= Dawn of Mana =

  Dawn of Mana , originally released in Japan as Seiken Densetsu 4 , is a 2006 action @-@ adventure game for the PlayStation 2 . It was developed and published by Square Enix . It is the eighth game of the Mana series and the third entry in the World of Mana subseries , following the release of Children of Mana nine months prior and Friends of Mana two months prior . Set in a high fantasy universe , Dawn of Mana follows a young hero , Keldric , as he journeys to close a portal to a land of darkness that has been opened in the base of the Tree of Mana and is corrupting the world .

  While it contains some small role @-@ playing elements , Dawn of Mana diverges from the prior two @-@ dimensional action role @-@ playing game titles of the series to focus directly on action @-@ adventure gameplay in a full 3D world . Incorporating the Havok physics engine , the gameplay focuses on the player grabbing and throwing objects and monsters in order to startle enemies before attacking them with a sword and magic . Keldric grows more powerful as the player journeys through an area , only to reset to his base abilities with each new zone unless difficult extra challenges are met . Unlike many of its predecessors , the game does not feature any cooperative multiplayer component .

  Dawn of Mana was designed , directed , and produced by series creator Koichi Ishii . The script was written by Ryo Akagi , based on a story created by Masato Kato , and the music was composed by an group led by Kenji Ito . The game was a moderate commercial success : it sold 229 @,@ 000 copies in its first ten days of release in Japan , and over 410 @,@ 000 copies worldwide by the end of 2008 . While critics praised the graphics and music as beautiful and lush , they found the leveling system annoying , the combat controls difficult and frustrating , and the story trite .

  = = Gameplay = =

  Unlike previous games in the Mana series , Dawn of Mana takes place in a full three @-@ dimensional world , in which the player characters navigate the terrain and fight off hostile creatures . The player controls the main character , Keldric , and is followed for almost all of the game by a fairy spirit , Faye . Unlike previous games in the series , Dawn is an action @-@ adventure game , rather than an action role @-@ playing game ; as such , gameplay is focused on movement and attacking enemies , rather than leveling @-@ up character statistics . Keldric is able to run , roll , and jump through the game world . Keldric has access to a vine @-@ like plant attached to his arm , which can be used at any time as either a sword , a whip , or a slingshot . The sword can be used to hit enemies and objects , the whip can grab and throw enemies and objects , and the slingshot can throw collectible pebbles as projectiles . Faye can cast magic spells , selectable by the player .

  The combat system in Dawn of Mana is called the Mono system , based around the Havok physic engine . Almost all objects in the game , including enemies , are moveable , allowing Keldric to throw objects at enemies , or even throw other monsters . Keldric can either throw objects in the direction he is facing , or can target a specific enemy or object to aim at them . When something is thrown near an enemy , they Panic , resulting in a counter over their head that counts down to zero to end the Panic . While panicked , enemies take more damage from attacks and spells . Defeating enemies when they are panicked gives the player two types of medals , which can either boost the player 's health and attack damage , or mana and magic damage . Throwing multiple objects can Panic enemies more ; when the Panic meter is greater than 99 the player can receive better medals . Defeating enemies also grants experience points , which raise Keldric and Faye 's level up to a maximum of four , granting higher health , mana , and damage , and granting new spells and attacks . In addition to being throwable , many objects in the game are also destructible .

  The game is divided into eight chapters and a prologue ; at the end of each chapter , the player is graded on their performance , and all of their statistics and medals are reset . The only items which carry over between chapters are emblems , which are given to the player for achieving high scores in a chapter or defeating hidden monsters . High scores are achieved by defeating more enemies , and defeating enemies with high Panic meters . In addition to the main game is a challenge arena ,

accessible through the main menu , where Keldric can fight timed battles against powerful foes . Keldric can fight alongside AI @-@ controlled pets in these challenges , found in eggs throughout the game . The challenge arena also contains a shop , which contains emblems , eggs , and bonuses like extra music or higher game difficulties , which can be bought with money dropped by enemies throughout the game .

= = Plot = =

Dawn of Mana opens on the fictional island of Illusia , a place where the giant Mana Tree lies dormant . Much of the story takes place on Fa 'Diel , a continent composed of the five nations of Jadd , Topple , Ishe , Wendell , and Lorimar . At the start of the game Ritzia , a Maiden in charge of tending to the Tree , and Keldric , her knight and the player @-@ controlled character , have left their village to find Ritzia 's missing pet . While they are out , Illusia is attacked by King Stroud of Lorimar . The pair rush to the Tree of Mana , thinking that Stroud intends to attack the legendary beast that lies sleeping underneath its roots . While searching for the beast , Keldric finds a seed of the Tree , which attaches to his arm and can transform into a slingshot , a whip , or a sword . They also find Faye , a spirit child , who can cast magic and joins them . When they reach the center of the labyrinth of roots , Stroud 's men catch up to them ; they had been searching for Ritzia , not the beast . Stroud intends to open a portal to Mavolia , a land of darkness sealed away for centuries , and believes Ritzia is part of the key as a Maiden had been a part of opening the portal before . Stroud leaves with Ritzia to find the rest of the key , and Keldric and Faye chase after them .
Keldric and Faye , with the help of the great beast , Flammie , force the Lorimarian army to leave the village . They chase after Stroud , catching up to him at the coast . There they free Ritzia , only to be attacked by Stroud , wielding the other part of the key ? the Sword of Mana . Keldric is thrown off of Stroud 's airship , and the Lorimarians invade Illusia again . Stroud opens the portal , and a wave of dark energy is released , transforming the Tree , turning the people of Illusia into monsters called Grimlies , and releasing dark monsters from Mavolia . Keldric and Faye flee , and head for Fa 'Diel .
A year of wandering later , the dark energy has begun to affect other countries in Fa 'Diel . Keldric discovers in Jadd that Ritzia plans to release the Mavolian energy to cover the whole world . He and Faye journey back to Illusia , only to discover Ritzia seemingly possessed and saying that it is their destiny to rule the world . After she runs away , Keldric meets a masked stranger who tells him that he was the one to close the portal centuries ago , sealing up the Maiden who had opened it , Anise , inside . He also reveals that Stroud is Keldric 's older brother . When Keldric and Faye reach the portal , they find Stroud and Ritzia fighting . Stroud is trying to prevent Ritzia , possessed by Anise , from destroying the world , but is being mutated by the dark energy . Keldric defeats the mutated Stroud , and then fights Ritzia . Realizing that the only way to close the portal is to defeat Anise , he is forced to kill Ritzia along with her . The spirits of Ritzia and Faye then merge with the Tree of Mana , the portal is sealed , and Illusia is restored .

= = Development = =

In 2003 , Square Enix began a drive to begin developing " polymorphic content " , a marketing and sales strategy to " [provide] well @-@ known properties on several platforms , allowing exposure of the products to as wide an audience as possible " . The first of these was the Compilation of Final Fantasy VII , and Square Enix intended to have campaigns for other series whereby multiple games in different genres would be developed simultaneously . In early 2005 , Square Enix announced a " World of Mana " project , the application of this " polymorphic content " idea to the Mana franchise , which would include several games across different genres and platforms . These games , as with the rest of the series , would not be direct sequels or prequels to one another , even if appearing so at first glance , but would instead share thematic connections . The third release in this project and the eighth release in the Mana series was announced in September 2005 as Seiken Densetsu 4 , the first 3D game in the series , though no other details were given in favor of promoting the first

game , Children of Mana .

Dawn of Mana was designed , directed , and produced by series creator Koichi Ishii . The script was written by Ryo Akagi , based on a story created by Masato Kato . The main objective of the development team was to convert the entire Mana world into a 3D environment , rather than just starting from scratch graphically and adding new elements to the gameplay . Ishii had previously wanted to make the 1999 PlayStation game Legend of Mana a 3D game , but the console had been unable to handle his vision of the player interacting with natural shaped objects in a full 3D world . He wanted to create a Mana title that could explore " the feeling of touch " in a game . After seeing the Havok physics engine in a demo of Half @-@ Life 2 at E3 in 2004 , Ishii decided to use the system in Dawn to give players a visual link between environments , objects , and characters . He hoped the physics engine and 3D graphics would allow him " to create a world where players utilize a variety of actions to alter the world and the objects contained within " . Although Ishii has said that the games in the series are only thematically connected , he has also asserted in an interview that Dawn is set ten years before Children of Mana , which depicts the aftermath of the " cataclysm " of Dawn .

= = = Music = = =

The score for Dawn of Mana was composed by Kenji Ito , while Tsuyoshi Sekito and Masayoshi Soken contributed numerous tracks and Grammy Award @-@ winning musician and film composer Ryuichi Sakamoto wrote the theme song , " Dawn of Mana " . Tracks originally composed for earlier games in the series by Ito , Hiroki Kikuta , and Yoko Shimomura were also arranged for Dawn of Mana by the main three composers . Sekito focused on the game 's boss themes , while Soken worked on other battle music . Ito had previously composed the music for the first game in the Mana series , Final Fantasy Adventure (1991) , as well as its 2003 remake Sword of Mana , and for the 2006 Children of Mana . This was the first soundtrack in the Mana series to feature work by Sekito , Soken , or Sakamoto , though Sekito and Soken had worked for Square Enix previously on other titles . The music of the game covers a range of styles , including rock , classical , and orchestral . Sakamoto drew inspiration for the theme song from the image of the Mana tree shown at the title screen of the game . The album Seiken Densetsu 4 Original Soundtrack -Sanctuary- collects 106 tracks from Children of Mana on four discs and is nearly four and a half hours in length . It was published by Square Enix on January 24 , 2007 . A promotional album , Breath of Mana , was released along with preorders of the game in Japan on December 21 , 2006 . The thirteen @-@ minute disc contains five orchestral and piano songs , all composed by Ito , three of which did not appear on the full soundtrack album .

= = Reception = =

Dawn of Mana sold over 229 @,@ 000 copies in Japan by the end of 2006 , ten days after release , and was the top @-@ selling PlayStation 2 title in Japan during its release week . As of November 2008 it had sold over 340 @,@ 000 copies in Japan . The game sold 70 @,@ 000 copies in North America by November 2007 .

Upon its release , Dawn of Mana received generally poor reviews over a wide range , with numerical scores that range from 30 to 80 out of 100 . Reviewers praised Dawn of Mana 's graphics and character design ; GameSpot 's Kevin VanOrd called it colorful and " pretty " , and praised the particle effects , while a reviewer for GameTrailers noted the " gorgeous in @-@ game cinematics " . Gabe Graziani of GameSpy also called out the cinematics in his review , calling them " beautifully rendered and animated " and the highlight of the game . IGN 's Jeff Haynes liked the scale and variety of the 3D environments and called out the character models as worthy of praise . Andrew Fitch of 1UP.com , however , described the level design as " chaotic " despite the " charming , candy @-@ coated graphics " . Joe Juba and Matt Miller of Game Informer said that the environments are " pretty bland " , but praised the rest of the graphics heavily . Michael Beckett of RPGamer said that " Dawn of Mana 's visual style is highly impressive " and especially praised the

character design and color palette . The music was also praised ; VanOrd called it " the highlight of the sound design " and the GameTrailers reviewer claimed that Dawn of Mana had a " lush soundtrack filling every moment of the game " . Beckett also praised the music , and noted the callbacks in the largely orchestral score to previous games in the Mana series .

 The gameplay was heavily criticized by reviewers such as Fitch of 1UP.com , who disliked both the way the character abilities reset with every new area and the " inane " and " mundane " system for collecting emblems , criticisms echoed by GameSpot 's VanOrd . The GameTrailers review added that the way the character 's levels and abilities reset in each area " zaps the sense of accomplishment from the game as a whole " . Haynes of IGN also found issues with the targeting system for attacking enemies at range , finding it ineffective , and also criticized the leveling system and the game 's map . Graziani of GameSpy felt the targeting system was one of the worst parts of Dawn of Mana , along with the camera system ? a complaint also raised by Haynes . Both Fitch and VanOrd focused their criticisms of the controls on the Havok physics engine , which they felt was poorly utilized and left the player feeling out of control ? unable to aim when throwing objects or easily control the character during the game 's jumping sections . Juba of Game Informer felt that the physics engine left the controls " laughably uncooperative " .

 The game 's story was also not seen as a highlight ; Graziani called it " trite " and " fan service " , while Fitch deemed it " a bit of a Neverending Story rip @-@ off " , though a charming one . Beckett of RPGamer called it " a somewhat trite tale of boy chases girl " and noted " a general lack of closure to the story " . Juba of Game Informer , however , deemed it an " interesting plot " . Both the GameTrailers review and VanOrd praised the " charm " of the characters , though VanOrd noted that they were making up for an unoriginal plot . Overall , several reviewers felt that Dawn of Mana was a divergence from the rest of the series that did not add as much as it took away ; even the notably high @-@ scoring Japanese Famitsu review felt that the change in gameplay would confuse fans and other players .