

# Demographic Research of turn-based JRPG players

AND THEIR PREFERENCES IN COMMON JRPG MECHANICS

LISA PERELAER, HKU GAMES & INTERACTION, VERSION 1.2

# 1 PREFACE

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As a young, four-year-old girl, I used to point at the TV saying ‘Broccoli!’. My father tells me this every now and then. I was pointing at this low-poly tree in Legend of Legaia, which was one of the three JRPGs my dad often used to play. My first memory of playing a JRPG was when I was probably around seven years old. As a Dutch girl, I couldn’t understand a word of what was being said in the prologue of Grandia. I had no idea I was on a quest to find a pot lid, a wooden sword and a pan.

Let’s just say that I was brought up with JRPGs. Or at least, 3 of them. Later, my curiosity grew, and I started playing Rune Factory, Fantasy Life, Dragon Quest 8, and a handful of others. However, I was the type of gamer who would rather replay the same games over and over again.



Figure 1 Grandia, my first JRPG

When I started my graduation project (of which this demographic research is a part of), I very much realized that I might not be a good, stereotypical example of the demography of JRPG players (21-year-old girl at the time of writing). However, as I am trying to make a JRPG myself, or at least a prototype of one, I needed to know what the demography did look like. This led to this passionately executed demographic research.

# 2 KEYWORDS

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Japanese Role Playing Game (JRPG),  
(Conditional) Turn-based battle,

Active Time Battle,  
JRPG Player preferences

# 3 SUMMARY

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In this paper, I will research the demography and player preferences of the JRPG audience. My research question is:

*“What are the possibilities I have as a game designer to interweave the narrative aspect of turn-based JRPGs into the battle system, based on the experience that the target audience of these games has on the entirety of the gameplay found in these games?”*

I will conclude by making general suggestions and how I, as a Game Designer, have used this information for my own graduation project where I make a JRPG battle system prototype.

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## 5 INTRODUCTION

My name is Lisa. I am a game designer with a passion for story-filled games, especially JRPGs or life simulation games. For my graduation project, I decided I wanted to design a turn-based JRPG where the battle system was not so much a divide between the story content and gameplay, as I feel is the case traditionally speaking.

### 5.1 WHAT IS A JRPG?

A JRPG is short for 'Japanese Role-Playing Game'.

#### 5.1.1 The first JRPG

The origins of the JRPG cannot really be attributed to one singular moment or game. Many people mention the first Dragon Quest, made by the Japanese Game Designer Yuji Horii and heavily inspired by the Western games Ultima and Wizardry, as the first well defined JRPG (Krane, 2017). However, older Japanese PC games were already implementing some RPG elements as well (Messner, 2017). The narrative aspect that became more and more important in JRPGs can for a part be attributed to the fact that the first computers in Japan had both a higher resolution than their western counterparts,



Figure 2 Different resolution leads to different graphics quality

which was needed to display their writings. Their script could convey more while using less digital memory: one kanji character can hold the meaning of a word in English, for which many characters are needed (Pepe, 2016). Combine this with the fact that the higher resolution led to better graphics, and it is understandable that the visual novel scene

took off (Visual Novels are literally games that as their core focus on telling a story). The visual novels' popularity, gives us a clue as to why Japanese role-playing games focus so much on following a characters' story.

#### 5.1.2 Defining JRPGs

Western role-playing games in the meantime were more inspired by the ability of character customization and giving the player a world that they could influence. Over the course of time, Western and Japanese role-playing games grew apart and became their own, more distinct genre.

There is not one definition of the JRPG, as building blocks transcend genres more than ever. However, in an attempt to try and give it more of a definition: it is a role-playing game where the player plays the part of a character (customized or defined, with most of them being defined) or team of characters. It features a battle system and has one or more levelling systems. Traditionally, the main point of the game is to experience a compelling narrative, as intended by the designer. Over the years, the focus has shifted to other gameplay aspects like their battle systems.

#### 5.1.3 Turn based systems

Within turn-based systems, there are varying degrees of how turns are handled. In this paper you will find the following systems.

Standard turn-based battle. Characters choose an attack and everything is based per turn. Either all actions are chosen at the beginning of a round and then executed at a specific order, or right before each turn and executed after selection.

Conditional Turn-Based Battle (CTBB). Certain actions influence the turn order. For example, if character X chooses a special action, it will take longer before they get a turn again.

Active Time Battle (ATB). Instead of having turns in sequence, multiple characters can

execute their turn at the same time. The turns are based on time. Usually, it takes some time before the player might choose an action for the characters turn. The time-ticking might stop when choosing an action in the menu or might continue. In which case, enemies will keep attacking once their time-based turn has come. Good examples of ATB systems are found in Chrono Trigger, Final Fantasy 7 (the original) and Grandia.

Cancel-based. This is more of an extra feature on top of ATB systems than a system on its own, where one character can cancel the other characters turn through an action.

## 5.2 THE 'WHY' BEHIND THIS RESEARCH

**5.2.1 As a Game Designer & my project**  
... the task of designing a well-rounded JRPG is daunting. Every designer who has played a couple of different JRPGs will know that there are many different gameplay systems within it that can be considered, being an extra feature set or just the core, while keeping the whole game cohesive. I tried to search for JRPG players wishes, but I personally couldn't find any generalization of the audience that was based on research.

On top of that, I wanted to create a JRPG that added a narrative layer to a turn-based system. I wanted to know players opinions on existing mechanics (narrative progressing or not), to be able to make educated decisions on what mechanics would suit my own game and which narrative progressing mechanics could be combined with those.

### 5.2.2 Building Blocks

After analyzing 16 JRPGs' turn-based systems in depth, I had found some building blocks in them. Many questions in the survey that I will discuss later, are based on these building blocks and my general knowledge of JRPG mechanics. That means that the survey I made is broader than what I would have strictly needed for my own project. In the 'Method'

paragraph, I will go further into detail about the questions.

### 5.2.3 Implementation

At the end of this paper, I will show you which insights of my research have made its way into mechanics that I used and built upon in my project.

## 6 RESEARCH QUESTION

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My main research question is as follows:

*What are the possibilities I have as a game designer to interweave the narrative aspect of turn-based JRPGs into the battle system, based on the experience that the target audience of these games has on the entirety of the gameplay found in these games?*

With the latter, I mean that I will ask the target audience about mechanics that are not a part of the battle systems traditionally, but are present in other gameplay modes of these games. The reason I am doing this, is to find existing mechanics that can be good building blocks to be interwoven into the battle system as well. Moreover, since I am not only designing a battle system but a whole JRPG, I liked to have a backlog of research-based building blocks to make my other design decisions on as well.

## 7 METHOD

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In this section I will explain how I organized and structured my survey, what kind of questions it asked and a general view on how I approached analyzing them. The surveys focus on who the audience is and what their opinions were on the gameplay found in turn-based JRPGs. The findings of this will lead to several design possibilities for me so I can answer the first part of my research question.

## 7.1 TWO SURVEYS

For this research I have created two surveys: 1 in English and 1 in Japanese. The English survey was posted on 3 large Facebook groups, of which one did not get any response at all. The other 2 groups response was very good. I stopped accepting responses once the counter started getting slower and it garnered a total of 336 responses.

The Japanese survey is the direct translation of the English one, spelling and grammar checked by miss Y. Iba. With the help of Kyushu University's Matsuguma Lab, I have spread this survey.

The Japanese version had a total of 11 responses, which I found was not enough to get a reliable, generalized answer from. Those who are wondering about the Japanese responses can contact me.

## 7.2 SURVEY CATEGORIES

I divided the survey questions into 3 categories, based on their topic. The first and shortest one was purely demographic based questions, and consisted of only two questions: age and gender. I have used these to see if there was a correlation between age/gender and gameplay preferences.

The second category was research how this audience consumes the product. Questions like what kind of hardware they used (at the time of the survey, next gen consoles like the PS5 had not been released yet), if they buy physical releases or digital, how long they play a game before deciding if they like it or not, etc. were in this category.

The last and most important category for my research was about the audiences' opinion on several JRPG building blocks. This section contained Likert Scale (rate from 1 to 5) based questions, 'choose between' questions and open questions. Likert Scale questions were, for example, how important certain mechanics/aspects of JRPGs were to them.

Choose between questions were for example to choose between random encounter systems versus visible encounters.

Open questions asked about favorite battle systems and why that is, or likes and dislikes within JRPGs.

## 7.3 APPROACHING ANALYSES

All the questions can be read in the annex of this paper, including all the per-question analyses. For the analyses, I used a couple of different scales and charts. For closed questions this was easier than for the open questions. I turfed keywords from the open questions' answers and analyzed that result to see similarities between answers.

# 8 ANALYSIS

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## 8.1 DEMOGRAPHY

The target audience consists of mostly men, with 92%. 5% is female and 3% falls into a different gender.

Almost 98% of players are between the age of 18 and 45. Between the age of 18 – 25 and between 36 – 45 is almost an even percentage, with just a bit more being in the older age group. Between the participants, there were no players younger than 11 or 65 and up.

## 8.2 CONTEXT & CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The majority of players use current generation consoles (in September 2020), like the PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch. Windows PC also is very frequently used. In the smartphone category, Android is much more often used for this demographic than iOS. Corresponding to this, non-handheld consoles are preferred over handheld consoles.

When buying games, physical copies (47.3%) are preferred over digital (20.8%). Others think it depends on the game. Before buying their copy, this target group relies mostly on

genre of the game, gameplay videos and reviews. After buying, the target audience will decide between 30 minutes and 2 hours if they actually like the game.

Ideally, the target audience likes their day to either be completely focused on gaming, or spend time finishing chores first and then dedicate 'earned' time on gaming. A full analysis on preferred circumstances when gaming is in the annex.

## 8.3 JRPG MECHANICS

### 8.3.1 Preferences on mechanics

Open world is more well-liked than linear, however people who have no preference and who like linear stories are still quite high.

Standard turn-based battle is more well liked than Active Time Battle. In this case, I did not add an explanation of what Active Time Battle was and so I think this answer might be biased towards Standard turn-based battle. In the following survey question, I found a more nuanced and answer to this question.

Skill Tree different per character, which is a more narrative based skill tree, wins easily over one skill tree for all that is unlocked separately.

Choosing a characters' class or job or having one assigned by the story seems to have no large preference over the other.

On-map encounters seems to have a slightly larger preference than random encounters.

Random turn order is severely so less favorable than a visible turn order.

Short battles and people who do not necessarily care for the length of battles are prevalent.

Choosing actions for each party member far outweighs AI strategy-based members.

Fixed positions during battle are much more preferable to running around, although a lot

of players also do not particularly care one way or the other.

### 8.3.2 Most-voted Battle Systems

Final Fantasy, especially Final Fantasy X with the highest number of mentions, Chrono Trigger, Dragon Quest (series, mostly Dragon Quest XI), Grandia, Octopath Traveler, Persona 5 and Xenogears have the most mentions.

For a detailed look, see the full analysis in the annex.



Figure 3 Final Fantasy X Battle Screen

### 8.3.3 Battle System Preferences

Common perks mentioned in a variety of games:

- Being able to create a strategy.
  - o In strictly turn-based settings, the time that it allows you to plan ahead.
- Visually pleasing attacks
- Variety in skills
- Character customization via skill sets, weapons, armor and stat enhancers
- Fast-paced battle
  - o In turn-based systems, this was achieved for example by the UI; remembering last choices
  - o In ATB, the quick-thinking.
- Slow paced battle
  - o Often mentioned that it allowed people to relax or strategize more than ATB.
- Positioning of characters on the field. Often mentioned with ranged attacks / field of influence for said attacks

- Tactics and strategy. The latter being the most mentioned keyword in all responses. Being able to plan ahead and choosing wisely based on information given.
- Simplicity. This was often mentioned with more slow-paced battle (strictly turn-based). Being able to understand the system.
- Combo's. Characters using combo attacks or multiple attacks in succession.
- Switching party members during battle
- See and/or affect turn order. This was often mentioned with slow-paced turn-based battle and simplicity.
- AI system. In particular, the gambit system of Final Fantasy 12.
- Weaknesses (and strengths). Elemental weaknesses and its implementation, allowing for more strategical thinking, like in Octopath Traveler.

### 8.3.4 Preferences regarding dynamics & aesthetics (& some feature mechanics)

The most mentioned aspects are the following:

- Story
  - o Surprising plot twists
  - o Opinions are ranging from mature and intricate content to light-hearted and humorous content. If this target audience can be split on something, it seems to be how mature or not the story is.
  - o Some mention branching and multiple endings
- Characters
  - o Great visual designs
  - o Great character development
  - o Relationships
  - o Character interactions with each other
- World Building

- o NPC's feel like a part of the world
- o There is a lot of lore to discover
- Music
- Graphics
- Side content
  - o Secret dungeons
  - o Optional bosses
  - o Side quest systems
  - o Reasons for backtracking through the world

Other mentions that stood out to me were the following:

- Quality of Life options
- Well-designed UI
- Voice acting
- Easy mode
- Crafting system
- Jobs/classes
- Levelling systems
- Visible changes when equipping weapon/armor
- Vehicles (obtaining a ship or flying)
- Monster taming
- Determine party leader

### 8.3.5 Aversions on JRPG mechanics, dynamics & aesthetics

#### Battle Related Gameplay

- (Excessive) grinding is by far the most mentioned pet-peeve.
- Random encounters
  - o High rates of random encounters
  - o Low-level random encounters
- Battles:
  - o Too long
    - Long battle animations
    - Unfair level spikes, especially with bosses
  - o Too complicated, trying to be too innovative and feel gimmicky
  - o Too much luck based (RNG)
  - o Too easy

- Auto-combat
    - Auto selecting moves
  - Are unclear when the fight is always unbeatable
  - Party AI is stupid
  - Lack of skills
  - Too much filler skills
  - Fixed party or MC always in the party, forcing player to use a character that they dislike.
  - Party members get no experience when unused, unbalanced levelling
  - Point system post-battle
  - Level caps during the story
  - Battle system builds up too slow, takes time to get to the real meat of the battle system.
  - Items feel irrelevant
- Enemy levels scale

### Story

- Shallow story
  - (anime) tropes/clichés
    - Saving the girl
    - (Kids) saving the world
- Poorly written characters
  - Characters are too cutesy
  - Annoying young characters
  - Male protagonist too cool / male 'swag'
  - stereotypes
- Fanservice (sexual portrayal of female characters) and underaged sexism
- Too much bloat;
  - Wordy intro's
  - filler dialogue
  - filler story progressing quests
- Static feeling world
  - Bland NPC's
  - Homes do not matter
- Cutscene where the player loses after beating an enemy/boss, cutscene deaths and destroyed towns

- Unskippable dialogue & cutscenes
- Silent protagonist
- All cutscenes look like a visual novel
- Too serious vs. too young target audience (not serious enough)
- Lack of LGBTQ+ awareness
- Story feels either rushed or too slow, bad pacing
- Characters are inconsistent or make weird choices

### Gameplay and settings

- Side quests
  - Pointless, particularly fetch quests
  - Not as optional as they seem; when needed to grind for the next boss or area
  - Repetitive
  - Optional bosses are too hard
- Puzzles and poorly implemented mini games
- Cannot backtrack and thus misses items/quests etc.
- Forced to backtrack
- Forced tutorials
- Characters design/looks do not change with weapon/armor changes
- No options to move around faster
- No settings. E.g., ATB to wait for input cannot be chosen.
- No easy mode
- Too intricate class system or skill tree system
- Save points instead of always being able to save.
- Bad / uninteresting level design

### UI

- Generally bad UI
- No quest markers
- No backlog of finished quests and story beats
- No map

### Sound

- Lazy music

- Same sound effects over and over again
- Bad Voice acting
- No voice acting

## 9 CONCLUSION

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Here is a reminder of my original research question:

*What are the possibilities I have as a game designer to interweave the narrative aspect of turn-based JRPGs into the battle system, based on the experience that the target audience of these games has on the entirety of the gameplay found in these games?*

To answer this question, I have to break it up into two parts. Let's look at the conclusion of what the target audiences' experience on the gameplay elements is first, and then look at the arisen possibilities for my project. After that, I will tell you how I implemented those and what my recommendations are for other designers.

### 9.1 AUDIENCES' EXPERIENCE

In almost all of the questions related to mechanics, the respondents emphasized on the importance of story, in particular character development. Music is often mentioned as an important part that can enhance the gameplay experience and even cover up for flaws. Secondary systems like quest systems and skill trees are important, but come with a lot of pitfalls and Class/Job systems do not seem to do as well as I thought they would.

#### 9.1.1 Story-related / Story Progressing Gameplay

One thing that the audience was less specific on than I thought they would be was open-world games. While open-world games are favored over linear games, they are not that far apart. Especially if the story is good and

allows for some form of side quests and optional backtracking, the world does not have to be completely open, which in turn allows for more control over the narrative.

What players seem to find the most important in JRPGs is story. What defines a good story is harder to grasp, as this seems to be a point where players are divided in their opinion. On one hand, people want to see more mature stories; they are through with common anime tropes and settings. No more kids saving the world, no more annoying child characters. Mature in this sense means more seriousness added to the feel of the game, as a very often 'mature' inclusion in JRPGs that was much disliked, was the inclusion of fan service, the hyper sexualization of female characters including underaged looking female characters. On the other hand, many responses mentioned that they liked brighter tones and story beats, adding humor to the game. Whatever the taste in story-style was, they all agree that whatever route it takes, characters have to develop throughout the story. Characters that join the party without having a backstory, without a reason or without more dialogue after their joining, also enters one of the pet-peeves the target audience has. (Romantic) relationships and character interactions are important to many of the players.

All of this has to be done in such a fashion that the story is not too long, too wordy, too filler, or too rushed and short. Dialogue, which is how the story is most told in these games, should be following these points.



Figure 4 The 'Tales Of' series has optional dialogue called 'skits'. It allows people to choose whether they want to see it or not.

Then again, many people also want to skip dialogue and cutscenes. Especially in cases like just before a boss battle, where losing the battle makes the player have to see the dialogue/cutscene over and over again. Unfair cutscenes, where the player wins a battle but then see someone die or lose the battle ultimately in a cutscene, is not favored either. Last but not least, cutscenes have to look visually more cinematic than visual novels.

For many, worldbuilding also makes or breaks the believability of the story. Bland NPCs and a world that feels at a stand-still breaks the immersion. This can be combined with the addition of side-content: people want a reason to stray from the linear path. Meaningful side quests, optional bosses and secret dungeons are wanted, if they add to the worldbuilding.

### 9.1.2 Directly battle-related gameplay

Standard turn-based battle systems do very well in the 'What do you like better?' question, however when seeing the games mentioned in the question 'Which JRPG's turn-based or ATB like battle system do you like the most?', the answer seems more nuanced. Often mentioned games are Final Fantasy 6 through 9, Chrono Trigger and others that are varying forms of ATB systems. Even many people choose systems like the one in Final Fantasy 7 Remake, which borders on action-based battle. If we dive a little deeper in terms, we can see that Conditional Turn Based Battle (CTBB) is very often chosen; Final Fantasy X, chosen 43 times. This is a

system where turns are a bit more blurred: they are based on speed/agility, and how long an action takes. Grandia, which is kind of in-between as well, using cancel-based combat, that kind of borders between ATB and CTBB. Still, (more) standard turn-based battle systems like Persona 5, Octopath Traveler and Dragon Quest XI still get quite some attention.

By far, for any of the options of battle systems given, what makes the battle system fun is if there is strategy involved. Button mashing and being able to spam the same attack should be a red flag for a good battle system. One good way to add options in its actions is via meaningful skillsets and character combos. Out of battle, character customization like your weapons, armor, stat enhancers and ways to obtain skills are very welcomed. Weakness and strength systems added options for more strategic thinking. Class systems do reasonably well, but should not be too difficult or free. While in one of the questions we established running around on the field was less preferable than fixed positions, positioning of the characters was often mentioned. The form of positioning has more to do with choosing a character's position on the field as an action per turn instead of actively moving the characters. Often mentioned with this was ranged attacks and field of influence manipulation through positioning.

Both fast-paced and slow-paced battles were often mentioned. Luckily, there seems to be a little bit of overlap. Fast-paced battles are for example already achieved in what would be perceived as a slower system by shortening battle animations or remembering the last input choice of the player, so what is meant here is actually the quality of the user interface. Even so, visually pleasing battle animations was often mentioned as a perk, so a balance needs to be found between the two. Slow paced battle players mostly mentioned that they want to be given the option to have the time to think. ATB systems

that have the option to wait during turn action choices were fine. Another mention in favor of strict turn-based battle was its simplicity. It was simply easier to understand what was going on.

### 9.1.3 Battle influencing mechanics

Skill trees that are character specific easily win from one big skill tree that can be unlocked per character. We already established that (meaningful) skills are very important to keeping the battle system interesting and provide much of the strategy of the system. Funnily enough, choosing a character's class/job (which often comes with a more class specific skill tree instead of character specific), seems to not be very important to the players. The only theory I have about this is that some class systems provide so many options for the player that they cannot oversee the consequence of their choices.

On map encounters gets a slightly larger preference than random encounters. However, in the question, 'What is your biggest pet-peeve in JRPGs?', random encounters were quite often mentioned. I had hypothesized that random encounters would have been more hated than the graph showed, just like the latter question seems to imply. If possible, I would stay away from the random encounters unless it is absolutely necessary for the design to work.



Figure 5 On-map encounter in *Atelier Ryza: Ever Darkness and the Secret Hideout*

## 9.2 PROJECT POSSIBILITIES & IMPLEMENTATIONS

Here I will explain how my conclusions on the player's experience have influenced my project and what choices I have made based on them.

### 9.2.1 Story-related Progressive Gameplay

Both because I would be programming the game alone and because the target audience did not hate linear games, I chose to make the world not entirely open world. This way, I had more influence on the character development during the game as well. The main characters in my game were young adults (19+ with the exception of one 11-year-old) to escape one of the biggest pet-peeve tropes of kids saving the world. Despite having an older cast, I chose for a bright and humorous style. Every character has a defined past, hobbies and personality and I have made descriptions on what the characters think of each other. In my design I implemented the option to skip cutscenes and fast-forward dialogue.

While my game has not been designed from beginning to end yet, I think it is extremely important to keep in mind that any backtracking should be optional.

### 9.2.2 Directly battle-related gameplay

Because the answer of which battle system was the most favored was actually so nuanced, I personally chose to largely implement the system found in *Grandia*, which was more fast-paced than a CTBB, but clear enough by providing a time-tick standstill during the turns choices. On top of that, it allowed cancel-based combat which does a lot for adding strategy into the battles.

I personally stayed away from implementing a class system, but I did implement a skill system based on 3 values; narrative, character specialization and character customization. I will talk more about this system in 'Enhancing Mechanics'.

### 9.2.3 Battle Influencing Mechanics

To get the obvious choice out of the way, I chose to implement visible encounters instead of random encounters.

For a skill tree system, I took one of the divisions in my skill system to add a tree to; the character customization system that I called the skill book skills. Per character, a skill can belong to either the narrative part, the character specific part of the skill book part. The skill book system allows the player to pick up 'skill books' during the game. They can be bought, found or earned during quests. The skill book can then be equipped on a character of choice. During battle, the character can use that skill to garner skill points. Out of battle, skill points can be used to permanently learn (so the book can be unequipped) and upgrade the skill. Upgrading in my battle system does not mean that the skill gets more powerful, but that the casting time reduces. Once a book is learned, it is used up. A player can try equipping the book to different characters and then choose which character should learn it.

### 9.2.4 Enhancing Mechanics: Interweaving narrative aspects into the battle system

Now to finally come to the point that has the most relevance to my battle systems' design: interweaving narrative enhancing mechanics into the existing mechanics.

I considered the following possibilities;

- A dialogue, input based system
- Cutscenes
- Voice Acting
- Banter mechanic
- Skills based on surrounding narrative
- Dialogue before & after battle
- Mandatory, narrative progressing battles
- Small terminological changes

An input-based dialogue system, while a staple of JRPGs, does not belong in a battle in

my opinion. This has been done in a couple of games and is regarded by the audience as an annoying interruption of the battle. The same goes for cutscenes; anything that is mandatory and cannot be skipped is not favorable.

Voice Acting is actually a good choice that I could not do. As seen by the survey answers, voice acting is fickle; the voice acting needs to be good, or even actually top-notch, to not be an irritating distraction. Once a player is annoyed by voice acting, they are willing to put the game down because of it. I do not have the funds for quality voice acting, hence it was omitted from my project.



Figure 6 I personally had a hard time listening to the English voice acting for Milla Maxwell in Tales of Xillia. It is rumored that the sound engineering had a problem, which made it sound like she had a lisp.

A Banter mechanic is where a dialogue is displayed without user input. This keeps the flow of the conversation going, as well as the players' main gameplay. It is often used outside of battle for relatively unimportant dialogue between characters. I found this a very interesting mechanic to implement in the battle system, so I did.

Skills based on surrounding narrative is one I thought of after reassuring how important skills are to the battle system. I came up with a narrative based skill that I called an 'area' skill in my game. Based on the story-beat of this linear game, characters can have a certain state of mind. For example, one of my characters in the beginning of the game is very enthusiastic about going on a journey. Until the next story-beat happens, this

character has a skill that in execution can be seen as a regular skill: it ups her attack stats. Combined with the description of the skill and the banter during the skill selection and skill execution, the player will come to know that it is the first time she is going on a journey, she has wanted to go for a long time and she incredibly energetic thanks to that. Once this story beat is over and her state of mind or surroundings have changed, the skill is no longer accessible. A nice extra is that I think it will add a fresh strategy layer that keeps the game fresh.

Dialogue before and after battle, is one I would advise against. Long battle overview screens (the ones where you see the experience, gold and items) is a pet-peeve for many players. Adding dialogue that requires input (or not) that drags out a non-gameplay filled section of the game – just reading the conclusion of the gameplay – is counterintuitive.

So, how about mandatory, story-changing or story-impacting battles? While this did not make it into my game because of my scope for the project, I think it can be a viable option for boss battles, as these battles are already mandatory. You can definitely reveal story-content during the battle instead of afterwards in a cutscene. Stay away from changing the outcome of the battle however: if the player wins a battle but then gets a cutscene where the characters still lose from the enemy, this is a pet-peeve, as well as unwinnable battles.

The last thing I did was implement some small terminological changes. If every characters' standard attack is just called 'attack', that looks a little dull. I spiced it up by changing this to match a characters' weapon type, or even how I thought the character would call it.

### 9.3 THE OUTCOME

The narrative enhancements that I described just before were well received in the playtest. Especially by the gamers who noted they play JRPGs mostly because of the story. More testing later down the line will reveal how the mechanics age over the course of a whole game instead of test battles.

### 9.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

To everyone who wants to try their hand at creating a JRPG, I have some recommendations. First of all, do research on the existing systems and figure out exactly what people like and do not like about the system of your choice. I chose a variation on an ATB system but every system comes with its own design challenges, even before you come up with your own creative spin on the system. Second, do not limit your research on the exact mechanics you want to use. Knowledge on similar mechanics or even mechanics that are opposite of what you want to implement can warn you about what to look out for. For example, knowing that windy overview screens at the end of the battle is a pet-peeve of many players, I decided to keep my narrative enhancements focused on coming forth parallel to the existing gameplay instead of an addition, like the banter that displays during battle that does not require input.

## 10 REFERENCES

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