

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Octopath Traveler
Platform: Nintendo Switch
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Developer: Square Enix, Division 11, Acquire
Publisher: Nintendo (Square Enix in Japan)
Scenario Writer: Kakunoshin Futsuzawa

Overview

Octopath Traveler is a turn-based JRPG that follows eight different protagonists, each with their own self-contained narrative. The game takes place in a medieval European fantasy-like realm, with each of the characters setting off on a journey therein. All eight protagonists have different purposes, but they each have a personal reason for which they must complete their quest. Some seek revenge, while others work to provide salvation to all those that their hands may reach. Though their paths differ drastically, it is apparent that they the characters are kindred spirits; all eight travelers share the fate of overcoming some sort of heartfelt discord.

Characters

Octopath traveler has a rich cast, and a whole slew of characters for the player to interact with. Each traveler's tale has its own antagonists and supporting cast members, detailed below.

Shared Characters

- **Graham Crossford** — Graham was a kindhearted apothecary that lost his wife to a disease he found himself unable to cure. He went on a journey after her death, curing those he came across of their ailments without asking for much in the way of payment. He resonated especially well with a young boy named Alfyn, who happened to contract the same fatal disease as his wife. Later on in life, Graham was manipulated by Lyblac. She lured him to the Gate of Finis and attempted to make him Galdera's vessel. However, he resisted and instead became the red-eyed beast that served as the primary antagonist in H'annit's tale.

- **Galdera** — Galdera is the dark god, the thirteenth god that was banished by and sealed. He is the story's overarching antagonist, but very little is known about him. He is, however, portrayed in a negative light, as many of the antagonists are proven to be connected to him in one way or another. His powers are sinister and often result in the creation of grotesque-looking characters and creatures.
- **Lyblac** — Lyblac is described as the daughter of the dark god and is the primary manipulator responsible for most of the story's events. She is cold hearted, and willing to go to any and all lengths in order to accomplish her goal.

Characters from Ophilia's Tale

- **Ophilia Clement** — Ophilia is the player's traditional multi-target healer. As the archetypal cleric, Ophilia is kind. She is often seen helping all those that her hands can reach, regardless of their intentions. She is seen assisting children throughout her journey and guiding those in times of need. Ophilia's journey is a pilgrimage. She was selected as the Flamebearer, the cleric responsible for rekindling the sacred flame across several locations throughout the realm. She is driven both by her faith and by the compassion she feels for her father and sister.
- **Lianna** — Lianna is Ophilia's adopted sister. Though the two are not related by blood, they are still very close. The two are best friends. Lianna was originally supposed to be the next Flamebearer, but Ophilia took the responsibility from her because Lianna's father, Josef, fell sick and approached death as it came time for the ritual. Like Ophilia, Lianna is a devout believer, but she is also more emotional and more easily swayed by temptation.
- **Mattias** — Like many of the realm's other members, Mattias is religious. However, he worships the Galdera, the dark god, as opposed to any of the regular twelve. He is self-righteous and believes himself the individual destined to revive Galdera and restore him to his former glory. He is a skilled manipulator and remains in the shadows for the vast majority of the story. He is only exposed when Ophilia confronts him in the middle of a ritual at the very end of her story.

Characters from Cyrus' Tale

- **Cyrus Albright** — Cyrus is a scholar that functions as the player's magic caster. Though Cyrus has little malicious intent, he often is swept away by his enthusiasm and drive. His intelligence is only second to his curiosity, and as such, he is capable of scrutinizing most of the non-playable characters the player comes across. The sole exception to his intellect is his inability to see through romance. Though many members of the opposite gender find him attractive, Cyrus is entirely oblivious to their affections. Cyrus' journey is a quest driven by his thirst for knowledge. He spends it searching for a missing tome and deciphering the mysteries surrounding its disappearance. He wishes to retrieve it because he firmly believes that all knowledge should be shared.
- **Lucia** — Lucia is responsible for the majority of the events that occur in Cyrus' story. She is portrayed as a character that prefers to remain hidden from public scrutiny; she manipulates another into the headmaster's position instead of taking

it for herself. Like Cyrus, Lucia has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, but unlike him, she longs for immortality and self-benefit at any cost. She doesn't believe that knowledge should be propagated, and that only the elite should allowed access to it.

Characters from Tressa's Tale

- **Tressa Colziona** — Tressa is a young merchant and a character whose abilities are focused on providing support. As she grew up in a port town, Tressa is curious about the world around her and wishes to learn of the wonders that lay within it. She is hot-headed, stubborn, and quick to complain, but she is mature enough to acknowledge when she's lost. Despite her age, she's wise enough to know when she's in the right, and continues trudging forward despite what is said by those around her. Tressa initially sets out on her journey to see the world, but soon finds herself on a path of self-discovery.
- **Ali** — Like Tressa, Ali is a merchant that detached himself from his family and set off on a journey. He has a way with words, and is much better than her at advertising his products. He is extremely proud of his father even though he was conned by a friend and forced to bear the burden of a heavy debt. He is quick to lose his temper and will thoughtlessly challenge those in positions of power if angered.
- **Leon Bastralle** — Leon is one of the individuals Tressa looks up to the most. He was formerly a cold-hearted pirate, but developed into a kind-hearted merchant after losing his best friend and greatest rival in a competition. He has explored the world and gathered treasures from all throughout the realm. Leon is calm and bold; he does not falter even when old wounds are brought back up to the surface. He is also extremely difficult to tempt, as, according to him, he has already found his greatest treasure: his deceased friend's ship.
- **Noa** — A young girl with a frail body that yearns for adventure and wishes to see the outside world. She is the girl that Tressa passes her diary onto at the end of the story. She is the daughter of an extremely rich merchant, and the reason for which the Merchants' Fair is held.

Characters from Olberic's Tale

- **Olberic Eisenberg** — Olberic is a warrior, one that served as a renowned knight for the fallen kingdom of Hornburg. Though once hailed as the unbending blade, Olberic retired to the countryside after failing to protect his king from mortal harm. Olberic is a honorable fighter. He respects his fellow warriors and often chooses to spare them if he has the option. He enjoys dueling, but not to the death. He loves to see the young lads around him grow and blossom into brilliant fighters. That said, Olberic is lost. He does not see any reason to swing his blade as he no longer has a master to serve. He sets out on his journey because he catches wind of a familiar name, the name of the friend that betrayed his country that slew his king. Olberic is driven by the desire to uncover the truth behind the incident.

- **Erhardt** — Erhardt is one of Olberic’s best friends and a former knight that worked with him under the king’s direct employ. Unlike Olberic, Erhardt’s past was tragic. As a child, he was brainwashed by a man named Werner and convinced that he needed to slay the king in order to avenge his village. Due to his honorable nature, the act left Erhardt scarred and wishing for a chance to redeem himself and make up for his crimes.
- **Werner** — Werner is one of Lyblac’s lackeys and the man responsible for the collapse of the kingdom Olberic served. He is cruel, cunning, and confident. He enjoys basking in the suffering of others. After toppling Olberic’s kingdom, he found himself ruling over a small town with an iron fist. He enjoys finding excuses to convict others of crimes and then publicly burning them at stake to demonstrate his power over his citizens.

Characters from Primrose’s Tale

- **Primrose Azelhart** — Primrose is specialized in buffing her allies. She was once a noble, but her father was assassinated, and her household destroyed overnight. She was forced to flee and become naught more than a nameless dancer. Witnessing her father’s death left her scarred. The incident led her to hide the her true self behind a mask of cold-hearted composure. Primrose’s journey is one of vengeance. She is driven solely by her urge to slay the three men she saw murder her father in her childhood.
- **Simeon** — Simeon is a man obsessed with tragedy. He finds beauty in the sacrifice of others and the loss of both love and life. He sees no problem in manipulating the fates of others for his own benefit. He is ruthless, cunning, and will stop at nothing to craft the stories he wishes to see.

Characters from Alfyn’s Tale

- **Alfyn Greengrass** — Alfyn is the party’s single target healer. He is bright, innocent, and strives to help everyone he can. In his youth, Alfyn’s life was saved by Graham Crossford, a traveling apothecary. Though the disease he was stricken with required a rare, expensive medicine, Graham left without charging him a dime. Inspired by the man’s actions, Alfyn sought the apothecary’s path and studied as hard as he could to improve his skill so that he too could one day do for others what the man had done for him. Alfyn sets out on his journey because he believes that he is ready, and that it is time for him to save as many people as he can extend his hand to. He is driven entirely by his goodwill and his admiration for the man that rescued him when he needed it most.
- **Ogen** — Like Alfyn, Ogen is a traveling apothecary. However, he prefers to choose his patients as opposed to helping everyone he can indiscriminately. He is unforgiving, harsh, and sees no problem with refusing a dying man service simply because he knows the man is a criminal. Ogen is extremely stubborn, and refuses to treat even himself because he knows that he too is guilty of taking the lives of others.

Characters from Therion's Tale

- **Therion** — Therion is a the party's thief. He is dark, cynical, and proud of his skills. He name is throughout the realm despite there existing very little knowledge of his appearance. As he was once betrayed by his most trusted companion, he finds it difficult to open up to others. Therion's journey is one of self-satisfaction. He spends it regaining his pride, which had been destroyed by an old butler that managed to catch him in the middle of robbery and stop him dead in his tracks.
- **Cordelia Ravus** — Cordelia is the mistress of bolderfall's ruling household. She was once betrayed in the past and as a result, had closed her heart off to those around her. But meeting Heathcote, her butler, had caused her to once again come to realize that there was good in both the world and the hearts of men. She is kind and trusting. She sees no issue with offering her aid to those suffering from their inner turmoil.
- **Heathcote** — Heathcote is an old butler serving the Ravus household. He is a skilled thief that retired from the trade in order to serve the daughter of a man that had bested him at the peak of his career. He is cunning, able to injure Therion's pride by slipping a Fool's Bangle onto his wrist mid-combat. Though retired, he bears extensive, up to date information regarding the underworld and its affairs.
- **Darius** — Therion's former partner. Darius betrayed Therion and attempted to kill him by throwing him off the side of a cliff. Darius does not allow himself to fully trust anyone, but believes that his lackeys will continue serving him because they idolize him.

Characters from H'annit's Tale

- **H'annit** — H'annit is a proud hunter and one of the party's heaviest damage dealers. Though she apprenticed under the village's best, she knows no arrogance. Unlike her master, she isn't much of a braggart, nor is she particularly keen on washing her woes away with alcohol. In fact, H'annit is extremely responsible and level headed. She only loses her cool when her master's wolf companion returns from a hunt to report that he could not. Knowing that her master's peril, H'annit sets out on a journey in order to rescue him and return him home.
- **Z'aanta** — Z'aanta is H'annit's master, and the man commonly known as the village's best hunter. His skills are acknowledged by all sorts of different organisations, and he is often hired to eliminate what the holy knights cannot. Though he is both kind and wise, he also likes bragging about his accomplishments, drinking, and gambling to his heart's content. Unlike his apprentice, he's not very responsible. She likely learned what not to do by observing him as an example.
- **Redeye** — The redeye is the creature that Z'aanta failed to defeat. It is actually Graham Crossford, or at least what was left of him after he was nearly turned into Galdera's vessel. The redeye cannot control itself. It is violent and rampages throughout the realm, attacking everything it comes across indiscriminately.

Breakdown

Octopath Traveler's story can be thought of as nine parts of a whole. Each character must go through their individual stories before joining together to solve the overarching plot. Each of these sections is described and analyzed below.

Ophilia's Story

Ophilia's story begins in the town of Flamesgrace, where she speaks to her sister, Lianna, about the pilgrimage that must soon be conducted. Ophilia congratulates Lianna, and the two engage in a bit of banter that shows off their relationship. Unlike many of the other storylines, Ophilia's starts slow, and not much happens until the archbishop is stricken with illness. This slow ramp-up allows the player to understand the deep friendship between the two sisters and slowly works the player into the game's setting by introducing key elements one at a time. However, it is not without its faults. The dialogue is bland, and the player is forced to endure an arduous lull before finally being pulled into the action. While this is fairly typical and not too far out the norm given that the story engages the player through rising action, it feels almost too slow. The banter between sisters feels unreflective of their actual personalities, and all in all, is disinteresting. It makes them both almost appear one dimensional.

The foreshadowing that occurs in the prologue is, for the most part, poor, there is no indication that the devout Lianna would attempt to sacrifice the sacred flame to save her father's life, especially given that her very first line features her greeting her sister with a prayer. However, the developers did do an excellent job by having Mattias, the primary antagonist, introduce himself by exiting the dark shadow of a pillar. Though the scene moves quickly and immediately impresses upon the player that he is merely a kind merchant, the initial scene and impression the player gets leaves a well-placed sinister impression.

Ophilia's story improves drastically after the initial lull. She shows her kindness by taking over Lianna's role once their father falls sick, and the story ramps up from there. The writers do an excellent job of maintaining rising action while keeping Ophilia's personality consistent. She journeys across the realm, rekindling the sacred flame and solving any issues she comes across with her kindness. Her journey is interrupted when her sister meets her along the way. Lianna informs Ophilia of their father's death before drugging her and stealing the sacred flame for the sake of a "saviour." Ophilia gives chase, only to discover that the "saviour" was in fact Mattias, who the player encounters and speaks to several times along their journey. Mattias' lines begin rather subtly, but slowly work to give the player a greater sense of the fact that he is in fact the antagonist. The foreshadowing surrounding Mattias is done perfectly throughout the story, all the way up until the end.

Ophilia barges in on Mattias as he and Lianna ready themselves to conduct a ritual to revive the thirteenth god, the unholy being the sacred flame existed to seal. Ophilia convinces Lianna to cease her actions by reminding her of their fathers words before confront Mattias, defeating him in battle, and then accompanying her sister back home.

Lianna's character is portrayed excellently throughout the latter half of the story. She is shown as a deep character that gives in the power of the dark out of emotional turmoil, but still possesses a good heart and a solid sense of morality. Though she is not the protagonist, the player can see her character grow as she is influenced by her surroundings.

Mattias and Ophilia, on the other hand, unfortunately both remain one dimensional. As the villain, Mattias is only ever shown to be a cocky, self-righteous man obsessed with the god of darkness. Though it is made clear that he is a competent wire puller, his genius is never really displayed to the player, and instead left to the player's imagination. Unfortunately, the bland portrayal of his character mitigates the player's attempt to imagine him as anything more than a typical, boring antagonist.

Likewise, Ophilia remains the typical JRPG protagonist that simply does whatever is the right thing to do. She one dimensionally interacts with all the children she comes across and attempts to solve their problems almost as if it were a mechanical response. She is barely affected by the news of her father's death, and her response to her sister's turmoil is simply to repeat his teachings because she is unable to come up with anything of her own. Her unique gameplay mechanic, the guide feature, is never used for a heart to heart conversation, nor does it ever show off another side of her character. It is merely used to transport NPCs from one location to the next. As a main character, she is both uninteractive and bland.

Cyrus' Story

Cyrus' tale has one of the more interesting prologues. He is introduced as a prestigious teacher in charge of the princess' education. After teaching his classes, he moves onto the library and discovers that there has recently been an incident in which several books had gone missing. Cyrus, being an inquisitive mind, was unable to let his curiosity stand, so he began investigating the case, only to find that one of his colleagues was responsible for stealing the books and selling them to spin a profit. After making his report, Cyrus is summoned to the headmaster's office. The player enters with a sense of expectation; they feel as if they deserve a reward for their task, but the plot thickens. Cyrus is accused of entering into a relationship with the princess and expelled from the academy. He takes this opportunity to search for another missing book by the name "From the Far Reaches of Hell." The book disappeared from the library fifteen years prior, and had been missing ever since. As Cyrus leaves town, he is chased down by one of his female students, who admits that she was jealous of the princess because of how much attention Cyrus paid to her, and that she was the reason Cyrus had been removed from his position. Failing to grasp her profession of love, Cyrus informs her that he wished to go on a journey in the first place, as he was curious about the book's whereabouts.

Cyrus uses his brilliant mind to track down clues about the book. Along the way, he began to understand its sinister nature and the sort of dark magic it contained. After finding a poorly transcribed copy of the book, Cyrus comes across the headmaster's assistant, who claims that the headmaster is in possession of the book and up to no good. Cyrus invades the headmaster's manor, only to find that himself trapped in one of the

headmaster's schemes. After breaking free and confronting the headmaster, Cyrus realizes that the headmaster was just Lucia's puppet, and that she was the mastermind all along. He then pursues her and hunts her down, discovering many a fact about the Gate of Finis and the dark god along the way.

Although the dense protagonist is a common Japanese trope, the application of it in Cyrus is interesting. He is portrayed as a genius with weaknesses. The card is played several times throughout Cyrus' story, but it doesn't get old despite the stark contrast with his deductive personality. In fact, it is through this repetition that the player comes to accept it as a part of his nature. Cyrus' intellect is put on display throughout much of the rest of the game. For example, he has a mechanic in which he is able to discern one of a monster's weaknesses simply by looking at it. He also constantly solves all sorts of mysteries and puts various distinct facts together to create deductions for the player. Unfortunately, showing off Cyrus' brain power is an aspect of the narrative that fails to mesh with the game's mechanics. The game tasks the players with these deductions by presenting them several facts and then asking them to reiterate them a mere moment or two later. It is understandable that the mechanic was not heavily developed as the game itself isn't about unravelling mysteries, but the presentation of the mechanic just makes it seem like Cyrus is always stating the obvious. The game would have benefited more with Cyrus coming to conclusions without the player's interaction.

The story elements of Cyrus' narrative are well put together. The foreshadowing exists and is well done through the character sprites and the dialogue. The headmaster has glowing red eyes and is made to seem different from the rest of the cast from the very start; the player is not surprised to discover that he was in fact a creature of some sinister nature. Likewise, Cyrus' inability to understand the emotions of women make it such that it makes sense for him to be deceived by Lucia. The player is given the impression that it simply couldn't be helped given the nature of his personality. Most interesting of all is Cyrus' take on morality. Although he looks down on unjust acts, like murdering civilians for one's own benefit, he believes that the knowledge itself is innocent, and that whether or not it is good or evil is entirely up to the manner in which it is used. His lines on the matter are thought provoking, and encourage player to form their own opinion as opposed to forcing justice down the player's throat as is often done in the JRPG genre. From a narrative standpoint, Cyrus' plot and character were both incredibly well written and executed.

Tressa's Story

Unlike many of the other characters, Tressa's journey isn't about some sort of epic quest in which she must achieve a specific goal, but rather, is a story of coincidence and self-discovery. She begins her journey in Rippletide, where her family owns a sizable business. A group of pirates attacks and causes her to lose a whole bunch of cargo, so she concocts a plan to retrieve the merchandise. She nearly succeeds, but fails at the very end, only to be helped by Leon Bastralle, a world renown pirate turned merchant. He rewards her for her bravery by granting her one of his treasures. Her senses as a merchant allow her to detect the most valuable, but she instead picks a diary, a book Leon himself hadn't even been aware of it. The diary, Graham Crossford's diary, informs her of his

adventures and the many journeys that he'd set out on in his time. Enamored, Tressa decides to do the same and set out on a journey of her own so that she could grow and become an even better merchant than she already was.

Her first stop is a mining town. There, she meets a fellow merchant by the name of Ali. Ali challenges Tressa to a sales contest and trumps her to show her that she has yet to become a full-fledged merchant. After the competition, the local lord shows up begins asking for unreasonable taxes. Ali rebels and claims that his prices are unjust, only to be locked up. Tressa decides that she can't leave him alone, so she invades the lord's manner, defeats him, and frees Ali from his chains and the town from its overbearing, unreasonable ruler. Ali thanks Tressa and informs her of the Merchants' Fair, an event where only the best gather. He challenges her to find herself a treasure so that the two could compete once more. She accepts and continues her journey in search of a suitable prize. This push from a friend and rival is what causes Tressa's character to really begin to develop. She begins questioning what a treasure truly is, and why she picked Graham's journal over all else.

She soon finds herself once again face to face with Leon, but this time, she has a treasure map belonging to his deceased best friend. She offers him the map, but he backs down and tells her that it now belongs to her, and that he has no need for the jewel his best friend treasured. With his permission, Tressa retrieves it and heads to Grandport to participate in the Merchants' Fair. There, she meets Noa, a young girl that wishes for adventure but can't have it due to the frail nature of her body. It is through speaking to Noa that Tressa realizes that the real treasure she obtained wasn't the shiny gem that she'd retrieved, but her adventure itself and the diary that served as its impetus. The story ends when Tressa passes her diary onto Noa and urges her to go on an adventure of her own.

Tressa's story is, at first glance, the blandest of the bunch. Unlike the other characters, she doesn't have any particular destination in mind, she effectively just wanders around until things happen around her. Most of the events that happen in her story are spurred on by meeting other characters. And, though she does get into a minor scuffle with the Obsidians, the organisation that assassinated Primrose's father, there aren't really any antagonists along the way. There is very minimal foreshadowing because of how whimsical the plot seems as a whole, but nonetheless, Tressa's narrative is outstanding.

It subverts from the tropes typically presented in Japanese RPGs and steers far away from the everyday typical plot lines. It doesn't require the player to good, seek vengeance, or do as would a hero. Yet, it manages to present a cohesive narrative that can only be described as an adventure. It is precisely the lack of an initial end goal that makes wandering the realm as Tressa so interesting, rewarding and engaging. Moreover, Tressa's game mechanics synergize very well with her character. As a merchant, she is able to purchase items off of every interactable NPC in the game. Doing so grants her access to tidbits of information that no other character can glean, which not only depends the world's lore, but also is precisely reflective of what it means to be a merchant in the medieval era.

Unfortunately, Tressa's story was, while an excellent subversion, still shy of perfect. The events that took place in her final chapter almost seemed random. Her diary is stolen by the chapter's final boss, and she is forced to retrieve it, and while the player is given several hints as to the boss' purposes, it is never explicitly stated and left entirely to the player's imagination. It is only made clear after the player reaches the ninth storyline, and only if they choose to read the extra tidbit of the developers chose to add at the end of one of the boss battles therein.

Olberic's Story

Olberic's story begins a remote village in the mountains. He begins his day like any other and trains with several of the village's young lads and instructs them on the art of swordplay. Suddenly, he catches wind of the fact that one of the village's boys had been kidnapped by bandits, so he sets out to rescue him. At the bandit's hideout, he encounters a powerful blade master that recognizes him as Sir Olberic Eisenberg, the Unbending Blade of Hornburg. The man makes mention of Erhardt, Olberic's brother in arms, his equal in combat, and the traitor that slew their king. Olberic demands to know more, so he promises the bandit's their lives in exchange for information about Erhardt. After hearing it, he sets out on a journey for Victor's Hollow, the place Erhardt's apprentice had apparently taken up residence. Olberic finds Erhardt's apprentice and earns the right to speak to him by winning through a tournament. The apprentice informs Olberic that Erhardt was last spotted in the desert, and so, Olberic continued to follow the trail, all while searching for a reason to swing his blade yet again.

The former knight arrives in the town that his old friend was last spotted in, only to hear that Erhardt was known as a local hero. He fought off the lizardmen attacking the town and ensured that it remained a safe place to live. Olberic confronts Erhardt and hears out his reasons. He acknowledges them, but challenges Erhardt to cross blades with him regardless the moment they resolve the lizardman problem. The player is left in suspense after proving victorious from the duel, as Olberic leaves the cave alone. A few moments later, Erhardt emerges and speaks a few lines to confirm that the two had, through battle, come to understand one another and that they had once again become the best of friends.

Olberic then sets out to chase down Werner, the man that had manipulated Erhardt and brainwashed him into slaying the very king he served. Olberic finds that Werner has taken over a town, and rules over it with an iron fist. He joins a rebellion, and with Erhardt's help, manages to overthrow Werner and bring him to justice. It is only then that Olberic reaffirms the purpose for which he swings his sword and declares his beliefs.

Olberic's story is very interesting to analyze. Like Tressa's, his story subverts several tropes, but to a much lesser degree. In modern Japanese literature, the typical unfortunate protagonist is either extremely kind and forgiving or unreasonably violent and unforgiving. Though Oberlic's backstory is tragic, he follows neither of these two typical patterns of behaviour. He does not go mad for his revenge, nor is he so kind as to be a pushover that does whatever he is told to. The best way to summarize Olberic's personality is to call him reasonable but self-centered. Though he has lost his convictions,

he continues pushing forward and attempts to face life head on. His character isn't needlessly dramatic, nor is it unreasonable or unrealistically exaggerated. He keeps a level head and acts only for his purposes. He doesn't possess a particularly strong sense of justice; he only subdues Werner for his own sake. Likewise, Erhardt is also an interesting character. He is shown to be honourable despite his remorse and atoning for his sins in the only way he knows how. Both of these characters are clearly deep and well thought out.

Werner, however, is the opposite. He is a one-dimensional villain introduced only at the end to provide Erhardt justification. He exists only so that the player may see Erhardt in a more positive light. Without Werner, it would be much more difficult for players to think Erhardt a victim, and potentially suspect him to be a manipulator that played off Olberic's accusations to save his own skin. Werner could have been expanded on much more if the story hadn't been limited to just four chapters; his introduction was rushed, and the player was not told much about his character besides the fact that he worked with Lyblac.

While Oberlic is a great character, his gameplay mechanic unfortunately breaks immersion. Olberic is able to challenge any NPC that the player can interact with to a duel, thereby knocking them out. This allows the player to enter areas that they weren't previously able to. These areas are typically the houses of NPCs. Unfortunately, this makes it seem as if the player is merely breaking and entering as opposed to challenging an opponent to an honourable battle. The even more confusing aspect is that Olberic always retains a single hit point after losing a duel, whereas his opponent will always end up unconscious if he defeats them. This disparity makes it feel as if Olberic's duels are sinister attempts for him to achieve self-satisfaction, which, according to the lore, is not the case at all.

Moreover, it is quite odd that Olberic starts at level 1 given his history as one of his kingdom's strongest knight's. It is also jarring that characters will refuse duels with him if he is not high enough level given his reputation.

Primrose's Story

Primrose is the heir to the Azelhart household, one of the realm's most powerful noble houses. Three men murdered her father when she was just a child, so she escaped to sunshade, where she became a dancer. She spent several years in hiding, lurking about and searching for clues so that she could avenge her father's murder. Upon finally finding the clue she was looking for, she abandoned her work, killed the employer that had been mistreating her for the past several years, and chased the murderers down.

She killed the first with ease, but when slaying the second, discovered that the third was in fact Simeon, the man that had romanced her in her childhood. She discovered that he had set the whole scenario up, both to silence her father, and to create a beautiful tragedy for his own sake. Realizing that, Primrose stormed his theatre in order to achieve her vengeance. But Simeon was prepared. He attempted to sway her emotionally through a play that reflected both on their romantic relationship and the longing Primrose felt for

her father. But, in spite of his scheme, she resisted his advances and slayed him, avenging her father once and for all.

Primrose's story is one of the most interesting in Octopath Traveler. Her emotions are clear as day; the player is able to see her struggle with them throughout her journey as she encounters old acquaintances left and right. The resolve she begins with proves brittle as subject to the erosion from her surroundings. And though her passion never fades, it also never feels too forced. Unlike the character, however, the plot does feel rather constrained. Like many of the others, Primrose's story suffers from being a mere four chapters long. The abruptness of the ending leaves the player thirsting for more and wondering about the exact events that had transpired. The player is brought to her father's mansion after the ending sequence, but it is unclear whether or not Primrose had taken on her father's former position, or merely decided to pay it a visit. There is nothing wrong with a vague ending, but there is something wrong with an ending that is too vague, and Primrose's is exactly that. It almost seems to the player that the story is incomplete, and that they should search for more, but there is nothing to be found outside a bit of lore on Simeon and his motives.

Another issue with Primrose's story is that the events happen too suddenly. Simeon effectively comes out of left field; the player has no of his relation to primrose until the very same chapter that he is unveiled as the mastermind behind her father's death. Earlier interaction with Simeon could have allowed the developers to not only foreshadow his actions, but also lead the player to trust him, which in turn allows the player to feel the same sense of betrayal as Primrose once he unveils his identity, therefore better aligning the player's motives with that of their in-game avatar.

Alfyn's Story

Alfyn's story begins in the town of Clearbrook. His friend's sister comes down with an illness, and he must retrieve an item from a powerful monster in order to cure it. After completing this task, Alfyn realizes that it's time to set out on a journey. He becomes a travelling apothecary and helps everyone he comes across as Graham Crossford had once done for him. Along his journey, he comes across two other travelling apothecaries. The former is a woman that plans to force people to pay her for artificial illnesses that she creates. Alfyn easily thwarts her efforts and rescues a town from her grasp.

The second, Ogen, is more skilled than Alfyn, but operates off of different principles. Unlike Alfyn, Ogen chooses his patients and only treats those he wishes to. Alfyn asks Ogen why he refused a certain patient, and Ogen informs Alfyn that the man was clearly a criminal. Alfyn confronts the man, who claims that he'll change his ways, so Alfyn heals him and saves him. The next day, the very man Alfyn saves captures a child and demands a ransom in exchange for his life, so Alfyn once again confronts him, and this time, kills the man he saved with his own two hands.

Alfyn leaves town and begins travelling again, only to encounter Ogen upon entering a town affected by the plague. He and Ogen work together in order to cure the patients, but he discovers that Ogen himself is also sick. Ogen refuses treatment and explains to Alfyn

that he doesn't treat criminals. He explains that his wife was killed by a criminal he treated, and that he later tracked the man down and mutilated him. He testifies that he doesn't deserve treatment, but Alfyn ignores him and treats him regardless. The two then discuss their morals and mention their mutual respect for one another before setting off and going their separate ways.

Though Alfyn's story is like Tressa's in the sense that it is atypical of the JRPG genre, it is much less endearing and worthy of praise. Though Alfyn is directly impactful and helps many a person on his journey, it feels aimless and unimpressive. He wanders around without purpose and acts as per his archetype. His character does grow, but only by the slightest bit. All that changes is that he comes to acknowledge Ogen's way of life as opposed to firmly denying it. All in all, both Alfyn and his story come off as both bland and disinteresting.

Therion's Story

Therion's story begins when he hears rumors of the Ravus manor and its treasures. Trusting in his skills as a master thief, he sneaks inside, only to be caught red-handed by a butler named Heathcote. Therion manages to defeat Heathcote in combat, but the butler slips a Fool's Bangle onto Therion's wrist before admitting his loss. Heathcote proclaims that he will not remove the bangle unless Therion assists him in retrieving three of the four dragonstones, to which Therion reluctantly agrees. Cordelia, the lady of the house, joins the conversation and thanks Therion, but the thief ends up brushing her off and stating that he is only helping her to uphold his end of the deal.

Therion steals the first dragonstone with ease, and returns to ask Heathcote for additional information. Heathcote informs Therion that the next will have to be stolen from an underground black market auction. Therion agrees and sneaks into the auction, only to see the stone pillaged by Darius, Therion's former partner in crime. Therion has a flashback to when Darius betrayed him and attempted to kill him as he chases after Darius and attempts to retrieve the dragonstone. However, Darius manages to get away by sacrificing one of his minions.

Therion returns to the Ravus Manor empty handed and explains the situation to Heathcote, who directs him toward Darius' base. Cordelia attempts to speak to Therion, but he once again rejects her and claims that she knows not his pain. However, she insists otherwise and informs him that she too was once betrayed. This causes Therion to sympathize with her, but he ultimately ends up putting up a front and going on his way. Therion then invades Darius' base, defeats him, and takes back the dragonstones. It is revealed after Therion returns that Heathcote had long unlocked his Fool's Bangle, and that he was wearing it until he finished the task that was given to him. He then says goodbye and parts with Cordelia and Heathcote on a more amicable note. He puts on a front the whole time, but it is portrayed in such a way that it is easy for the player to see through.

All in all, Therion's story is rather interesting. It can be described as a story in which he relearns what it means to place his faith in others. Therion is, as far as narrative goes, a

fairly consistent character. His beliefs don't change without reason, and he is very clearly influenced by those around him; seeing Darius again clearly shook him up. However, the games mechanics don't meld particularly well with his character. The lore describes Therion as a master thief, but he starts at level 1 like all the other characters. Since his steal skill scales with his level, he only has a 3% chance of stealing most of the items at the start of the game despite his reputation and apparent skill level.

But to reiterate, the narrative itself is excellent. It leverages Therion's personality, which is otherwise like that of an angsty teenager, to express his growth. The developers do an excellent game of showing his growth through his actions rather than telling it to the player through dialogue. Therion's changes are indeed apparent, but many of them are subtle and it is up to the player to notice the precise details.

H'annit's Story

H'annit's story begins one year prior to when the player is given control. Z'aanta, her master, sets out on a journey to slay a fearsome beast known as the Redeye that the knights find themselves unable to handle. He informs H'annit that he will return once he completes his task, but he never does. A year later, his wolf companion returns to the town alone. She realizes that her master is in trouble and thus sets out a journey to find him. She ventures all over the realm only to find her master petrified, with nothing more for her but a note stuck to a tree by his side. It claimed that he was bested by the beast's ability to petrify its foes. H'annit immediately understands that she needs to save her master, so she seeks the aid of a seer who informs her that the only way to undo the beast's petrification is to defeat it. The seer has H'annit harvest an herb that would prevent her from being petrified by the beast in the exact same manner as her Master, testing her in the process by forcing her to combat a dragon. The hunter overcomes the quest, retrieves the herb, and then hunts down the Redeye with its assistance, freeing her master from its curse.

Unlike many of the other characters, H'annit's quest is straightforward. It loosely follows the archetypal hero's journey. H'annit begins her quest in her hometown, grows as she defeats many a powerful monster, and then returns home with her quest complete after growing and becoming a more powerful and experienced hunter. Her call to adventure is her the return of her master's wolf, and the supernatural aid she receives is the power of the seer. In this case, the seer trope is subverted; H'annit does not receive true supernatural guidance, but rather, the advice of a wise old woman whose seductive prowess is so logical and accurate, that all who know of her feats believe her to be a psychic. Although H'annit's journey is typical, it remains interesting due to its well executed nature. The story is short, but it does not seem forced. The events that occur flow naturally into one another, and the characters that appear are genuine and for the most part, rather believable.

However, like many other characters, H'annit fails to have her mechanics meld with her character. H'annit's unique action is to order her monsters to attack townsfolk. Though H'annit is a hunter, she is just and proud. Attacking the townsfolk with her monsters directly contrasts her personality.

In fact, the monster capture mechanic as a whole, while interesting, seems out of place. The game's lore is rather insistent of the fact that hunters have but a single creature as their companion. H'annit already has a snow leopard that fits that exact purpose, and this leopard can often be seen in many of H'annit's cutscenes. None of the creatures she captures show up at all in the overworld, nor does capturing a monster ever play a role in the story. All of the story-related monsters are uncapturable. H'annit's only option is to slay them. There is no mention of the hunters' ability to catch and temporarily tame an entourage of monsters anywhere outside the game's combat space. The rift between the narrative and the gameplay seems to indicate that the two were developed separately from one another and never truly integrated.

The Overarching Story

After completing all eight stories, the player is provided access to a ninth, final story involving all the characters. Unfortunately, this isn't a part of the main story, and players need to go out of their way to complete side quests in order to stumble upon it. However, this final story is still important to discuss because it brings all the characters together to fight the dark god as he is revived.

The players follow Lyblac to the Gate of Finis, where she sacrifices Kit and turns him into Galdera's vessel. The players must defeat every final story boss in any order they wish before facing Galdera in his two forms. The player must use all eight characters for the first time in the final boss battle, four for each of the two phases. Once the player defeats Galdera, peace is restored, and Kit is returned to his usual self.

This final part of the story is, unfortunately, lackluster. It is never explained to the player why they need to finish all eight main quests to unlock it, and likewise, there is no reason for the entire party to remain together after they have all completed their individual tasks. Yet, for some odd reason, all the party members are gathered and forced to assist each other in one final confrontation that adheres to the old JRPG archetype of saving the world, a theme that was never once mentioned or even touched on throughout the rest of the game.

The sudden development overwhelms the player and leaves them in a state of confused exasperation. Hints are strewn throughout the final chapters of each player's storyline, but the pacing is off, and thus, the player is not capable of anticipating that they will be drawn into what is effectively a gauntlet of bosses without any real prior setup. While this final fight is an interesting throwback to the JRPGs of old, it feels excessive, out of place, and forced. There is no sense of rising action, only a sudden ramp-up that the player from zero all the way through to one hundred in a matter of moments. The final sequence would have benefited greatly from more development time, specifically with a focus on its lore. The story would have been much more cohesive had there been a ramp up in which the player was slowly eased into the scenario as opposed to suddenly being led to the game's equivalent of hell.

Strongest Element

The best element of Octopath Traveler's narrative is undoubtedly the expression of its characters' emotions. The player accompanies the cast as they develop in response to the situations they're exposed to; the player witnesses the characters as they grow into more complete individuals and emerge from the solitary shells in which they began. The player sees Primrose struggle as she's torn apart by the affections she held for her lover and the hatred she felt for her father's murder. The player is exposed to Olberic's confusion as he searches through the darkness for a reason for which to swing his blade. The player is shown Tressa's emotions as she develops and comes to understand herself as she experiences an adventure for the first time. Almost every single member of the main cast is exposed to drastic emotional growth, and it is clearly expressed through the manner in which they carry themselves in the many cutscenes and dialogue sections the game presents.

Unsuccessful Element

Octopath Traveler's least successful element is the lack of interaction between the party's members. The player is given eight protagonists. They begin with one and can recruit all the others simply by speaking to them. However, these conversations are never detailed. The player is merely presented with the character's prologue and a quick overview of the character's backstory alongside a prompt asking them whether they would like to take the character along. It is never explained why the eight travelers choose to journey together as opposed to working alone or forming smaller groups. This aspect is especially jarring when it comes to Therion, as it is explicitly stated in the story that he prefers to work alone. There is some travel banter, but only after the characters have already set off.

It appears as if the developers wanted the players to leave the interactions between the characters to the players. To be fair, their method is acceptable. It is extremely time consuming to produce dialogue for every single possible party permutation given that the player may start however they wish. However, it leaves much to be desired as it deemphasizes the bonds shared by the party's members and leaves the player confused and desiring additional explanation.

Highlight

Octopath Traveler's highlight is undoubtedly the moment Tressa describes the diary she and Graham shared before passing it on to Noa. The moment serves as an expression of both the culmination of the emotions Tressa felt on her adventure and the sense of camaraderie she felt for the frail but adventurous young lady. Tressa sums up everything she felt with on her journey an emotion filled speech before finally passing offering the diary to her newfound friend and speaking words of encouragement to inspire in her the urge to follow her path. It serves as a perfect demonstration of the most successful element of the game narrative: the emotional depth with which it is written.

Critical Reception

IGN: Seth Macy - 9.3/10

Macy states that the characters and their stories aren't particularly original, but that they are well written and contained enough in the way of plot twists to keep him entertained. He claims that he was charmed by Therion's tale, and that had both the right tone and the substance necessary to deliver it. He claimed that the problem with Octopath Traveler's story was that it wasn't particularly tied together, and that each tale was self contained and unfortunately didn't overlap much with any of the others. He enjoyed interacting with the NPCs, but found himself craving for more plot because they appeared to lack depth many other games' side quests often had. [1]

Slant Magazine: Jed Pressgrove - 3/5

Pressgrove states that the world and story both unfortunately fall short of his expectations. He attests that the characters are interesting, but are strangely disconnected with one another and need to interact more often. He also claims that the game feels rather dreary due to the limited number of NPCs the player can interact with, and the lack of options in dialogue. [2]

Gamespot: Peter Brown - 8/10

Brown states that the game fails to weave the disparate stories together despite the interesting characters behind them. He claims that, while he enjoys the occasional bit of banter in which the party members converse with one another, it is too infrequent and inconsequential for him to think that any of it matters. However, he feels that the world makes up for this with the sheer amount of background information there is to discover with regards to each NPC. [3]

Lessons

- *Give the party a reason to form:* One of Octopath's biggest weaknesses was that the characters the player had access to had little relation to each other. From this, one can learn that it is important to ensure that the player's party has a purpose, and that there is at least some overlap between the characters' tales to attest that there really is a reason for the characters to associate themselves with each other.
- *Character growth is a key to success:* One of Octopath's greatest strengths and weaknesses was the growth in its characters. The differences between the changes in the game's protagonists are immediately apparent. Ophelia does not change, and therefore remains uninteresting and one dimensional, but Olberic, Primrose, and Therion do. These alterations to their characters allow the player to find them and their stories more interesting and engaging.
- *It is not necessary for a game to maintain the same narrative tone throughout:* The many different tones taken on by Octopath's story excelled at keeping the player engaged. Pieces of each story came in short chunks, so it was easy for players to move from a revenge-driven experience to a tale of self discovery in a matter of moments. The player did not need to shift to a different game after growing tired of a specific character archetype.
- *Sync gameplay mechanics with narrative:* One of Octopath Traveler's weakest aspects was that its narrative and its game mechanics often failed to mesh. At low levels, Olberic considered too weak for others to accept his challenges despite his

reputation and all the glory it clearly brings with it. Likewise, Therion is effectively incapable of stealing even common items from certain individuals despite being a renowned master thief. H'annit, despite being a proud hunter, can sic her captured animals on civilians for no apparent reason. Although these aspects of the game are interesting, they are also jarring because they are not reflected in the game's narrative.

Summation

Octopath Traveler inherits much from the many SNES era predecessors that it pays homage to and improves on them by subverting their tropes in order to present players with interesting, engaging experiences. It leverages the power of tone shifts in order to express eight unique stories in within a single realm, and successfully delivers its narrative by pulling players in with an evolving cast. The game is, without a doubt, to be praised for its ambitious, multifaceted approach to storytelling and its avoidance of the typical world-saving main story quest.

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