

= Shin Megami Tensei : Strange Journey =

Shin Megami Tensei : Strange Journey (Japanese : ? ? ???? STRANGE JOURNEY) is a role @-@ playing video game developed by Atlus and Lancarse for the Nintendo DS . It was published by Atlus in 2009 in Japan , and in 2010 in North America . It is the fourth entry in the Shin Megami Tensei series , which forms the core of the Megami Tensei franchise . The story follows a special task force sent by the United Nations to investigate the Schwarzwelt , a spatial distortion that appears in Antarctica and threatens to engulf the world . Players take control of an unnamed protagonist , navigating the environments of the Schwarzwelt in first @-@ person . Combat involves the player and recruited demons fighting against various enemies , with the protagonist having the option of talking with and recruiting enemies .

The game originated from the team 's wish to develop a large @-@ scale role @-@ playing game for the DS . Many of the main staff had worked on previous Megami Tensei titles in some capacity , including producer and designer Kazuma Kaneko , director Eiji Ishida , writer Shogo Isogai , and composer Shoji Meguro . The setting in Antarctica was chosen to appeal to an overseas audience . Alongside the new setting , the game featured multiple science fiction elements new to the series , taking inspiration from films such as Damnation Alley and The Thing . For the music , Meguro used grander musical styles than his previous works , incorporating choir music using a special synthesizer . Reception of the game has been generally positive for its story and gameplay , but many disliked its first @-@ person navigation .

= = Gameplay = =

Shin Megami Tensei : Strange Journey is a role @-@ playing game in which players control the main protagonist , who can be named by the player . The environments within the Schwarzwelt are seen and navigated from a first @-@ person perspective : the 3D environment is displayed on the top screen of the Nintendo DS , while a 2D map is displayed on the bottom screen . Explored environments are automatically mapped out , with highlights being placed for unopened containers and doorways . These environments contain traps including pits , shifting floors , and floor tiles which damage the protagonist if stepped on . Alongside the main story quests , human non @-@ playable characters and demons within the Schwarzwelt unlock side quests which yielded rewards upon completion . During the game , the protagonist 's Demonica suit can be upgraded to open new pathways , enabling entry into new areas for story progression , as well as new parts of previously explored areas .

During exploration , the player enters battle through both story @-@ based boss battles and random encounters with standard enemies . Combat is turn @-@ based , with enemies facing against a four @-@ member party made up of the protagonist and three chosen demons . Combat is governed by a derivative of the Press Turn system used in Shin Megami Tensei : Nocturne : in Strange Journey , the relevant system is called the Demon Co @-@ op System . If either combatant group hits their opponent with a Critical Attack or strikes their weak point , any allied demon of the attacker 's alimnet will follow up with an unblockable attack which deals high damage .

As well as fighting demons , the protagonist can negotiate with them in a variety of ways : demons can be bribed , scared away , or recruited depending on responses given during conversation . After they are recruited , different demons can be fused together to create new demons . The new demon inherits skills from its parents , and some demons can only be obtained through fusion . The game includes 300 recruitable demons , all of which take inspiration from various world mythologies including Welsh , Egyptian , Norse , and Christian . Two main alignments govern the way demons must be approached : one that represents light , neutral and dark alignments ; and one representing law , neutral and chaos alignments . The choices made in the story also effect how demons respond to player commands , and whether they will remain loyal . As with earlier titles , a Moon Phase divided into eight segments dictates how demons will behave . When the Moon is full , demons will refuse to talk . Fused demons can be shared between players using thirty @-@ two character passwords generated when a new demon is fused . These passwords can be traded between

different players .

= = Synopsis = =

= = = Setting and characters = = =

The setting and events of Strange Journey are unrelated to any other entry in the Shin Megami Tensei series . The game is set in the early 21st century on the continent of Antarctica . During the game 's opening , a massive atomic collapse occurs at the South Pole , causing the creation of the Schwarzwelt (??????? , Shubarutsub?su , German for " Black World ") , a black void which swallows anything it touches and threatens to engulf the Earth . The space within the Schwarzwelt is occupied by spaces representing the many vices of humanity , acting as a critique of them . The main bases are special amphibious vehicles : Red Sprite No. 1 , the protagonist 's vehicle , Blue Jet No. 2 , Elves No. 3 , and Gigantic No. 4 .

The central cast are part of a special task force created by the United Nations to investigate and neutralize the Schwarzwelt . Players take control of a nameless member of the task force (Japanese in the original and American in the localization) . Alongside the main protagonist , there are three main crew members on the Red Sprite : Commander Gore (???? , Goa @-@ taich?) , the crew 's leader ; Jimenez (???? , Himenesu) , an experienced American soldier who seeks rewards for his work ; and Zelenin (????? , Zer?nin) , a knowledgeable Russian scientist . Other characters include Arthur (???? , ?s?) , the Red Sprite 's AI computer ; the angel Mastema (?????? , Mansematto) , who represents the forces of God ; Mem Aleph (?????? , Memu Arefu) , a primordial mother goddess who controls the demons of the Schwarzwelt ; and Louisa Ferre (??? ???? , Ruiza Fere) , an avatar of Lucifer who watches the protagonist 's actions .

= = = Plot = = =

As the expansion of the Schwarzwelt is threatening to destroy Earth , the United Nations send in multiple teams , led by Gore , to investigate and eradicate the phenomenon . During their attempt to enter the Schwarzwelt , all ships but the Red Sprite are destroyed . During their missions , the crew is helped by Arthur , who gradually accumulates knowledge of the Schwarzwelt and develops a personality . During an early mission within the Schwarzwelt , Gore is killed . As the protagonist and members of the Red Sprite 's crew explore the regions of the Schwarzwelt , they slowly uncover the truth behind its existence . In ancient times , humans were controlled by the forces of God . His rule over them was broken when the Mother Goddess Mem Aleph destroyed him , breaking his hold on Earth . Residing within the Schwarzwelt , Mem Aleph saw humans abusing Earth 's environment and consequently corrupting her dimension . Determined to remove those humans responsible for the corruption and return the world to its ancient state , Mem Aleph unleashed the Schwarzwelt . The remaining forces of God , mainly represented by Mastema , intend to use the Schwarzwelt to spread their influence across the world , removing free will to create a united utopia . Key items are the Cosmic Eggs , objects created by Mem Aleph that can reshape the world when combined by the core of the Schwarzwelt .

Zelenin and Jimenez respectively side with Law and Chaos , while a resurrected Gore becomes Neutral . Depending on the choices made during the game , the protagonist has the choice of allying with either Law , Chaos or following a Neutral route and continuing with the original mission . If he sides with Law , the protagonist and Zelenin defeat Mem Aleph and use the Cosmic Eggs to create a World of Law , with Zelenin worshiped as a channel to God for humanity , which is forced to surrender its free will . If he sides with Chaos , he and Jimenez help Mem Aleph and defeat Zelenin , using the Eggs to fulfill the Schwarzwelt 's original purpose and create a world where humans and demons live together in a primal world where only the strong survive . In both the Law and Chaos routes , Arthur chooses to destroy his new personality to save the protagonist after the Red Sprite is damaged by Gore . If the protagonist rejects Law and Chaos , Gore transmits the necessary

information for the destruction of the Schwarzwelt to him before truly dying . After defeating Zelenin , Jimenez and Mem Aleph , the protagonist and surviving crew escape in the Red Sprite while Arthur sacrifices himself to ensure the destruction of the Schwarzwelt , although there is a chance of it reappearing if humanity continues its abuse of the Earth .

= = Development = =

Strange Journey originated during talks among Atlus staff about creating a large @-@ scale role @-@ playing game using a small development team . Kazuma Kaneko suggested a Shin Megami Tensei game for the Nintendo DS . There were two main reasons for developing the game for this platform : Kaneko felt that the portable design fitted in well with Shin Megami Tensei gameplay philosophies , fellow role @-@ playing game Etrian Odyssey had been a commercial success , it had the biggest install base among their target audience , and its nature as a portable game meant people could concentrate more on the game when knowing that they could end their play session with ease . The game 's title was originally going to be Shin Megami Tensei IV , but due to the game 's setting , it was decided to give it its own subtitle . The original inspiration behind it was the event horizon as associated with black holes . An early subtitle was " Strange Horizon " , but this had been used in a previous unspecified video game setting . After Kaneko watched Amazing Journey : The Story of The Who , he and Eishida agreed on the title Strange Journey . Despite lacking a numeral , it is still a mainline entry in the Shin Megami Tensei series .

The game was co @-@ developed by Atlus and Lancarse , the developers of the Etrian Odyssey series . Strange Journey ran on a modified version of the engine used in the original Etrian Odyssey . The Atlus staff were made up of many veterans of the Megami Tensei series : Kaneko was producer , and character and demon designer ; Ishida made his debut as a director after being chief designer for Shin Megami Tensei : Nocturne ; and the scenario 's main writer was Shogo Isogai , who had worked on Shin Megami Tensei II , Shin Megami Tensei If ... , and Nocturne . The gameplay was kept firmly within the traditions of the Megami Tensei series , while evolving and sometimes changing them . For example , the fusion system was re @-@ designed to keep the game fast @-@ paced , and former restrictions on skill inheritance were loosened to encourage experimentation . In contrast , the ability to fine @-@ tune the main character 's stats was removed . The battle system design and programming were both handled by Lancarse . The battle system was designed to provide ease of player , while aspects of demon alignment directly tied to the game 's moral alignment system . The Demonica suit , which was tied into many of the game 's systems , was designed around the concept of a spacesuit that included crucial software with which new demons could become visible and new areas could be explored . The multiplayer feature was originally conceived as players having contests between their demons , but this was decided against as it did not fit the game 's atmosphere . Instead , the concept of demon exchanges was designed . Passwords were chosen over Wi @-@ fi functions as it would make password exchanges through internet forums easier .

From the outset , the game was designed with an overseas release in mind . Among the early ideas created for the title was for it to be set in New York City , inspired by John Carpenter 's 1981 film Escape from New York . This was vetoed as it would not offer much variety in its cast . To enable an international cast , it was decided to set the game in Antarctica . This choice of setting was also made to depict the danger posed by the Schwarzwelt on a worldwide scale . This setting differed greatly from previous Shin Megami Tensei games , which had taken place in Tokyo . It was also chosen as the North Pole had no widespread landmass , making it an impractical setting . When developing the character drama , the team took inspiration from another film by Carpenter , 1982 's The Thing . The moral alignment system , a staple in earlier Shin Megami Tensei entries , was reintroduced for Strange Journey to help players experience the game 's themes . The central cast acted as both a microcosm of humanity and representation of the game 's alignments . Due to the setting , the characters had to be members of a Special Forces group , as opposed to previous protagonists who had been average people . The game includes a larger presence of science fiction elements than in previous Shin Megami Tensei games . Various elements within the game were

inspired by science fiction movies : the Red Sprite was inspired by the main vehicle from the 1977 film *Damnation Alley* , and some equipment was inspired by James Cameron 's 1986 film *Aliens* . The characters ' firearms were all modeled after real @-@ life guns . Elaborating on how the science fiction elements complemented rather than clashed with the mystical elements of *Shin Megami Tensei* , Kaneko stated that he felt that the series had always had elements of those two genres merging , commenting that some people saw a web URL as something like a magical incantation and referencing a quote from Arthur C. Clark about technology becoming so advanced that it looked like magic .

= = Music = =

The music was composed and arranged by Shoji Meguro , whose previous work for the series included *Revelations : Persona* and *Nocturne* . In contrast to his previous work on the *Persona* series , Meguro did not use contemporary musical elements . Instead , he created a more mature experience to reflect the game 's story and setting . To achieve this , he used militaristic orchestration , Gregorian choir , and minimalistic ambiance . The choir sounds were created using Eastwest Quantum Leap Symphonic Choir , a synthesizer which could realistically simulate a choir . An exception was the " Sorrow " theme , for which he primarily used a piano melody . For the game 's " chaos " theme , he used musical elements similar to those in *Nocturne* . So as to get as much music as possible on the game cartridge , Meguro used CRI Middleware 's Kyuseishu Sound Streamer compression algorithm .

Shin Megami Tensei : Strange Journey Original Soundtrack released on November 18 , 2009 as a single CD release under the catalog number COCX @-@ 35945 . It was published by Nippon Columbia . A bonus soundtrack containing music from the game was included with launch copies of the game in North America . After the game 's release , it was discovered that the bonus disc had a manufacturing defect that made it unplayable . Once the issue was raised , Atlus and its manufacturing partner moved to enable players to receive free replacements . Reviews of the original soundtrack release have been positive , with reviewers noting its change in style compared to previous *Megami Tensei* games .

= = Release = =

Strange Journey released on October 8 , 2009 in Japan , and March 23 , 2010 in North America . The first information on a new title in the series appeared in the form of a teaser site created on July 16 , 2009 for the Japanese Atlus website , depicting Earth with a large hole in the bottom . Using the page 's source code and locating an unused graphic , it was deciphered the game 's title was *Strange Journey* and confirmed it to be a *Megami Tensei* title . A week later , Atlus officially announced the game for the DS , clearing up a rumor among fans that the title was an entry in the *Persona* series .

The game 's North American release , along with a release window , was announced in November 2009 . For its release , the ESRB rated the game " M for Mature " . This made the game the tenth game for a Nintendo DS game to earn the rating . Alongside the bonus CD , Atlus revealed a mini @-@ poster exclusive to GameStop customers who purchased the game through street stores and online . After release , Atlus USA gave away exclusive demon passwords to fans to unlock otherwise inaccessible demons during gameplay .

The localization was handled by Atlus USA , led by project editor Nich Maragos , and project lead Yu Namba . During translation , the team had a mixed experience translating the katakana names . While names such as " Williams " were easy , names such as " Skogsra " , a demon based on a Scandinavian forest spirit , proved a challenge and required specific research on the name 's origins . Some of the localization choices were made due to the team 's knowledge of Ishida 's enthusiasm for western culture . They also needed to create varied speaking styles for the various demons , from Archaic English to a more modern vernacular , which proved a time @-@ consuming process .

= = Reception = =

Strange Journey sold 97 @, @ 000 units in its first week in Japan , coming in third on the Japanese sales charts behind Pokémon HeartGold and SoulSilver and Wii Fit Plus . Ultimately , the game sold lower than expected : Atlus expected the game to sell 170 @, @ 000 copies , but actual sales by November had only reached 152 @, @ 000 copies .

The game has had a positive reception , earning scores of 80 % and 80 / 100 respectively from aggregate sites GameRankings and Metacritic . Famitsu gave the game a score of 36 points out of 40 , noted by IGN as being the highest score given by the magazine to a Shin Megami Tensei game up to that time . In their review , Famitsu praised the game 's consistent balancing present throughout the game as well as commenting that while the player is having fun exploring , there is always a constant tension around . They also praised the demon combination system by saying that it was " the greatest asset the game has -- they give you better results the more you use them " as they allowed the battles to remain fresh and new . Famitsu also noted that " The tutorial is helpful , and the mission goals are clear enough that you 're never really lost . "

Charles Onyett of IGN called the game 's plot " interesting " and " well @-@ developed " , concluding that there is a " surprising amount of personality in the game " . Andrew Fitch , in his review on 1UP.com , commented that the game 's story is the " same kooky MegaTen narrative fans have come to expect " , but that fans will miss the voice acting of the Persona games . Lark Anderson of GameSpot agreed , calling the plot " excessively preachy " . Phil Kollar of Game Informer said that the game " numerous troubling means of highlighting the tension between technology and nature " . Heidi Kems , writing for GamePro , called it " a refreshingly thoughtful experience compared to most Japanese RPG plots , but it 's not for the easily offended " . Eurogamer 's Matt Edwards called the story " isn 't particularly original but is nonetheless absorbing " .

Speaking of the gameplay , Fitch called it a combination of " classically engrossing MegaTen and Etrian Odyssey " , noting that the " same sense of exploration 's still there , but there 's also a meatier plot pulling you along " . Kems called the dungeon exploration " exciting " , but found the lack of help with demon fusion detracted from the experience . Edwards was generally positive about the battle system , which he called " an easy @-@ to @-@ understand , turn @-@ based set @-@ up " . Anderson found the gameplay dated , particularly citing the dungeon design and negotiation system , citing the former as being too repetitive to be interesting . Onyett called the combat " standard " , but praised the demon fusion and negotiation mechanics . Kollar said that the Demon Co @-@ op attack system made the game more approachable than previous Shin Megami Tensei series , but found that exploration could become tedious .