# Chrono Trigger
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## I. Game Information
  The game being reviewed is "Chrono Trigger," which was both developed and published by Square Soft and was released in August 1995 for the Super Nintendo. The game was largely created by the "dream team" of producer Kazuhiko Aoki ("Final Fantasy" producer), character designer Akira Toriyama (of "Dragonball Z" fame), and supervisor Yuji Horii ("Dragon Quest" scenarist), along with supervisor Hironobu Sakaguchi. Composer Nobuo Uematsu (Final Fantasy composer) teamed up with Yasunori Mitsuda to provide the music for the game. The main programmers for Chrono Trigger were Keizo Kokubo and Katsuhisa Higuchi.

## II. Storyline and Game-play
  As an RPG (role-playing game), Chrono Trigger's storyline is very important to the game. Luckily, its storyline is definitely one of the most outstanding aspects of the game. But to fully understand the storyline, one must first learn about the characters that the storyline revolves around. For almost every RPG-lover who has ever played Chrono Trigger, the Akira Toriyama-designed characters are among the most loved out of any game. The main character, Crono (referred to by some as "Chrono"), is a brave, young, and taciturn boy (he never talks in the game) with wild hair. The beautiful and adventurous Marle is secretly, in reality, Princess Nadia of Guardia Kingdom. Crono's childhood friend Lucca is a scientific genius and inventor extraordinaire. Frog is a noble being from the Middle Ages who protects his kingdom even after having been turned into a frog. Ayla is a strong-willed prehistoric woman who can put up a very convincing argument with her fists. The futuristic robot Robo is both inquisitive and good-natured. Magus, a master of magic from the Dark Ages and the one who cursed Frog, begins as one of Crono's toughest enemies, but eventually switches sides. In such a short space it is impossible to do justice to the great design of the characters. Additionally, other than these playable characters there is a large number of non-playable characters that are just as deep as the playable ones. It is this depth in the characters that causes the player to be able to relate to these characters and as a result care about them.

  With such great characters, it is not surprising that the time-spanning story of Chrono Trigger is also quite compelling. It starts off in 1000AD, as Crono checks out Lucca's teleportation device at the Millennial Fair. Marle shows up and tries the device, but her pendant causes a strange reaction that sends her hurtling through time. Crono gives chase. And the adventure begins!

  Event after event causes Crono to continue to hop through time. He visits several different time periods throughout both the past and the future. The time periods are designed to each have a unique feel and atmosphere. 1000AD is the cheerful and optimistic time that Crono, Lucca, and Marle are originally from. Frog hails from 600AD, the Middle Ages, which is a time of knightly chivalry. The Dark Ages (12,000BC) features widespread knowledge of magic and floating continents in the clouds. The Prehistoric Era (65,000,000BC) is a time of lush rainforests filled with dinosaurs, where Ayla leads her small colony of people in a fight to survive against the dangerous Reptites. Robo hails from the post-apocalyptic future of 2300AD. There is even a time known as the "end of time," which is reminiscent of a foggy London street of yore, where there exists only a man standing next to a lamppost and some time portals.

Initially, Crono and friends are pulled from time period to time period because of several small quests to accomplish various things, but they eventually come to learn of an apocalyptic event that occurs in 1999AD because an evil being known as Lavos.  Upon learning about this, their ultimate destiny becomes clear and they spend the rest of the game hurtling toward the final confrontation with Lavos.

Chrono Trigger has all the standard game-play elements of a typical console RPG.  There is a general over-world map through which the player travels.  The map has small areas that represent such things as towns, forests, and castles.  When the player moves onto these areas, he enters a new map that is a more detailed expansion of the small area.  Within these expanded maps, there are a multitude of NPC's (non-playable characters) to talk to or enemies to fight.

To progress in the game, battling enemies is a necessity.  Chrono Trigger has a menu-based battle system that allows the player to choose from a variety of commands, including attacking normally, using a special technique such as magic, or using an item.  The presence of usable magic itself is another RPG mainstay and in Chrono Trigger each playable character has a multitude of spells.  As each character grows stronger, he or she gains better spells and techniques.  Characters grow stronger by gaining various amounts of experience points from the various battles encountered.  After gaining a certain amount of experience, a character can gain a level, at which point various character attributes such as the number of hit points (i.e. amount of life) improve.  Characters can also increase their battle abilities by purchasing stronger weapons and armors.  This motivates the player to be constantly on the lookout for stores with better equipment and to complete side quests that allow the player to obtain secret equipment.

In order to purchase the equipment at the stores, the player must collect gold.  Gold is obtained from doing battle with enemies, as well as from finding and opening treasure chests and selling equipment and items at stores.  Also obtainable through battle with enemies and treasure chest are the aforementioned items, which cover a wide range of uses: anywhere from healing items such as elixirs to "tabs" that, when used, permanently improve some of a character's attributes.

All the game-play elements mentioned thus far are pretty typical for RPG's.  Chrono Trigger has a few elements that were quite unique to it when it was released.  Most significantly, it does not have random enemy encounters (situations in which the characters are walking through a map and a battle just randomly begins without warning).  All the enemies that can fight the characters are visible on whichever map the player can encounter them.  Thus, when battles occur, they do not occur in a battle subscreen; rather, they happen on the regular map with some menus overlaid on top.  The visibility of the enemies allows for the unique opportunity to avoid many battles completely by simply sneaking around the enemies.

Chrono Trigger also has many mini-games within it that can be played for fun such as all the games at the Millennial Fair and a futuristic motorcycle race.  Although many games since have contained mini-games for the player to engage in, Chrono Trigger was one of the first to come up with this innovation.

Chrono Trigger aims to be a pleasurable game that players will love.  More specifically, it endeavors to engage the player emotionally.  These goals are achieved by eliminating some problems commonly associated with RPG's and by excelling in the standard RPG elements.  The main example of a problem that the designers removed is the aforementioned random enemy encounters.

The designers did a good job with the standard RPG elements.  As mentioned before, the characters are designed so well that players feel a strong emotional attachment to them.  The

storyline is complex but not overly so, containing many interwoven subplots.  Almost immediately from the start of the game, the player is spellbound by the story.  The environments are well designed, with each time period having a unique feel that matches up well with its place in the story.  The beautiful game music is appropriately matched with the different moods of the game.  By making a game that engages the player emotionally, the designers have made Chrono Trigger a game loved by many video game players.

## III. Technology

Chrono Trigger is a graphics-based game with graphics that are on par with those of most Super Nintendo games released in the last days of that gaming system. Although there are many new concepts employed in Chrono Trigger's storyline and game-play, the technology used in it does not appear to be anything new.  The graphics are oddly reminiscent (for some players, pleasurably so) of those of "The Secret of Mana," which was released earlier by Square for the Super Nintendo.  In fact, Chrono Trigger's Marle looks exactly the same as the main female character in The Secret of Mana, other than a color change in her outfit.  Having been released later than The Secret of Mana, Chrono Trigger's graphics are still superior, appearing to be based on an improvement of the same graphics engine.  More generally, Chrono Trigger has 2D graphics similar to those in other Square games for the Super Nintendo such as Final Fantasy III.

Perhaps, more significant than what graphics Chrono Trigger has is what it does not have.  There is a noticeable lack of the Mode 7 graphics that are so prevalent in Square's other games for the Super Nintendo.  Mode 7 can be approximated to the graphics engines contained in primitive first person shooters that allow the player to turn around to view the full 360° around his character (except that in this case, your vantage point would be from slightly behind the shooter).  Mode 7 graphics anchor the screen on the player's character (or as in Final Fantasy III, the player's airship).  Turning left or right causes the world to turn around the character.  This is as opposed to the normal Super Nintendo RPG graphics that have the characters moving over a stationary map.  The lack of Mode 7 graphics is significant because basically every other major Square game for the Super Nintendo uses these graphics to portray the act of flying around in the player's airship or other form of air travel.  Chrono Trigger, on the other hand, just uses the normal RPG style graphics (i.e. with a stationary map) to portray its airship travel.

In terms of other aspects of technology, Chrono Trigger is also fairly standard compared to other Super Nintendo games released at the same time.  The control interface is the same as the standard Super Nintendo RPG, with the control pad being used to traverse the map, bring up menus, pick options from the menus in battle, and talk to other characters.  Also, the enemies have very limited artificial intelligence, following a very simple behavioral pattern when attacking the player's characters.

## IV. Game Design

When developing Chrono Trigger, the creators of the game did a good job addressing its replay value.  Several elements were put in place to keep players coming back for more.  Some of these elements have to do with the very nature of RPG's.  Having the game's characters level up and increase in power as the player uses them to battle entices many players to continue playing the game so that they can build stronger characters.  The RPG nature of the game also causes a collector's mentality in some players that keeps them playing the game in an attempt to collect as many of each type of item, weapon, and armor as possible.

Additionally, there were also several replay value-enhancing elements put in the game outside of just plain being an RPG. Chrono Trigger contains multiple endings; which ending the player sees depends on the how the player plays the game and at what point the player defeats the final boss. (There are several points at which the player can defeat the final boss.) There are a total of 12 different ending (with slight variations depending on how the player played the game). They range from real full-fledged endings to silly endings having nothing to do with the storyline, such as the one where the player gets to talk to the designers of the game. Players will often play the game over and over until they have seen all the endings.

Another feature that enhances replay value is the "New Game+" feature that allows the player to start a new game with the characters that they have developed in another saved game. This feature lets the player start from the beginning of the game with characters that are at the same level as in the previously saved game and with all the items, weapons, and armor that the player had before. This also entices players to continue coming back to the game. When combined with the collector's mentality mentioned above, it makes for even more addictive game-play since it then becomes possible to collect the maximum amount of nearly every single item.

Although not all that deep strategically speaking, Chrono Trigger does contain some amount of strategic depth. Assuming characters of relatively low or intermediate experience levels, the battles require some amount of strategy to survive. A player will need to know when to attack, when to cast magic, when to heal, and so on. On the other hand, it is possible to eliminate this strategic aspect by massively powering up the characters such that they are much stronger than the enemies, making battles quite easy. Also, the magic spells in the game are each associated with certain elemental types such as fire, ice, and lightning. Certain elemental magic types work better on certain enemies than others. Wise use of the elemental aspect of magic can make battles much easier.

The time-traveling aspect of the game also adds some strategy. Certain actions performed in past eras can affect future times, so the player must think carefully before performing some actions. For example, some treasure chests yield better items in future time periods than in past ones so the player should consider not opening a treasure chest in a past time period in hopes of getting a better item in a future time period.

**V. Game Success**

Chrono Trigger was a great commercial success. But beyond that, it is also successful in its game design. The excellent story attracts many players, who end up becoming emotionally attached to the many well-designed characters. Problems such as random enemy encounters that would normally annoy players are eliminated. The battle menu system, being similar to other RPG's systems, provides a familiar and thus easy-to-use interface for fighting enemies. The graphics, while not astounding, are not too shabby. Chrono Trigger's soundtrack comes from the mind of one of the greatest video game composers around and is a real treat to listen to. And after all this, the excellent replay value keeps players coming back for more.

In the history of computer games, Chrono Trigger is significant for a few reasons. First, it has several different endings. Although it is not the first game to have featured so many different endings, it is definitely one of the first to have accomplished it so successfully. Second, it is one of the first and only games to feature something similar to the "New Game+" feature. Finally, it is important because of the sheer quality of the game. According to Gamers.com,

"Many consider Chrono Trigger to be the RPG pinnacle of the 16-bit era, if not of all time."
With such quality, Chrono Trigger should most definitely be considered a success.