Turn-based J-RPG Repertoire Research

Finding inspiration and building blocks from existing J-RPGs

Lisa Perelaer

SILLY STORY GAMES

1 PREFACE

With this repertoire/reference research, I want to make sure I have a collection of interesting J-RPG's and their battle mechanics, as well as interesting narrative supporting mechanics that occur during battle. By creating this a reference list full of inspiration, I will have an opportunity to overcome creative blocks.

2 CONTENTS

3 RESEARCH QUESTION

What are turn-based J-RPG's battle systems composed of and what mechanic defines that battle system or makes it more unique or interesting?

4 METHOD

Before I begin dissecting random games, I want to explain how I found these games and what my criteria is. There are hundreds of J-RPG's out there and I cannot possibly research all of them. Games that make the list should have the following criteria:

- ✓ The game has been released in North America or Europe
- ✓ The game has an official English release
- ✓ The battle system is Turn based
- ✓ The official ESRB-rating cannot be M (Mature) or AO (Adults only). I do not want to review graphic nudity or extremely violent content.
- ✓ The game must be released after 1995.
- ✓ If the game had not been released after 1995 but has seen a remaster or re-release, it counts.

With these criteria, I found over 225 games, so I needed more of criteria to make this research doable.

- ✓ Games that I have personally played will stay on the list, because they will be easier for me to dissect.
- ✓ Games with a Metacritic score below 70 or no Metacritic rating available will be excluded from the list.
  - o Multiplatform release: The highest rating counts.
- ✓ I will exclude games for the following consoles because the hardware was too limited in my opinion:
  - o Game Boy
  - o Game Boy Color
  - o Game Boy Advance
- ✓ First-person view games will not make this list as I do not plan on making a first person view battle system.
- ✓ The following series will have all entries validated:
  - o Pokémon (mainline only)
  - o Final Fantasy
  - o Dragon Quest (Dragon Warrior)
  - o Atelier
- ✓ RPG Maker will be omitted (as it is not a game but a game maker)

After these criteria are applied, the list of games is the following:

1. Atelier Ryza: Ever Darkness & The Secret Hideout
2. Atelier Ayesha: The Alchemist of Dusk

3. Atelier Meruru Plus: The Apprentice of Arland
4. Atelier Rorona Plus: The Alchemist of Arland
5. Atelier Shallie: Alchemists of the Dusk Sea
6. Atelier Totori Plus: The Adventurer of Arland
7. Atelier Escha & Logy Plus: Alchemists of the Dusk Sky
8. Atelier Firis: The Alchemist and the Mysterious Journey
9. Atelier Lydie & Suelle: The Alchemists and the Mysterious Paintings
10. Atelier Sophie: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Book
11. Atelier Iris 1
12. Anachronox
13. Aveyond Rhen's Quest, Ean's Quest, 3 series
14. Ar Tonelico: Melody of Elemia
15. Astonishia Story
16. Brave Story: New Traveler
17. Bravely Default: Flying Fairy
18. Bravely Second
19. Breath of Fire II, III, IV, V
20. Blue Dragon
21. Chrono Trigger
22. Cosmic Star Heroine
23. Cthulhu Saves the World
24. Chrono Cross
25. Class of Heroes 2
26. Crimson Gem Saga
27. Dragon Warrior 1, 2, 3, 4,
28. Dragon Quest 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 8, 9
29. Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker, Joker 2
30. Demon Gaze
31. Digimon Story Cyber Sleuth: Complete Edition
32. Digimon World DS
33. Dragon Ball Z: Attack of the Saiyans
34. Etrian Odyssey, 2, 3, 4, 5, Untold
35. Fairy Fencer F: Advent Dark Force
36. Final Fantasy I, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, X-X2, 12, 13, 13-2
37. Final Fantasy 1 & 2: Dawn of Souls (extra stuff)
38. Final Fantasy 4 Advance, 5 Advance, 6 Advance
39. Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light
40. Final Fantasy 4: The After Years
41. Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy 13 (sequel to 13-2)
42. World of Final Fantasy Maxima
43. Final Fantasy Anthology
44. Final Fantasy Chronicles
45. Final Fantasy Origins
46. Grandia
47. Grandia II
48. Golden Sun: Dark Dawn
49. Golden Sun, The Lost Age
50. Hyperdimension Neptunia Re-Birth 1, 3
51. I am Setsuna
52. Jade Cocoon 2
53. Legend of Wukong
54. Lunar: Eternal Blue
55. Legend of Dragoon
56. Legend of Legaia
57. Inuyasha: Secret of the Divine Jewel
58. Lufia: The ruins of Lore
59. Lost Odyssey
60. Lunar Silver Star Harmony
61. Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete
62. Lunar 2: Eternal Blue Complete
63. Mana Khemia 1, 2
64. Megadimension Neptunia VII
65. Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time
66. Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story
67. Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga
68. Mind Zero
69. Nostalgia
70. Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch
71. Octopath Traveler
72. Oreshika: Tainted Bloodlines
73. Okage Shadow King
74. Paper Mario (N64)
75. Paper Mario TTYD
76. Paper Mario: Sticker Star
77. Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & 2
78. Phantasy Star 2, 3, 4
79. Phantasy Star Collection
80. Pokémon Gold, Silver, Crystal
81. Pokémon FireRed and LeafGreen
82. Pokémon Red, Blue, Yellow
83. Pokémon Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald
84. Pokémon Let's Go
85. Pokémon Sword, Pokémon Shield
86. Pokémon Alpha Sapphire, Omega Ruby
87. Pokémon Sun, Moon, Ultra Sun, Ultra Moon

88. Pokémon X, Y
89. Pokémon Diamond, Pearl, Platinum
90. Pokémon HeartGold, SoulSilver
91. Pokémon Black, White, Black 2, White 2
92. Penny Arcade Adentures 1, 2, 3, 4
93. Pier Solar and the Great Architects
94. Panzer Dragoon Saga (Panzer Dragoon Orta?)
95. Resonance of Fate
96. Romancing Saga 3
97. Septerra Core
98. Shadows of Adam
99. Radiant Historia, Perfect Chronology
100. Suikoden Tierkreis
101. Suikoden 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
102. Shadow Hearts
103. Shadow Hearts: Covenant
104. Shadow Hearts: From the New World
105. Skies of Arcadia
106. Skies of Arcadia Legends
107. SaGa Scarlet Grace: Ambition
108. Tokyo Mirage Session #FE
109. The Last Remnant Remastered
110. The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel 1, 2, 3
111. The Alliance Alive HD Remastered
112. The Last Remnant
113. The Alliance Alive
114. Tales of Destiny 2
115. Valkyrie Profile
116. Wild Arms 1
117. Wild Arms 3, 4, 5
118. Wild Arms Alter Code F
119. World of Final Fantasy
120. Xenosaga Episode 1, 2, 3
121. Xenogears
122. .hack Part 1, 2, 3, 4

As you can see, I have some of the game series in one line, so in total I have more than 120 games that I can dissect. I will try doing a lot, but I will choose games I have played before or have been recommended to me because of its battle system, and games that excel first.

4.1 ANALYZED GAMES

1. Atelier
2. Aveyond Series
3. Bravely Default: Flying Fairy
4. Chrono Trigger
5. Cosmic Star Heroine
6. Dragon Quest
7. Final Fantasy X
8. Grandia
9. Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch
10. Octopath Traveler
11. Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door
12. Radiant Historia Perfect Chronology
13. The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel II
14. Wild Arms

5 OBSERVATIONS

Before I begin, I want to address some of the jargon I use.

Actor - the entities in the battlefield; including playable characters, NPC's and enemies.

Character – reserved for the actors that are in the player's party.

Turn – The moment when a player chooses the actors behavior, and, when it applies, when the actor executes its behavior.

Round – when all actors have had a turn.

I will also describe if I have owned a game or not.

5.1 ATELIER SERIES

5.1.1 Atelier Ryza: Ever Darkness and the Secret Hideout
Status: not owned

This game is promoted as a fast-paced, real-time tactics battle system. It is officially a turn-based system, but it features some real-time elements. [1]

One of the real-time elements is that you only control one character per round. You can switch characters during battle, but if you do *not* do so, the other characters will act on their own when it's their turn.

Turn order
The round bubbles are the party characters; the diamonds are the enemy characters. Once a bubble or diamond reaches the arrow beneath, it is that actors turn. For the playable character, this means you can select to attack, move, use a skill or use an item.

Whenever it is the players turn, the game does not pause. Players have to choose quickly so they do not waste any time.

---

[1] https://store.steampowered.com/app/1121560/Atelier_Ryza_Ever_Darkness__the_Secret_Hideout/ , Under "Intense Battles"

Action Point System

The Action Point System, or the AP, is new in this Atelier installment. Action Points can be received by doing regular attacks and can be used for 3 things:

- ❖ Raise your tactics level
- ❖ Use a skill
- ❖ Unlock Quick Actions

The skills that each party member possesses does not use the usual Magic Points (MP) found commonly in RPG's, but the AP.

Tactics Level

Raising your tactics level allows the party to do more regular attack hits per turn. Because you do more attacks, you receive more AP as well. Skills also get upgrades that are specified under that specific skill.

1 The skill "Blood Thrust" gets an upgrade that reduces the target's attacks status, because the Tactics Level is 2.

To upgrade your tactics level, you need to max out the AP bar (the yellow ring surrounding AP). If your Tactics level is 1, then you will need 10 AP to upgrade. For every level raised, the AP demand grows with 10.

Skills

Where other games might make a difference between strong physical attacks (often called special attacks) and magic attacks, this game combines both magic attacks, physical attacks, buffs and de-buffs as 'skills'. The skills use up AP, defined per skill.

Quick Actions

You can spend 10 AP to use a Quick Action: this makes the player's character use a turn right away. During a Quick Action, you can only use Items or Skills.

Orders

Orders are like the side quests of this battle system. They will ask a specific action of the player character, after which the side characters will do something specific immediately after.

Here, the player is using the character 'Klaudia'. Two orders have appeared in the upper left corner of the screen. If the player decides to do magic damage with Klaudia, they have fulfilled the request of the character Ryza. Ryza will then perform an 'action order'. To make the character 'Lent' perform his action order, the player should use an item with the current character. There are a couple of different orders:

- ❖ Action orders: upon fulfilling the request, the character asking for the request will do an attack that deals a good amount of damage.
- ❖ Normal Orders: the character asking for the request will perform a healing skill on the character that has low Health Points (HP). This order only appears whenever a character has low health.
- ❖ Extra Orders: The request can only be fulfilled by using a skill through Quick Action. The order only appears when an enemy is preparing a large attack or is stunned. The benefit from this order is a high damage attack performed by the requesting character.

Core Charge System

The Core Charge (CC) is for using items without the used item disappearing. E.g., when you use a potion, that potion would usually disappear as it has been consumed. With the core charge, you get the benefits of the item without it disappearing. Using an item requires a set amount of CC. Core Charges are difficult to replenish: they can be replenished by offering up one item for 10 CC, unlocking an ability that gets 1 CC back after each battle, or returning to the home base – the Atelier.

Party Quests

An interesting mechanic that is outside of the battle system but does has influence on it, is the party quests system. This is a side quest system that requests the player to do all kinds of actions, and rewards in skills and permanent status buffs.

Pre-emptive strike

Hitting the enemy outside of battle, starts a battle with the benefit of having 10 AP immediately. This allows you to raise your Tactics level to 2 immediately as well.

5.1.2   Atelier Lydie & Suelle: The Alchemists and the Mysterious Paintings

Status: Not owned.

This atelier game features a more regular turn-based system. Turns get executed immediately after choosing. An interesting aspect is that the next turn of the actor is based on the action of their current turn.

The bar on the right shows whose turn it is at the top. Party members are on the right side of the bar, enemies on the left side. Whenever choosing an attack, the bar will reflect how far pushed back the character will be before his or her next turn will be:

In this shot, it is still this character's turn, however, you can see that she will be placed quite far away on the bar for the next turn. In terms of UI, the bar is can be a little confusing. This character is placed quite far away for her next turn; however, she uses her next turn immediately after the blue monster has executed its turn.

Later in the game, when there are more characters, the battle system allows the player to use 3 characters per battle. Every one of those 3 characters can have a support character that the player cannot control. This support character acts after the character has used his or her turn. The follow-up skills that the support characters use can be seen (but not selected) when selecting an action.

Stun mode

The more you get hit, the more a yellow bar around the characters turn sprite builds up. If it builds up completely, the character will break and be stunned for a while.

5.2 AVEYOND

Status: owned all

I have played all the Aveyond games when I was younger. They are all made using RPG Maker.

3 Aveyond: The Lost Orb (part of series 3)

2 Aveyond: Ean's Quest

The reason why I add these to my research is because these games feature the turn-based battle systems' most general version.

The player gets a party of 4 members. Each round, an action can be chosen for each of the party members. An action can be a regular attack, a skill, defend, or usage of an item. Once the actions are chosen for each party member, the round is then played out. What actor goes first per round is based on their agility or speed status. Often, some luck and deviance are added to keep the player guessing as to who goes when, although the player will also realize that some characters are generally quicker than others. Ultimately, players do not have control over who goes first. Skills are unlocked through leveling up or an out of battle game progressing event. Leveling up comes from Experience Points (EXP) gained through defeating monsters.

In a couple of these games, there are more party members available than there can be active in battle. Through the menu outside of the battle, the active battle members can be selected.

5.3 BRAVELY DEFAULT: FLYING FAIRY

Status: not owned

The Bravely Default battle system features regular attacks, abilities, items, a run (flee) option and an

addition called 'Brave & Default'. Characters have HP and MP and a battle-only levelling system with BP (Brave Points).

Each cycle, the attacks of each of the characters have to be chosen in advance. Then, when everything is chosen, the turns play out for that round.

Brave & Default Mode
The default option makes you store your power, which you can unleash using the brave option.

Default is the option to 'skip' a turn, which stores 1 BP. By using default, you also take less damage than usual. Your BP can be used as an extra action in a later turn. The default option thus is essentially a defend action, with the addition of it storing your actions.

The Brave option lets you use the BP. You can also use Brave when you have 0 BP, in which case your BP will go into the minus and has you default in the following turns. You can choose actions again when your BP returns to 0.

Job System
The characters in this story have jobs. These jobs have levels that require experience points called Job Points that can be acquired after completing a battle. Gaining a job level gives you a job specific ability. This system is much like class systems of multiple other games.

A more unique part of this job system is that you can change your job at any point and still have access to the skills you've learned in other jobs.

Summon Friend
You can become friends with other real players and send and summon these friends' characters. You can send one of your characters to another player and set the attack that they will do when your friend summons them. This system is not real-time; you can save the summons and use them when you like. Using the Nintendo 3DS streetpass function, you can also send and summon guests you've met along the way.

5.4 CHRONO TRIGGER

Status: not owned, played a lent Nintendo DS copy for approx. 3 hours

Chrono Trigger features a simple ATB system. Characters get the choice to do an action once their ATB bar (on the right) fills up. Each character then gets the choice to do an attack, do a skill that they renamed to 'tech' in this game or use an item. The 'tech' menu changes to 'comb(o)' when multiple characters have their ATB bar filled up as well, in which case you can use skills that require more party members to be active.

Continuing gameplay: Active versus Wait Mode
Whenever it is the characters turn, the game does not pause; enemies keep attacking and the bar of your other party members keep filling up. This is in contrast with a couple of other ATB systems, where the time stops whenever the player gets the choice menu for the characters turn.

The game does have 2 built-in modes that you can change during the game at any time. The active mode lets the ATB bar always run, but the wait mode introduces a very slight variation; the ATB pauses whenever the player is in the 'Tech' or 'Item' menu. The game will still continue time on all other occasions.

Tech Points
The tech attacks and 'dual techs' are skills acquired not by leveling up the characters, but by acquiring TP. TP is gained from battling as well. Some monsters or battles give more TP than other battles. Having enough TP will automatically unlock the skills. The end battle screen will show

automatically if a character learned a new skill (which, again, can happen regardless of a character levelling up or not).

Tech Points themselves can include ranged attacks, where if a character or a group of enemies is in a certain position, the attack can hit multiple enemies.

Sort of random encounters
Chrono Trigger does not have random encounters in the sense that, without seeing any enemy first, the screen goes into a battle arena of some sort. However, at some points encounters are random as the player walks into an area and monster will come jumping out of bushes or trees; you cannot really avoid these battles. In some areas, the encounters are not random at all, showing enemies on the map and requiring the player to bump into them before a battle begins.

On map battle
Typically, JRPG's tend to have their battle occur in a separate, arena like map. Chrono Trigger has no such thing; rather, all enemies are quite strategically placed on the map, so that if a battle occurs the characters can get into position and the battle can take place in the same spot.

5.5 COSMIC STAR HEROINE

Cosmic Star Heroine has a turn-based battle system. Each character has a turn once per cycle. Battles are not random but are also hard to avoid; once the player enters within a certain area of the enemy, the battle plays out on that exact spot, much like Chrono Trigger.

Unlike the standard "attack – spells – items – defend", each character rather has a set amount of actions. A lot of these actions, like the abilities and usage of items, can be set to a character in the main menu of the game. Moreover, most of these actions can only be used once, and are then disabled until the character defends with the 'rest' action. Rest has a recharging functionality, that unlocks the actions again. This locking mechanism also applies to items and programs (the latter will be explained later). These two do not recharge upon a rest, and they are only available once per battle. They unlock each new battle.

Attacking actions and the rest option are under the skill menu. There is also an item tab and a programs tab. The programs tab also has attacks or what conventionally would be spells, except they have a restriction that I will explain later.

Style
In Cosmic Star Heroine, you have to keep performing different moves, as they get used up and locked. By doing this, you raise your style percentage, which in turn makes you deal more damage and have a higher chance of inflicting ailments. The same goes for enemies; the longer the battle takes, the stronger they get.

Hyper Points
Characters go into what is called 'Hyper Mode', when they have enough Hyper Points. Hyper Mode also improves your amount of damage and the chance of inflicting ailments.

Programs

Equipping different shields has an advantage in this game. Depending on a stat called 'hackitude', (which is a permanent stat) the player has the actions of the equipped shield available to him or not. These actions are called programs.

Desperation

Style Percentage has one more important effect; having enough style can mean that a character can have a negative HP value. Usually in games, a character dies when HP hits zero. Damage dealt goes up as well, but HP restoration goes down. This desperation mode only lasts one turn.

Ailments

Ailments are not always easily inflicted. The game tells you early on that enemies might have a certain ailment HP that needs to go down before that ailment can be successfully inflicted. This sort of HP also becomes higher every time that enemy recovers from its ailment, making it more difficult to keep inflicting the same ailment over and over again.

5.6 DRAGON QUEST

Dragon Quest games usually aren't known for their innovative battle system; rather, they are known to almost not differ at all, providing an easy to understand battle system. Most Dragon Quest games feature a hard mode or extra story mode known as the 'Draconian Trials' or the 'Draconian Quest', which insanely ups the strength and defense of the already not too easy monsters. Dragon Quest has also been called Dragon Warrior in the localized version for a while.

5.6.1 Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King
Status: owned

In Dragon Quest VIII, you have a regular attack, items, defend, abilities and spells. There is a distinction between spells and abilities; abilities are learned by adding skill points to the characters specific skill list. Spells are learned by leveling up your character. Both skills and abilities usurp MP. Each character has different skills they can learn and some of these add to the narrative feel of the character. Items can be used or equipped. Equipping an item does not use up the turn.

Each cycle, the attacks of each of the characters has to be chosen in advance. Then, when everything is chosen, the round plays out. Which actor goes first is based on agility with a random deviance.
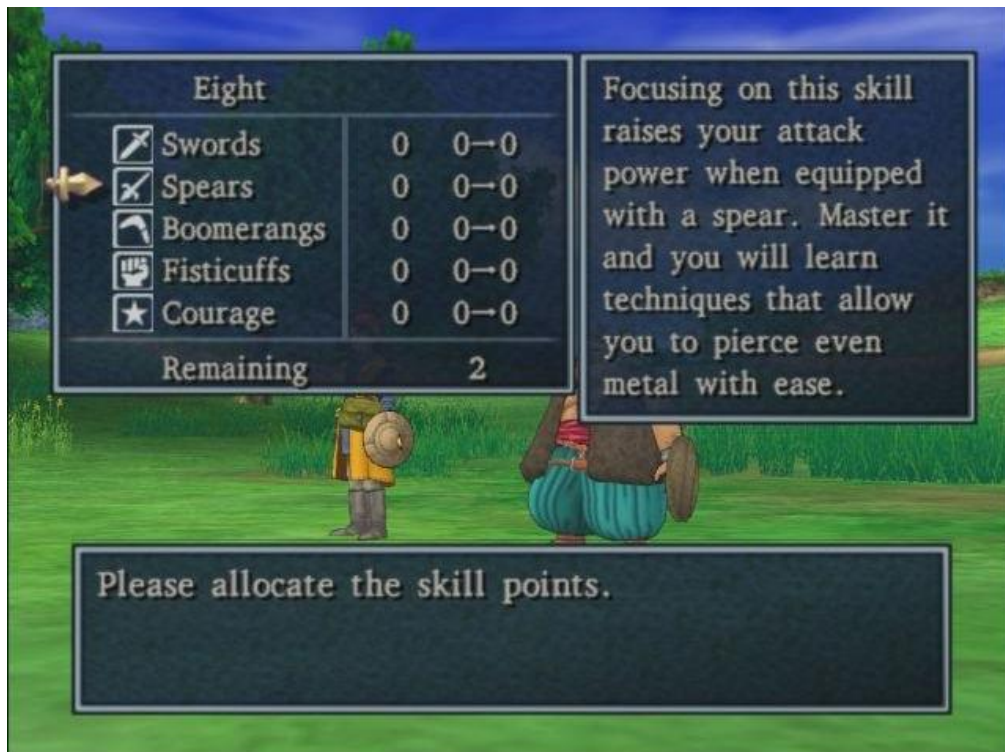
Psyche up

Psyche up is an action where the player increases their strength by a factor, and uses up a turn. You can psyche up each turn to increase from 5 to 20, 20 to 50 and 50 to 100. In the beginning of the game, you won't always be able to reach the last psyche up level of 100. Doing this can heavily increase your damage, way more than doing the same attack for the amount of turns you psyche up. Multiple enemies throughout the game can undo your psyche level in multiple ways, such as removing extra stats or impending statuses like sleep, being thrown off your feet, et cetera, making the psyche up mechanic risky.

Status effects

Dragon Quest VIII features many types of negative status effects. The following is a list of all negative status effects:

- ❖ Confused
- ❖ Cursed
- ❖ Dazzled
- ❖ Death
- ❖ Decelerated
- ❖ Envenomated
- ❖ Fizzled
- ❖ Paralyzed

- ❖ Poisoned
- ❖ Sapped
- ❖ Sleep
- ❖ Stunned
- ❖ Thrown of feet
- ❖ Uncontrollable Laughing
- ❖ Uncontrollable Dancing

The last two of these status effects add a layer of humor to the battle system, despite having the same effect as being thrown of your feet.

### 5.6.2   Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age
Status: owned

In Dragon Quest XI, each character immediately plays out its turn after choosing their action. The characters all get one turn per round. They can choose from attack, spells (again level based unlocking), defend, abilities (skill tree based), items, and equipment. The latter gives the option to change equipment in battle, which Dragon Quest VIII also featured in its item menu. Furthermore, characters can be set to follow a tactic, making them choose an action based on their AI. The default setting when a character joins the party is one such tactic; you have to set it yourself to 'follow orders' if you want to control them.

Swapping Members
Members of the party can be swapped out during battle. Each turn, you can swap out as many members as you like. The game features up to 8 party members available depending on where you are in the story, of which 4 can be in battle actively and swapped out for any of the others.

When the 4 characters in battle have died, the game automatically swaps the dead members for the alive ones.
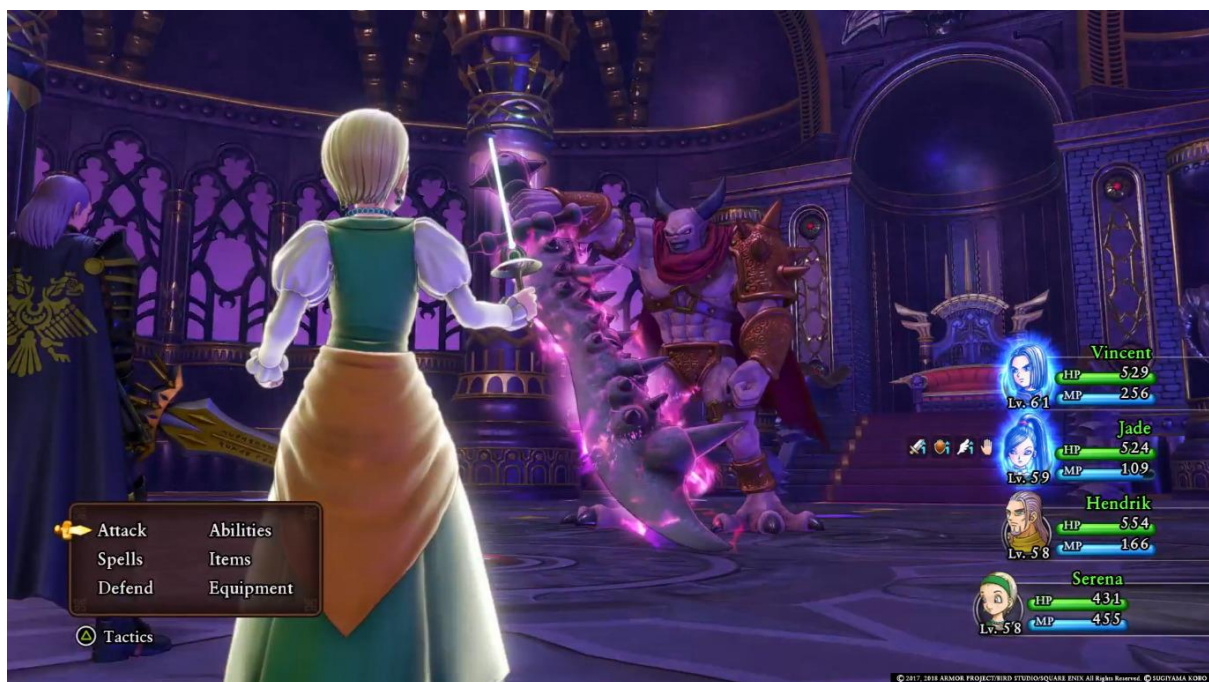
Pepped Up
Instead of psyching up like Dragon Quest VIII, the characters in Dragon Quest XI occasionally get pepped up, without the player having a direct influence over when this happens. A character can stay pepped up for a couple of turns, enjoying stat boosts, or use their pep power to unleash powerful extra skills like attacks, buffs and debuffs. Some of these skills require multiple characters to be pepped up together. When using a pep power, the pepped up state disappears right after. The game indicates when the characters' pepped up state is going to disappear. Strategically, it is best to use the pep power in the last round that you can enjoy it and keep the buffs until the last possible moment.

Pepped up members can be swapped out of battle to keep their pepped status for a later moment. You can plan out a strategy to have certain members be pepped up and swap them in battle (e.g. a boss battle) to have them use their combined pep power attack when the time is right. The UI in battle only shows the pep power that can be used at that moment, but in the menu out of battle, the player can check which pep powers each character has unlocked.

Skill Tree

Dragon Quest XI's skill tree still features character-based categories, however unlocking them is no longer just a case of adding points to each category.

Nodes in the skill tree can only be unlocked if a node that touches it is also unlocked. In some cases, there is also a '?' node, of which you do not know what skill it contains beforehand. These nodes have to have most surrounding nodes unlocked before the skill is revealed.

Unlocking these skills is not permanent; the player can pay a sum to one of the church pastors (whom in the games handle saving, getting rid of the curse status effects, bring back from the dead, etc) to do a 'rectification'. The player can then get their skill points back by removing the skills.

5.7 FINAL FANTASY X

Status: not owned

Final Fantasy X featured an ATB system, much like its predecessors did from Final Fantasy IV onwards. It was the first in a series to have deviated from a more standard ATB system into merging the ATB with more action-based elements.

Battle begins based on a random encounter system. There is a maximum of 3 characters on the battlefield at any time, which can choose to attack, do a special action, or use an item. Some of these actions have influence on the turn order; using an item may make one the next turns of the character earlier.

Use

Certain items that are offensive in nature can only be used with a skill under the 'Special' menu tab, called use. The earliest example given of this is a grenade.

Aeons

One of the characters can summon beasts, referred to as 'Aeons'. These summoned aeons take the stage temporarily instead of the other characters and are fully playable in battle, having their own special attacks, overdrive attacks and so on. The aeons will stay in battle until their HP hits 0, and they will not be usable for some time. Aeon HP can be recovered at the Save Points called Save Spheres.

Overdrive

All of the characters have a long bar below their name that gets filled. How it gets filled is something the player can choose, and is called 'Overdrive Modes'. For example, the meter can get filled

whenever the character damages an enemy or when the characters HP is low. These overdrive modes can be unlocked per character by how many turns in battle they have had throughout the game. When the characters fill their bar and reach the Overdrive, they can use special attacks. These Special Attacks also need to be unlocked for the most part, for example by performing other attacks for x amount of times or obtaining things.

Overdrives seem to come with the special action-based mechanics mentioned before, like having to press a button at the right time for extra damage.

Switching members
Members of the party can be switched during the battle by pressing L1 when it's a characters' turn.

Sphere Grid
The skill tree of this game is called the 'Sphere Grid'. It can unlock stat raises or skills. Each of these are one node on the screen, and have to be unlocked. There are 2 stats influencing this: Sphere Level and Ability Points (AP). Sphere levels go up by getting these AP, which is gained from actively using a character in battle. If the character is not used, it will not get any AP.
The Sphere Level determines which nodes the character can go to and activate. It is like a determined step counter, and within those steps you can activate nodes. You cannot go to the end of the path, activate a node and then freely go back. After activating a node, in which case your path is definitive, going back to the node you started on, evidently retracing your path, will require 1 sphere level per four steps.
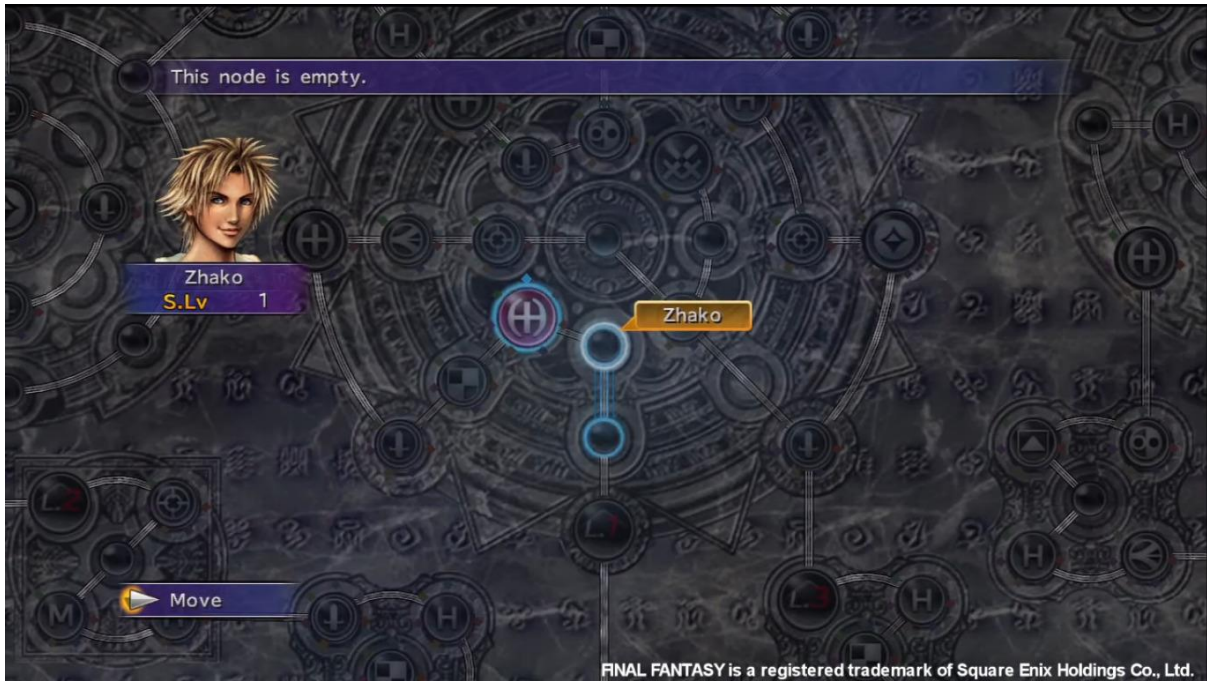
The activation of these nodes is not a simple as just pressing the X button, spending some Sphere Levels and done. To activate these nodes, a sphere needs to be placed on it. These spheres come in different categories; power spheres, mana spheres, speed spheres and ability spheres. Each of them can be used for different purposes. The Power sphere for example, activates nodes that have to do with Strength, Defense or HP.

These spheres are not an infinitely usable supply, and they can only be placed on the node that the character is on or the nodes directly next to that one.

All of the characters use the same sphere grid, and activate each node for themselves, unlike having a character specific skill tree as in Dragon Quest XI.
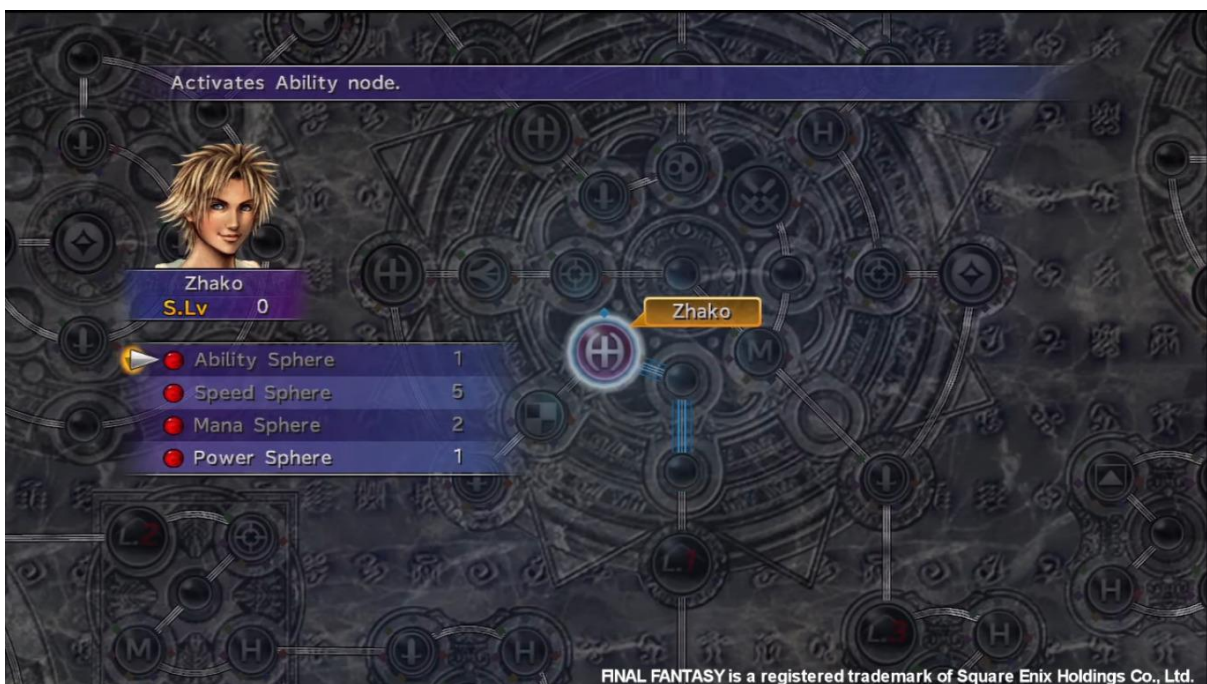
5.8 GRANDIA

Status: owned

Grandia features an ATB system with a maximum of 4 characters in the party. Throughout gameplay, the party members change occasionally.

Whenever a character reaches 'com' at the ATB bar on the lower right, the player can choose their action. Certain actions will immediately be played out and others need a charging time, which is reflected on the ATB bar between 'com' and 'act'.

How quickly an actor moves from 'wait' to 'com' is based on their move stat. I will refer to this as 'choice wait'. How quickly an action is executed from 'com' to 'act' depends on the type of action and the skills' level. I will refer to this as 'charge wait'.
There are a couple of different actions to be found in this battle system.

❖ Combo
   This is the regular attack. The character hits the enemy twice.
❖ Critical
   This attack is one, heavier hit. Critical has the power to cancel an enemy's charge wait and even set them back if they are over 50% over their choice wait. Enemies that are going to use a special attack are indicated by their animation showing sparkles, that conveniently appears around after 50% of their choice wait.

❖ Moves/Magic
   This is divided into 2 categories: moves and magic spells. Moves will use up SP and Magic will use up MP. All of the skills need to be acquired by leveling up that skills element, which I will explain later.

❖ Defend
There are 2 choices: endure or evasion. Endure is the standard form of defense in most JRPG's where the character holds up their shield and hardly gets an HP drop from attacks. Evasion gives the player a couple of choices to move the character to somewhere else on the battlefield, which can be great to negate the enemy's ranged attacks.

❖ Items
❖ Tactics
Each character can be made to automatically act using certain tactics, like focusing on recovery or go all out. This can be set for characters individually or the whole party.
❖ Look
Inspect the enemies. The same information can be seen before selecting the receiving end of an action.
❖ Flee
Fleeing always uses a rather slow charge wait.

The battle ground
In this battle system, the placement of the actors on the field has influence on what gets damaged. There are ranged attacks, attacks that only hit one actor and attacks that hit all opposing actors. There are magic attacks that the actors execute immediately when the actor reaches the 'act' on the timer bar, and there are attacks where the actor first has to run to the receiving end before it actually executes. If the actor in turn cannot reach the receiving end, they will get 'confused' (not as a status effect) and their wait time returns to around the middle of the choice wait, effectively skipping a turn.

4 A Ranged attack where the character does not have to run up to the receiving actor first.

The magic / moves skill system

Magic has their own skill point system for both the moves and the magic. Not only that, all magic spells are divided into their own 'magic level', which each comes with a maximum amount of MP to use per that level. You do not just have one MP pool: you have three. SP is one pool.

There are 4 magic elements that can be learned: fire, water, earth & wind. Each character also has their own preferred weapon category.

Each skill receives points upon usage. Most spell attacks also are heavily dependent on how many enemies get hit by the attack, which garners more points. Spells that are in the lower Magic Levels,

will give less skill points than higher ones, and spells will decrease in the amount of skill points they give when the skill level is raised.

For example, the 'Burn' attack is an attack that will most likely hit one enemy (but it can hit multiple of they are very nearby). With Fire level 1, the 'burn' attack will give 5 fire skill points per hit. Hit 3 enemies in one turn, and you receive 15 fire skill points for that turn. These elemental and weapon skill points are added during battle, so you occasionally level up and unlock a skill during battle, immediately ready for use.

For every skill level raised, you also get permanent character stat changes; raising your water skill will give you +1 HP per every level raised.

Some magic skills appear for more than one character; each character, when unlocking a magic element (the elements have to be bought using something called a mana egg), will start with the same magic spell as the others. What other skills they unlock later is sometimes different for each character. As a player, you do not have any influence over what skills they get, but you have a lot of influence over when you get them.

5.9 NI NO KUNI: WRATH OF THE WHITE WITCH

Status: owned, PS3 version

Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch has a turn-based battle system in which a lot of the elements are more action based. The party consists of 3 human characters, each being able to have 3 familiars.

The player can, at the beginning of battle, select which human or familiar they want to control.

In this case above, the player can now choose between this character's familiars or the character itself. Pressing 'L1' or 'R1' will switch between the human characters and in turn show their familiars. The battle will only commence once the controlled character is chosen. This battle system sometimes pauses in certain menus, but for other menus the battle system will continue running.

Familiars vs Human characters
There is quite a difference between controlling a familiar versus a human character. The human character has the following actions:

- ❖ Attack
- ❖ Spells
- ❖ Defend
- ❖ Run Away
- ❖ Set tactics
- ❖ Provisions (items)

The tactics button is the option to set the AI of the other characters to focus on certain strategies and on which target they should focus (e.g. the other character should attack a different target than the player is attacking).

The other options in this menu do exactly what you expect them to do just as in other JRPG turn-based games.

Familiars have other options than the human character. They feature an attack, defend, and 3 special attacks that can be learned and set in the menu out of battle. They are 'commanded' by the human character seemingly shouting these commands. The player has control over the movement of the familiar.

Familiars also have a limited amount of time they stay in battle, which is shown on their own, health-bar like head-shot. Once they run out of time, control is moved over the human character they belong too. You can then choose to switch out another familiar character, although you can do so whenever you are given a new turn by pressing 'L1'.

HP and MP
When a familiar is controlled, getting hit or using spells all uses up the HP and MP of the human character that owns them.

Timing
A lot of elements in this battle system are time-based. When choosing to attack or defend, the action will go on for some amount of time. They can also be canceled during that time.

Spells have a small amount of charging time before they get enacted, but cannot be canceled during their execution. In turn, spells casted against you also have a small amount of time before they get executed, leaving the player to have to cancel what they were doing quite quickly in order to be able to defend.

Sometimes, the battle system pauses so that the player is able to make a choice. This happens in the following occasions:

- ❖ In the item menu
- ❖ In the spell's menu
- ❖ In the tactic's menu
- ❖ When changing characters using L1
- ❖ Choosing the receiving end of an action (offensive will give choice between the enemies, defensive will give choice between the party members)

All out

There are 2 commands that can be chosen at any time and also go on for a select amount of time. These are the 'All-out Attack!' and the 'All-out Defense!'. They can be chosen easily at any time during battle by pressing the triangle button or the square button.
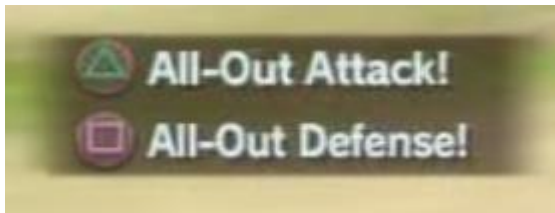
5.10 OCTOPATH TRAVELER

Status: not owned, played the demo

Octopath Traveler has a random encounter system that leads into a battle with up to 4 party members. Each round, every character has a turn. Both this round's turn distribution and the next one is displayed on screen. The characters have HP and SP, with SP also fulfilling the role of what MP would stand for in other games.

Characters can use an attack, character specific skills, items, defend or flee. Choosing defend will have the character's next turn jump more to the front of the next round.

Vulnerabilities
Each enemy comes with a set of vulnerabilities, shown under the sprite. Some are known and some have to be found out. Finding out a certain vulnerability can come from trying out different things or using certain abilities. Once knowing what an enemy is vulnerable of, you can hit them with these to bring down their guard, indicated by the shield that houses a number. Bring this to 0 to have the enemy break; in which case, they skip a turn and seem to receive a larger amount of damage until they restore their guard when it's their turn again.

Boost
Each turn, the character builds up BP points for each action. These are indicated by the little dots under the character's name. You can save these and use them all at once to unleash either your regular attack for the amount of times you have a boost for, or make the skill you use that much stronger.

On the left, you see that this one boost point is being used, making it able for this character to strike twice.

On a turn that you use Boost Points, you will not get any BP back for that turn.

Unswitchable Character

You can switch out all the characters except for the one character that you chose to start the game with. That character became the main character and can never be switched out.

Character related skills

There are quite some skills that are completely character specific, and work to enhance their narrative. Alfyn is a character that helps out the sick and wounded in the story, and can use 'Concoct', to mix ingredients to make either a medicinal potion for the party or a potion to wound the enemies. Each of the character has certain skills to them that make them stand out as the character they are, and it goes deeper than just using a different weapon or slightly different stats.

5.11 Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door

Status: not owned

Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door is the second installment in the Paper Mario series, featuring a turn-based system with many timed mini-games as attacks.

Out of battle, Mario can hit an enemy to gain an initial attack. Mario has one companion in battle, in this example Goombella, and the order in which Mario and Goombella attack can be switched pressing the Y button. Both characters have different options to choose from.
Mario has the following options:

❖ Jump
❖ Hammer
❖ Items
❖ Special
❖ Tactics

The jump attack(s) has Mario run up to the enemy. The player has to press A at the right timing to do the attack well. Attacks like Jump and Hammer unlock harder versions requiring both more timed presses and Flower Points (FP), the latter being somewhat of a replacement for the more generic MP.


The hammer attack has its own menu as well for different hammer attacks. The player has to hold the joystick to the left and release it on the last count to execute the attack properly.

Goombella and the other secondary characters have the choices for Attack, Tactics and Items.

Her attack menu gives the option to choose not only attacks (like Headbonk) but also other actions. One of those is 'Tattle', giving the player info about the enemy that he/she chooses. Each secondary character has a handful of character specific attacks.

Pools
The player characters both have HP, which stand for Heart Points in this game. The characters also share a pool called Flower Points, or FP, which can be used for stronger, regular attacks. Special Attacks use up SP, or Star Power, and can only be used by Mario. The SP pool is filled after each time Mario attacks enemies, and the crowd gives Mario stars.
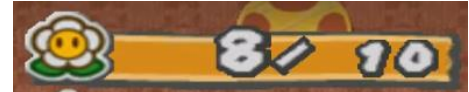
5 The Star Power Pool on the left, and the Flower Points Pool on the right

Whenever a battle is won, Mario receives Star Points. Each 100 Star Points, Mario gains a level and the player gets the choice to upgrade 1 of 3 pools: the HP pool, the FP pool, or the BP (Badge Point) pool.

Badge Points & Badges
Mario can find and equip "badges". These badges all hold a special move that Mario can use in battle. The number of badges that can be equipped is dependent on the cost of a specific badge and on how much BP Mario has available.

Stylish
The battle arena is in the form of a stage. The player can press the A button at just the right time after an attack to make the move he just did 'stylish', which will do a sort of appeal to the audience and in return give more star power.

Defend mechanism
Whenever the enemy attacks, the player can defend against the enemy by timing a button press well. There is a regular defend and a dodging defend. The regular defend is used by pressing a, and the timing is half a second to react. This defend protects against gaining negative status effects and reduces the damage by 1 point. The dodging defend is done by pressing B. The player will only have ¼ of a second to do this, but if they manage to do it, the enemy will receive damage and the character will not be damaged at all.

5.12 RADIANT HISTORIA

Status: not owned, lent a copy and played for 1.5 hours

Radiant Historia comes with a turn-based system that doesn't necessarily hold rounds. It has a mechanic named 'Change', that allows the player to let a character change when they have their turn. There is a maximum of 3 characters in combat, and the battle can begin with a pre-emptive strike if the player hits the enemy on the map out of battle.

All characters have the following choices in combat:

- Attack
- Skills
- Change
- Items
- Defend
- Flee
- Mana Burst

Enemy Grid

Enemies are placed on a 3x3 grid, holding a front-line, a mid-line and back-line. The further to the front the enemy is, the more damage they do to the player's characters.

Characters can use skills that influence the placement of the enemies. Enemies can be temporarily pushed to another enemies' node, having them overlap. Until it is that enemies' turn, they will stay there and allow for the player to hit all of the enemies on that node with 1 hit.

Change

Characters can change their turn with other actors. This will have a slight negative effect on the character until it is their turn again. They will be more vulnerable against attacks and ailments. Changing turns gives, for example, the opportunity to use skills that change enemy placement. By using those first and a strong attack later, you can hit multiple enemies with one attack.

Condition & Auto Attack

During character turns, the player can check the condition of each actor in depth. This shows the actors' weaknesses, and their HP. The player can also use Auto Attack, which will have the battle commence automatically. Both of these options are included in the UI as just one button press.
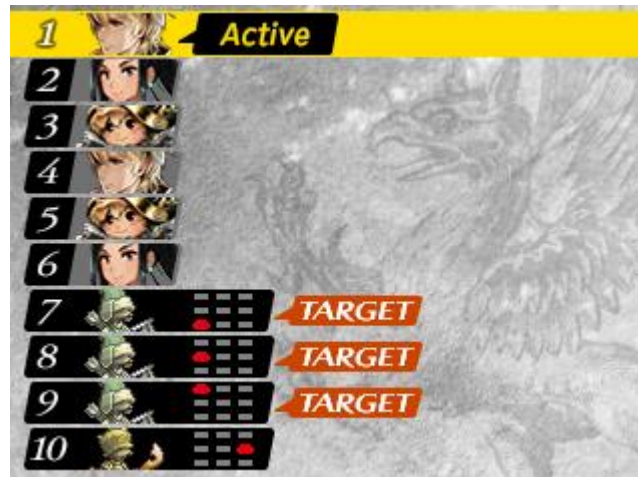
Mana Burst

Mana Burst can be used when the Mana gauge of a character has filled up. Mana bursts are special, powerful, character specific skill like actions.

5.13 THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS OF COLD STEEL II

Status: not owned

Battle begins when you walk into an enemy. Before battle begins, you can do certain actions on the field to determine how the battle begins. This is explained in encounter types.
Actors are shown in a turn bar on the right of the screen, and their next turn is based on the delay of the action they took in the last.

Characters have the following choices in the menu:

- ❖ Attack
- ❖ Arts (Skills)
- ❖ Move
- ❖ Run
- ❖ Item
- ❖ Crafts

Enemies need to be in range for certain attacks. If you select attack, an indicator will show what your range is, and if the enemy is outside of that, the character will instead use 'move', to move up to the edge of this range. The indicator shows two circles: the inner circle shows the range in which the character can move, and the outer circle shows where the attack still hits.

Crafts

There is a difference in this game between the regular magic attacks, dubbed Arts, and character specific attacks, called Crafts. Crafts use CP, or Craft Points, and are gained by damaging the enemy or receiving damage. Craft skills are automatically gained when characters level up.

Arts

Arts are the magic spells of this game. Instead of having a select amount of magic spells per character, they can be set using what's called 'Quartz' in the characters 'Orbment' menu. More on this will be under the 'Quartz' heading. Arts cost EP, which replaces the usual MP, and the action costs some time before they are performed. You will see on the turn-order bar when the action will be performed and you get an indication of that before selecting the action.

Arts are divided in the menu by 'Attack' and 'Support'. The former gives you offensive spells, the latter defensive or buffing spells.

Turn Bonuses

Each turn, a character may get a turn bonus, that can enhance stats. For example, the HP gets healed by 10% for that turn, or the player knows that the next attack will be a critical hit.

Encounter Types

On the map, you can approach an enemy in certain ways that may leave you with an advantage. Attack the enemy from the front, and the enemy will be temporarily pausing its movement. Attack from behind, and the enemy will be stunned. Attack the enemy from behind with a weapon they are weak to, and the enemy 'faints' (they do not die). Note that this all happens before battle. The following are the results of these actions:

- ❖ Enemy walks into you from behind
  Enemies have the first strike; the party order and formation are different. Combat links are broken. (explained later)
- ❖ Walk into the enemy
  Regular battle

- ❖ Walk into enemy from behind
  Player's character turns are earlier.
- ❖ Walk into a stunned enemy
  The party gets the bonuses from regular walking into the enemy's behind, and will also get 10CP per character.
- ❖ Walk into a fainted enemy
  The party gets the former 2 bonuses and all enemies take damage.

Enemy Specifics

Enemies have information that come handy like exactly how much HP they have and what they are weak or strong to. You can find these out by either trial-and-error, by using an item called the 'Battle Scope', or using specific Arts or Crafts. The information can be read in the Monster Guide and seen during battle on the battle's UI.

Quartz

To unlock new Arts, you have to set up a characters' 'orbment', a device that can hold these quartzes. There is a master quartz that has to be set, which is a quartz that can level up. These quartzes come with multiple advantages to multiple stats, multiple Arts, etc. Regular quartz usually either give stat changes or an art.
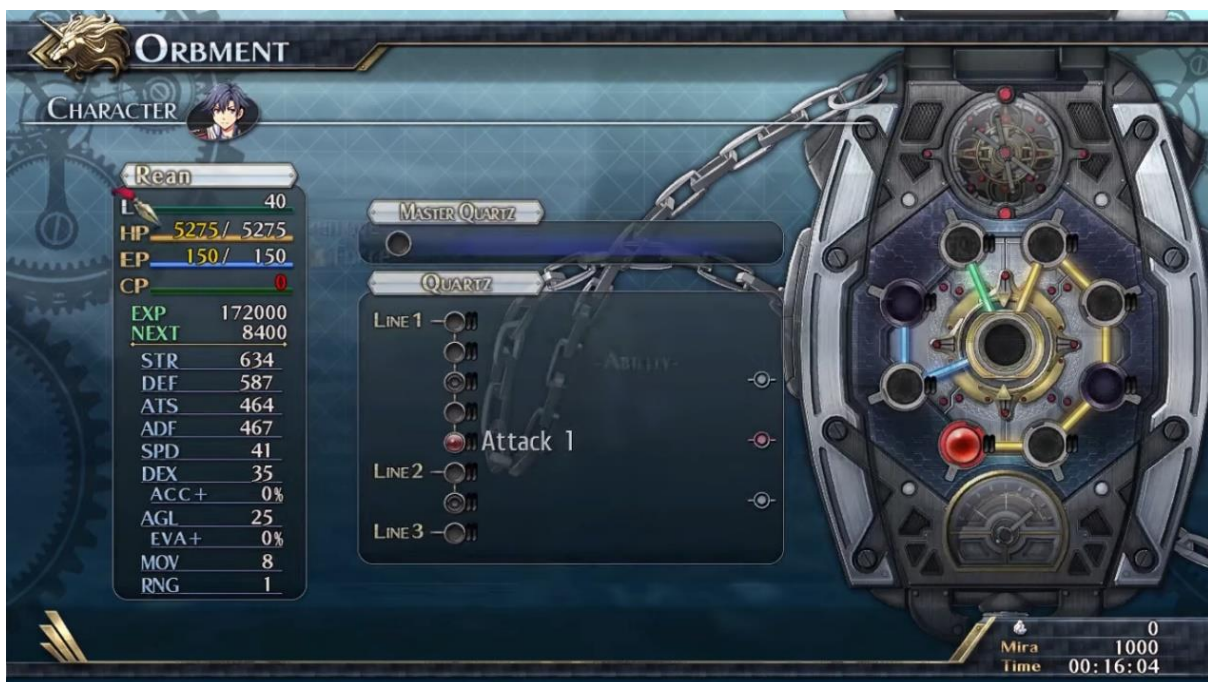
Combat Link

The player can link characters together in combat to use link abilities. Whenever an enemy 'unbalances', you can get a timed event called a link attack. You are then one button away for using a special Link Attack, in which case the linked partner of the character that broke the enemy's stance will do its follow up move. Stronger link abilities are gained throughout the story.

5.14 WILD ARMS

Status: owned

Wild Arms has a strict turn-based battle system with round. The battle starts as a random encounter. All actions get selected at the beginning of the round and the turn order is a mystery beforehand. The game has 3 playable characters that are in combat together for almost all of the game.

Before choosing the actions, the player can select the following

- Attack (the middle icon)
- Equipment (the upper icon)
- Flee (the right icon)
- Strategy (the left icon)
- Turn order (the lower icon)
  You can set in which order you can choose the characters actions. This doesn't change how the round actually plays out.

Each character then receives the option to use:
- Regular attack (middle icon)
- Skills (upper icon)
- Defend (right icon)
- Force Actions (lower icon)
- Items (left icon)

All characters have an HP pool, 2 of them also have an MP pool. All characters can build up Force to execute special Force Attacks. The character without MP has a weapon called an ARM (which the title of the game refers to) and instead of MP, he has a number of bullets left in his gun, which he can use his gun-related skills with. Reloading bullets is by using a bullet clip item which you have to buy.

Force
Force builds up every turn and when it reaches a certain amount, you can build up to 4 usable Force Points. Each character has its own, 4 available special actions (of which the higher-level ones unlock throughout the game) that can be used with these Force Points.

What these actions do varies; one character can use an action that allows an item normally used for 1 character, to be used for

multiple. All characters can later use an action to summon a beast (called guardian) with a strong attack. The character with the ARM can use an action that allows for better accuracy. With this Force Action, you can then use the regular skill that this action needs to be applied to. In one turn, the Force Action will play out and immediately after, the action it's applied to will play out.

Counterattack

When the actors receive an attack, they might do a counterattack, which defaults to their regular attack. You cannot influence this.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Before I begin writing down my personal opinion on what I found interesting or not, I will have to say something about the games that I have not played completely myself. Some of the games that I did not own, I have gotten the chance for to at least spend an hour or so to try out the combat, either via lending the game or finding demos. I am aware that by seeing only this early combat, I miss out on some of the important underlying systems, like the job system in Octopath Traveler and Bravely Default, or the skill tree system in Final Fantasy X. This is without even mentioning that in all of these games, there are balancing nuances and/or specifics that I have not been able to experience. All I can say is that, for now, I will have to do with what information I can find, and keep such in-depth hands-on experience to when I either have more time to finish at least a substantial amount of these games or am able to buy or lend them in the first place. I want to finish this little intro by saying that if you, the reader, feel like I left out an important game, or an important aspect of a game I tried to cover, then feel free to e-mail me at info@lisamichelle.nl.

I also want to emphasize that this part, where I write the conclusions to my research question, is opiniated with my own beliefs.

6.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

What are turn-based J-RPG's battle systems composed of and what mechanic defines that battle system or makes it more unique or interesting?

6.2 WHAT ARE TURN BASED J-RPG BATTLE SYSTEMS COMPOSED OF?

After analyzing a couple of J-RPG turn based battle systems, I can divide most of the mechanics in certain trends or building blocks.

Before Battle

Battles start based on a random encounter or walking into visible on-map enemies. The latter may give the option for the player to hit the enemy on the field to give some advantages. The enemy may also run into the player character to give the player some disadvantages.

Battles

Battles, strictly turn-based or not, feature a couple of the same elements:

- Regular attack. The character uses their weapon to hit the enemy.
- Skills. These are often divided into 2 categories: magic and special attacks. They may use the same pool of points that are used up or they may have different pools.
- Defend. In its most basic form, allows the character to receive less or no damage from an incoming attack. Defend can also come with extra perks like charging points for certain extra pools.
- Items. Items can be used to heal characters, do attacks, change active equipment, use buffs or debuffs. The difference with skills is that the items have to be bought or found and are almost always a finite resource, based on how many you have. Items can be used after which they often disappear. Items have their own pool point in a way; you have a certain amount of a certain item. Unlike skills, which has a pool you can often replenish during a battle, items cannot be replenished during battle.
- Strategy / Tactics. The player can choose if a character follows a strategy, in which case the AI of the character takes over.
- Run. The player can choose to stop the battle.

Skill learning

Skills can be learned in different ways.

- Levelling up a character
- Levelling up the category that a skill belongs to
- Spending skill points on a skill tree to unlock the skills you want
- Skills unlocked by progressing through the narrative
- Skills unlocked by side quest systems
- Class/Job specific skills, either by levelling up the character when in a specific class or levelling up the class itself as a separate levelling system.
- Item bound skills that can be given to certain characters to make them have that skill.

These bullet points can be combined.

Status Effects & Skill Categories

Status effects affects an actors' pools, statuses or ability to execute an action. Here are the most common ones:

- **Poisoned**: the HP of the character gets depleted extra every turn.
- **Paralyzed / Fear / Sleep**: The character does not act until the status effect is gone.
- **Accelerated/Decelerated**: The character is quicker or slower; in a strictly turn-based battle system they execute their actions earlier or later in the round. In an ATB system, the time between their turns get shorter or longer.
- **Time-outs like Thrown of Feet**: For one round only, the character cannot execute their turn.
- **Confused / Charmed**: The player might have some say on what the character does or none at all. The character might not execute the action the player wanted, not execute an action at all, or execute an offensive action on their own party members. The character might hit an enemy but will often miss.
- **Fizzled / Magic Block**: Characters skills get blocked from usage.
- **Dazzled / Foggy**: The characters can't see as well and do a lot less damage or none at all.

Many games also feature a system where actors can be weak or strong to certain types of elements. For example, elements like water, fire, earth and wind. A skill can belong to an element type, like a category. As an additional status effect, an actor might become weak or strong to a certain element as an effect of another skill or extra mechanic's system.

Arena Placement
Some games have incorporated importance of the actors' position on the map for hitting or missing other actors. This can also include the addition of ranged attacks or defending by running out of certain hit areas. Movement of the actors can be limited to their turn before they execute their action, it can be the action of the turn, or can be rather freely done while executing an action.

Extra Mechanics
Almost all of these games feature extra mechanics that try to set them apart from others in the franchise. Most of these extra features include extra levelling systems within the battle that gives buffs or very powerful skills. Some these extra mechanics give the ability to spice up the turn order, especially in the non-ATB systems. Others feature action-based mechanics to execute skills or attacks.

6.3   WHAT MECHANICS DEFINES THE BATTLE SYSTEM OR MAKES IT MORE UNIQUE OR INTERESTING?

In this part, I will write down what I think are the selling points of the battle system per game.

6.3.1   Atelier Ryza: Ever Darkness and The Secret Hideout

This game is quite fast-paced as your other party members will execute actions when it's their turn without the player choosing their actions. The Tactics and Action Point system add to the fast-paced style by providing the player with a goal to get stronger or get more perks fast. Because raising your tactics level and using a skill both use up the Action Points, the player has to think tactically in a short amount of time. There is even more incentive for the player to get perks by reacting to the orders of the party members. The player should be very concentrated during battle and should have no time to lay back or get bored.

In short: the combination of the extra 3 mechanics (AP, Tactics Level and Action order) in this fast-paced system allows the player to have a large quantity of options that the player has to think about tactically in a short amount of time.

6.3.2   Atelier Lydie & Suelle: The Alchemists and the Mysterious Paintings

Once the player has unlocked all party members, the follow-up system starts. The player has control over 3 out of 6 characters, with the other 3 using a random skill from a list that the player can see. This system adds a bit of luck to the game.

The most interesting mechanic to me is the stun mode; if an actor is hit too much, they will get stunned for a while. There seems to be a way that you can avoid this. But trying to get the enemy stunned is handy in boss fights.

6.3.3   Aveyond Series

With the simple RPG Maker default mechanics that Aveyond comes with, the charm of the Aveyond series was not really found in its battle mechanics. Most interesting in these games was unlocking certain skills throughout some narrative choices you could make in some of the games.

6.3.4   Bravely Default: Flying Fairy

Bravely Default tries to break each rounds repetitiveness by allowing the player to save turns and use them all at once. However, I think the real selling point of this game is in its job system, which I wasn't able to experience myself, but to me it seems like there is a lot of possibilities to let the characters grow how you like and in that way create a party to your liking.

6.3.5   Chrono Trigger

Chrono Trigger was one of the first to come with an ATB system with on-map encounters. While I personally do not really enjoy that the time keeps running while you can choose the action for the turns, I can see how this was revolutionary for its time and brought a much-needed spice in J-RPGs.

6.3.6   Cosmic Star Heroine

This system asks of the player to have a strategy, because of the way actions get locked after use and the fact that all actors (enemies included) get stronger the longer the battle takes. Having a plan and knowing your party and enemies seems to be crucial to the system and it's unique point.

6.3.7   Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King

The battle system itself does not feature really unique mechanics that makes the game stand out. The charm in this game's system does come, in my opinion, from how solid it is balanced and how memorable the enemies' designs are. Flavor this with some humor in status effects and skills and you have a battle system that still works despite not throwing that much new and special mechanics to the table.

6.3.8   Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age

Extensive, character specific skill trees, cooperative skills between characters and a couple of Quality-of-Life additions compared to earlier Dragon Quest games make this game a very solid, but not necessarily innovative game. Personally, I think the selling point of this game lies in how well it is balanced and how the identity of the characters is strengthened in their skill set. I would also like to mention that I like how the rest of the party members that are not active in battle will change with the active party members when they die. In other games, it is game over when your active party members die, which does not make a lot of sense story-wise.

6.3.9   Final Fantasy X

The sphere grid seems overly complicated to me, so I do not think that this particular mechanic makes people stay. The action-based mechanics seem like a nice extra to me, but I am also not convinced about that this is the actual selling point. The aeons and the overdrive modes seem like a

great enhancement to the core of the battle system, which is why I think these 2 mechanics are what makes this battle system great.

6.3.10   Grandia
Grandia's ATB system's core, with the difference between the choice wait and the charge wait and the slightly different combo and critical attack make a very dynamic battle system that can sometimes leave the player slightly anxious about who will go first. Cancelling your opponent's strong moves and having to increase your speed of the charge wait by levelling up your skills makes the whole system work much more interesting than a more standard ATB.

6.3.11   Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch
Ni no Kuni offers a vast amount of playable characters through the familiar system, all while keeping the story of the rest of the game intact by having not many playable human characters but many animal characters. Creating a difference between the human character's actions and the familiar character's actions and having a limited amount of time before the familiar has to be switched out of battle leaves the player with gameplay that switches up frequently and is fast-paced in an enjoyable way.

6.3.12   Octopath Traveler
Tactical decisions are what matters the most in Octopath Traveler; finding out your opponents' weaknesses to have them break is important because the battles in this game are not easy. You have to find weaknesses and use your boosts because if you don't, you are in for a very difficult time.

What I like most is how each character has a specific skill like mechanic to them that strengthens their personality.

6.3.13   Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door
My problem with Final Fantasy X's action-based mechanics is that they feel a bit gimmicky to me; an addition on an already quite elaborate turn-based battle system. Paper Mario makes more sense to me: the action-based mechanics are the core and not the gimmick. Execution of timing is not only apparent in the regular, main attacks, but also as an extra in defending that can determine if you end the battle nearly unscathed or not. Instead of throwing on feature after feature, Paper Mario TTYD uses a couple of core mechanics and makes it work like a charm.

6.3.14   Radiant Historia Perfect Chronology
The grid placement and the turn order changing are the unique features in this game. Change who hits when so all enemies line up on one node, hit them all with one strike and if possible, make sure they're all in the back so their attacks are less heavy. This is what the battle system revolves about and while not being an ATB system, leaves rounds completely out of it to still create a working system.

6.3.15   The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel II
In my opinion, this game is one that throws as many features as it can onto the player. The best one, in my opinion, is the orbment system, where you can essentially assign items to unlock skills while that item is equipped. Having the same skills that every character can use opens up a variety of trying out so the player can experiment with what skills works best on which character.

6.3.16   Wild Arms
Force Actions are the extra mechanic in this game and add a layer of character specific mechanics that can enhance actions or open up a variety of extra skills in the form of guardians. Building up

your Force or using it early for one of the less costly force actions creates a bit of strategical and tactical thinking in this otherwise regular battle system.