

Exploring Anime and JRPGs in Your TTRPGs



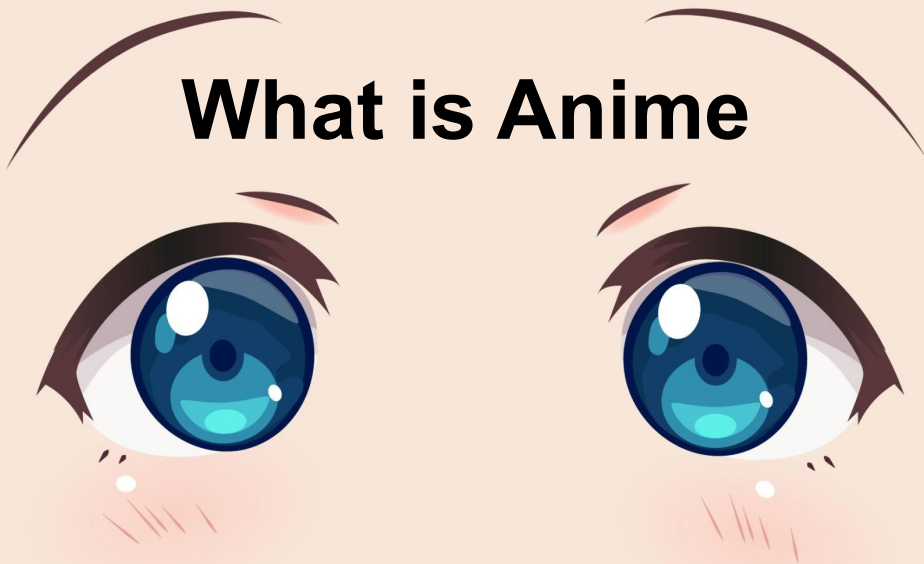
Dylan Baird



TOPICS

1. What is Anime
2. What is a JRPG
3. How do you use media in games?
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9. Workshop (Q&A)

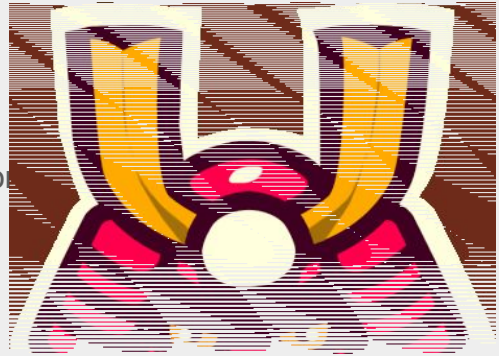
What is Anime



Look, we had to start somewhere

What is Anime?

1. Style of Storytelling
2. Developed in Parallel with Western Cartoon
3. Originally for Kids, Expanded Over Time.



Traditions of Kabuki influenced the medium.

1. Anime is a style of storytelling popularized in Japan, originating in Manga as a format before moving into animation.
2. Comics and animation paralleled Western media as they expanded, experimented, and adapted to new tools.
3. Initially regarded as something primarily for kids, the medium has grown to a wide array of genres for all people.

The evolution of anime developed through inspiration from early american animation including Disney, and Japanese storytelling traditions like Kabuki, where performers would exaggerate and

vibrantly perform emotions so the whole audience could see and hear it.

Popular Genres of Anime

Shoujo - A genre marketed toward girls/young women.



Shounen - A genre marketed toward boys.



Shoujo - A genre marketed toward girls/young women.

Commonly features a young female/femme protagonist, shy personalities for MCs, and if not in the main plot, a romantic sub-plot. Common examples include Sailor Moon, Fushigi Yuugi, Ouran Host Club, Fruits Basket, etc.

Shounen - A genre marketed toward boys.

Commonly features a young male/masculine protagonist, who overcomes challenges through hard work and perseverance. Often action, adventure, and coming-of-age themes. Common examples include Naruto, Dragonball, etc.

Popular Genres of Anime

Josei - Josei anime is intended for an adult audience, typically for adults.



Seinen - A genre marketed toward young men.



Josei - Josei anime is intended for an adult audience, typically for adults.

It places emphasis on realistic and complex themes like adult romance, workplace issues, personal growth, and societal challenges. Character design is more realistic and less fantastical. Josei Storytelling prioritizes authenticity and emotional depth, exploring the intricate inner lives of flawed, multi-dimensional characters and their authentic struggles in the real world. Examples include Kakuriyo Bed & Breakfast for Spirits, Love of Kill, Apothecary Diaries, and Libra of Nil Admirari.

Seinen - A genre marketed toward young men.

Unlike shonen, seinen often features more complex themes, emphasis on realism, deeper character development, and can include violence and mature themes. This is not exclusive toward Seinen, but Seinen often have serious tones, even for their comedies. Examples can include things like Gundam, because while it has elements kids would enjoy, the complex politics of the wars in it would make it closer to Seinen. Psycho Pass would certainly qualify due to the violence.

What is a JRPG

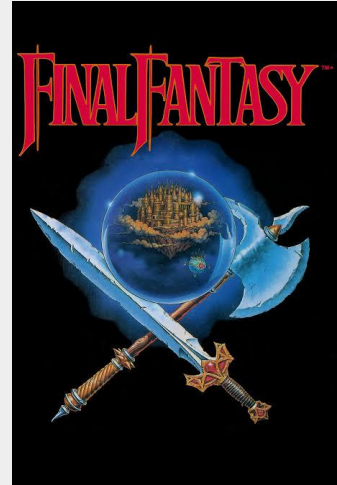


Not specifically required to be Japanese, anymore

What is a JRPG

JRPG stands for Japanese Roleplaying Game.

Chrono Trigger, with art done by Akira Toriyama and main story by Masato Kato, for the Super Nintendo/Super Famicom demonstrated a natural relationship between Anime and JRPGs, which has only continued.



JRPG stands for Japanese Roleplaying Game. In the early years of Nintendo (or Famicom if you're feeling fancy), Role Playing Games were in their infancy. Square Designer Akitoshi Kawazu, who made the first Final Fantasy game in 1987 explicitly stated that he modeled the first game's combat system after D&D, which was a studio saving title, intended to be their last attempt at making a successful game.

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History and the Present

Historically, JRPGs are from Japan, and are inspired by the styles of storytelling demonstrated in the same themes of popular anime.



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Now, a JRPG is merely a genre, it includes taking on the role of a protagonist, sometimes silent, others not, coming from humble roots or falling from a position of authority, and having a Hero's Journey to the end, and typically involves high fantasy or science fiction, magic, technology, leveling up, hit points, and both turn-based and real-time combat elements.

JRPGs that can inspire great TTRPG storytelling

The Tales of Series (17 titles), particularly great examples include Symphonia, Verspiria, Zestiria, Berseria, and Arise.

Legend of Dragoon

Legend of Heroes Series (21 titles, but start with Trails in the Sky, SC, and 3rd)

Legend of Legaia

Ni No Kuni

Parasite Eve

Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin



What makes these examples great?

Tales of leans into the idea of mostly ordinary people ending up in extraordinary stories. In the very first you begin as just a teenager from a small village thrown back in time to fight an ancient evil. In Symphonia Lloyd's first quest is to make a friendship bracelet. By the end of the game you fight god.

Legend of Dragoon has the characters lose greatly throughout the first half of the narrative, either through allies being kidnapped, killed, or too injured to continue, or having vital items taken from them, while in the latter half you take the fight to your enemies.

Legend of Heroes has a nuanced world that is reeling from the aftermath of war, which has a complex political structure and mercenary guild, that you are a part of as a young Bracer. It follows Shounen/Shoujo style storytelling and really layers in the drama.

Legend of Legaia begins the world post-apocalypse. And things get worse from there. You adventure in a world that is overrun by an unknown alien force in The Mist that turns magical entities that bond to humans to give them great power, into great horrors. From there, you fight a never ending struggle, thinking the world is safer than when you started, only to get confronted at the end in the ruins of your hometown.

Ni No Kuni is a fairytale style story about grief, loss, and trying to change your fate as a small child with a broken heart. It uses a great deal of western influence in the world

and setting, with art from Studio Ghibli, a well known and popular studio that made films like Howl's Moving Castle and Princess Monoke.

Parasite Eve is a classical horror film, that turned into a video game a year later, taking inspiration in part from Biohazard, which we know in the West as Resident Evil, and including RPG elements like leveling up and powers gained from Mitochondria.

Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin is a comedic misadventure of the young Princess Goddess of Harvest, Sakuna who after being too lazy and burning her annual offering to the divine, is forced to work an abandoned field in a formerly demonic realm that has fallen into disrepair to earn back her good graces.

How do you use media in games?



~~Theft~~ Inspiration Is Key

Using Media in TTRPG Games

File off the serial number



Name Things



Inspire Villains



File off the serial number

If you're struggling to come up with a plot? Borrow short arcs from video games or anime, especially if most of them haven't played or seen it. (This goes double if one has and it's an arc for their character.)

Name Things

We all struggle with city, person, and magic item names. Watch less popular anime titles, play JRPGs that are not from the A-list titles. For example, how many of you knew about Legend of Legaia when I brought it up? Exactly.

Inspire Villains

When deciding the BBEGs, sometimes stealing motivations or stories of them is an excellent way to incorporate the inspiration.

Using Media in TTRPG Games

Define World Elements

Borrow Fantastical Elements

Inspire Allies



Define World Elements

Magic and technology in tabletop gaming can come from any number of sources, in Final Fantasy 7, magic is equipped from a physical object, while in Tales of games it is typically learned through training and experience. Borrow inspirations on the source of Magic.

Borrow Fantastical Elements

With tabletop games, the option to include things like interplanar travel, interstellar invasions (even in fantasy settings), Portals and incursions from otherworldly regions, all of this can be a plot shift tool you can use to advance a game.

Inspire Allies

JRPGs and Anime often have support characters who may not be as powerful as the main characters, but who give everything to help. Don't be afraid to borrow ideas and have a beloved NPC lost to try and save the players.

Accepting the Premise

Serious is not always necessary

Accepting the Premise

Ignore Realism



Silly Beginnings to Monumental Quests

Don't Forget to Twist Dramatically



Ignore Realism

While some TTRPGs claim to be a gritty and realistic simulation of historical and fantasy elements, realism tends to not be fun to play. In JRPGs and Anime, characters leap down great heights, or up on top buildings, slash boulders in half with a sword, and perform impossible feats. They do this by ignoring reality and playing into the genre. TTRPGs can too.

Silly Beginnings to Monumental Quests

We've all started in a tavern, as a rag-tag group of hopeful adventurers. But instead, what if you started before Level 1, or before finishing character creation and play out the character's as children making decisions that lead them to their character classes, with quests like foraging for gifts and exploring ruins?

Don't Forget to Twist Dramatically

While most TTRPGs trend in a slow escalation, Anime and JRPGs tend to lean into. Kefka ending the world in Final Fantasy 6 is one example, while half of Naruto is "You didn't expect this" layered like a wedding cake. Don't be afraid to make your players have to tactically retreat in the middle point, so long as you let them come back stronger.

Accepting the Premise

Villain Introduction: Early and Often

Weave a Connected Story

Time Skips



Villain Introduction Early and Often

TTRPGs often lend toward one big bad, who is the bad character that players spend 2 years working toward fighting. Instead, consider making many villains, often unrelated, that players defeat and move up from, to greater threats.

Weave a Connected Story

While introducing many villains, give them a theme, or several disconnected details, and let the players put together a story based on that. At the end of every session, ask them to guess where the plot goes, take notes, see if they invent a story for you from their own ideas.

Time Skips

TTRPGs don't have to be every day in the player character's lives. Downtime elements let players have their characters practice a skill, make equipment, and advance a story of their own. Utilize time skips after significant plot achievements, but do so with the players being aware so they can plan ahead what they want their characters to work on.

Re-flavoring the World



Add elements to the world building

Classical Fantasy is fine, but overdone.

Instead of a western european medieval fantasy, why not take inspiration and build something different?

Giant Monsters



Aftermath of Great War



Themes and Tropes as Fact



Instead of a western european medieval fantasy, why not take inspiration and build something different?

Giant Monsters are everywhere, and a major part of construction and economics. Using parts from them to create magically infused structures. (Monster Hunter, Solo-Leveling)

Or - Monsters and Otherworldly horrors have changed the very way people have survived, dependent on defensive measures and security in order to protect society. (Legend of Legaia, Attack on Titan)

Start the world in a brutal aftermath of a decades long war or horrible conflict with evil that creates unfinished storylines and tensions the party can interact with to get their story started (Final Fantasy Tactics, Frieren: Beyond Journey's End)

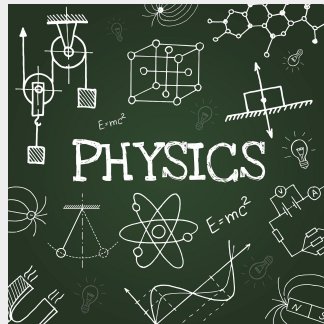
Have the world include something simple as a theme to start from that allows and encourages tropes, like a Dungeon that just exists next to a city and fuels its economy (Azure Dreams, Delicious in Dungeon)

Change the Lore but Keep the System

Game mechanics have a purpose, they create and enforce a set of rules that the players adhere to, and in doing so, act as the “physics” of that universe. If you think of the game that way, the world’s lore, themes, and expressions can work completely within the structure of it.

Bend but don’t break your rules.

Magic Items and Anime / JRPGs



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Bend but don’t break your rules. A game is designed to work how it’s designed to work, but we can change some aspects so long as it’s consistent.

If we bend some of the rules for the players (ignoring physical jump limits and fall damage in D&D, for example) that is fine so long as it becomes the internal consistency of the world. For example, if players can survive leaping off a 100 foot statue, so can the villains.

Magic Items and Anime / JRPGs

Having an item that does something that can’t be represented mechanically in a TTRPG because it is over the top or too much should have reasonably boundaries. Think of the Phase Gun Claude has in Star Ocean 2: The Second Story, it’s a one-hit kill for the beginning of the game, but you break it early on and then need to rely on the levels and experience you have collected at that point. Don’t give the players an item that you can’t manage without their being limits on its use or eventual breakdown of the item.

Open Yourself to Inspiration



Absorb Media

Am I Suggesting You Watch More Anime? —YES



Find and read free content when it's offered.

- Many JRPGs include a free demo.
- Many streaming platforms offer shows "Free-With Ads"



The best way to increase your ability to roll-with-improvising these elements, and incorporating media into your games is experience.

Play more TTRPGs with friends, do more one-shots and short-arcs. Find someone on StartPlaying.games and try and have them run a table for you (I'm not on StartPlaying, I don't have the time to play much more than I already do.)

Watch more Anime that have 1 or 2 seasons only. There are some phenomenal stories that wrap up in short and concise little arcs. Those can be great to add ideas without committing you to 500 hours of One-Piece, or 1,300 hours of "nerdy voice actors playing Dungeons and Dragons."

Find and play JRPGs with an under-40 hour commitment. That can be 1 finished game a month if you can do 10 hours over a week. They exist, just don't farm all of the achievements.

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**Want one fresh off the tin?
Here are some of my favorites!**

TTRPGs already inspired by Anime and JRPGs



DESIGNED AS ANIME AND JRPG GAMES

THE FOLLOWING IS A NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF GAMES ALREADY IN THE GENRE OF ANIME/JRPGS



A final fantasy inspired love-letter to JRPGs that is rules light and story driven.



An inspired game taking elements from D&D 4e and Final Fantasy 5/Tactics with great battle mechanics.



Giant Monsters have destroyed civilizations, survive in the aftermath in moving colonies while battling Titans.



DESIGNED AS ANIME AND JRPG GAMES

THE FOLLOWING IS A NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF GAMES ALREADY IN THE GENRE OF ANIME/JRPGS



An OSR Inspired high-lethality dungeon crawler.

CORE RULES
HADRIAN - TARTAGLIA



A Pokemon and Digimon inspired TTRPG about kids and their evolving allies.



What if Naruto had to assassinate a rival ninja clan member at his 9-5?



IF WE HAVE TIME



WORKSHOP



You have ideas, let's work on them



This presentation, and other things I've done are available at my site
using the QR Code here!