

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana

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Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana follows the young male alchemist Klein who is traveling on the road to Kavoc. Along the way he encounters a monster hunter named Lita. Lita's first impression of Klein is that he is weak; after all Klein is an alchemist and she is a monster hunter, known as a Galgazit. Lita accompanies Klein and takes him to the city of Kavoc. She shoes him around, taking him to the local bar, shops and even finding him a place to stay where he can practice his alchemy. Klein's ultimate goal is to surpass his grandmother Daphne in alchemy; who taught him the basics of alchemy. Klein also wants to explore the secrets of the once prosperous city of Avenberry — a city known for alchemy. In order to do this he slowly picks up other members that help him on his journey; Delsus, Norn, Arlin and Marietta. These characters explore the world of Regallzine and as they do they understand how Mana shapes their world.

Delsus who enjoys a good alcoholic drink and spicy food is constantly taunting Lita for loving sweet things. Delsus who is suave with the ladies and can't seem to hold himself back from a good flirt. Despite Delsus' charm, he has a deep-rooted past waiting for him at his hometown. Norn is the unusual cat-girl and personal assistant to alchemist Zeldalia who both live in Popo's forest. Zeldalia used to perform and study alchemy with Klein's grandmother Daphne. Zeldalia promised Daphie that she would look out for Klein; in doing so she offers Klein great advise on alchemy. Arlin is a mysterious knight who seems to have the same goal as Klein; to learn more about Avenberry and Marietta was once a former knight of Alkavana. After a few encounters, Klein invites Marietta to join the group.

There is no room for exploration at all, parts of the map unlock as the story continues. Like most Atelier games in the series it is not fully clear what the storyline is or your motives. Oddly enough it is clear who the antagonist is -- Mull. He appears in various cut scenes, constantly conjuring magic and will let out a devious laughter. His motives are never made clear, and don't become apparent until nearly 35 hours of gameplay. The game took nearly 40 hours to complete.

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana's pride and joy comes from its extensive synthesis. Story takes on a primary role while synthesizing is secondary, complementing the game. You obtain new synthesis recipes from unlocking certain types of chest, ornamented in gold and blue which is easily distinguished. Other recipes can be found in stores from various cities or NPC's who wander Regallzine. There are three types of synthesis that can be performed; mana, store and weapon synthesis.

The first way to synthesize is by going to your home and using your atelier to work. To create items that require mana, also known as mana synthesis you just need the required mana, such as fire or water. Some items may require more than one type of mana to synthesis. You obtain mana energy by defeating enemies with Klein mace or using elemental extraction from items in the field, such as hitting a barrel or a rock. Mana synthesis can also be performed in the battlefield and used on enemies or party members. Second type of synthesis is done in a store, also known as store synthesis. Store synthesis include a bar, bakery, magic shop and more. Shop synthesis doesn't require any mana, instead it uses items gathered from the field or dropped from defeated enemies. When you first craft a new item at any shop you are given the option to review the newly created item, thus allowing it to be sold by the store owner. This allows you to not have to

craft the item again and just buy it directly from the store owner. Late game store synthesis becomes a conundrum; items like Nectar — an item used to revive your characters. Nectar requires multiple synthesized items from multiple cities, making store synthesis time-consuming.

The third type is weapon synthesis. Early in the game you unlock the ability to synthesize weapons. Weapon synthesis is a little deceiving from the typical RPG. You don't create new weapons, rather you crystallize mana stones. Mana crystals will have hidden effects such as dealing more damage or having magic resistance. You can then fuse these mana crystals into a customizable weapon. This was probably my least favorite of synthesis for two reasons: I never knew what kind of mana crystal I was going to create and I didn't know which weapons I could customize. Leaving me to hardly ever use this system of synthesizing.

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana does a stellar job of engaging you in combat. You won't be performing combos to quickly eradicate the enemy, however it did have one feature that I especially enjoyed. You can freely change your characters without missing a turn — something rarely seen in an RPG. Being able to freely swap characters becomes a useful strategy in fights.

You can change the battle outcome with skill break and knock back. Some enemies perform skills that take more than one turn to cast. While they are casting it is possible for your characters to perform a skill break with a basic attack or with their skills. Skill break interrupts the enemies' skill, giving you the upper-hand in battle.

Sometimes your skill can cause an enemy to knock back. This moves them back from their original position. Although not visible on the battlefield in the formation menu you can see that the battlefield is separated into three columns and rows. You can take advantage of this in two ways. First positioning enemies can allow you to group them closer for an A.O.E attack or spell. For instance, Klein's fire bomb can hit multiple enemies vertically and horizontally if enemies are grouped close enough. Delsus can use his crossbow to attack multiple enemies horizontally, as well as Norn with her wand. The second way to take advantage of positioning is the farther back an enemy is, the less damage they will do to you, however I didn't notice much of a damage difference. Positioning also applies to your party members as well. You can align your party members in a way where you can heal everyone or give them buffs.

What makes Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana so special is acquiring new mana. Mana are just like people; they have thoughts and feelings like everyone else. Mana appear in several forms and can perform abilities on the field as well provide a great boost to your individual stats. You can boost these stats even more by transforming a mana with metamorphosis, turning them from adorable to total bad ass.

Most mana have abilities that you can perform on your arduous journey. Diemia -- mana of stone, allows you to use him as a stepping platform when summoned in the field. Allowing you to jump to places you couldn't before. Because you obtain mana throughout the game, when you gain a new ability with them you will backtrack to previous locations that may not have been possible to travel before.

Mana can also be equipped to your characters, allowing you to gain additional stats, such as attack up. They also can boost your skill leveling. Your characters skills are predetermined and unlock as you level your characters. For every character level you will be given three points and can use them to level up your skills. When your mana levels up they too add additional points to certain skills, allowing you to level up your skills faster. The effect increases with a mana under metamorphosis.

Mana tends to ebb and flow in world of Regallzine. Both mana and alchemist are

dependent on each other, however there are some alchemists who wish to go beyond the teachings and abuse the power of mana. Klein and his retinue learn how mana works and also prevent the abuse of its powers.

Story and synthesis complement Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana by not overbearing one over the other. Although there is no room for exploration, the journey is engaging at all time. Keeping you on a steady course. Characters although don't have much depth to them have great conversations with great voice acting. Watching them connect and grow through the journey is worth the play. As a fan of the series it was great to play one of their older titles and see how much the series has grown.