



A STORY OF CARDS, CONSOLES, AND ANIME

My life growing up with Pokémon

PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

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Throughout my school years, I would save up most of the money my mother gave me for tiffin breaks to quench my thirst for an insatiable hobby of mine. After I had saved up enough, I would go to the nearest stationery store after school and spend hours looking at their Pokémon card collections, trying to decide whether I should make a purchase.

Years later, when one day our house help accidentally threw away the crusty old box containing the Pokémon cards I had spent so much of my lunch money on, I was devastated. The only cards remaining with me are the ones I glued inside my desk drawer after that life-altering incident.

Pokémon trading cards have their complicated battle system, but little did we, as kids, know or care about it. So, whenever my friends and I battled, we held our decks firmly and went against one another by stacking cards on top of each other at every turn, one by one; whoever had the highest base health points won.

Growing up, the fondest memory I have of video games is of booting up *Pokémon Emerald* and listening to the splashing noises in the rain as I walked across water puddles. Before that, my happiest discovery in a video game must have been in *Pokémon Fire Red*, where you could get an Eevee of your own in Celadon City by climbing to the top of the Celadon Mansion.

Over the years, Pokémon games have changed dramatically, from both stylistic and story perspectives. 3D models and landscapes have replaced the nostalgic 2D sprites and pixels that enamoured our hearts. The first time a Pokémon story caught my attention was when I played *Pokémon Black* from the 5th generation of Pokémon games. With concepts of truth and ideals stacked against each other, the narratives of *Pokémon Black/White* and its direct sequel series, *Black 2/White 2*, graze over many controversial topics of discussion among fans.

The games deal with the morality of Pokémon battling, a phenomenon in the Pokémon world that N, the secondary antagonist and my favourite character from the Pokémon

franchise, actively protests against. Compared to these titles, the recent new generation additions in the Pokémon video game franchise have felt like immeasurable letdowns.

The Pokémon anime needs no new introduction. Like many other Gen-Z kids, I also hogged the TV with my siblings when it was *Maghrib*. The episode would air on Cartoon Network, and my siblings and I would follow Ash's journey of becoming a Pokémon Master with wishful anticipation. Making new friends, overcoming hardships, and embarking on fresh adventures

myself bidding adieu to a fond part of my childhood, almost as if I was bidding goodbye to a friend of mine.

When I felt myself seeking closure surrounding the unanswered parts of Ash's journey, namely the story of Ash's Pidgeot, who was still waiting for him on some hill in Kanto, the *Pokémon Ultimate Journeys: The Series* showed up with all the older fan-favourite characters from the previous regions and extended on the story of our protagonist beyond his journey's end, drawing the curtains once and for all.

As a young adult, I find solace in crunching numbers in a damage calculator to ensure one-hit knockouts before selecting moves on *Pokémon Showdown*, an online competitive Pokémon platform.

The blessing of online platforms is that sometimes you get to bond with communities, and finding the "Bangladeshi Pokémon Battlers" community on Facebook was one such blessing. Though I am older and have more important things to spend my time with, when the announcement of a Pokémon tour arrives, I still feel a rush of excitement comparable to that of a child taking up a new challenge.

Over the years, I have amassed a vast amount of indispensable Pokémon knowledge. But as I look back, I realise that these adorable and sometimes vicious creatures were not just characters on a screen; they were companions that guided me through the trials of childhood.

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were perhaps things I needed to watch during my formative years. It took 25 years for Ash to reach the end of his journey; I had outgrown him long ago. At the end of the road, I found