

Return to PopoloCrois: A Story of Seasons Fairytale

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Pietro returns again to an exciting agrarian adventure in Return to PopoloCrois: A Story of Seasons Fairytale. PopoloCrois has merged itself with Story of Seasons, which was formerly known as Harvest Moon. PopoloCrois has been an ongoing series in Japan. Starting as a manga in 1984 and then releasing as a video game for the PlayStation in 1996. North America and Europe wouldn't see their first release until 2005 on the PSP.

The adventure starts off in the town of PopoloCrois, where you play as prince Pietro, a 13 year-old, pure-hearted boy who has already saved PopoloCrois from evil. Unfortunately, peace doesn't last forever as evil once again creeps back into the town of PopoloCrois. This time the soil becomes tainted and no growth can come from the land. Inquisitive Pietro gets involved and unfortunately Pietro is separated from his town, family and friends and ends up traveling to the world of Galariland. A turn of events will lead you to a new farm and friends, where you will travel to different villages and towns, cleansing Galariland from the black tainted soil. New characters are introduced throughout the story along with the original cast from PopoloCrois. Each character has their own distinct characteristics, accompanied by great voice acting which makes cut scenes enjoyable to watch. Cleansing farmlands in Galariland will grant you access to new farmlands, seeds and animals. Story progression is slow, repetitive and predictable. You can break up that monotony by using fairy dust to instantly zapp yourself to any farm to grow more crops, tend to animals or craft items. You can also to back to any town or village to take on quest from villagers.

Unlocking the farms advances you in the story, however, farming on the land doesn't. You could complete the entire game without having to do anything on your farm. "So what's the point?" you ask. This is where the mechanics from Story of the Seasons start to reflect in the gameplay. Crops that you grow can be sold for money with the use of your shipment box at your farm or selling them to Nora — an NPC living in Lampling village. There are several options for you to make money, however I used none of these options because there was plenty of money to be made from fights and looting chest. Crops and produce you receive can also be synthesized into items such as weapons, armor and food that you can use in or outside of battle. You can even create paint to redo to look of the roofs at your farm. There is a long list of quest that you can complete. The rewards are meager at first but certainly become worth your while when quest give you rare items and equipment as a completion reward. The most notable mechanic that transferred over from Story of the Seasons are the infamous women you can marry. Marriage is not available in this game for two reasons. One, Pietro is only 13 years-old and second he only really has love for Narcia — a character who was in the original PopoloCrois. However, befriending one of the girls does grant you access to quest that helps you upgrade your tools, so still make sure to give them gifts. Mechanics that Return to PopoloCrois has excluded from Story of the Season are not having fatigue, not having a bedtime and no winters, although it would have been nice see the seasons change.

Return to PopoloCrois has some interesting game mode options. There are three different voiceover audios you can select and change at any time, English and two different Japanese audios. You can play this game on three different difficulty modes and encounter modes. Difficulties range from seedling, prince and king (easy, intermediate and hard) and your encounters low, medium and high. No matter what difficulty you set it on the game is pretty easy. Most of the spells haven't changed from PopoloCrois on the PSP. One of its newest spells are joint spells. Depending who is in your party certain joint spells can be used in battle. You probably won't be using too many spells or doing anything in battle since fights are too easy in this game. They were so easy I left this game on auto battles for nearly 90 percent of the gameplay, those battles include boss fights. Auto battles in this game don't behave like other games. You won't be hitting auto battle every time it loops around to your main characters turn.

All of your characters will automatically start fighting and will keep fighting until the battle is over. The A.I. is fairly good if you consider that your characters will use heal spell if someone is low or use an AOE spell if there are two or more monsters on the field. There are only two cases where I took auto battle off. First removed auto battle if your character gets inflicted with confuse status and if you think the fight will last more than two turns. Status effects are removed from your character at the end of every fight. The only other instance where you should not have auto battle is when you are going up the last couple of bosses. Whether you fight all of your easy battle or leave it up to auto mode chances are you will feel bored and disconnected from fights.

Overall it is a kid-friendly game that is easy enough for a child to play however could potentially bore adults. The story stays on a steady and predictable path but can be broken up if you take the time to go back to the villages and the farmlands. Return to PopoloCrois: A Story of Seasons Fairytale has something for the returning PopoloCrois or Story of the Seasons fan. For the PopoloCrois fan it brings on new and exciting characters as well as reunite you with the old cast. For the Story of the Seasons fan (Harvest Moon) the mechanics are lightly brought back. Whether you are new to either one of the series or it is your first time, Return to PopoloCrois: A Story of Seasons Fairytale is a perfect marriage of both series put together that all ages can enjoy.