



The Tech Ghost of World Peace

Ten Years Since a Mobile App Almost Achieved The Unimaginable

There are many moments across our history that could sound made up if you weren't there.

Strange happenings occur often on this pale blue dot - many of which will have the spacemen flying by coming to the conclusion that it may be the right choice to roll up their windows and give us a wide berth - whilst keeping their many necks locked tight into a forward facing position in order to avoid eye contact.

The summer of 2016 may not have been one of those moments to fly on by...

That summer saw an odd and fascinating phenomenon - one that could be easily evidenced by the complete strangers that would walk up to each other in parks, and ask a simple question, with very little worry for their safety, or concern that they may look *odd*;

"Caught anything good here?"

Introductions absent. No politicking or weird awkward British style small-talk. No presence of culture war nonsense and religious bastardry, with no thought spared on what class the person you were speaking to might be, or which political circus they may juggle for.

There was a new equaliser - a shared obsession over imaginary monsters.

And it was with thanks to these cute little digitally rendered bastards, that for a few extraordinary months the world felt simply *friendlier*.

Pokémon Go had arrived.

An augmented reality game that overlaid onto your phones map and GPS location, bringing forth fictional characters almost seamlessly into our world.

The product landed at what seemed like a perfect time.

Disposable income still existed, with the cost of living crisis at more than an arms distance down the timeline. No one felt the impending doom of what would become a global pandemic either.

More importantly, millennials - who were raised on the original *Game Boy* games by *Game Freak*, whilst tuning in on a Saturday morning to watch the anime as kids were becoming adults.

I was 26 years old at the time of the mobile apps release.

Furthermore, although we were now all technologically connected, we were yet to completely surrender our physical world to the feeds. Instagram hadn't become a weird video montage product real for shopping - and TikTok didn't even exist.

The infinite entertainment machines we now find ourselves carrying simply weren't there yet.

Summer had just started, and we were about to feel the warmth doubly so.

One glow from the sun, the other from the comforting embrace of nostalgia.

Smartphones were at that moment, the most powerful they had ever been, with geolocation tech now in a mature place to handle such an interface. More importantly too, social media was still a relatively welcoming place, where Pokémon hotspots could be shared - in any number of the hundreds of groups that suddenly appeared.

The season was pure madness that, for some, would border on - or cross completely into - bad craziness.

There were reports of people stopping vehicles on high speed Freeways and Motorways. Trespassing onto private property - even government secure locations. And car crashes skyrocketed, as everyone's eyes went down to snag a chance at being the first person to proclaim that they had a Charizard.

Parks were overflowing with all creeds, ages and classes. With people screaming at the tops of their lungs the name of the catch of the day - to alert other "trainers" to go ahead and snag it.

"RAICHUUUUUUUUUUUUUU!"

Crowds would mobilise swiftly and rush in masses through high streets - human stampedes a common symptom of this new craze.

Within the game were Pokestops - locations you could obtain free Pokeballs and other trainer items to use in your adventure. You could also use a specific item type called a lure, that you could apply to said stops. These would encourage Pokémon to come to you, for those moments where the walking got too much and it was time to sit down and catch critters whilst recharging both your energy and your phones - it was mandatory to carry at least a charge pack or two.

A unique quality of the game was that you would all get the opportunity to catch the same Pokémon. A clever way of creating an invisible sense of cooperation.

That summer the creators of this app, *Niantic*, had given us all permission to play again.

All 45 million daily active users were having a blast pretending to be the Pokémon trainers they had always imagined themselves being as kids, with players from other generations joining the digital journey as the app surpassed 500 million downloads by September of that year. Pokémon hit the mainstream.

Technology has done a lot to separate us. Myspace introduced a top friends list to argue over. Facebook provided a reward mechanism with their like structure.

It seemed as though everything online was becoming a popularity contest with every one desperate for more and more attention and validation...

Cyber bullying was becoming more prevalent and attacks were happening more often against peoples digital identities, as data was starting to be scooped up and sold off to data brokers.

Pokémon Go was the antithesis to all of that.

The technology didn't just bring people together by connecting them on a digital frontier. It brought people together by giving them a reason to leave the fucking internet.

To many, like lost grandparents and baby boomers who didn't quite get *it*, all of the madness surrounding the game seemed excessive. But to the people riding this beautiful wave in that golden summer, the moment was simply *perfect*.

Instead of doom scrolling endlessly whilst rotting on a sofa, people got back outside and back to exploring. Arguments in digital space were traded in for meeting with unsuspecting groups of people you may have just been ripping to shreds in a comments section - to unify in the name of catching digital monsters.

The algorithms that today push and reward outrage were being dwarfed by a simple gaming app that rewarded what humans were increasingly losing sight of.

Discovery.

In the fourth industrial revolution, moments like this are becoming rarer, and *Pokémon Go* managed to exploit simple human technology to make it happen; walking around!

Somehow one of the most socially productive applications of modern technology was creating an excuse for us to go outside and chase a fucking Pikachu...

Sadly, it was short lived, much like the original Pokémon craze back in the 90's. The wave we were riding eventually lost momentum and slowly rolled back.

As the first regional Pokedex began to fill - with Legendary and Mythical Pokémon still yet to make their debut - the novelty was already starting to wear off.

Nostalgia is one hell of a drug. It hits fast, with a come up just as strong, before the ultimate come down when you realise those initial days you just revisited are truly gone - with the experience you just had presenting itself as no more than a faux time machine.

For a brief moment, life may feel less complicated, but you can't live inside a memory forever.

There were all kinds of reasons that eventually gave players cause to log off, and cease logging in altogether.

The game was rife with technical problems; batteries were draining endlessly, and the gameplay, although fun, was repetitive. The game in its infancy had launched without player versus player battles, or the gyms and raids that would come later. There simply wasn't much incentive to keep going once the thrill of collecting was gone.

For many, the app became akin to collecting postal stamps.

With a grind that felt ever more laborious day-by-day, as the magic simply disappeared.

The game wasn't necessarily bad, it just stopped feeling new.

Millions clung on, including me and my friends, for years. Even now I log in from time to time just to admire my shiny collection - auspicious colour variants of Pokémon that are a staple for any serious collector. But it's rare I go in to use the features that came after the initial hype died down.

Community days, PVP, Gym battles, raids - were all excellent additions, and brought a few people back, but only the true obsessives stuck around.

Even for the true poke-maniacs, the cultural phenomenon that started this settled gently into being a daily background hobby.

Now, ten years on, I can't help thinking, "what did it all mean?"

Especially when I go on social media, and see how polarised we've become. Even people I would once march around in the pouring rain with, just for a chance to catch a Lugia or Mewtwo after annihilating it in a group raid, I now find myself a complete stranger to.

This period of time may not have been anything like the summer of love back in the 60's, but it was indeed still a cultural moment worth noting. The kind of lightning moment that rarely strikes twice - no matter how many times you cry out the command, "THUNDERBOLT!"

Many companies have tried to recreate and manufacture the next *Pokémon Go*, but none have succeeded due to one simple fact; you can't engineer a cultural moment - you can just be lucky enough to make a move at the time when the conditions are just *right*.

Perhaps we should take more time to reflect on this, and revisit that summer more often. An attempt should be made I feel to try and harness that same energy we had back then, for I feel it would help us in our current moment to push back and perhaps turn the tides we face, of doom and attention economy.

Instead of kids streaming endless dorks like Clavicular or Andrew Tate, they could get back out biking again.

Instead of competing with each other using our political beliefs like battling monsters, we could be agreeing to disagree and be agreeable about it - whilst offering the spare lead of our charge packs.

Imagine that...

A world where we all come together to meet a shared goal - like filling our Pokedex.

Perhaps I am just dreaming like Lennon, and *Pokémon Go* was nowhere near close to achieving world peace - but I would confidently argue that it came bloody close...

At the very least for one unforgettable summer it achieved something that modern tech is increasingly failing to do; bring us together.

2016 reminded millions of people that the real world is and still remains worth exploring - even if a creature on a screen had to coerce us to get back out there to realise it.

With it too, came the realisation that the stranger standing next to us, might just be our next team mate...

Just a thought...

Until the next moment comes, the tech ghost of world peace will continue to drift wistfully and aimlessly like a Haunter in a cemetery, with no trainer...

Waiting for us to find ourselves again, and get back out to discover it...

World peace could be possible...

We simply have to catch it

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