything you wrote about would be just a typical Pokémon let's play. (u/MrOliverira, “Explanation of Everything Thus Far”)

The community is welcome and able to respond and further the discussion at all levels of the scaffolding structure.

These types of comments show how the Creative Leaders are understood within the community. Specifically, u/Johnnyhavok2 repositioned himself and recognized that Creative Leadership exists only in relation to the other participants: “I'm not trying to editorialize anything here. I personally enjoy the Anarchy more and wish it would stay with that system throughout the whole thing. I'm just reciting what I've read and surmised from the hivemind at large” (“Explanation of Everything Thus Far”). Creative Leaders are only successful when they are generally accepted by the community. While no one is likely to be accepted by everyone it is possible to see the lean of the community in support of these types of leaders.

With Creative Leadership leading the way at the top of the scaffolding while lower levels are supported by a Rebel Leader and a collection of Informer Leaders, the very large and varied community of TwitchPlaysPokémon is able to work together to build a story. This communal work serves as the final critical piece to the community system interwoven into the myth-making of TwitchPlaysPokémon.

## Communal Control

TwitchPlaysPokémon's reliance on community control offers an interesting divergence from how fandom communities often function. While a fandom may have many participants this does not always translate to power. Often, power remains in the hands of the producers of media and not the consumers (Bosher, 2020). Laws set limits on how involved a fandom may be in the production of its primary text.

There are examples of communal pressure to change or extend media, such as the demand for an adjusted Sonic the Hedgehog after an outcry of the animated figure being "creepy" (Lee, 2020). However, these pushes into some positions of power are limited and more often than not, rebuffed by the bigger production companies. With no larger company behind it and no central producer of the text as it was being written, TwitchPlaysPokémon had a much better chance of retaining communal control. In fact, this type of control served as the central power source of the TwitchPlaysPokémon storytelling system as it is what drove the entire event. In my research, I came to understand that the communal focus on both winning the game and telling a story was what made the community successful in achieving these goals. Where the leaders of TwitchPlaysPokémon helped to move between the layers of scaffolding, the community and what they produced filled out each layer of scaffolding as the central parts of TwitchPlaysPokémon. Everything from the Start9 riots to voting for Pokémon nicknames, as we shall soon discuss, showed how much TwitchPlaysPokémon relied on the retention of communal control even after leadership had emerged.

Within Game Studies, the reliance on co-created experiences is well-known (Banks, 2013; Czarnota, 2018). This combination of game developer and fan producer allows gaming to approach storytelling in different ways depending on the perspective at play. This communal work has recently been pushed to the forefront of other industries as well with a focus on enabling participants to center themselves in their work (Roberts et al., 2014; Resch et al., 2020). This centering of the relationship between individual and community member has allowed for a much more personal connection to the production that those people are involved in. This is mirrored perfectly in TwitchPlaysPokémon.

One of the enduring fascinations with TwitchPlaysPokémon is the fact that the game was won by thousands of players collaborating with the controls. With so many people, the game should not have been winnable, much-less fun, yet the community beat the game in 16 days[17]. This success can not be awarded to a single, or select few, players but is, instead, a success owned by the community. Even the original programmer did not take credit as he was hands-off about the game: "I didn't want to babysit the stream and nerf[18] the game. I'd rather the game be beaten on its own terms" (McWhertor, 2014). The one major change the programmer did make, to create Democracy-mode, was ultimately rejected by the community.

Democracy was the programmer's response to the chaos of TwitchPlaysPokémon. The programmer implemented Democracy with the idea that the game would progress better

[17] Going off the testing done by *HowLongtoBeat.com* a game of Pokémon Red would traditionally be beatable within 27 hours though to complete the game entirely the count goes up to 101 hours. It is still significantly shorter than the 384 hours taken by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community.
[18] To reduce the power of something, in this case, the game.

when not every command was injected into the game. However, this change was made after the community had begun to give importance and meaning to parts of that chaos. Instead of solving a problem, many players felt like the programmer had ruined the fun (u/TheEggKing, "Anarchy/Democracy Explained") and turned the game into a "hollow victory" (u/thatguywhoisthatguy, "Anarchy/Democracy Explained"). It is here that the community began to show how much control they had within the system.

In direct response to the implementation of Democracy, players began to use the system to disrupt the game. The way that Democracy worked is that a 30-second timer was set, and everyone typed in the command they felt should be done next. At the end of the 30 seconds, the move with the most votes would be done. These moves could be expanded by typing a number from 1-9 behind the command which told the system how many times to follow the command. Inputting 'Start' would open the menu and no gameplay could be done until the menu was exited. Players, mad at the new mode of play, began inputting Start9 (u/danman1232, "What is 'Start9' from 'TwitchPlaysPokémon'?"). This opened and closed the menu multiple times which resulted in no forward progression in the game.

Eventually, the programmer responded by making both Democracy and its opposite, Anarchy (or the original game mode), both available. Votes towards a system would battle it out to see which mode would be used. Max Mallory, in his article about TwitchPlaysPokémon, comments that he considered "the start9 riot as one of the most important lessons in Twitch Plays Pokémon: players will get what they want, regardless of what systems are put in place to stop them" (2014, 33). A portion of the community had won but only, arguably, a portion. There was some disagreement over the use of this new

play mode, with some players appreciating Democracy for the ability to navigate the game precisely (u/manwithasquarehead, 2014, “Democracy Mode Sucks”; u/mastahcheech, 2014, “Democracy Mode Sucks”). The community was split but they responded to this in a different manner.

Rather than only fighting, the community merged the two sides into the story. Democracy became associated with the Dome Fossil (u/TheEggKing, 2014, “Anarchy/Democracy Explained”) which was the other fossil the community could have selected but didn’t. The divide between play modes became a divide between fossils, became a divide between gods (u/jsnbrgmn, 2014, “Anarchy/Democracy Explained”). The community took control not only of the game but also how they understood this new element within the story. When considering the work done on the story’s production, there are many points where one can recognize the fingerprints of multiple perspectives and voices. Just as no single leader took control of the entire game, no single leader took control of the whole story.

Other story elements were developed and decided on by communal control. Rather than allowing one person to dictate how each Pokémon would be recognized by the community, there were often disagreements between participants. These disagreements were either worked into the story or overcome through communal action. For example, when the players successfully caught Zapdos (an electric-bird Pokémon) there were many suggestions for the name that would be given to it. To reach a decision, u/Sidnoea posted the following:

> Okay guys, seriously. All people do in the submissions anymore is... moan about Zapdos's nickname and I am sick of it. Let's settle this right here. Comment with a nickname, use upvotes to pick one. I'll be back in like a day and post the top two to the document. (“Nickname for Zapdos”).

Many players had suggestions for possible nicknames. For the majority Zapdos became known as the Archangel of Justice. Yet, even with this, the individual community members maintained their control, calling the Pokémon anything from Battery Bird to Bird Jesus 2 Electric Boogaloo.

The control of the story isn't in one person's hands and, it could be argued, that it's actually not in the community's hands either but, instead, moved fluidly between communal and individual control. With thousands of players, the discussion of story elements and the growth of the mythology outright relied on communal efforts which, simultaneously, recognized individual actions. As we will explore below, each person participated both within a group and as an individual. The participants moved between these identities smoothly. When the game was threatened, they could very quickly come together to save the day but when it came to deciding a side between Helix and Dome, they could be notably individualistic.

The allowance for this movement proves that the community, as a whole, actively controlled the story because it allowed both group and individual identities. Instead of forcing players to be one or the other, the crowd-sourced power enabled people to navigate the story in their own ways. This acceptance of individuality in a communally controlled space is best seen in the full religion the community developed. The entire religion is full of schisms and sects which incorporated all different perspectives. Figure 4.6 shows only a part of the religion, focusing on the perspectives surrounding Flareon, the Pokémon that alternatively became known as the False Prophet.

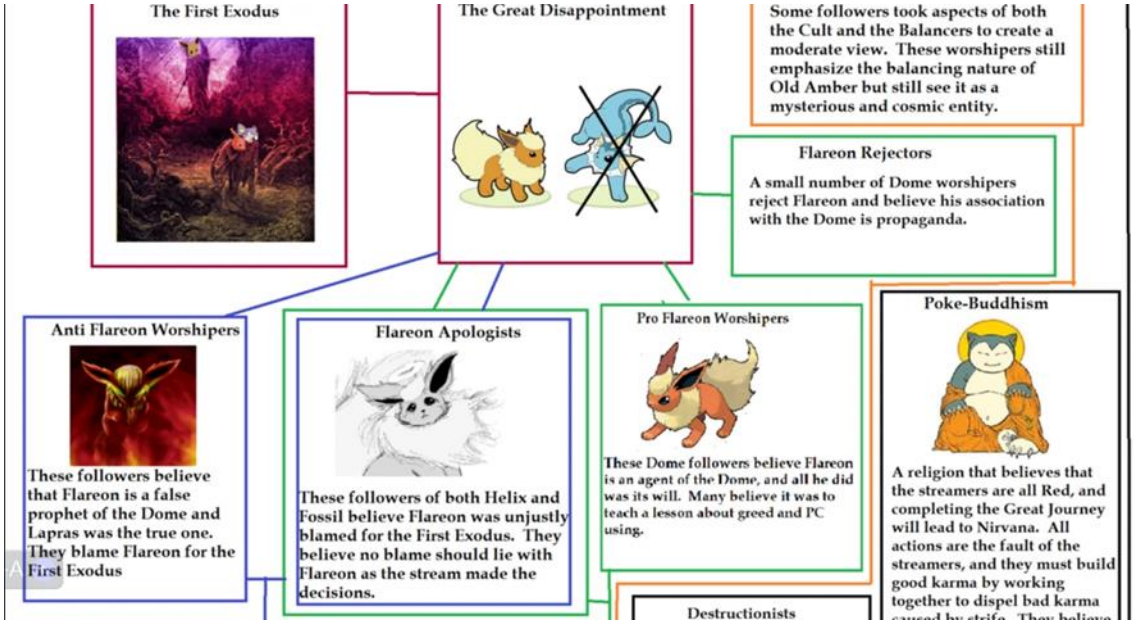


*Figure 4.7 A portion of the TwitchPlaysPokémon religion showing the four sects surrounding Flareon*

Flareon's four-way division, as seen in Figure 4.7 shows that a player can have a variety of viewpoints in regards to all aspects of the mythology. Each of these viewpoints has been translated into the religious account, allowing a participant to remain part of the group even while retaining a different viewpoint.

Each of these examples, from the Start9 riots to choosing a name for Zapdos, shows how the power of the TwitchPlaysPokémon community failed to fall into the hands of one or two leaders fully. Rather, the players continued to retain their own perspectives and to use their power both within the game space and outside of it. The community members could be both individualistic in their perspective while also maintaining community cohesion through a broad and accepting story.

## System Dynamics at Work

Each of the earlier discussions that make up the body of this chapter works in tandem to produce a community system through which the TwitchPlaysPokémon community successfully told a story. The scaffolding structure, with its four layers, framed the entire system and was navigated through the other two parts: naturally arising leadership and retention of communal control. The leaders of the community provided easier movement between the layers of the scaffolding while the community at large provided the content for each of those layers.

The appearance of natural leaders within the game and story of TwitchPlaysPokémon brought attention to the fact that cooperation was a possibility which created awesome things. The need to fight against Destiny or receive information from u/ItsTyrrellYo and u/Johnnyhavok2 meant that people engaged more directly not just with the game itself but also with each other through comments and discussions on posts made by both natural leaders. This engagement enabled the community to retain control of both aspects of TwitchPlaysPokémon, keeping a hold of the stories that mattered to them and fighting off changes they did not feel were appropriate.

These leaders rose to their positions via group cohesion and agreement. The connective tissue between community and leadership helped to unite the community as a whole while still allowing for the existence of sub-groups within the community. These internal subgroups often relied on an understanding of how the larger community functioned and the roles they played within that community. Paul Zanazanian articulates this balance between group and subgroup as a challenge that “is a double need for a unifying vision that

establishes a sense of legitimacy, which, [will provide] an acknowledged form of connectivity among the community's differing sub-groups" (Zanazanian, 2019). To unify the whole community it is necessary to recognize the development of subgroups within the community. Within TwitchPlaysPokémon the fact that subgroups formed meant that individual perspectives were brought into the story and were accepted by the community as valid perspectives on the TwitchPlaysPokémon experience. The layers of scaffolding provided entrance points into these groups via knowledge and creation.

Altogether, this community system shows how well the players of TwitchPlaysPokémon were able to adapt not only to the game but also to the expansion onto other sites such as Reddit. Rather than shying away from these developments, the community took advantage of the opportunity to unite and build something new together. When the game failed to provide them the necessary approach for creation the group developed it themselves, harnessing certain aspects of the internet for specific layers of their projects. Control remained within the community and goals were set and achieved through cooperation and community development.

## Conclusion

My research into TwitchPlaysPokémon has revealed interesting aspects of the community and its storytelling practices. This chapter has worked to reveal the bones not only of the story, through its discussion of the scaffolded building method, but also the bones of a community: leaders and community members. Interestingly, the pairing of communal members and leaders opens up two pathways of exploration. First, the

inclusion of leaders within a community does not cancel out the work and power of the community itself. Secondly, the story, the system, and the community rely on each other to continue growing; one does not solely lead to the others.

In bringing together a project such as either a shared control gaming system or an all-encompassing story explaining that system, the participants of these projects must be willing to adapt and change to suit the needs of the entire project. For example, the players of TwitchPlaysPokémon had to adapt to the appearance of the Rebel leader Destiny to continue both the game and their story. This speaks to the communal growth found between communities and the stories they tell. Without the growing story around TwitchPlaysPokémon, certain natural leadership positions, such as u/JohnnyHavok2's Creative position would not have been needed, never mind arisen as smoothly as it did. Yet, without the community already engaged in the game, the story never would have been created. This generated a feedback loop where the community built the story but then the story also began to form the community. This formation ranges from attracting new participants to the project to allowing the natural development of leadership roles that need filling.

Altogether, this communal growth and development between leaders and community and community and story results in a positive system of cooperation. Together, each community member added both to the story and gameplay and also to the confidence (or lack thereof) in the leaders who have stepped forward to represent the group. Anyone could step forward, but people did not have to be recognized leaders to participate and feed the storytelling development.

# Chapter 5: Reading TwitchPlaysPokémon Artwork

In this thesis I argue that, alongside the organization that enabled easy storytelling, the participants of TwitchPlaysPokémon used three key sources of knowledge – the Pokémon game, the TwitchPlaysPokémon story, and external knowledge – to create and position artworks within the communal space. Positioning was done via three elements of the artwork: conceptualization, adaptation, and accessibility. These elements helped to dictate the relationship between pieces of fanart and the overall community, expanding the story through visual media which helps to explain How the story of TwitchPlaysPokémon came to exist. This expansion resulted in the recognition and inclusion of art as a necessity for understanding and interpreting the story as a whole. Even Creative Leaders, such as u/Johnnyhavok2 who we discussed in Chapter 4, relied on "community fan art/chatter" (u/Jonnyhavok2, "Explanation of Everything Thus Far") in the construction of their own story elements.

The work done by TwitchPlaysPokémon artists tended to fall into two forms of approachability. The artworks could close off the community by adapting the story closely using expected iconography. Alternatively, the artist could open the community for new fans by hosting their art on sites independent of TwitchPlaysPokémon and prompting curious investigation. The viewers of TwitchPlaysPokémon artworks were invited to participate in the artwork through their knowledge surrounding the sources of TwitchPlaysPokémon, Pokémon Red, and external realms of knowledge. These sources are infused throughout the artwork and help to form the backbone of the artists' approach to their own story account.

Since the artwork of TwitchPlaysPokémon provides different ways to approach the story, a particular issue arises: what is the difference between 'reading' and 'viewing'? In his discussion of visual culture, Richard Howlles argues that "We live in a visual world. We are surrounded by increasingly sophisticated visual images. But unless we are taught how to read them, we run the risk of remaining visually illiterate" (2003, 1). In this visual world people can 'view' images all the time; viewing here means to see images. The 'reading' of these images articulates that one is not just able to see but can also understand.

When a viewer of TwitchPlaysPokémon work becomes a reader of that work, they position themselves in relation to the whole of the TwitchPlaysPokémon community. This becomes more apparent when those readers engage with the work and express interest in knowing more. The understanding and study of the visible is necessary to contemplate the relation between image and the community. This is particularly true when one considers the "transnational" and "globalized" states in which visual culture exists (Boidy, 2020).

Images need to be readable and read to perceive messaging within those images, on a variety of scales. Communities that use artistic work as a way to spread knowledge rely on a shared system of articulation that allows others to understand the work in the context in which it is presented. Reading and articulating artworks allow for more knowledge to be dispersed within and outside of their respective communities.

A community's artworks act as much as a center of knowledge as their other community work does ("Twitch Plays Pokémon: Lore_Red", Reddit). Within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, the knowledge of the story was augmented through the reading of the artworks. By reading these artworks participants can further the story or rewrite it entirely

through the consumption of specific images. I argue that the artwork produced by the community informs the story-building just as much as pieces of written story. With this said, I focus on how the artwork of TwitchPlaysPokémon can be read through the organization of its sources and elements.

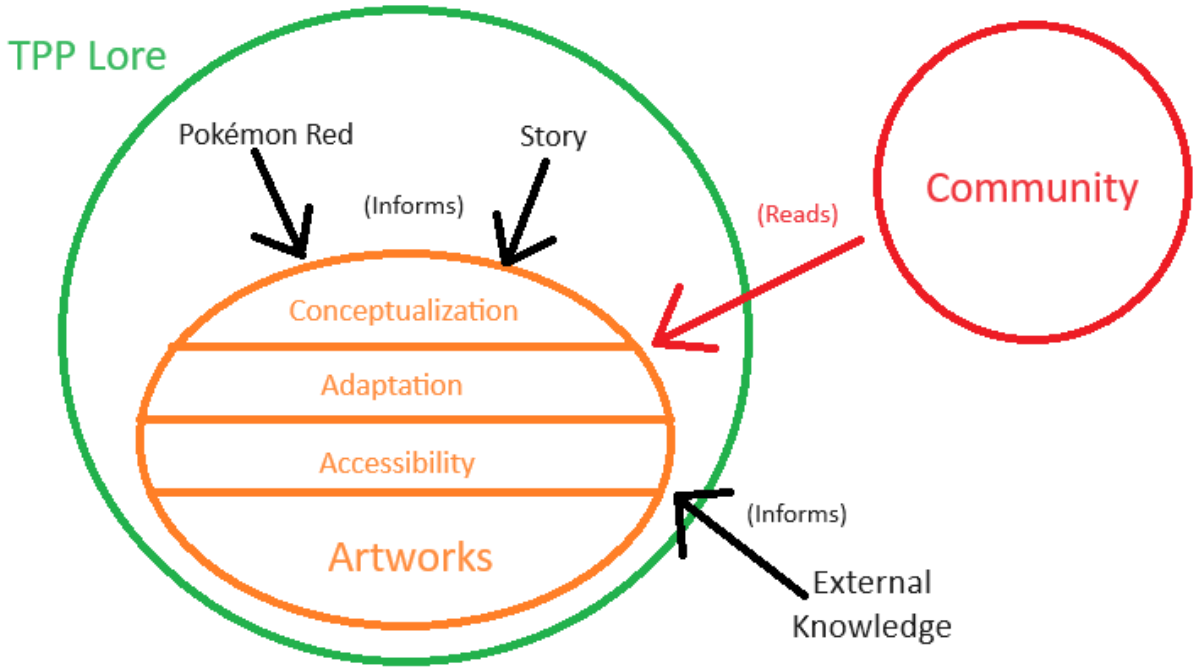


*Figure 5. 1 A diagram showing how the artwork is incorporated into TwitchPlaysPokémon lore. The three sources of knowledge are in black while the three elements which will be discussed are in orange*

Figure 5.1 shows the broad structure of the TwitchPlaysPokémon community as it relates to fanart. To break it down, the artwork of TwitchPlaysPokémon incorporated three key sources of knowledge that dictated how the story would be explored: *Pokémon Red* the video game, the TwitchPlaysPokémon story as developed by the community, and external bodies of knowledge. Each of these sources offers unique knowledge from which the artist can draw and then develop in their own way.

The original *Pokémon Red* game provides artists with the basic visual language that the TwitchPlaysPokémon community used. The game had been designed by Nintendo and thus had a visual art style before TwitchPlaysPokémon's story was overlaid. These basics serve as the basis of all Pokémon art and thus all TwitchPlaysPokémon art.

TwitchPlaysPokémon, as it built its story through the scaffolding structure discussed in the last chapter, provided a wealth of knowledge to community artists. The religious elements that the community had adopted began at the lower layers of the scaffolding and thus were incorporated prior to when much of the artwork was done. This gave a structure of religion, or sacredness, to the artworks which they had to contend with, if not directly address, this type of knowledge.

Finally, many artists of TwitchPlaysPokémon, of whom we will see only a small portion[19], worked to combine their understanding of TwitchPlaysPokémon with external sources of knowledge. These external sources allowed for the adoption of different shared languages to incorporate into their artwork. These external languages enabled outsiders to gain some understanding of the artwork while prompting curiosity regarding TwitchPlaysPokémon.

Through the synthesis of these three sources, the artists of TwitchPlaysPokémon produced artwork built with three key elements that helped to position each artwork within the wider community: conceptualization, adaptation, and accessibility. Each of these elements helps dictate how approachable the artwork is to the community and how the story develops from written work to artwork. Together these elements make up the creative

[19] There are hundreds of pieces of art dedicated to the original TwitchPlaysPokémon playthrough. A collection of artworks can be found linked here: https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/wiki/lore_red/

approach of the artist as well as their discussion to share that art. Since story development is done through both written and artwork the TwitchPlaysPokémon community relied on these key elements to explore different approaches to the story. To briefly consider how these elements interconnect I will explore a common TwitchPlaysPokémon meme.

Memes, as discussed in Chapter 4, were used in the discussion layer of the scaffolding structure. By using the language of the internet's known memes, participants were able to add parts of TwitchPlaysPokémon to their memes and provide humorous and understandable explanations of how TwitchPlaysPokémon functioned. I will use a wide-spread meme for this explanation. Here in Figure 5.2 is a meme of Pokémon edited over The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci.


*Figure 5.2 u/Akalron's meme of The Last Supper of Bird Jesus*

u/Akalron's meme, fully titled "The Last Supper, as led by our saviour, Bird Jesus", shows a collection of TwitchPlaysPokémon Pokémon participating in the Christian act of Jesus' last supper. All three elements of TwitchPlaysPokémon artwork can be seen.

First, there is *conceptualization*. The concept of an artwork is what the artist wanted to create. It is the idea from which the artist works. Within TwitchPlaysPokémon an artist's conceptualization is built through a combination of all three sources of the game, story, and external knowledge. In u/Akalron's work the Pokémon imagery comes from the original game, Bird Jesus is pulled from the TwitchPlaysPokémon communal story, and the rest of the meme's content is adopted from da Vinci's original painting and its connection to the biblical story.

The second element is a*daptation,* which focuses on the execution of the artwork through the choices made during production. Each artist adapts images and symbols from the original game and the communal story but combines them in a way that is unique to them. Additionally, artists often use external sources of knowledge in this process to make connections between TwitchPlaysPokémon, their artwork, and other pieces of media. u/Akalron uses Bird Jesus as a replacement for Jesus but chooses not use external knowledge to connect other Pokémon to biblical figures such as Judas (u/Anonymous, "The Last Supper, as lead by Our Saviour, Bird Jesus"; u/Kamkake, "The Last Supper, as lead by Our Saviour, Bird Jesus").

Finally, there is *accessibility* which concerns itself with the audience. Accessibility is how a person approaches the artwork: both by finding it (where it is online) and by reading it (understanding it). u/Akalron's meme spread out from Reddit allowing internet users to locate it. There are three points of access in reading the piece: *Pokémon Red*, TwitchPlaysPokémon, and the Christianized painting. Knowledge of one of these sources makes it easier to understand the picture's intent.

These elements became complicated as artworks evolved from meme edits to fully original artworks. However, by examining TwitchPlaysPokémon artworks from the perspective of these three elements it is possible to get a more detailed perspective on the relationship the artwork of TwitchPlaysPokémon has with the fuller story. By highlighting the ways that these artworks expand on the story I will show how the community expanded their story through the adoption of a different medium. I will discuss several examples of artwork through conceptualization, adaptation, and accessibility to display TwitchPlaysPokémon's communities' story expansion.

## Conceptualization

When approaching artwork about TwitchPlaysPokémon, it is key to grasp the concept from which the artist is working. Artworks are "intentionally constructed artefacts (sic)" (Savile, 1968, 101) that are "dependent on the artist's intention to give expression to his work to what he selects" (104). By approaching an artwork from the perspective of the concept the artist used it is possible to understand more fully what is being shown in the image.

With artwork focused on TwitchPlaysPokémon, the concept synthesizes the three sources that make up the background knowledge of any TwitchPlaysPokémon work: the game, the TwitchPlaysPokémon story, and exterior knowledge brought to bear on the project. Through combining these sources in different ways, an artist can create an artwork that is their own while maintaining the relationship to the TwitchPlaysPokémon event overall. To approach these works with an eye to their conceptualization, we must pay

attention to this relationship to TwitchPlaysPokémon and consider how close or distant the artwork is to its main shared sources of knowledge, the game and the TwitchPlaysPokémon story. Even if the artist's exterior knowledge is not shared with the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, the relationship between Pokémon and TwitchPlaysPokémon provides an entrance into these artworks.

I will begin by taking a look at a an artwork that does not deviate from the TwitchPlaysPokémon story the community had written to show how the concept of TwitchPlaysPokémon can be presented by an artist. Hajimikimo's artwork, "Twitch Plays Pokémon Red" (Figure 5.3) shows a stained-glass style piece which focuses on the roles that each of the TwitchPlaysPokémon Pokémon were given in the story.


*Figure 5.3 Hajimikimo's stained-glass TwitchPlaysPokémon artwork titled "Twitch Plays Pokémon Red"*

Hajimikimo's artwork presents each of the important TwitchPlaysPokémon characters as the roles that the members of the TwitchPlaysPokémon community assigned them. Helix and Bird Jesus are presented as holy, surrounded by angels, Nidoking (purple monster middle right) and Laprus (opposite) each have crowns, and the All-Terrain Venemoth has wheels. Hajimikimo's work centered the pseudo-religious story the community had developed as the concept of their artwork.

Some artworks rely more heavily on Pokémon itself as their basis rather than the TwitchPlaysPokémon story. For example, engraven's work (Figure 5.4) shows a series of Pokémon characters with only a few hints to their importance as TwitchPlaysPokémon characters.

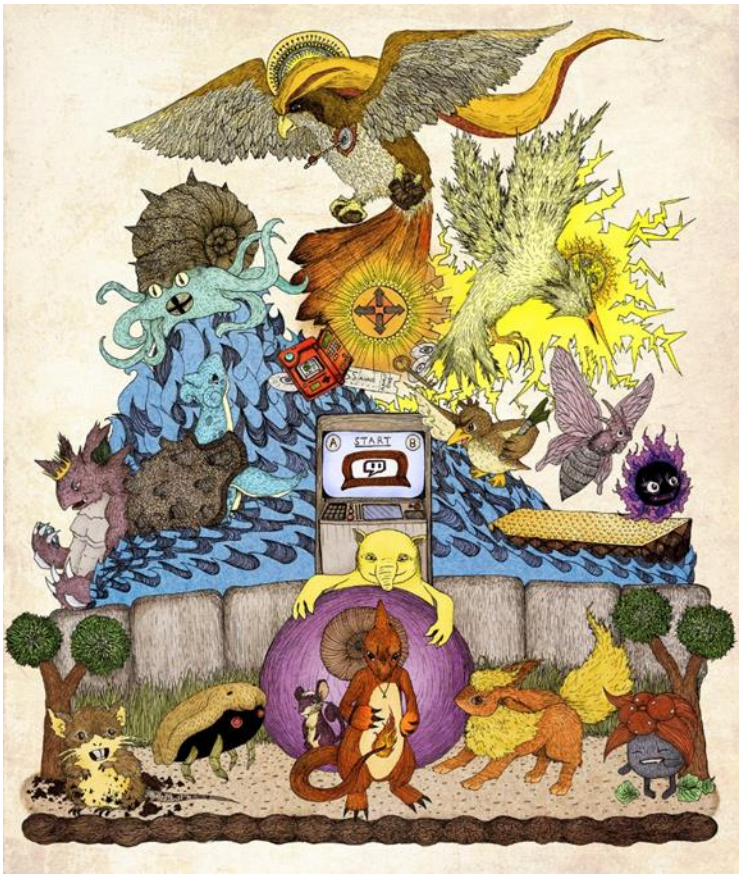


*Figure 5.4 engraven's artwork centering Pokémon rather than TwitchPlaysPokémon*

Engraven's work, also titled "Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (color)" does provide some reference to TwitchPlaysPokémon beyond its title. Nidoking (the purple character to the left nicknamed the Fonz) has a crown and the PC, (which caused the playthrough so much trouble) both act as references to TwitchPlaysPokémon. However, engraven does not rely on TwitchPlaysPokémon mythology entirely. The Helix and Dome are both present in the image, but neither are elevated to their godlike standing nor is the False Prophet Flareon deified or demonized.

Rather, engraven works from the concept that TwitchPlaysPokémon was primarily a game of Pokémon Red and, while it produced some interesting characters, each of them mattered for their own reason. There is no external knowledge needed to understand this piece, but people who also do not know TwitchPlaysPokémon can enjoy a piece of Pokémon art. There are enough small references for a TwitchPlaysPokémon participant to see and recognize but not so many that others cannot enjoy the piece for its Pokémon roots. Contrary to other pieces of artwork with firmer basis in TwitchPlaysPokémon, the few comments engraven has on this piece do not reference TwitchPlaysPokémon or ask for an explanation.[20]

The third and final approach to the conceptualization of an artist's artwork is to emphasize the external knowledge and its relationship to the story. A strong example of this is Tewhitney's "Tarot of TPP" (Figure 5.5) which shows a selection of major arcana tarot

[20] "I love the way you made this" (Liokora, "Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (color)"); "Everything about this is so freaking epic" (sevenrubies, "Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (color)"); "I love this a.wesome (sic)" (checkers, "Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (color)").

cards with the images drawn from both TwitchPlaysPokémon and the original Pokémon Red video game.


*Figure 5.5 Tewhitney's Tarot of TPP Major Arcana Cards*

Here Tewhitney has matched the major arcana of a tarot deck with imagery pulled not just from TwitchPlaysPokémon (such as the importance of the fossils and the All-Terrain Venemoth) but also from Pokémon Red directly (Nurse Joy as the High Priestess and Dr. Oak as the Magician for example). While the images may be recognizable to members of the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, the external knowledge in use makes it difficult to understand without previous knowledge about tarot. While the images have changed the meanings behind the cards have not.

Consider the Lover's card. Its image has been changed quite a bit from the original image of the card (Figure 5.6), but the meanings of the card are still applicable.


*Figure 5.6 The original imagery of the Lovers tarot card*

The original card shows a man and a woman (the lovers) being overseen by an angelic figure. In Tewhitney's design, there are two fossils that the player must choose between: the Dome and the Helix. These two fossils became the center of the TwitchPlaysPokémon story as a dichotomy in which the community members must pick a side. This matches well with the meaning of the traditional Lover's card: "In general when the Lovers Tarot card appears it is an indication that you have major choices to make or are faced with a dilemma" ("The Lover's Card", The Tarot Guide). The choice between the Helix and the Dome dictates how one perceives the rest of the TwitchPlaysPokémon story and often changes one's position within the community, a dilemma at its core. However, the image itself is not enough to explain this connection. Knowledge of how the Tarot deck works is crucial to understanding why such an image was chosen for such a card.

This artwork has been moved away from the game and focuses on reflecting the TwitchPlaysPokémon story into artwork that relies on the viewer of the images having key external knowledge. This has allowed not only a new perspective on the game characters but also a different perspective on each of these events within the story of

TwitchPlaysPokémon. To continue with the Lover's example, the card has more personal meanings: "The Lovers can represent finding the balance within oneself. You are learning to understand yourself, your own personal moral code, and what you value in life" ("The Lover's Card", *The Tarot Guide*). This may seem overly serious for a game which was just about thousands of players trying to control a single avatar, but by bringing the event into a concept like Tarot, one can see further connections throughout the community. The concept of Tarot card knowledge brings these lessons to the forefront.

The conceptualization of each artwork is key to understanding how one is to read those artworks. Figure 5.3, Hijimikimo's stained-glass artwork, shows how the conceptual focus could remain fixed on the TwitchPlaysPokémon story and represent it as told, but through a visual medium. Engraven's (Figure 5.4) and Tewhitney's (Figure 5.5) artworks show how visuals can move beyond the story and into new and old realms of knowledge. By focusing their concepts away from TwitchPlaysPokémon and towards a different source (the game and the tarot deck), each artist can examine how the events of TwitchPlaysPokémon are echoed in various other spaces of knowledge.

## Adaptation

Once a TwitchPlaysPokémon artist has a concept in mind, they adapt it onto the page through visual language. This language uses key imagery to tell the story the artist intends to tell, and the imagery can be connected to any of the three sources the artist is using. Primarily, TwitchPlaysPokémon artists are focused on the story as the community has built it and adapt external sources of knowledge and the imagery of Pokémon Red to reflect this.

All characters come from the original Pokémon Red game and thus, in adapting TwitchPlaysPokémon, the artist adopts the original look of the Pokémon game.

When it comes to adapting external knowledge into a visual language, the most common knowledge used by TwitchPlaysPokémon artists is Christianity. Since the TwitchPlaysPokémon community adopted a, tongue-in-cheek, religious overtone for the story early on, many artists use the iconographic language of Christianity in their works. This adaptation of external religious knowledge allows artists to strengthen ties between the written TwitchPlaysPokémon story and their artwork. Alternatively, as we shall see shortly, the artist could have expanded their work beyond this Christian focus by adapting visual languages from other external sources. Either way, the adaptation focuses on the specific artistic choices made by the artist and how it tells the story of TwitchPlaysPokémon.

The story of TwitchPlaysPokémon progressed quickly because once a shared language had been established, the community used it extensively. Once there was a religious perspective connected with the game, the Game-Response Layer of scaffolding (Chapter 4) allowed for widespread religious connections. Owing to the strong Western connections within the playthrough, partially due to the insistence on the use of English as the only language, these religious connections were rooted in Christianity. This became especially true with the establishment of Bird Jesus as a direct Christian connection. From there it becomes easier to mimic Christian archetypes, filling the story with false prophets and angels.

Christian archetypes in writing made the use of Christian iconography in art an obvious approach. Consider, for example, Skypup's "On the Seventh Day of Helix" (Figure 5.7) which shows a stained-glass-style image filled with Christian references.

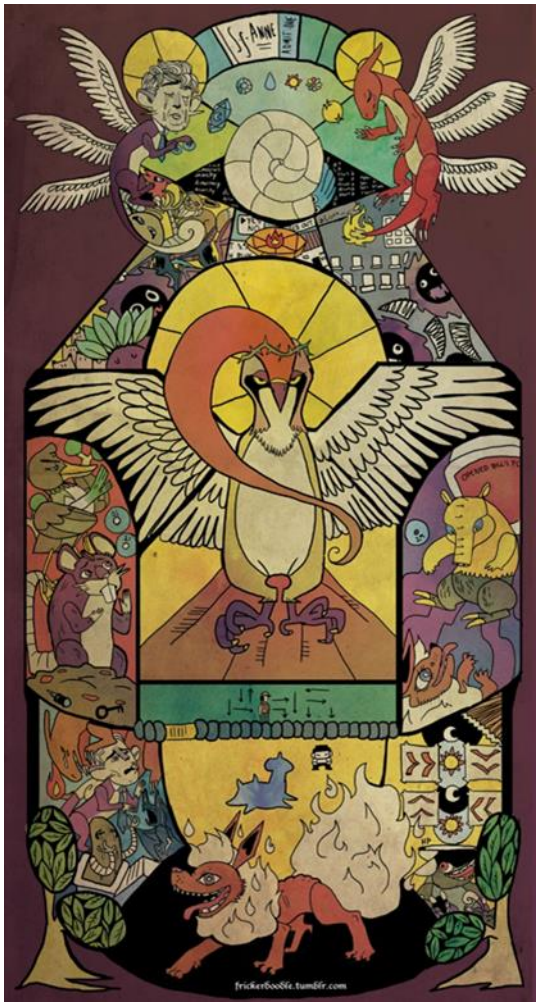


*Figure 5.7 "On the Seventh Day of Helix" by Skypup showing a variety of Christian-based icons.*

Skypup uses several key images to highlight the connections between their artwork and the archetypes the TwitchPlaysPokémon community relied on. For example, Skypup uses the "Glories" around the heads of the Jesus and angel figures:

> The Glory is constantly adopted by artists, both in painting and sculpture, as a characteristic ornament: it either encircles the head alone or the entire figure. As an attribute, it serves to denote a holy person, in the same manner as the crosier or the sceptre distinguishes a bishop or king (Didron, 129).

The Glory is an easy visual shorthand for holy character and Skypup is not the only one to use it. Hijimikimo's (Figure 5.3) uses both stained-glass and Glories while engraven's (Figure 5.3) limited iconography also uses a Glory for Bird Jesus. Other religious trappings include the crown of thorns and the demonizing of the False Prophet as a "beast monster" (Skypup, "On the Seventh Day of Helix").

Along with strengthening the connections between their artwork and the story told by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, Skypup has also set up their work as a guide to the first seven days of the playthrough. Each of the stained-glass panels shows key happenings within those first seven days: the panel on the middle right shows Drowzee (the yellow and brown character) being assigned as the "Keeper" of Flareon the False Prophet to protect the rest of the Pokémon from evil. This guided approach to the story is analogous to the use of early Christian artworks such as windows and sculptures. As Christian iconographer, Didron, writes:

> The imitative art as practiced in cathedrals, performed the combined offices of a lesson for the purposes of instruction, of a sermon for morality, and an example of edification; like the religious drama, it gave individual forms to the whole range of Christian science and its dogmas. Assisted by such material objects, by statues, images, and scenic games, the most feeble intelligence might rise to the conception of truth (Didron, 7).

Since, for much of Christian history, only higher members of the church could read the rest of the congregation relied on stories told to them during service. The visual elements of the church, such as their detailed stained-glass windows, augmented this storytelling through a shared visual language. Certain visual cues would help the congregation connect with the

figures being displayed[21], just like how the iconography of Skypup's work lets viewers connect to the TwitchPlaysPokémon story.

While it can be safely assumed that the majority of TwitchPlaysPokémon participants can read, and thus the need for a visual account is lessened, there are other reasons such artwork is key to the community. As we will discuss more thoroughly later, the accessibility of a piece of work can be improved through this shared visual language. The more one connects with the external Christian imagery, the better chance one has to understand the picture: "I have no idea of the story but looking at this gives me some hints of what happened" (melondream, "On the Seventh Day of Helix"). Accessibility, in many cases, relies on the clear adaptation of the story into a strong visual piece.

Adaptation does not just occur through the use of Christian iconography. There are artists who approach their visual concept through the adaptation of different forms of imagery. An artist, through adapting different forms of iconography, could alter the already written TwitchPlaysPokémon story. Consider Whoaconstrictor's "The Origin of Ancient Helixism" (Figure 5.8) which uses not Christian imagery but, rather, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics as the basis of the artwork.

[21] One more common example of this is St. George who killed the dragon. No dragon present, probably not St. George.

*Figure 5.8 Whoaconstrictor's "The Origin of Ancient Helixism" using Egyptian stylized imagery*

Completed after the game was won, this artwork tells the story of all the major events of the playthrough. However, this storytelling diverges from the story as the majority of the community viewed it by centering a different art style. Rather than trying to tell a story that mimics Christianity in a faux Egyptian hieroglyphic style, Whoaconstrictor tells a story more appropriate to the style they have selected. The story that the artist tells is about an ancient king who is sent on a journey to regain his sight.

Since they made so many changes, Whoaconstrictor provided a reading guide to their artwork to help explain what is occurring. Instructing the viewers to read from bottom to

top, moving left and changing direction on each line[22], the artist tells the main plot points of the story using Red, the ancient king, on a journey founding the Helix religion while seeking wisdom to regain his sight. In the reading guide Whoaconstrictor uses language that matches the ancient mythic style of his art:

> A wise man, AJY demanded proof from ABJEZS that RED was truly worthy of his power. He demanded a test against the PC of desire. RED accepted this test with faith in the HELIX in his heart. 12 of his followers would be lost in the exchange. AJY was impressed at his dedication and swore loyalty to the king.[23]

This exchange occurs in the third panel from the top and shows the Pokémon involved in the Egyptian style of humanoid bodies with animal features. The style of art and the style of story are adapted together so they complement each other. While the events are the same, the story is changed because the artwork has moved away from Christian iconography.

Just as the use of recognizable religious iconography in Skypup's work (Figure 5.7) made the story more accessible by appealing to Western Christian knowledge, the fact that Whoaconstrictor uses a reading guide also speaks to accessibility. While Skypup could use images like the Glories and crowns to assist in telling their story Whoaconstrictor is using a less-known artistic style[24]. Since the story has also changed, they cannot rely on the viewer's understanding of TwitchPlaysPokémon either. Instead, Whoaconstrictor directly communicates their story so that people can understand their artwork.

---

[22] Left, right, left, right, left, right, left

[23] This portion of the story is about the capture of Zapdos and the release of 12 Pokémon as the community was trying to get Zapdos from the PC

[24] Additionally, Whoaconstrictor admits that the artwork is "by no means authentic Egyptian" (u/WhoaConstrictor, "The Origin of Ancient Helixism", Reddit) and thus knowledge of the actual hieroglyphic language would also not assist in reading the work.

These different approaches to adaptation between WhoaConstrictor and Skypup serve as clear examples of two different styles of adaptation. By playing with this adaptation style, the story can be brought closer to the original Christianized account or drawn away from it to view it from a new perspective. This has to be done intentionally, at least partially, as the artist must choose what style of art, they will adapt the story into. By purposefully selecting artwork that is or is not congruent with the original story, the artist chooses how the story will change through their own work, relying more fully on external knowledge rather than the story.

With the concept of the image captured through the use of adapted imagery, the artist is now able to release the artwork to be viewed by others. This leads into the final element of the artwork, its accessibility to others.

## Accessibility

Accessibility is key to reading and understanding an artwork. The artists of TwitchPlaysPokémon have two specific ways that they can extend the accessibility of their pieces to a wider audience. First is accessibility of space: viewers must be able to find the piece online in order to enjoy it. Second, is accessibility through knowledge, as in, the viewer must have the necessary knowledge to understand what the artwork is showing them. With these two aspects of accessibility taken into account, the TwitchPlaysPokémon artworks have the potential to attract new viewers and encourage them to learn more about TwitchPlaysPokémon which we will see shortly.

Where an artist posts their art online dictates, broadly, the audience that will see that work. If an artwork is posted to an online site, the people who use that site become the audience for artworks uploaded to that site. This means that the artists of TwitchPlaysPokémon had two options for where to place their works: either TwitchPlaysPokémon or non- TwitchPlaysPokémon spaces. A work could be posted to the TwitchPlaysPokémon subreddit or submitted to the shared Google Doc, which primarily designated the audience for the artwork to be TwitchPlaysPokémon participants. However, artists could also post their artwork to broader-audience sites such as DeviantArt and Tumblr which meant that the audience would not be guaranteed to be knowledgeable about TwitchPlaysPokémon and thus limited in their understanding. Often artists did both.

When using these non-TwitchPlaysPokémon spaces, TwitchPlaysPokémon artists could prompt interest in and investigation of TwitchPlaysPokémon. Consider Figure 5.9 created by cocowoushi and posted to DeviantArt. This artwork, having moved away from TwitchPlaysPokémon spaces online, became viewable by audiences that did not know about the playthrough and the story that grew from it.

*Figure 5.9 Cocowoushi's "Helix Power" artwork*

Mythical-Luz commented on Cocowoushi's work and asked what was happening in the artwork: "Is anyone willing to tell me how this whole 'Hail the Helix god' happened? What even is 'Twitch plays Pokémon'"? (Mythical-Luz, "TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power"). The fact that viewers of these artworks may not understand them but are curious to know more, like Mythical-Luz, allowed for the TwitchPlaysPokémon community to continue to grow. Readability of the work is limited to those "in the know" but could also prompt others to seek out this information and learn. These artworks could be enjoyable to insiders and intriguing to outsiders[25].

[25] This does not mean that insiders were always particularly forthcoming about the information. Responding to Mythical-Luz's question commenter Morshality's response is limited: "Well this is explained in 3 words: PRAISE THE HELIX" (Morshality, "TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power").

Mythical-Luz's inquiry into Cocowoushi's work shows how deep the connection between the two aspects of accessibility is; the more accessible the space is, the less of a guarantee that the knowledge is accessible to everyone. Without the correct knowledge, a piece is viewable but not necessarily readable (returning to Richard Howlles: the viewer remains "visually illiterate" (1)). The knowledge of all three sources we have been discussing is needed to fully understand an artwork and to articulate a understanding response to that artwork. Mythical-Luz does not have that knowledge and thus seeks it out. Other commenters understand what they are seeing: a combination of Pokémon Red, TwitchPlaysPokémon, and the anime Gurren Lagann[26].

The majority of the visuals are drawn from Pokémon Red and their relationships with each other arise from TwitchPlaysPokémon (Red, the protagonist wields the Helix and is defended by Bird Jesus against the evil Dome and False Prophet). As discussed in Chapter 4, Cocowoushi as a participant of TwitchPlaysPokémon, explores their understanding of events using their own work and thus deviates partly from the most common story by placing the 'Hivemind' (all the players) in opposition to Helix and the protagonist. The extension of the story into the realm of artwork allows this alternative approach to be explored. The use of spirals and the drawing style Cocowoushi used (how they adapted the story) is pulled from Gurren Lagann.

This combination of all three sources results in excitement from the audience that understood the references. "TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power" has a variety of comments highlighting the audience's recognition of Cocowoushi combination: "Red: (To

[26] For a basic rundown of the anime check the Wikipedia here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurren_Lagann

Mob and Dome): WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK I AM?!?" (Ego-Man25); "Bird Jesus, leave this one to me!" (Malcrosz); "This picture is [sic] just shouts "Row Row Fight the Power!" (Adventurous-Dreamer)". These responses pull lines from the anime and their use here shows how the audience, with proper knowledge accessibility, can respond enthusiastically to TwitchPlaysPokémon artwork.

Interestingly, all three sources of knowledge need to be present when reading a piece of art. Too much knowledge in one area can result in further difficulty reading a piece of TwitchPlaysPokémon artwork. For example, consider Figure 5.10 which is ThroughSpaceandTime's "Twitch Plays Pokémon: Helix Altar".

*Figure 5.10 ThroughSpaceandTime's "Twitch Plays Pokémon: Helix Altar" work*

Just like the previous artworks discussed in this chapter, ThroughSpaceandTime's work requires all three sources of knowledge: Pokémon Red to understand the characters, TwitchPlaysPokémon to understand their relationship with each other, and external knowledge to understand why these characters have been drawn in this setting.

However, too much external knowledge can make the piece unreadable if it is not balanced out via knowledge of TwitchPlaysPokémon. The anarchy symbol (written on the altar's pillar) is recognizable politically but, without knowing that the players of TwitchPlaysPokémon used the name Anarchy for one of their play modes, it does not make sense in this religious context. Too much religious knowledge can make the setting of a religious altar recognizable but make the placement of the Helix Fossil and Bird Jesus can make the work confusing at best and inappropriate at worst depending on one's own religious beliefs. The right balance of game, story, and external knowledge must be struck to maintain the equilibrium it takes to understand TwitchPlaysPokémon artwork.

Accessibility, then, is controlled through several choices the artists make. First, where they post the art and whether or not it is accessible to those outside the community. If the space is limited to TwitchPlaysPokémon then the accessibility is limited as well. Additionally, the use of various sources ranging from the TwitchPlaysPokémon story to external sources of knowledge can either broaden or narrow the audience that can read and understand the artwork.

## Conclusion

When looking at how the artworks of TwitchPlaysPokémon extend the story beyond its basic elements there is a pattern that I want to make note of. Each of these artworks has the ability to either open up the community or close it off further. TwitchPlaysPokémon was limited in its reach to those interested, and able, to connect to Twitch and invest time and effort into a confusing and frustrating game. Most discussion and story development occurred in the subreddit and so, again, access to that online space was necessary. However, the artwork of TwitchPlaysPokémon extended beyond these spaces and opened up new lines of interest and communication for a wider audience.

Visual literacy became the new limiting factor. Without an understanding of how these artworks used their sources in both concept and adaptation, a viewer remained a viewer and not a reader. Without some prior knowledge of TwitchPlaysPokémon this new audience remained limited in its ability to approach these artworks. Except, due to the visual language of TwitchPlaysPokémon artwork also relying on external sources of knowledge, new viewers had areas of possible access. While TwitchPlaysPokémon did not mirror Christianity completely, the visual iconography remains recognizable to those with a Christian background.

Words alone could not have extended the story of TwitchPlaysPokémon beyond spaces already delineated as TwitchPlaysPokémon-spaces. Only those with insider knowledge could understand written accounts and these accounts, more often than not, remained in those limited spaces. Artwork moved across spaces. While artists shared their work on the subreddit they also used sites where they usually posted and shared their artwork. They

had other audiences to include and so their parts of the story spread more easily. While much of the visual language remained bound up in TwitchPlaysPokémon and its story, the artworks could still attract new interest and, with enough effort, a viewer could become a reader.

The conceptualization of the artworks was key to understanding how one is to read the account. Adaptation allowed the artist to produce that context through chosen imagery. Some pieces conceptualize TwitchPlaysPokémon closer to its roots as a Pokémon game while still others remove that concept almost completely in order to apply a new or unique concept to it. This movement also affected how well someone could read the work and in which concept they needed to recognize the piece. The examples used in the adaptation section of this chapter each retained the concept of a wider account of TwitchPlaysPokémon, telling large parts of the story. Meanwhile, the Tarot card images drained away the TwitchPlaysPokémon knowledge to specific moments and characters but conceptualize them within the realm of Tarot card meanings. The story became divided from the images to create a concept of its own. The more artists adapted the story into a different visual format, the more likely they were to change the concept central to their artwork. All three elements were connected deeply and built on each other to articulate the positionality of each artwork.

# Chapter 6: The Tripartite Lens

> When I started following the stream, we had a couple of badges. We spent hours cutting a tree, and I shouted out in joy when we finally made it. We miraculously did the vermillion gym puzzle and I threw my hands up in the air. We passed a ledge after hours (was it 9?) of trying, and I made a reddit account for the first time to partake in the celebrations. We maneuvered flash cave, without flash of course, I won a bet with my friends. We did a TON of awesome stuff, created gods and storylines, tons of art. We became an established community, much larger than many of the gaming communities out there that have been around for years, all in a matter of days. (u/no_terran, "Confessions of a follower since 1d9h).

u/No_terran is only one of the many thousands of TwitchPlaysPokémon players but their comment hits on the wonder of TwitchPlaysPokémon. The point of the experiment was not just to beat the game but to do so while sharing control between all viewers: "TwitchPlaysPokémon is about the shared experience of us all working together" (u/wingfan1405, 2014, "Confessions of a follower since 1d9h"). With this in mind, Ramirez, Saucerman, and Deitmeire ask a key question: "Why would anyone willingly play a game with over 60,000 other players?" (2014, 1). *Why* is the next question I will approach.

In the previous chapters I have approached the practices of storytelling that made it possible for seemingly spontaneous story construction: the How of TwitchPlaysPokémon. It is now possible to pivot the focus away from the How and onto Why the players of TwitchPlaysPokémon were so persistent and creative in their playthrough. The game, where play stalled for hours at a time, should have been too frustrating to attract such a large player-base. Something about the game must have captured the interest of the players which encouraged them not just as a player but also as a creator. I propose that it is useful to consider the community from the three perspectives of the *urge to understand and create order*, the *tendency to imagine*, and *the drive to replicate*.

These perspectives speak to tendencies within people that encourage them to seek out and explore new spaces. Through viewing the hundreds of posts made by TwitchPlaysPokémon participants, primarily on the TwitchPlaysPokémon subreddit but also following the discussion to other sites, I have been able to highlight how these critical perspectives allow us to view the creative habits of the TwitchPlaysPokémon players. By combining the three I have created the Tripartite Lens through which I have viewed TwitchPlaysPokémon as a space of creative storytelling.

First, there is the *urge to seek understanding and order*. The players of TwitchPlaysPokémon were met with a game where, once a variety of players were involved, confusing actions often occurred. The protagonist would run into walls for hours, repeatedly jump off ledges, and continually try to use items at the wrong time. The more players joined, the more chaotic it got. However, players were soon able to spot patterns within the chaos which helped them to understand and articulate what was happening in all the confusion, albeit in a playful way. By bringing order to the chaos the players found a creative way into the game not previously available to them.

Second, there is the *tendency to imagine*. Jean-Paul Satre argues that the human mind is designed to image information, first to fill in missing information, and secondly to create new information entirely. This tendency to create through imagination, when met with the chaos of the TwitchPlaysPokémon playthrough, helped to fill out the reasons behind the patterns seen in the chaos. Missing information was created and built on by thousands of creative minds.

Finally, there is the drive to replicate, a process I pull from Elaine Scarry. Scarry makes the argument that the enjoyment of something beautiful encourages the viewer to create something beautiful in response to that first element of beauty. Beauty, then, replicates beauty. In TwitchPlaysPokémon's case, once work had been done to establish order through patterns and to enhance the story using imagination, more people were welcome to appreciate that work. This appreciation in certain participants grew into an interest in adding to the communities' creative drive which encouraged them to make their own beautiful pieces in relation to TwitchPlaysPokémon. This replication tended to focus on the interesting aspects of the playthrough and the hard work involved resulted in much additional work (such as the artworks in Chapter 5).

*The Tripartite Lens* is the unification of these three perspectives. It considers how all three approaches to the chaos worked together to provide a creative as a naturally driven response to an otherwise frustrating situation.

## The Need for Understanding, Order, and Meaning

Angela Duckworth makes the argument that humans, even as babies, have a drive to understand the world around them. When the world is unknown to humans it can seem chaotic but, through learning and understanding the world, humans create order. Steven R. Mann calls this urge a "terrific need…to develop order" ("Chaos Theory and Strategic Art"). While Duckworth was considering human psychology and Mann, human politics, this combined drive to make sense of the world appears in a microcosm within

TwitchPlaysPokémon through the players' direct response to nonsensical in-game actions. Even in gaming humans strive to understand.

Dr. Duckworth connects understanding to experience:

> Unlike other animals, which have strong instincts to act in certain ways, babies need to learn almost everything from experience. If babies didn't have a strong drive for novelty, they wouldn't learn as much, and that would make it less likely they'd survive. (Duckworth, 114).

New and different things draw a person's attention even when they grow older. It is here that we can see the initial attraction to trying a new way to play video games. As wingfan1405 says, TwitchPlaysPokémon was about the community playing together in a new and interesting way. It may have been a frustrating experience, but it was also a new one.

Interestingly, there is a historical approach to understanding which is reflected in the development of TwitchPlaysPokémon's story. Early in human history, there was a tendency to attribute events to divine sources. For example, ancient Greeks attributed earthquakes to the god Poseidon ("Poseidon", Encyclopedia Britannica). This divine sourcing provided an understanding of what was previously not understood as well as providing an order to the chaos of these events, even if that order was on a divine scale and not a human one.

While divine sourcing is less common in the modern day there are still many religious or spiritual approaches which recognize some other as source, be that God or otherwise. Robin Dunbar notes that this is a common way to understand religious perspectives, as a "unifying framework for the world in which we live: it allows us to make sense of our world in a way that enables us to function effectively because we can control its more erratic behaviour" (2022, 50). This attempt to use a religious framework to explain and control the

world is echoed strongly in the TwitchPlaysPokémon communities' use of religious language to explain their little part of the world. Control is gained through the use of recognizable tropes. Rather than accounting for the patterns they were seeing through a human source (such as themselves or even the original programmer of the game), the wider community made the source divine. The Helix fossil became a sleeping god and the rest of the playthrough came to revolve around that divine nature.

This attribution to a holy Helix is, of course, tongue-in-cheek. The community is not seriously expressing the idea that the game has produced a new god, but, rather, jokingly mimicking the shared cultural significance of a recognizable religious (Westernized Christian) language. Working from this prior established language allowed the participants to explain what was happening in a creative way rather than relying on the direct explanation of 'too many commands in an overwhelmed system'.[27] Dunbar notes that this is another common approach within religious frameworks. It is far easier to map a new religion or means of understanding on top of an older one "graft[ing] onto them precisely because the older forms are so deeply engrained into people's psyche" (2022, 10). The language and tropes were already present for a lot of the community so adapting it, even as a joke, was perfectly natural.

A reason behind the events which is independent of themselves allowed the community to place themselves within the story rather than only being the creative source of them. Once this narrative connection was made and taken up by the wider community, the

[27] With the onset of the scientific age the drive to understand events moved out of the realm of fear and into the realm of curiosity. The TwitchPlaysPokémon players also worked from curiosity when exploring the game but the echo of a divine source is still apparent.

chaotic elements of the game were given even more meaning because they were now understood: “to explain that the seemingly strange pattern of behaviour exhibited by the protagonist was not frivolous, but critical to the ultimate goal of completing the game” (Saucerman and Ramirez, 2016, 78). The urge to have understanding and order became a way to make meaning for those participating, helping to explain why they continued to play and even enjoy the chaotic elements of the game.

Saucerman and Ramirez also note that this meaning-making merged into the creative habits of the players as a way not only for themselves to understand but also to communicate that meaning to others: “Narrative also serves an important role in meaning-making by allowing individuals to reflect on experiences and enabling that information to be transmitted to others” (2016, 77). Understanding the patterns led to ordering the patterns led to making meaning with those patterns. Even the players themselves recognized this need for understanding and its connection to meaning-making: “This narrative now has about a dozen major players and attempts to give reason to the chaotic events within the game” (u/johnnyhavok2, 2014, “Explanations of Everything Thus Far”). The community needed something more to avoid what Angela Duckworth calls “the despair” of doing something that “lacks purpose” (2016, 151) by providing their own meaning for the whole event.

What is particularly interesting about the relationship the TwitchPlaysPokémon community had with chaos and understanding is that they needed to strike a balance between the chaotic nature of the game and the work they put into explaining that chaos in

an interesting way. At its core, the playthrough could not be successful without both elements. Consider this statement from a Redditor about the chaotic element to the game:

> If the stream gets down to five people, then it's TPPB (TwitchPlaysPokémon beta), which, in my opinion, is just as boring as democracy. It wasn't our version of democracy, but it wasn't anarchy, either. It was a small group of people policing a chat. It had the streamer posting plans, paths, and objectives for the group. It was centrally organized, like a coxswain and his or her rowing crew. The fun part about anarchy, in my opinion, is when it's on a large scale. It's seeing how people try and organize plans. It's the accidents that happen. It's the anger that each side gets at the other. (u/marekkpie, "Confessions of a Follower since 1d9h")

U/marekkpie connects a non-chaotic playthrough with a small group of players to a rowing crew taking commands and their rhythm from the coxswain and recognizes that a playthrough like that would be fundamentally different from the creative TwitchPlaysPokémon unfolding.

However, the chaos is not enough on its own either. U/Jim7777PS3 makes the argument that the creative energy used to understand and make meaning within the community remains a key part of what makes TwitchPlaysPokémon fun:

> I think what makes this so damn good, so funny, so interesting, and why I cant [sic] stay away from this subreddit: is the story. The meaning and narrative you are all weaving around the absolute randomness of the steam is spectacular. I don't really care about the stream itself, while its funny at first there is only so much you can watch Red read his pokedex [sic]. (2014, "You people are what is making this thing so fun")

For TwitchPlaysPokémon to be an interesting and fun internet event, it required a community willing to put in the effort to produce understanding, order, and meaning. That effort relied on the playthrough being chaotic in the first place. The fact that they could make meaning from the chaos first because they were confused and then because it was *fun* is why the community invested so much time into the playthrough. Much of this

meaning making work was done narratively through the use of the second perspective I want to highlight: the tendency to imagine.

## The Tendency to Model and Imagine

Imagination was critical when it came to TwitchPlaysPokémon's outcome. By approaching the chaos with an eye for meaning making, the community members applied two elements of their mind to the information they were receiving; modeling and, of course, imagination. To explore how these two elements work together, I combine work done by Donald A. Norman with Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of human imagination. With this groundwork in place, I then explore how these tendencies appeared within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community.

Norman argues for the idea of mental modeling: that people build a version of the world in their heads from which to navigate. This modeling perspective then merges with Sartre's perspective on imagination which states that the mind is designed to freely fill in gaps in the mental model with information produced via the imagination. Sartre then takes it a step further and allows the human mind to create the unreal within their mental model by using that model to create images rather than simply filling them in. This gives the imagination power in the development of a mental model. In the realm of TwitchPlaysPokémon, this combination of model and imagination helps to explain how the community responded to a game that, through its unusual control system, produces models with many gaps. Particularly, the community's use of modern religion as the basis for this imagined story reflects early explanations for religious perspectives. Since creating the model is automatic

when it came to TwitchPlaysPokémon the reliance on developing the model further was also automatic. The community created TwitchPlaysPokémon because that creative element was a natural way to approach the chaotic game.

## How Modeling Works

First, let us consider Norman's work. In *The Design of Everyday Things*, Norman makes the argument that people create mental models of the world around them: "the models people have of themselves, others, the environment, and the things with which they interact" (17). The internal mental model helps one to navigate the external world by mapping actions and thoughts against the model inside one's head. Being able to better understand the world through this deduced version means that people can interact with the world in a number of ways.

This tendency to build models comes from the first element we discussed, the need to understand things, and is based on "whatever knowledge we have" (38). When someone is inside a room, they are able to navigate that room through the modeled version because their brain can compute knowledge about what they see, hear, and more. However, there can be too much information for the model to understand what needs to be primarily focused on. Alternatively, this knowledge can be "fragmentary" (38) and needs to be filled in by the person. One way the missing information can be attained is through the imagination.

Imagination is the freedom to take the modeled world and change it within one's own mind. This choice offers a myriad of ways to explain and explore that world, feeding off the

need to understand. The tendency to imagine, then, helps to build up the story of TwitchPlaysPokémon, from the information missing from the playthrough. The players understood the game and its control method which formed the model, but they were missing explanations for why they were continuing to play with such confusing results. Since people have the ability to conjure up an image of something that is not present before them or even present in the physical world, such as a centaur or spaceship this meant that TwitchPlaysPokémon could fill the game in with the unreal via their imaginations. This was an innate response to missing parts in the model.

## Jean-Paul Sartre

However, understanding the tendency to imagine is difficult because people exist within the real physical world. It is helpful, then, to draw on Jean-Paul Sartre's work to better understand how the imagination relates to the real world. By then bringing Norman and Sartre together we can see how the modeled imagination was pivotal in the creation of the TwitchPlaysPokémon event as a whole.

To understand how the imagination of Sartre's work functions, one must first understand how the world is perceived through consciousness. In his work, "The Psychology of the Imagination", as reprinted in the text *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writing*, Sartre argues that consciousness is always connected to some object within the world. Models are created in the mind based on what one has experienced, just as with Norman. For Sartre, this is human consciousness, which is closely tied to human imagination; there is no consciousness without the ability to imagine.

This ability to imagine, Sartre argues, is not only a necessary part of modeling the world but it is how consciousness exercises its freedom within the world. The conscious mind is free not only to acknowledge the real physical world around it but to add to and change that imaginary space within its mind to produce aspects of the world that are not physically present.

For example, Sartre argues that, while his friend may physically be away traveling, he can imagine his friend to be in the room with him; the modeling can connect to a real object – his friend – but is creating an unreal aspect to that object – his presence. This is true of all objects within the world which means that the imagination is always ready to produce some imagined story, possibility, or object when given the chance.

Sartre offers many examples of how imagination joins with reality to create a fuller picture. One such example considers the image of the designs on a rug partially hidden behind a chair leg. His imagination fills in the missing images (that which is hidden by the leg) and thus allows his mind to produce a full image of the rug: "I perceive the beginnings and endings of the hidden arabesques (which appear to me before and behind the leg of the chair) as continuing under the legs of the chair. It is therefore in the way in which I grasp the data that I posit that which is not given as being real" (95). Because Sartre can perceive part of the rug, since it is present in the physical world, he can use his imagination to fill in the blanks of the full design. This ability to fill in data means that additional information can be added to physical information to create something whole or wholly new in the mind of the creator.

With Norman's work combined with Sartre's, it is possible to understand how TwitchPlaysPokémon was developed. The world is modelled for the human mind to comprehend it and imagination fills in the gaps in the model, allowing for new accounts of the world. This is where TwitchPlaysPokémon connects most strongly with Sartre's work. The chaos of thousands of simultaneous commands led to, often nonsensical, actions within the game space. This meant that the gameplay was sparse for modeling and had many gaps that needed to be filled. The community then applied its imagination to fill those spaces and created a story which they started to model on top of the gameplay. For example, the community connected their repeated use of the Helix fossil to a god being prayed to. TwitchPlaysPokémon presented a blank canvas that let the imagination run free.

In TwitchPlaysPokémon the players are given a lot of data. Not only could the community see the thousands of commands in the chat box but they could also see the actions being performed in-game. With that data, they needed to model the gameplay and then figure out what was missing. Just as Sartre could fill in what he does not see of the arquebus so, too, could the TwitchPlaysPokémon community fill in the space left from the chaos of the game. In the physical sense, the missing information was what next needed to happen in the game but in the imaginative sense, the data was missing since all choices remained open. This was the part of the real situation that Sartre would describe as "pregnant with the possibility" (38). Why are the actions that are being inputted happening?

## Connecting Understanding to Imagination

Here the first framework – the need to understand – is connected to the imagination. The missing model data is what TwitchPlaysPokémon community members want to understand, and they create their own understanding through their imagination. The imagination began to create a story in the heads of players which they discussed with each other and began to work together to grow and produce. They were able to take what was not present, but possible, and make it present.

While experiencing this new game the community began to develop their own understanding of what they were seeing through the use of their imaginations. This was generally done in a tongue-in-cheek way, making jokes and memes. u/Cee-man calls this a meme process:

> The large majority of memes do not simply "appear" out of nowhere. They are, in fact, forced. For every Bird Jesus, All-Terrain Vehicle and False Prophet there's a buttload of other 'suggestions' that ultimately lost out because they were not quite as fun/fitting/well-timed as the others. This is the whole point of the "meme process": the less enjoyable concepts are drowned out (“What May Break the Fun of TPP”).

Having recognized the patterns in the chaotic play the community began experimenting with creating order. The internet shares a language of memes (as discussed more in-depth in Chapter 4) and thus the TwitchPlaysPokémon community used that shared language to approach the chaos. A meme was a model onto which the community could create knowledge through applying their imagination. Those memes that were taken up by the community at large became how that community understood what was happening in the game as a means of sharing the fuller model.

This also helps to explain why the story the community of TwitchPlaysPokémon produced began to mimic the Christian faith. Many of the participants were already aware of the structure of Christianity. They were able to apply what they already knew to their imaginative work to make it more real. Some believe that this imagination towards the divine is shared across all religions. For example, Karen Armstrong, in her forward to her work on the Islamic faith, turns to Sartre herself, arguing:

> Human beings are religious creatures because they are imaginative; they are so constituted that they are compelled to search for hidden meaning and to achieve an ecstasy that makes them feel fully alive. Each tradition encourages the faithful to focus their attention on an earthly symbol that is peculiarly its own and to teach themselves to see the divine in it. (*Islam: A Short History*, 2002, x)

Religious beginnings, in Armstrong's opinion, are found in earthly objects that peoples' imaginations can grasp and create a fuller account of it via their conscious imagination.

TwitchPlaysPokémon players did exactly that. All it took was one player seeing the pattern of selecting the Helix Fossil and associating that action with the divine. The first "Hail Helix" comment from one player primed others into the creation of a religious story. From there, the community's imaginations were free to act independently of the information they were receiving on the screen to make all the objects seen in TwitchPlaysPokémon as something divine. For example, their Pidgey (a bird-like Pokémon) was named in the game, as always, through a series of random inputs resulting in the name aaabaaajss. All the community needed was the ending "jss" to associate that Pokémon with Jesus and thus Bird Jesus was made a reality through imagination. Parts of the larger sparse model of the TwitchPlaysPokémon game were filled in with information created

around each Pokémon's name. The incorporation of pseudo-Christian ideas within the model allowed the community to enhance their model of the game.

This proposes an interesting question regarding the relationship between wanting to understand and focusing on imagination. Is human imagination triggered by that need for understanding and meaning or is it engaged to imagine for its own sake? The two practices are interlinked because the imagination acts as the freedom of people to fill the gaps and create the unreal. So, imagination plays a large part in the exploration of the world and how it operates. Thus, the need to understand triggers use of the imagination, in part, to fill in the gaps of that understanding; it prompts the imaginative steps to fill the model out.

This theory also explains how the story spread into different artistic media. Once the community had welcomed the creation of a story around the playthrough, the first "Hail Helix", they allowed others to imagine as well. Since it was not a single person's story, but the community's as a whole, parts of the story could come from anyone's imaginative thinking. Everyone who understood what was happening was invited to imagine and try to bring that imagination into the physical world via artistic creations.

Participants who focused on the realms of digital art, and especially fanfiction, highlight this imaginative perspective. The artists and writers of the community already had their own online spaces that they could use to produce the imagined TwitchPlaysPokémon story. The writers, especially, had more space to imagine by working beyond the boundaries of the story and bringing more created images to their own reality through their writing. The artists, as discussed in Chapter 5, were more restrained by what the community had given

them but were able to use their imaginations to bring a mainly written story into the realm of the visual.

The application of modeling and imagination served as a basic drive behind Why the community embraced this new way of playing and storytelling. As we will see in the next section, participants found enjoyment in the creative elements of responding to an incomplete model. Once they experienced TwitchPlaysPokémon the participants that remained responded creatively because it was fun to do so. Rather than be frustrated they derived enjoyment in filling in the model with the community. With the imagination being connected to understanding and meaning, it becomes possible to examine the final element of the Tripartite Lens: the drive to replicate aesthetic aspects of TwitchPlaysPokémon.

## The Drive to Replicate

In her work *On Beauty and Being Just,* Elaine Scarry uses the term "beauty" in her discussion of the human tendency to create and recreate aesthetic aspects of the world. The meaning of beauty is a deeply disputed term. To allow us to focus on Scarry's process of replication, I will rely on her definition of beauty as something pleasurable that encourages new beauty to be created. The focus in this section of the chapter will be how these pleasure-giving qualities prompt replication and thus recreation of other pleasurable things.

Scarry's thesis statement, "Beauty brings copies of itself into being" (*On Beauty and Being Just,* 3), allows for an understanding of TwitchPlaysPokémon creation through three

cycles: the pleasure of the patterned chaos, the pleasure of knowledge creation, and the pleasure of artistic creation. *The pleasure of the patterned chaos* motivated participants to decide what was important to pay attention to and what could be disregarded. Within TwitchPlaysPokémon the community was able to recognize patterns and impose order, as discussed previously. The *pleasure of knowledge creation* began when the scaffolding feedback loop (as considered in detail in Chapter 4) began to function, bringing story knowledge into the gameplay and resulting in knowledge that the community members could share. These story developments show a connection to Scarry's work via the use of divinity within the story. Finally, returning to the original thesis of Scarry, the pleasure of these previous cycles encouraged artists to seek *pleasure in artistic creation* and to create pieces of work which became beautiful in their own right.

## The Pleasure of Patterned Chaos

Some people may have found pleasure in the chaos of TwitchPlaysPokémon, while others may have been frustrated by the game. While some failure is necessary to enjoy a game (Juul, 2013), TwitchPlaysPokémon's tendency to stall for hours on end should have resulted in fewer and fewer players being involved, not more. The programmer who originally set up TwitchPlaysPokémon did not expect it to bring in so many players:

> I wrote the code and put it up on a server all within a few days. I didn't put much effort into it because I didn't expect it to be successful; I just wanted to test to see if interacting with a game in this manner would have any interest at all. I was expecting to let it run for a short while (until interest died) and then take what I had learned and applied it to something more complex. (Stevens, Q2)

The programmer expected things to not be overly attractive to players; they were making a test run before a real project. Yet people continued to play.

Thus, frustration could have overrun the pleasure offered by the game but, instead, we can return to the quote by No_terran which opened this chapter. When successful moves were made and patterns spotted, the players became excited and recognized something attractive in the chaos. This was the beauty of having an open space to explore and on which to impose order. Playing in this new space, even when gameplay was stalled, was enjoyable and fed into the pleasure of the participants. However, the fun could have ended there, especially once the game was beaten. Yet, the players created a new cycle of beauty and appreciation instead by replicating these elements of beauty in new forms.

## The Pleasure of Knowledge-Creation

The creation of understanding by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community members, the first element discussed above, had its own pleasurable aspects. Players spotted patterns in the chaos and attempted to recreate those patterns in their own creative way via the drive to replicate. Thus, the story of TwitchPlaysPokémon began to be developed. The appreciation of the patterns was then joined by appreciation for the explanation that the community formed: beauty replicated beauty as Scarry wrote. Rather than using technical facts to explain what was happening, the participants created gods and saints instead. By responding to the patterns in creative ways they produce their own pleasurable story through recreating the original game pleasure in a new form.

The TwitchPlaysPokémon participants recognized the pleasure of TwitchPlaysPokémon through its chaos and their creative energy, reminding them of childhood:

> Think about all the weird stories and headcanons we've invented. Pitting the fossils against each other, making Flareon the antichrist, making sense of nonsensical names (Abby, Jay Leno). There's so much more of the childhood innocence in here than there is at first glance (u/vithod, 2014, Reddit).

The open canvas of the chaotic game provided a space for child-like wonder and play which prompted the community to explore like they were children. Creation of understanding is something all children do; they take a world they do not understand and make sense of it in their own way.

The chaos of TwitchPlaysPokémon, much like the experience of childhood, opened the way for this creative investment through the chaotic field it provides:

> [I]f the monster appears suddenly, transported into a world of surface alone, with neither depth nor interior, no inside distinct from an outside…then there is no way for humans to invoke the creativity that would generate a story.… To invoke a story, all one needs do is fold over this naked world of surface only, with no distinct inside and outside, to produce creases, hollows, and gaps. (Nakazawa, 2019, 39)

The chaos produces these "creases, hollows, and gaps" through which a story can develop. Part of the pleasure of the chaos – the noise of TwitchPlaysPokémon – was found in the appeal of picking it apart, interrogating and interpreting it, trying to unravel it to understand it, and, ultimately, control it through knowledge creation. For Scarry, beauty prompts reflection as well as creation.

## The Pleasure in Creation

Finally, there is pleasure in the creative objects brought into being through artistic players. Certain community participants, having experienced the pleasure of knowledge creation wanted to replicate the pleasure into creative objects of fandom. These objects – digital art, sewing, memes, and more – were able to take aspects of the playthrough and bring them out of the gaming space and into new areas of the internet and even the physical world. Consider the long hours u/jabbacakes spent cross-stitching (Figure 6.1) or the real-world graffiti shared by Gergo Vas (Figure 6.2).


*Figure 6.1 u/jabbacakes 100+ hour cross-stitch of the final team of Pokémon*


*Figure 6.2 Helix graffiti spotted by Gergo Vas*

These were also appreciated and likely encouraged other people to produce TwitchPlaysPokémon-related works. Since these works spread beyond Twitch and the TwitchPlaysPokémon gameplay, they became recognized by people outside the community. As we saw in Chapter 5, people became curious about the game and restarted the cycle anew.

Enjoying something pleasurable prompted the replication of that pleasurable thing into more pleasurable things. The community, feeling this urge, developed several layers of replication through their work on the playthrough. They replicated the patterned chaos into knowledge creation which they then replicated into creative pieces of artwork. Each part of the cycle brought more pleasure, and in Scarry's words beauty, into being to be enjoyed by other people through the urge to replicate that beauty.

This want to replicate what one finds pleasurable helped to prompt interaction with the community. Once someone had found the playthrough their curiosity about it could be

prompted. As we saw in Chapter 5 with the artworks: finding the replicated pleasure of the artwork encouraged people to explore the community. This urge to replicate not only helped with How the story was told but also showed Why so many participants were interested in the community. With an understanding of how the drive to replicate created a cycle within the TwitchPlaysPokémon community, it is now possible to bring all three perspectives together to form the Tripartite Lens through which the community can be viewed.

## The Tripartite Lens

The Tripartite Lens, the bringing together of the three separate perspectives into a coordinated approach, provides powerful insights into the creation of TwitchPlaysPokémon and the formation of its community. These insights come in two ways: the Why of TwitchPlaysPokémon and some of the How. That is to say, the Tripartite Lens helps to explain why the community of TwitchPlaysPokémon players decided to become a community of TwitchPlaysPokémon storytellers, no matter how unconscious that decision may have been. In addition, this lens also begins to formulate the answer to how such a community of storytellers formed, coming together through the shared use of imagination. The Tripartite Lens allows for a clear view of the processes behind TwitchPlaysPokémon and its story by considering the frameworks in relation to each other.

Why did the players of TwitchPlaysPokémon come to produce an interlinked storyline to help explain the confusing game they were playing? The specific reasons are likely too

personal and varied to account for all of them. However, the Tripartite Lens puts forward the idea that, underneath any conscious decision to take part in the creative elements of the community, these three interlocking ideas served as the unconscious drive to continue the playthrough. The confusion of thousands of players attempting to control a single character left the players with a sense of uncertainty. To process what they were seeing, the community had to explain it somehow.

The players began to perceive patterns in the chaos, actions they just kept repeating for some reason, such as the fact that they kept selecting the Helix Fossil. These strange moments, which were repeated in the chaos, were all that was needed for the players to begin to find the pleasure in what was happening; no matter how many players there were, patterns continued to appear. When the imagination was applied to explain and give meaning to the chaos, the community began a cycle of reiteration of the pleasurable environment in which they were playing.

However, the game could not be modeled completely; the chaos caused too many gaps. The players' imaginations began to fill those gaps using processes of making the unreal real. The players were able to feel like kids again, playing and discovering the game and story for the first time. Once one person became open with their imaginative gap filler, perhaps the first player to "Hail Helix!", the rest of the community was invited to join in and together they worked to build their own account, one which brought together understanding, beauty, and imagination. The Tripartite lens takes up the perspective that the players became more than players and brought themselves into the creative fold. Traditional games do not provide space for player-based storytelling since the

programmers often script out their story. Once the players became the storytellers, anything was possible.

The Tripartite Lens complements my previous discussions of How the community successfully built such an interlocking story. As put forth in the Need for Understanding section, the playthrough of TwitchPlaysPokémon could have gone very differently when explaining the chaos of the event. The players could have simply remained on the logical side of the argument: the chaos is caused by too many people trying to play the game at once and thus thousands of signals were being crossed. Done. Everything explained. But the Tripartite Lens brought in the appreciation of beauty and prompted the application of imagination, and the "logical" explanation was replaced by a community-made mythological one.

Because the last two frameworks were active within the community, the How of the story began to write itself: it HAD to be created. Rather than approach the situation with a logical explanation, the community had to approach it with creativity to fulfill the unconscious pull of the Tripartite Lens. The game made them feel like kids again and thus they came to respond to it like children, making up their own rules and characters. From this inception, the community and artistic systems were utilized, and the community began developing the mythology communally.

## Conclusion

The Tripartite Lens, as its name implies, is the coming together of three related perspectives: the need to understand, the tendency to model and then imagine, and the

drive to replicate. The need to understand is a response to unknown situations that people seek to explain. When applied to TwitchPlaysPokémon, the need to understand highlights the confusion of thousands of people attempting to play a single-player game together, but also the recognition of patterns within that chaos. The interest in understanding those patterns came into being alongside the start of the pleasurable cycle of appreciation. The open space for creation that was TwitchPlaysPokémon enabled players to see the beauty of chaos, patterns, and the creations that spring from it. Each of these steps enabled them to apply their appreciation creatively, helping not only to explain what was happening on screen but also to make it their own. All of this was done through the application of the final framework: the combination of modeling and imagination. Modeling the world within one's brain helps one understand how to interact and navigate the world. When this type of modeling was attempted with TwitchPlaysPokémon, it became apparent that imagination would be needed since there were so many holes in the modeling information. The community began to imagine explanations for this missing information and thus began to grow a story around it. This Tripartite Lens as a whole came together, explaining why the players of TwitchPlaysPokémon became community creators as well, their minds prompting them to respond in creative ways such as storytelling, art creation, and the discovery of a shared language. This three-part creative spark opened the way for a community to come together and build each other up through their shared mythology. This movement from thought process to physical presentation has many steps but the first ones that occur have to be completed in the mind of every participant. u/No_terrain, u/marekkpie, 8\u/vithod, and thousands of other players saw the beauty, the meaning, the

chance to create the unreal and stepped forward together into the unknown land that was TwitchPlaysPokémon.

# Part 3: Conclusion

# Chapter 7: Concluding the Story

To complete this work, several key parts of the entire project need reflection. First, the entire project will be summarized so that it is at the forefront moving forward. From there I return to the research questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation to consider whether or not I have reached a satisfactory conclusion. Third, I will take another step back and reflect on what contributions to the fields of study this dissertation has provided and then, where this research may head in the future. With this complete, I will briefly reflect on how this project has affected me as a researcher before concluding altogether.

## To Summarize

TwitchPlaysPokémon, as a storytelling venue, is a unique one. A single-person game controlled by thousands of players should not have worked. People should have been frustrated, not curious and creative. Yet, people became creative. Even in situations detrimental to creation, communities may develop the approaches needed to create anyway, and TwitchPlaysPokémon certainly did. On a micro-scale, TwitchPlaysPokémon showed what could happen when hundreds, or even thousands, of players worked together to move from chaos to understanding and from understanding to creativity.

Creativity was helped by a series of community systems. This led to the creation of the story through the development of layers. The story did not leap fully formed from Zeus' head but instead needed to be built piece by piece. This work was taken up by the broader community but, still, natural leaders appeared to help the story's forward momentum in

key moments. The crowd maintained its control, never quite letting these leaders take full command, and continued to work on the project themselves.

Artistic applications to the project came early in the form of memes but soon developed into fully-fledged artworks with their own positions within the storytelling cycle. They helped to make the story accessible, letting it be read in more ways than one. The adaptation and conceptualization found throughout the visual projects people created helped the interior/exterior relationships of the TwitchPlaysPokémon community while also inviting people who had never experienced TwitchPlaysPokémon to cross those boundaries and become knowledgeable.

Finally, a unique framework to approach these storytelling systems was considered. The Tripartite Lens shows how the stories of TwitchPlaysPokémon can be viewed from different perspectives. Considering how people's want to understand, their application of imagination, and the drive to replicate all helped reveal the possibility of "Why" TwitchPlaysPokémon even happened.

Each of these chapters, it can be argued, divides the subject up in arbitrary ways. The practices that produced both writing and art came in contact with each other. They are deeply tied together and serve the community by being fluid and adjustable when needed. Ultimately, these three chapters show a dissection of a strange phenomenon with the recognition that had TwitchPlaysPokémon come into being at any other time, it may not have produced such a creative following. Right place, right time, right systems in play.

## Research Aims and Conclusions

Let us now return to the two major research questions that began this TwitchPlaysPokémon study. There was a question of How. How did the community successfully create such an elaborate story with no formal leadership and the only goal being to beat the game? There was also a question of Why. Why did the community persevere through frustrating controls to not only win the game but also build an entire mythology behind it? Throughout this work there have been some conclusions drawn around these two questions, so let's break them down below.

### How?

The TwitchPlaysPokémon community used several types of storytelling practices which helped to explain how the community developed such an elaborate story. In this dissertation I drew out two critical practices that built up important areas of TwitchPlaysPokémon content: the community practice and the artistic practice. We have seen how critical these systems were to encouraging all different forms of participation that to worked together and created a communal story.

The community system, which was built on a series of scaffolding layers, produced a feedback loop. The game created a response, the response created discussion, and the discussion created story development. Once the feedback loop was established, gameplay and story creation could no longer be separated. The community continued to develop content on all layers of the scaffolding and natural leaders that arose from the participants helped to smooth the transition between those levels.

The artistic system embraced the story in a new way: through media other than writing. Visual works were created, and each one helped to develop communal relationships with the story. By making the story more accessible to participants, the artists of TwitchPlaysPokémon opened the way for exploring different aspects of the story. Adaptation of Christian mythology or, the opposite, moving further from those Christian roots, enabled those perspectives to flourish using different art styles. The conceptual approach to the artwork both grounded the story in its Pokémon roots as well as letting the story move beyond that and into the real world.

Between these two systems, the creation and development of the story flowed naturally and easily into being. There were changes, of course, and disagreements throughout the entire event but even these issues display the operation of both systems, particularly around community control of the story. Individuals could make their choices, where they sat in the TwitchPlaysPokémon religion or how they wanted to draw the important Pokémon from the story, and the community would make room for them. Everything produced by the systems was brought under the umbrella of the growing mythology.

## Why?

Answering the question of Why the community not only persevered and beat the game but also took the time to create such an all-encompassing story around the gameplay, is harder. When one looks closely at the game-play response, the Reddit posts, the art, and more, it is possible to trace the systems at work. This is less concrete when considering the Why. It is not possible to trace every single player's thought process behind their

continuation of the game and their participation in the story development. This is not to say that some players didn't reflect on their own reasoning for their enjoyment of the game and their interest in the story. These discussions can be used to start the conversation, but it is necessary to take a step back and view the TwitchPlaysPokémon event as a microcosm of human creation.

I presented the Tripartite Lens through which TwitchPlaysPokémon could be viewed. By taking some frameworks which often apply to different areas of creativity and play and combining them, one possible view of Why is revealed. A drive to understand and replicate their sense of pleasure, coupled with the human ability to imagine, could be a major reason why the community worked together the way it did. This Tripartite Lens opens a way to view the communal work completed and speculate on the thought processes that went into all that work.

## Contributions to the Field

This dissertation contributes to two fields. First, there is the narrower field of academic work on TwitchPlaysPokémon itself. More broadly, the dissertation also contributes to the discussion around communal storytelling. To break these considerations and additions down, I will consider each field independently.

### The Field of TwitchPlaysPokémon

The TwitchPlaysPokémon pool of thinkers is as narrow as TwitchPlaysPokémon itself. Several key perspectives were considered and discussed by these thinkers, such as the

Christianized perspective (Lindsay, 2015) and the political leanings (Aikens, 2014) of the playthrough. However, the most common discussion was that of gaming and how TwitchPlaysPokémon offered a new way to play with a larger body of players. While the number of players who became involved in TwitchPlaysPokémon gives us some sense of how large that group was, TwitchPlaysPokémon only received moderate attention within academic spaces. A smaller field offers plenty of newer areas to cover when it comes to an analysis of TwitchPlaysPokémon. Much of the focus of previous writers and thinkers has been on particularly specific aspects of the original playthrough such as Michael Aiken's breakdown of the political aspect of Anarchy and Democracy as game modes or Andrew James' discussion of sacrifice within the TwitchPlaysPokémon story. These types of focus allowed in-depth discussions of select aspects of the game which left open a consideration of the development of the story overall.

By taking a step back and considering How the story was created and breaking down the two major systems that were at work, this dissertation was able to consider the larger scale of TwitchPlaysPokémon. This broader consideration helps to form the backbone of TwitchPlaysPokémon in which the other authors in the field fit together. Articulating the systems with an eye both for the written and artistic components of the story meant that a layer of the event, previously not discussed, could be peeled back and considered. The resulting discussion of the community system highlighted a critical approach to the community of TwitchPlaysPokémon which dictated a need for leadership positions which meld well with a communal system of control both within the game and within the story. Key leaders have not been discussed academically as they often blended in with much of

the rest of the community. The exception to this may be Destiny the Rebel Leader who, in reflections of TwitchPlaysPokémon, often takes up much of the discussion. However, these conversations often failed to consider the communal work that went into the Bloody Sunday events set off by Destiny's interference. With an eye on how communal control produced content while the leadership smoothed the movement across scaffolding layers, this dissertation was able to open a discussion of how these positions balanced each other rather than cancel each other out.

The art created by the TwitchPlaysPokémon community garnered a lot of attention from TwitchPlaysPokémon thinkers, as the community produced pieces that are eye-catching and, often, present complex and detailed images. The breakdown of how these images fit into the entire event is necessary to consider given how popular these artworks were. This dissertation considered the system which helped to decide key aspects of the artist's decisions such as how close or far the artwork fell from the Christianized perspective the mythology was mapped onto. These broader readings, through the use of select examples, allowed a close consideration of the attention paid to mythological authenticity alongside individual perspectives.

A wider perspective was created through which a variety of TwitchPlaysPokémon's elements could be linked together and explored as parts of a grand mechanism. Both the community and artistic systems discussed allow for other authors' works to meld together and be viewed as a larger account rather than just isolated discussions.

## The Field of Communal Storytelling

Storytelling has always been a communal act. Stretching back to Ancient Greece with poets telling the tale of Troy, to Inuit peoples keeping their history alive, and to children scaring each other with ghost stories around the campfire, storytelling is at the center of human communication. The study of storytelling is also directly involved in academia and is present at the heart of many disciplines. How, then, is it possible to expand on such a strong and always-growing field? Through the consideration of how this dissertation narrows down to key features that can work together to enable easier communal storytelling.

This case study of TwitchPlaysPokémon showed how a non-geographical group can come together thanks to today's technologies and build an entire mythology. Participating in the playthrough required only access to a computer and an internet connection fast enough to keep up. This type of storytelling opens the way for many other story projects to take advantage of the lack of digital distance to form unique communities which work and play together. TwitchPlaysPokémon also showed a new approach to video games which also takes advantage of shared online space in a new and thoughtful way. Systems of storytelling have become more open due to the internet and other technologies.

Narrowing focus, this dissertation can be viewed as providing an outline of some of the key factors that encourage story development among groups. With both a writing system and an art system in place, a complicated story is still possible to develop when a community decides to work together. With a structured scaffolding underpinning the work of both leaders and the wider community, it is possible for many perspectives to come

together through various forms of media. Attention paid to adaptation, accessibility, and context provides new spaces, both in art as discussed here and in other media, to play with communal information and content and produce individual perspectives on it.

## Moving Forward

This research could continue in a variety of ways. To highlight the most compelling, it is important to consider how TwitchPlaysPokémon is embedded into several different spaces and how these spaces may be developed to study different parts of the TwitchPlaysPokémon phenomenon. Here I will discuss three possible directions the research could go: a consideration of the latter TwitchPlaysPokémon play on Twitch, a study of shared game control in small groups vs. groups of unrestricted sizes, and how the systems may be already implemented in other communities.

First, and most obvious, is an exploration of the subsequent playthroughs of TwitchPlaysPokémon. While the community never again hit as high a number of players as the Pokémon Red playthrough, the community has continued to play through the original Pokémon game collection. This would allow for a long-term study of the communal storytelling aspect of gameplay through the comparison between the original run and later gameplay. Tracking how the community has developed across nearly 10 years of play would open the way to gaining insight into how the previous games and experimentation change how the players approach new experiences in the different games.

Secondly, it would be interesting to experiment with various sizes of cooperating players interacting with the single-character control system. This study would be performed in

more controlled systems to better understand how communities of geographically and non-geographically based groups approach shared control. While a controlled test is not likely to spark as integrated story as the original TwitchPlaysPokémon did, it would be good to see if creative elements are incorporated during shared gameplay.

Finally, the study of other communal storytelling projects would allow more development to be made around the systems highlighted in this dissertation as well as the Tripartite Lens discussed in the last chapter. This exploration would allow similarities and differences to be considered and would help build a stronger understanding of these communal systems as they apply to various groups. This research would pull focus from TwitchPlaysPokémon specifically and consider both geographical and non-geographical communities and how they build and share their own stories.

These three projects, each tackling a different sector of previous research, would help to build on this dissertation through both natural and simulated situations. The further understanding of the TwitchPlaysPokémon event, the development of the shared control gameplay in unique spaces, and the consideration of how these systems apply in other communal story spaces would all see further development. Each project would open the research questions further into understanding some of the larger forces behind TwitchPlaysPokémon.

# Works Cited

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Aiken, Michael. “Anarchy vs. Democracy: The Politics of ‘Twitch Plays Pokémon’.” *Diplomatic Courier*, 8.3 (2014): 74-7. Web.

Banks, John. *Co-Creating Videogames*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.

Berelson, Bernard. *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. New York: Free Press, 1952.

de Sola Pool, Ithiel. *Trends in Content Analysis*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959.

Fullerton, Tracy. *Game Design Workshop: a playcentric approach to creating innovative games*. 4th ed. 2019. Web.

Gershenfeld, N.G., and J. Euchner. “Atons and Bits: Rethinking Manufacturing.” *Conversations: Research-Technology Management* 58.5 (2015): 16-21. Web.

Holmes, A. G. D. “Researcher Positionality–A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research–A New Researcher Guide.” *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4),2020: 1-10. Web.

James, Eric Andrew. “Using Rhetorical Criticism to Track Twitch Plays Pokémon fans’ Attachment to Sacrifice.” *Transformative Works and Culture* 28 (2018). Web.

Kleinheksel, A.J., Nicole Rockich-Winston, Huda Tawfik, and Tasha R. Wyatt. “Demystifying Content Analysis.” *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 84.1 (2020). Web.

Lindsay, Marley-Vincent. “The Politics of Pokémon: Socializing Gaming, Religious Themes and the Construction od Communal Narratives.” *Religion in Digital Games Reloaded* 7 (2015): 107-38. Web.

Mallory, Max. “Community-based Play in Twitch Plays Pokémon.” *Well Played: a journal on video-games, value and meaning* 3.2 (2014): 25-40. Web.

Margel, Michael. “Twitch Plays Pokémon: An Analysis of Social Dynamics in Crowdsourced Games.” *In SIGCHI Proceedings*, 2014. Web.

Ramirez, Dennis; Saucerman, Jenny and Jeremy Dietmeier. “Twitch Plays Pokémon: A Case Study in Big G Games.” *In Proceedings of the DiGRA 2014* (2014). Web.

Stemler, SM. “Content Analysis.” *Emerging trends in the social and behavioural sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*. 2015: 1-14. Web.

Wallace, Ryan. “Modding: Amateur Authorship and how the video game industry is actually getting it right.” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1, 2014. Web.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Arnott, Luke, and Jennifer Martin. “Unraveling Braid: Puzzle Games and Storytelling in the Imperative Mood.” *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 32.6 (2012): 433-440. Web.

Banks, John. *Co-Creating Videogames*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.

Bickerdike, Jennifer Otter. *The Secular Religion of Fandom: Pop Culture Pilgrim*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE P., 2016. Web.

Chen, Hsiu-Ling, and Yun-Chi Chuang. “The effects of digital storytelling games on high school students critical thinking skills.” *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 37.1 (2020): 265-274. Web.

Consalvo, Mia and Jason Begy. *Players and Their Pets: Gaming Communities from Beta to*

*Sunset*. Minnesota: U. of Minnesota P., 2015. Web.

Dille, Flint and John Zuur Platten. *The Ultimate Guide to Video Game Writing and Design*. New York: Random House, 2007. Print.

Dyer-Witherford, Nick and Greig de Peuter. *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*. Minneapolis, U. of Minnesota P., 2009. Print.

Frissen, Valerie; Sybille Lammes; Michiel de Lange; Jose de Mul; and Joost Raessens. "Homo Ludens 2.0: Play, Media, and Identity." *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam U.P., 2015. Web.

Fornäs, Johan, at al. ed. *Digital Borderlands: Cultural Studies of Identity and Interactivity on the Internet*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. Web.

Fullerton, Tracy. *Game Design Workshop: a playcentric approach to creating innovative games*. Boca Raton: Taylor & Francis, 2019. Web.

Garner, Ross Peter. "Acafan identity, communities of practice, and vocational poaching." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 35 (2021). Web.

Gillespie, Bruce. "Using Digital Story-telling and Game-based Learning to Increase Student Engagement and Connect Theory with Practice." *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* 10 (2022). Web.

Glickman, Seth; McKenzie, Nathan; Seering, Joseph; Moeller, Rachel and Jessica Hammer. "Design Challenges for Livestreamed Audience Participation Games." From CHI PLAY'18 *Proceedings of the 2018 Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play*. 2018. 287-199. Web.

Hamilton, William A.; Garretson, Oliver and Andruid Karne. "Streaming on Twitch: Fostering

Participatory Communities of Play within Live Mixed Media." *In Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (2014): 1315-24. Web.

Harris, John., Hancock, Mark., and Stacey D. Scott. "Leveraging Asymmetries in Multiplayer Games: Investigating Design Elements of Interdependent Play." *In Proceedings of the 2016 Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play* (2016): 350-61. Web.

Harries, Dan ed. *The New Media Book*. London: British Film Institute P., 2002. Print.

Hetrick, Laura. "Reading Fan Art as Complex Texts." *Art Education* 71.3 (2018): 56-62. Web.

Hill, Matt. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge, 2002. Web.

–, – –. "Media Fandom, Neoreligiosity, and Cult(ural) Studies." *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film and Television* (2000): 73-84. Web.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: the meaning of style*. New York: Routledge, 1979. Print.

Huizinga, J. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1949. Web.

James, Eric Andrew. "Using Rhetorical Criticism to Track Twitch Plays Pokémon fans' Attachment to Sacrifice." *Transformative Works and Culture* 28 (2018). Web.

Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York U.P., 2006. Web.

––, ––. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Web.

Jung, Sun. "Fan activism, cybervigilantism, and Othering mechanisms in K-pop fandom." *Transformative Works and Cultures* (2012). Web.

Juul, Jesper. *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players*. Cambridge: MIT P., 2009. Web.

– –, – –. *Half-Real: Video games between real rules and fictional worlds*. Cambridge: The MIT P., 2011. Web.

– –, – –. *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013. Print.

Laiti, Outi, Sabine Harrer, Satu Uusiautti, and Annakaisa Kultima. "Sustaining Intangible Heritage through video game storytelling – the case of the Sami game jam." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27.3 (2021): 296-311. Web.

Lamerichs, Nicolle. *Productive Fandoms: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam U.P., 2018. Web.

Lee, Daniel H., and Tzyy-Ping Jung. "A Virtual Reality Game as a Tool to Assess Physiological Correlations of Stress." 2018. Web.

Lewis, Jeff. *Cultural Studies: The Basics*. 2nd Edition. London: SAGE P., 2008. Print.

Lindsay, Marley-Vincent. "The Politics of Pokémon: Socializing Gaming, Religious Themes and the Construction of Communal Narratives." *Religion in Digital Games Reloaded* 7 (2015): 107-38. Web.

Madigan, Jamie. *Getting Gamers: The Psychology of Video Games and Their Impact on the People Who Play Them*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Print.

Mallory, Max. "Community-based Play in Twitch Plays Pokémon." *Well Played: a journal on video-games, value and meaning* 3.2 (2014): 25-40. Web.

Mäyrä, Frans. *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. London: SAGE

Publications, 2008. Print.

McInroy, Lauren B. “Building Connections and Slaying Basilisks: Fostering Support, Resilience, and Positive Adjustment for Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Online Fandom Communities.” *Information, Communication, and Society* 23.13 (2020): 1874-91. Web.

Mitchell, Liam. *Ludopolitics: Videogames Against Control*. Washington: Zero Books, 2018. Print.

Muriel, Daniel and Gary Crawford. *Video games as Culture: considering the role and importance of video games in contemporary society*. New York: Routledge, 2018. Web.

Paul, Christopher A. *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games: Why Gaming Culture is the Worst*. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P., 2018. Web.

Pearce, Celia and Artemesia. *Communities of Play*. Cambridge: MIT P., 2009. Print.

Perry, Ryan; Anders Drachen; Allison Kearny; Simone Kriglstein; Lennart E. Nacke; Rafet Sifa; Guenter Wallner; and Daniel Johnson. “Online-only friends, real-life friends, or strangers? Differential associations with passion and social capital in video game play.” *Computers in Human Behaviours* 79 (2018): 202-210. Web.

Reysen, Stephen; Courtney Plante and Daniel Chadborn. “Better Together: Social Connections Mediate the Relationship Between Fandom and Well-Being.” *AASCIT Journal of Health* 4.6 (2017): 68-73. Web.

Scully-Baker, Rainforest; Begy, Jason; Consalvo, Mia and Sarah Christina Ganzon. “Playing

along and playing for on Twitch: Livestreaming for tandem play to performance." In *Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (2017): 2026-35. Web.

Shaw, Adrienne. "What is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies." *Games and Culture* 5.4 (2010): 403-24. Web.

Stenros, Jaakko. "In Defence of the Magic Circle: The Social, Mental, and Cultural Boundaries of Play." *ToDigra* 1.2 (2014): 147-85. Web.

Tobin, Joseph, ed. Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon. Durbam: Duke U.P., 2004. Print.

u/brocky1495. "Seen on my college campus: They were shouting "worship the helix fossil" while throwing SS Anne tickets at people." *Reddit*. Web.

u/pareil. "Spotted at a basketball game at my college." *Reddit*. Web.

Upton, Brian. *The Aesthetics of Play*. Cambridge: MIT P., 2015. Web.

Zimmerman, Eric and Katie Salen Tekinbas. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cumberland: MIT P., 2003. Web.

## Chapter 3: The Chaotic Background

"Abby" *Helixpedia.com*. https://helixpedia.fandom.com/wiki/Abby. Web.

Aiken, Michael. "Anarchy vs. Democracy: The Politics of 'Twitch Plays Pokémon'." *Diplomatic Courier*, 8.3 (2014): 74-7. Web.

Chen, Scott D. "A Crude Analysis of Twitch Plays Pokémon." *Computer Science and Game Theory* (2014). Web.

Epstein, Adam. "Twitch is the Undisputed Champion of Video Game Streaming." *Quartz*,

January 31, 2021. Web.

"Evolution". *Bulbapedia*. https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Evolution Web.

Hamilton, Willian; Oliver Garretson and Andruid Kerne. "Streaming on Twitch: Fostering Participatory Communities of Play Within Live Mixed Media." *Conference of Human Factors in Computing Systems Proceedings*, 2014. Web.

Haque, Albert. "Twitch Plays Pokémon, Machine Learns Twitch: Unsupervised Context-Aware Anomaly Detection for Identifying Trolls in Streaming Data." Cornell University, 2014. Web.

Hern, Alex. "Twitch Plays Pokémon: Live Gaming's Latest Big Hit." *Theguardian.com* (2014). Web.

Lin,Jih-Hsuan Tammy, Nicholas Bowman, Shu-Fang Lin, and Yen-Shen Chen. "Setting the digital stage: Defining game streaming as an entertainment experience." *Entertainment Computing* 31 (2019): 1-8. Web.

Mallory, Max. "Community-based Play in Twitch Plays Pokémon." *Well Played: a journal on video-games, value and meaning* 3.2 (2014): 25-40. Web.

"Parent's Guide". *Pokemon.com*. https://www.pokemon.com/us/parents-guide/ Web.

Rice, Carolyn. "Twitch Plays Pokémon Completes Game." *BBC News*, March 3, 2014. https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-26417482. Web.

Saucerman, Jenny and Dennis Ramirez. "Praise Helix! Christian Narrative in Twitch Plays: Pokémon." *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 10 (2016): 74-94. Web.

Stein, Joel. "Why we're losing the Internet to the culture of Hate." *Time*, 2016. Web.

Stevens, Tim. “Twitch Plays Pokémon: In conversation with the phenomenon’s creator (Q&A).” *CNET*, March 12, 2014. https://www.cnet.com/news/twitch-plays-pokemon-in-conversation-with-the-phenomenons-creator-q-a/. Web.

“The Start Trolls” *Twitch Plays Wiki*. Web. https://twitchplayswiki.fandom.com/wiki/The_Start_trolls.

Tobin, Joseph, ed. *Pikachu’s Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*. Durbam: Duke U.P., 2004. Print.

“Type”. *Bulbapedia*. https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Type Web.

u/Darkell. “This democracy system has just ruined this experiment.” *Reddit*. 2014. Web.

Zimmerman, Eric and Katie Salen Tekinbas. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cumberland: MIT P., 2003. Web.

## Chapter 4: TwitchPlaysPokémon System Dynamics

Aiken, Michael. “Anarchy vs. Democracy: The Politics of ‘Twitch Plays Pokémon’.” *Diplomatic Courier*, 8.3 (2014): 74-7. Web.

Banks, John. Co-Creating Videogames. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.

Baym, Nancy K. *Tune in, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. London: Sage P. I. (2000). Web.

Beavers, Kevin M. *Hacking for Dummies*. 7th Ed. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2022. Web.

Bliss, Joan., Mike Askew and Sheila MaCrae. “Effective Teaching and Learning: Scaffolding Revisited.” *Oxford Review of Education* 22.1 (1996). Web.

Cadwell, Alexander. “Sharing a Meme Means Sharing a Message.” *Understanding Literacy in*

*Our Lives* (2021). Web.

"Community". *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Web.

Cooper, James L., and Pamela Robinson. "Using Classroom Assessment and Cognitive Scaffolding to Enhance the Power of Small-Group Learning." *Journal of Excellence in College Teaching* 25 (2014): 149-61. Web.

Cooper, James L., Pamela Robinson, and D. Bell. *Small Group Learning in Higher Education: Lessons from the Past, Visions of the Future*. Oklahoma, New Forums P., 2003. Web.

Czarnota, Jedrzej. *Co-Creation, Innovation, and New Service Development: the Case of the Video Game Industry*. NY: Routledge, 2018. Print.

Ducheneaut, Nicholas, Nicholas Yee, Eric Nickell, and Robert J. Moore. "The Life and Death of Online Gaming Communities: A Look at Guilds in World of Warcraft." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference of Human Factors in Computing Systems* (2007). Web.

Ellen Mathisen, Gro, Ståle Einarsen, Reidar Mykletun, and Alejandro Escribá-Esteve. "Creative Leaders Prompt Creative Organizations." *International Journal of Manpower* 33.4 (2012): 367-82. Web.

"Emergent". *Oxford Languages*. Web.

Fairhurst, Gail T., and Stacey L. Connaughton. "Chapter 16: Leadership Communication." *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Communications: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*. London: Sage P., 2014. 401-24. Web.

He, Yingyao, Xinyue Wang, Kelong Lu, and Ning Hao. "Letting leaders spontaneously

emerge yields better creative outcomes and higher leader-follower interbrain synchrony during creative group communication." *Cerebral Cortex* 33.11 (1991). Web.

Hewett, Katherine J. E. "Youth Gamers and Their collaborative 21st century leadership skills." *Whiley* (2022). Web.

Hillier, J. "Chapter 3: Presumptive Planning: From Urban Design to Community Creation in One Move?" *Psychological Sense of Community. The Plenum Series in Social/Clinical Psychology*. Boston, Springer (2002): 43-67. Web.

James, Eric Andrew. "Using Rhetorical Criticism to Track Twitch Plays Pokémon fans' Attachment to Sacrifice." *Transformative Works and Culture* 28 (2018). Web

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Web.

Jenkins, Henry, Gabriel Peters-Lazaro, and Sangita Shresthova. *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination*. New York: New York U. P., 2020. Web.

Kington, C.S. "Con Culture: A Survey of Fans and Fandoms." *Journal of Fandom Studies* (2015). Web.

Lee, Chris. "Beyond the Creepy Teeth: How Sonic the Hedgehog Saved Itself." *Vulture.com*. 2020. Web.

Lee, Shin Haeng, Jin-Young Tak, Eun-Joo Kwak, Tae Yun Lim, Karen Shackleford, and Joanne Broder. "Fandom, Social Media, and Identity Work: The Emergence of Virtual Community Through the Pronoun 'We'." *Psychology of Popular Media* 9.4 (2020): 436-46. Web.

Li, Zhengping, Cheng Hwee Sim, and Malcolm Yoke Hean Low. “A Survey of Emergent Behavior and Its Impact in Agent-based Systems.” *Proceedings of the 4th IEEE Conference* (2006). Web.

Lindsay, Marley-Vincent. “The Politics of Pokémon: Socializing Gaming, Religious Themes and the Construction of Communal Narratives.” *Religion in Digital Games Reloaded* 7 (2015): 107-38. Web.

Mallory, Max. “Community-based Play in Twitch Plays Pokémon.” *Well Played: a journal on video-games, value and meaning* 3.2 (2014): 25-40. Web.

McWhertor, M. (2014, February 20). “Twitch Plays Pokémon Creator Tweaks Channel to Make Game More ‘Beatable’.” *Polygon*. Web.

“Meme”. *Oxford Dictionary*. Web.

Pearce, Celia and Artemesia. *Communities of Play*. Cambridge: MIT P., 2009. Print.

Pedrazzi, Stefano, and Franziska Oehmer. “Communication Rights for Social Bots?: Options for the Governance of Automated Computer-Generated Online Identities.” *Journal of Information Policy* 10.1 (2020): 549-81. Web.

Rea, Dennis. “Improvised Performance: Nurturing Natural Leadership.” *Journal of Organizational Transformation & Social Change* 11.2 (2014): 108-24. Web.

Resch, Bernhard, Patrizia Hoyer, and Chris Steyaert. “Affective Control in New Collaborative Work: Communal Fantasies of Purpose, Growth, and Belonging.” *Organization Studies* 42.5 (2020). Web.

Roberts, Deborah, Mathew Hughes and Kia Kertbo. “Exploring Consumers’ Motivations to

Engage in Innovation Through Co-Creation Activities." *European Journal of Marketing* 48 (2014): 147-69. Web.

Rowley, Jennifer., Beata Kupiec-Teahan, and Edward Leeming. "Customer Community and Co-creation: A Case Study." *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 25.2 (2007): 136-46. Web.

Supalla, Ted., Peter C. Hauser, and Daphne Bavelier. "Reproducing American Sign Language sentences: cognitive scaffolding in working memory." *Frontiers in Psychology* (2014). Web.

"System". *Oxford Languages*. Web.

u/Anonymous. "The Resurrection of Helix." *Reddit*. Web.

u/danman1232. "What is 'Start9' from 'TwitchPlaysPokémon'?" *Reddit*. Web.

u/Djank1. "Live Updates Day 8." *Reddit*. Web.

u/Hypolol. "The Moment I Knew Bird Jesus was the Chosen One." *Reddit*. Web.

u/johnnyhavok2." "Explanation of Everything Thus Far." *Reddit*. Web.

—, —. "The Release of Abby K and Jay Leno." *Reddit*. Web.

u/jsnbrgmn. "Anarchy/Democracy Explained." *Reddit*. Web.

u/LukP99. "We need a TPP chat room." *Reddit*. Web.

u/manwithasquarehead. "Democracy Mode Sucks." *Reddit*. Web.

u/MarkRowen. "Thoughts on Destiny." *Reddit*. Web.

u/mastahcheech. "Democracy Mode Sucks." *Reddit*. Web.

u/MrOliveira. "Explanation of Everything Thus Far." *Reddit*. Web.

u/no-terrain. "The Moment I Knew Bird Jesus was the Chosen One." *Reddit*. Web.

u/phan7om. “Live Updates Day 11.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/pikminlover72. “Thoughts on Destiny.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/ Sidnoea. “Nickname for Zapdos.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/spazmo702. “Thoughts on Destiny.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/Synchrotr0n. “Thoughts on Destiny.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/thatguywhoisthatguy. “Anarchy/Democracy Explained.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/TheEggKing. “Anarchy/Democracy Explained.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/ThePokeBard. “Thoughts on Destiny.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/the-soggy-taco. “The Moment I Knew Bird Jesus was the Chosen One.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/WhiteChocolate12. “Live Updates Day 8.” *Reddit*. Web.

Williams, Rebecca. *Post-Object Fandom: Television, Identity, and Self-Narrative*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Web.

Willis, Chris., Kristina N. LaVenia, and Christy Galletta Horner. “Wisdom of the Outsiders Within: How Career Technical Education Leaders Can Inform Educational Leadership Preparation.” *Journal of Research on Leadership Education* (2023). Web.

Wood, D.J. “Aspects of Teaching and Learning.” *Learning to Think*. New York: Routledge, 1991. Pg. 191-212. Web.

Wright, Will. “Foreword.” *A Theory of Fun*. Raph Koster, auth. Sebastopol: O’Reily Media, 2014. Print.

Yong-Chan, Kim and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach. “Community Storytelling Network, Neighborhood Context, and Civic Engagement: A Multilevel Approach.” *Human Communication Research* 32 (2006): 411-39. Web.

Zanazanian, Paul. “Mobilizing Historical Consciousness for Concerted Social Action: English-speaking Quebec’s Community Leaders and Their Quest for Group Vitality.” *Canadian Ethics Studies Journal* 55.1 (2019). Web.

## Chapter 5: Reading TwitchPlaysPokémon Art

Adventurous-Dreamer. “TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Boidy, Maxime. “‘I hate visual culture.’ The Controversial Rise of Visual Studies and the Disciplinary Politics of the Visual.” *Visual Studies* 35.4 (2020): 310-8. Web.

Didron, Adolphe Napoléon. *Christian Iconography: the history of Christian art in the Middle Ages*. New York: F. Ungar (1965). Web.

Checkers. “Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (color).” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Cocowoushi. “TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon - Helix Power.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Ego-Man25. “TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Engraven. “Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (color).” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Hajimikimo. “Twitch Plays Pokémon Red.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Howells, Richard. *Visual Culture*. Polity P., Cambridge (2003). Print.

Liokora. “Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (color).” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Malcrosz. “TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Melondream. “On the Seventh Day of the Helix.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Morshality. “TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Mythical-Luz. “TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon - Helix Power.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Savile, Anthony. “The Place of Intention in the Concept of Art.” *The Proceedings of the*

*Aristotelian Society* 69, 1968-69: 101-124. Web.

Sevenrubies. “Twitch Plays Pokémon Red (colors).” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Skypup. “On the Seventh Day of the Helix.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

Tewhitney. “Twitch Plays Pokémon Tarot.” *Tumblr*. Web.

“The Lover’s Card.” *The Tarot Guide*. Web.

ThroughSpaceandTime. “Twitch Plays Pokémon: Helix Altar.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

“Twitch Plays Pokemon: Lore_Red.” *Reddit*. Web.

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/wiki/lore_red/

u/Alkaron. “The Last Supper, as lead by Our Saviour, Bird Jesus.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/Anonymous. “The Last Supper, as lead by Our Saviour, Bird Jesus.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/johnnyhavok2.” “Explanation of Everything Thus Far.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/Kamkake. “The Last Supper, as lead by Our Saviour, Bird Jesus.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/WhoaConstrictor. “The Origin of Ancient Helixism.” *Reddit*. Web.

WhoaConstrictor. “The Origin of Ancient Helixism.” *DeviantArt*. Web.

## Chapter 6: The Tripartite Lens

Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: A Short History*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London: 2002. Print.

Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. Scribner, New York:

2016. Print.

Dunbar, Robin. *How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures*. Dublin: Penguin Random House

P., 2022. Print.

Juul, Jesper. *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*. Cambridge:

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013. Print.

Mann, Steven R. "Chaos Theory and Strategic Art," *Parameters* 22, no. 1 (1992), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1634.

Nakazawa, Shinichi. *The Lure of Pokémon: Video Games and the Savage Mind*. Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, Tokyo: 2019. Print.

Norman, Donald A. *The Design of Everyday Things*. Currency Doubleday, New York: 1990. Print.

Ramirez, Dennis; Saucerman, Jenny and Jeremy Dietmeier. “Twitch Plays Pokémon: A Case Study in Big G Games.” *In Proceedings of the DiGRA 2014* (2014). Web.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. “The Psychology of the Imagination”, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*. Stephen Priest. Routledge, Oxfordshire (2000). Web.

Saucerman, Jenny and Dennis Ramirez. “Praise Helix! Christian Narrative in Twitch Plays: Pokémon.” *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 10 (2016): 74-94. Web.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton U.P., Princeton: 1999.

Stevens, Tim. “Twitch Plays Pokémon: In Conversation with the Phenomenon’s Creator (Q&A)”. *CNET*. March 12 2014. Web.

u/cee-man. “What may break the fun of TWITCHPLAYSPOKÉMON.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/jabbacakes. “100+ hours later, the Twitch Plays Pokémon cross-stitch commission is finished! :D.” *Reddit*. Web.

+u/Jim7777PS3. “You people are what is making this thing so fun.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/johnnyhavok2”. “Explanations of Everything Thus Far.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/ marekkpie. “Confessions of a Follower Since 1d9h.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/no_terran. “Confessions of a Follower Since 1d9h.” *Reddit*. Web.

u/vithod. *Reddit*. Web.

u/wingfan1405. “Confessions of a Follower Since 1d9h.” *Reddit*. Web.

Vas, Gergo. “Dayshot: Proof that The Cult of Helix Fossil is a Serious Thing.” *Dayshot*. Web.

## Chapter 7: Concluding the Story

Aiken, Michael. “Anarchy vs. Democracy: The Politics of ‘Twitch Plays Pokémon’.” *Diplomatic Courier*, 8.3 (2014): 74-7. Web.

Lindsay, Marley-Vincent. “The Politics of Pokémon: Socializing Gaming, Religious Themes and the Construction of Communal Narratives.” *Religion in Digital Games Reloaded* 7 (2015): 107-38. Web.

# Appendix A: TwitchPlaysPokémon Primary Sources

## Reddit

### Culminative Posts

“Explanation of Everything Thus Far” authored by u/johnnyhavok2

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y90kl/explanation_of_everything_thus_far/

“The History of TPP: Gen 1” last authored by u/david123

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/wiki/historyofTwitchPlaysPokémon_gen1/

“The History of TwitchPlaysPokémon” authored by u/pureownege75

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y94r8/the_history_of_twitch_plays_pokemon/

“Twitch Plays Pokémon – Lore_Red” collected by the community

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/wiki/lore_red/

### Posts

“Anarchy/Democracy Explained” authored by u/TheEggKing

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y8o60/anarchydemocracy_explained/

“This Democracy system has just ruined this experiment” authored by u/Gunter_steals_jewels

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y8rw2/this_democracy_system_has_just_ruined_this/

“The Resurrection of Helix” authored by u/skandianwolf

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ysd0d/the_resurrection_of_helix/

“What is “Start9” from “TwitchPlaysPokemon”?” authored by u/MIlawls

https://www.reddit.com/r/OutOfTheLoop/comments/1ynhwh/what_is_start9_from_twitchplayspokemon/

“Live Updates Day 8” authored by u/itstyrellyo

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yectc/live_updates_day_8/

“Democracy Mode Sucks” authored by u/themaroonduck

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ybm3f/democracy_mode_sucks/

“What may break the fun of TPP” authored by u/KingSpanner

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1zcdle/what_may_break_the_fun_of_TwitchPlaysPokémon/

“THAT’S why I love this game” authored by u/JohnMarkParker

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yao0c/thats_why_i_loved_this_game/

“The Helix Prayer” authored by u/DieSowjetZwiebel

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ychls/the_helixs_prayer/

“The Evolution of Religion in TPP II” authored by u/aseanman27

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yyxi3/the_evolution_of_religion_in_TwitchPlaysPokémon_ii/

“You people are what is making this thing fun” authored by u/Jim777PS3

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y6cln/you_people_are_what_is_making_this_thing_so_fun/

“Thoughts on Destiny” authored by u/ThePokeBard

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1youbc/thoughts_on_destiny/

“Nickname for Zapdos” authored by u/Sidnoea

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yuiz9/nickname_for_zapdos/

“Spotted at a basketball game at my college” authored by u/pareil

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yo5wd/spotted_at_a_basketball_game_at_my_college/

“Seen on my college campus: they were shouting “WORSHIP THE HELIX FOSSIL” while throwing SS Anne tickets at people” authored by u/brocky1495

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ygmcr/seen_on_my_college_campus_they_were_shouting/

“The Last Supper, as led by our savior, Bird Jesus” authored by u/Akalron

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yr00h/the_last_supper_as_lead_by_our_savior_bird_jesus/

“The Moment I Knew Bird Jesus was the Chosen One” authored by u/Glitchnom

https://web.archive.org/web/20140306142335/http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yo500/the_moment_i_knew_bird_jesus_was_the_chosen_one/

“100+ hours later, the Twitch Plays Pokémon cross-stitch commission is finished! :D” authored by u/jabbacakes.

https://www.reddit.com/r/pokemon/comments/a6zciy/100_hours_later_the_twitch_plays_pok%C3%A9mon/

“MFW Bird Jesus went for that second whirlwind at 1 HP” authored by u/Broseidon241

https://web.archive.org/web/20140321043352/http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yan08/mfw_bird_jesus_went_for_that_second_whirlwind_at

“Interesting Take on Start9” authored by u/maxman14

https://web.archive.org/web/20140326043906/http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ya183/interesting_take_on_start9

“Using Whirlwind against Kangaskhan with 1 HP left” authored by u/PutinsGymShorts

https://web.archive.org/web/20140219091257/http://i.imgur.com/CffEash.jpg

“Everyone of us right now” authored by u/MilhouseJr

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9uol/every_one_of_us_right_now/

“FLAREON RELEASED” authored by u/Rob1Ham

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9kab/flareon_released

“I’ve Learned So Much Already” authored by u/DoctorExcellent

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9pzm/ive_learned_so_much_already/

“Helix vs. Dome” authored by u/Sebulba_Chubaa

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9pal/helix_vs_dome/

“The Battle Between Drozee “The Keeper” and Flareon “False Prophet” authored by u/futuristmusic

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9lk2/the_battle_between_drowzee_the_keeper_and_flareon/

“Meanwhile in Bill’s PC” authored by u/flipsynce

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9815/meanwhile_in_bills_pc

“We Did It!” authored by u/irobeth

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9kcc/we_did_it/

“Who agrees that we should continue with anarchy and get rid of the vote?” authored by u/basedpidgeotto

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y96eu/who_agrees_that_we_should_continue_with_anarchy/

“MRW I learned we got the Lift Key through voting” authored by u/250lespaul

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y9nw0/mrw_i_learned_we_got_the_lift_key_through_voting/

“OP Deliver” authored by u/thesprawl2

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1y99m3/op_deliver

“The Gang’s All Here” authored by u/vaanrose

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yi08i/the_gangs_all_here

“The Most Sacred Tablet (fan art)” authored by u/whoaconstrictor

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yhopy/a_most_sacred_tablet_fan_art/

“Confessions of a follower since 1d9h” authored by u/no_terrain

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynys1/confessions_of_a_follower_since_1d9h/

“Twitch vs. Team Rocket” authored by u/Dublin_III

https://reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yhzoh/twitch_vs_team_rocket/

“Abba Jesus is simply unstoppable” authored by u/TopChickenz

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yi59g/abba_jesus_is_simply_unstoppable/

“Pokémon Tower complete!!!! With over 90,000 viewers” authored by u/CaribaLd

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yhqs1/pokemon_tower_completed_with_over_90000_viewers

“So I started a run of Pokémon Yellow yesterday while watching TWITCHPLAYSPOKÉMON… this is my final battle vs. Blue” authored by u/red_agent

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yh2ql/so_i_started_a_run_of_pokemon_yellow_yesterday

“360 no scope” authored by u/IDUnivailable

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yh277/360_no_scope/

“Something I’m expecting to happen eventually” authored by u/chronodestroyer

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ygqk3/something_im_expecting_to_happen_eventually/

“Regret” authored by u/Jibberdooo

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yhzwy/regret/

“Blessed in the name of Helix” authored by u/Snakebyt3

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yg5oo/blessed_in_the_name_of_helix/

“Group of girls at University of Florda” authored by u/Xeagu

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yg5oo/blessed_in_the_name_of_helix/

“Live Updates Day 10” authored by u/ItsTyrellYo

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yl5kg/live_updates_day_10/

“To all the trainers that claim that they can read our mind” authored by u/GowsenBerry

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yn6nm/to_all_the_trainers_that_claim_they_can_read_our/

“I made a GIF thing” authored by u/colourmefred

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yn8su/i_made_a_gif_thing/

“Everybody’s reaction when we beat Sabrina” authored by u/Nathorus

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yncn5/everyones_reaction_when_we_beat_sabrina/

“Neither can we Sabrina, neither can we…” authored by u/quantumesheep

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yms6p/neither_can_we_sabrina_neither_can_we/

“When I saw the Laprus/Grimer fight” authored by u/neohylanmay

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymil7/when_i_saw_the_laprasgrimer_fight/

“Characters of TPP mythology” authored by u/yorba59

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymxw8/characters_of_TwitchPlaysPokémon_mythology/

“Sabrina’s got nothing on Bird Jesus” authored by u/Sethym

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yna1r/sabrinas_got_nothing_on_bird_jesus/

“Proof of Lord Helix’s power – solo run of Red with Omanyte” authored by u/dayalexc

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymtoc/proof_of_lord_helixs_power_solo_run_of_red_with/

“The Abuse of Democracy” authored by u/NeverWish

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynjw0/the_abuse_of_democracy/

“How I feel right now” authored by u/beastbad

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymt6x/how_i_feel_right_now/

“AIIIIIIIIR Fainted!....Select a Pokemon” authored by u/musseltoff

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yn5or/aiiiiiiiir_faintedselect_a_pokemon/

“Pierce the Heavens!” authored by u/stklaw

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymlxd/pierce_the_heavens/

“Red! It’s not time to use that Helix fossil” authored by u/Garfulgog

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymym0/red_its_not_time_to_use_that_helix_fossil/

“Arc Angel Abby with jay” authored by u/RefreshAzure

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymx0s/arc_angel_abby_with_jay/

“After all these years, I finally understand” authored by u/KhrushchevGT

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymvtd/after_all_these_years_i_finally_understand/

“Bird Jesus going into another battle with 2 HP” authored by u/Juz_4t

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymx3y/bird_jesus_going_into_another_battle_with_only_2hp/

“My thoughts on the Master ball debate” authored by u/UniversityGyno

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynal9/my_thoughts_on_the_masterball_debate/

“The Inevitable Fate of the Masterball” authored by u/thumtac

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynewu/the_inevitable_fate_of_the_masterball/

“So I was checking Google trends ..” authored by u/axelhansson

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymno7/so_i_was_checking_google_trends/

“FLAAAAAAIIIR please?” authored by u/moleman_dgaf

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yn5md/flaaaaaaiiir_please/

“Let’s take a moment to appreciate what we’ve done here” authored by u/James_Keenan

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymlf9/lets_take_a_moment_to_appreciate_what_weve_done/

“Another Bird Jesus Highlight gif cap : Sand > Self Destruct” authored by u/ssbmang

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ym1s3/another_bird_jesus_highlight_gif_cap_sand_self/

“Checking the Pokedex too often” authored by u/GOD-PORING

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ymkcc/checking_the_pokedex_too_often/

“A Visualization of the 65k Watching/Playing Now” authored by u/Conexion

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yngg2/a_visualization_of_the_65k_watchingplaying_now/

“Hi from Twitch HQ” authored by u/fashnek

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ylwbn/hi_from_twitch_hq/

“The Poke Flute Moment” authored by u/sshmang

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ym4hr/that_poke_flute_moment_gif_cap/

“Feelings on How the Stream is Becoming” authored by u/alien122

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yo1k7/feelings_on_how_the_stream_is_becoming/

“TPP is being consumed by Anarchy vs. Democracy” authored by u/paxslayer

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynxrb/TwitchPlaysPokémon_is_being_consumed_by_anarchy_vs_democracy/

“Tip jar at college library” authored by u/iglooman1

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynn73/tip_jar_at_college_library/

“My friend just drew Bird Jesus” authored by u/murgatroid99

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynl6u/my_friend_just_drew_bird_jesus/

“Torpidwaters is Hacking” authored by u/Falurbashmurtze

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynty2/torpidwaters_is_hacking_if_the_creator_of/

“I was thinking about what we would call Zapdos if we somehow did manage to catch it. And then it hit me” authored by u/Soulsiren

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yntew/i_was_thinking_about_what_we_would_call_zapdos_if/

“Zapdos Caught” authored by u/Frox_is_okay

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yoz0y/zapdos_caught

“A Rebranding of TWITCHPLAYSPOKÉMON” authored by u/JohnMarkParker

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yocfq/a_rebranding_of_TwitchPlaysPokémon/

“This Just Happened” authored by u/swanpenguin

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yp1b3/this_just_happened

“MRW we switched to Democracy trying to get to the daycare” authored by u/elindsayfan

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ynvde/mrw_we_switched_to_democracy_trying_to_get_to_the/

“This B and A is how insanely close we were from releasing Zapdos” authored by u/Dracyoshi

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yp3oh/this_b_and_a_is_how_insanely_close_we_were_from/

“Live Updates Day 12” authored by u/ItsTyrellYo

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yr3an/live_updates_day_12/

“He is Risen” authored by u/UniversityGyno

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ysess/he_is_risen/

“Day 11: They still do not suspect I am not an NPC” authored by u/Verbumdei

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yse64/day_11_they_still_do_not_suspect_i_am_not_an_npc

“When we found a roomful of PCs, the resulting NOPE could be heard from outer space” authored by u/maruya

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ysd94/when_we_found_a_roomful_of_pcs_the_resulting_nope

“Europe after getting Nidoking, resurrecting Helix and not releasing any major Pokemon” authored by u/BurningWater

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ysjxh/europe_after_getting_nidoking_resurrecting_helix

“Everyone keeps saying that Flareon and Zapdos are false prophets, but the real enemy…is Bill” authored by u/YourMachine

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yrqi1/everyone_keeps_saying_flareon_and_zapdos_are/

“On the way back to Verdian” authored by u/ruleof5

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ysjcd/on_the_way_back_to_veridian/

“It really is a full proof plan” authored by u/TheTurtleBear

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yr5zb/it_really_is_a_foolproof_plan

“I like to think they all found each other again [Part 2]” authored by u/7ofDiamonds

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yr6i5/i_like_to_think_they_all_found_each_other_again/

“[ART] The Massacre of Bloody Sunday” authored by u/Aeuma

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yrfhp/art_the_massacre_of_bloody_sunday/

“Whenever we fight a Grimer with Nidoking” authored by u/MrMaple24

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ysmmz/whenever_we_fight_a_grimer_with_nidoking/

“After the Losses” authored by u/Wivru

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ys0n4/after_the_losses/

“We have a solid team, PC never again” authored by u/pixels123

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1ysv9h/we_have_a_solid_team_pc_never_again

“Can We Drop the bird jesus and helix crap?” authored by u/jpwns93

http://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1zcbiu/can_we_drop_bird_jesus_and_helix_crap

“The Origin of Ancient Helixism” authored by u/Whoaconstictor

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/20cz6i/the_origin_of_ancient_helixism/

“Brothers, I have a confession to make.” Authored by u/Sailor_Gallifrey

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yi3f1/brothers_i_have_a_confession_to_make/

“What TwitchPlaysPokémon has become” authored by a deleted user

https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/comments/1yfz5o/what_twitchplayspokemon_has_become/

## Wikis

TwitchPlaysPokémon Wiki

https://twitchplayswiki.fandom.com/wiki/Twitch_Plays_Pok%C3%A9mon_Wiki

Helix Wiki

https://helixpedia.fandom.com/wiki/Twitch_Plays_Pokemon

## Google Docs

"Pokémon Red Archive" No listed author.

https://sites.google.com/site/twitchplayspokemonstatus/red-archive?authuser=0

## DeviantArt

"Twitch Plays Pokémon: Helix Altar" by ThroughSpaceandTime

https://www.deviantart.com/throughspaceandtime/art/Twitch-Plays-Pokemon-

Helix-Altar-436427358

"TPP: Twitch Plays Pokémon – Helix Power" by cocowoushi

https://www.deviantart.com/cocowoushi/art/TWITCHPLAYSPOKÉMON-Twitch-

Plays-Pokemon Helix-Power-436251021

"Twitch Plays Pokemon Red (colour) by engraven

https://www.deviantart.com/engraven/art/twitch-plays-pokemon-red-color-

437891519

"On the Seventh Day of Helix" by skypup

https://www.deviantart.com/skypup/art/On-the-seventh-day-of-the-helix-

435640218

"The Origin of Ancient Helixism" by whoaconstrictor

https://www.deviantart.com/whoaconstrictor/art/The-Origin-of-Ancient-Helixism-

440177704

"Twitch Plays Pokémon Red" by Hijimikimo

https://www.deviantart.com/hajimikimo/art/Twitch-Plays-Pokemon-Red-

453088250

## Imgur

“The Origin of Ancient Helixism Explained” by whoaconstrictor

https://imgur.com/a/uhTrE