

Atelier Shallie

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The final rendition of the Dusk series ends with Atelier Shallie: Alchemists of the Dusk Sea. Get ready to play between two female protagonists who strive to protect their village and pursue their alchemist abilities to perfection. The Dusk has slowly grappled the water supply in several towns and it is up to these ladies to stop the Dusk at all cost. Atelier Shallie: Alchemists of the Dusk Sea has some of the best character motivation and newest improvements to the series.

You are introduced to both main characters; Shallistera Argo and Shallotte Elminus in a brief prologue. Shallistera is a young alchemist and the daughter of the chief village of Lugion. Shallistera's retinue travel to Stellard in attempts to find out how she can save her village due to the shortage of water. A sudden encounter with a dragon in the Dusk sea causes Shallistera's ship to crash into Shallotte's hometown oasis Stellard. Shallotte is an optimistic trash-collector who desires to accomplish great things for her small town Stellard. After the brief prologue this is where you get the chance to select your main character for the next ten chapters of the story. Despite the two Shallies' running into each other at the start of the game, they briefly interact with one another for the first five chapters. The first five chapters are plodding with no real interest of Stellard and the Dusk. Your journey at the beginning is spent learning about your character Shallie and discovering new areas within the Dusk. Eventually the two Shallies' and their retinue join forces to solve the problem with the Dusk. Working together isn't as easy as it sounds.

The characters not only have conflict with their environment but also with themselves and others around them. Secondary characters such as Willbell showed more significant character development than the previous Dusk series. For once Willbell was a relatable character who strives to become a great magician and overcomes her obstacles. Characters from the previous Dusk series make cameo appearance in Stellard however, they do not greatly contribute to the story. Nevertheless, it's a joy to see the whimsical cast of the Dusk series.

Battles are similar to previous Dusk games however, there are new battle mechanics and character customization worth praising. Battles are bland at first but when all seven characters join in your party battles start to become more intricate, filled with growth system, burst, and chains. Atelier Shallie introduces character customization with the Growth System. You can increase your battle performance by adding character stats and abilities, such as health, defense, attack and abilities. Another mechanic is going into burst mode which increases your characters' damage output. You increase the burst bar by attacking the enemy with physical attacks, magic or the use of alchemy items which only the Shallie's are capable of using. When the burst bar is at a 100 percent or more you will go into a burst mode. The higher the boost bar is the longer you will stay in boost mode, which I found almost essential for fighting – because your damage outside of boost mode is substantially less. Burst mode is also a good time to perform as many chains as possible by swapping characters in for an extra attacks. If done correctly you can perform special attacks, duo attacks or field burst. Field burst occur when completing chains when your burst bar is over 100 percent. Different character add different field abilities; Resonance Echo given by Shallistera would increase attack power and defense of allies by 15 percent. All character have different abilities but depending on your chains you were allowed up to three field abilities at once giving you an edge in battle.

Crafting in any Atelier series is always the prized gem and is predominantly what makes the series so unique in RPG gaming. There are some minor tweaks that makes crafting more understandable compared to its predecessors. Mixing properties give you powerful stats and bonuses are more simplified. As usual, you can use crafting for quest, battles and equipment. Quest in Atelier Shallie are no different from its previous titles – they are repetitive and you gain very little reward besides money. Individual characters like Shallotte's mother, Keithgriff and other cameo character also have repetitive side quest which can lead to learning new recipes and additional scenes that usually gets you an achievement.

Unlike previous Atelier titles where crafting was used as a progression in gameplay, Atelier Shallie lacks crafting for story progression. Chapter completion for Atelier Shallie has taken a completely different turn for a number of reasons. One notable change was the lack of days tracked. Previous titles tracked how many days would pass when traveling on the map or crafting. Not tracking your days has given a more relaxed vibe in Atelier Shallie, giving you more freedom to explore and level up your alchemy. Although you are not tracked by time, you should try to keep your character happiness level high by completing life skills. In the menu and in the top left corner you have a new introduction to what is called a life task. Completing life tasks consist of achieving short and long term goals. These goals can vary from crafting certain items, exploring different maps, completing quest and more. Having a high level of happiness boost your movement speed and gathering. So although there is no time limit, it is your best interest to keep yourself happy.

Atelier Shallie couldn't be any more adorable with its colorful cast of characters and beautiful cell shaded watercolor like environments. Improvements to the game are minor but highly noticeable. Atelier Shallie is a more relaxed style of gameplay. This allows for more opportunity to delve into alchemy and exploration without the constraints of time. The story starts off fairly bland and the exaggerated reaction of the characters "hey look there's two Shallies," gets a little overworked. The story gradually picks up pace and there is an interest in knowing the Dusk and how it's affecting the region. Unfortunately, there are some unanswered questions about the Dusk and a few characters remain a mystery – Linca and Keithgriff primarily. Despite some mysterious plot holes, Atelier Shallie: Alchemists of the Dusk Sea was upbeat with its whimsical characters, engaging battles and emotional storytelling.