



FIRE EMBLEM ENGAGE

REVIEW BY VERTEGRAS



ONE STEP FORWARD, SEVERAL STEPS BACK

Fire Emblem Engage is the newest mainline entry to the Fire Emblem series, after almost 5 years since the previous entry, Fire Emblem: Three Houses.

Preface.

Engage was leaked in early 2022 with details about the game and in that, I, personally, did not like the style and the protagonist's design off the bat.

Then Engage was announced in the Nintendo Direct in September, 2022. The art style remained the same of the leaks, with our newest protagonist (also known as a My Unit going forward), Alear. Nintendo would showcase the game for the upcoming months with various characters, story trailers, little excerpts of what features are coming.

Week before release, I was still on the fence as other reviews had started to come out. It seemed like Engage was a stepback on most things and that worried me. However, with a stroke of luck I got it on sale with the collector's edition, Engage came on January 21st and I had started the journey in Elyos.

Some First Impressions.

- The world and atmosphere of the game are vibrant and colorful.
- The performance and textures have vastly improved in the time between Three Houses and Engage. Presentation is one thing Engage has in spades.
- Alear, the newest My Unit, is less of a customizable character and more of a full fledged character like previous 'Lords' like Chrom, Marth, Lucina, Roy, and Ike. They have no customization like Robin (Awakening), Corrin (Fates), or even customizable clothing or accessories that remain throughout the game like Byleth (Three Houses). They are only customizable in name, alone.
- Combat is pretty *engaging*, it feels pretty good.
- The Somniel, the new hub for Engage, is less like the Monastery of Three Houses and more like the My Castle of Fates. It has optional activities and doesn't have a [limit] of what you can do in a day.
- The support chains are split into two,
 - Bond supports which are brief two or three sentences long between an Engage Emblem (Marth, Celica, Roy, etc.) and another unit.
 - Regular supports remain in the game from previous installments, however, a lot of them are very uninteresting for C and B.

- Hero worshiping is extremely prevalent in this game and it carries over into some of the characters' core identities. Like Framme and Clanne.

I will be breaking down each part of this into short sections between 5 parts.

Story, Art Direction, Characters, Combat, and Sound. This will be **spoiler free** as most of the characters are in promotional art.

Part 1: Story.

Engage's story harkens back to a very standard story procedure for Fire Emblem fans. Hero saves the world vs. the evil dragon. This isn't a new concept and one of the things Engage does decently enough. It is a simple but effective story and while many will compare it to the previous release, Three Houses, I am looking towards the other games of the franchise. As this game has very similar story beats to Awakening and Fates, rather than Three Houses. Alear is the Divine Dragon who wakes up after a thousand years with amnesia. And the Fell Dragon, Sombron, has awoken and is trying to gather the 12 Emblem Rings. Alear's duty given by his mother, Lumera, is to collect them all and put a stop to the Fell Dragon once and for all.

There are a few moments that do break the repetition but the story is very cut out of the same cloth as the two I mentioned above.

Part 2: Art Direction.

This is the most decisive piece, I think, for a lot of Fire Emblem players. And while Fire Emblem has never had a dedicated one-stop-shop for art direction, it retained a certain tone to it that Engage completely tosses out the window for bright and vibrant picturesque. It is a bit jarring comparing any of the predecessors, even Awakening and Fates, to Engage - even more so if looking directly comparing Shadows of Valentia / Three Houses to it. Which for some, is a good thing, as people do like brighter and more over the top color schemes - I think it will definitely split players up.

Not to mention, a good number of the character designs are extremely overdone, it almost feels like they didn't want to have any negative space on characters. I think a good balance in the game are Alcryst and Diamant as opposed to characters like Celine.

Extra note: It's very likely that the style probably helps with the performance on the Switch.

Part 3: Characters.

The characters in Engage are a sore spot for a lot of players, myself included. And it is predominantly due to two things, the art style direction which was hit upon, and support chains being less as thrilling as Three Houses.

The characters are much more one-tone and the support chains do not help flesh some of the secondary cast. However, stepping back and looking at the characters as opposed to the traditional chains of previous installments, most of them do fit in between Awakening and Fates in terms of quality. I have already started to see certain characters develop throughout the story and wish most of the characters had even a sliver of the same attention.

But the elephant in the room is that some of the characters just don't fit their designs and it hinders the entirety of the character. I will be using Etie as an example of this. Etie is one of Alfred's two retainers, she is to be a bodybuilding, 'get swole' character with all of her dialogue being about working out and muscles but she has less muscles than I do. Not to mention, her base class is Archer and it has no reflection of why she's an archer. She and the other retainer, Boucheron, honestly should've swapped designs or personalities.

My Unit: Alear is one, I don't know why they proceeded to advertise them as a customizable protagonist, like Robin or Corrin before them. They are on the same level as any of the other characters in Engage for customization besides naming them. They do have a personality and it actually is a bit refreshing because they aren't as stalwart and perfect as others. They are actually a bit of a wimp and don't particularly feel comfortable about all the worshiping. I feel like people got the wrong idea, myself included, by their advertising of Alear. *Their **BASE** outfit is still one of the worst designs in any game, though. Their Engaged one looks nicer.*

Extra note: While Fire Emblem has fan service characters, Engage does take it a bit up even more with a lot of the feminine cast being extremely sexualized in their designs. Guess can't go long before having an extremely sexualized dark mage trope in FE games.

Oh and before I forget, a lot of the male bodies don't fit their heads so they have tiny heads and bigger frames, besides Alear for some reason.

Part 4: Combat.

This is the saving grace, the midas heel, for Engage. The combat is incredibly fluid and I don't know if it is the best in the franchise but it is definitely up there. So far I haven't had any map designs where it feels impossible, the Emblem mechanic is pretty strong for certain units (*Sigurd is busted, lol.*) - and it retains a sense of importance because you can freely change out who has the Emblem between chapters and prologues. This on top of the break mechanic which, at first, I wasn't entirely sure I enjoyed, helps supplement the weapon triangle even more.

However, Sword units are arguably the weakest out of the bunch and desperately rely on the Emblems (*minus a certain Hoshido wannabe*) and the game doesn't give you a lot of Axe users to balance out the cast through the early game.

Dagger and healer units both are pretty significant and feel pretty good to use, I do think they could've given us a better healer than Framme earlier on, though. While on that topic, the martial arts are gimmicky and there's very little playable units who take advantage of them, they're like a worse version of Brawling from Three Houses (cause that was an actually strong class type.)

Part 5: Sound.

I contemplated putting this into the total but I think it goes without saying that they killed it in the sound department yet again. I am unsure if any of the soundtracks will have the same power as any of the predecessors in recent years (especially God-Shattering Star) but it has been extremely enjoyable to listen to and there's enough variety in sound to not get bored.

Extra note: They took out the iconic leveling up noise and it's lowkey upsetting.

Conclusion.

To wrap up. This game has the base of something great - it, however, is bogged down by divisive choices for a mainline game. Three Houses was experimental in social aspects and that gave a lot of people those expectations going into Engage. However, Engage is more of the traditional Fire Emblem full of pretty one dimensional characters and a standard story beat. It has some of the best combat and will most likely be benchmarked for future installments on that. The game does feel a bit smoother and less hindered by the engine that Three Houses was on, it looks good and runs pretty well on the Switch's outdated hardware.

If you want a more traditional Fire Emblem strategy game, this is for you by leaps and bounds. If you are wanting something more in-depth and story rich, it might feel less. I've been enjoying the game, to my own hypocritical statements before release. But knowing we have had a taste of something more, we can't look past the flaws.

I rate Fire Emblem: Engage:

7.5/10.

Recommended for veterans and newcomers if they can get past the various returning heroes and cliché story.