= Sword of Mana =

Sword of Mana , originally released in Japan as Shin 'yaku Seiken Densetsu (?? ???? , lit . " Legend of the Sacred Sword : The New Testament ") , is a 2003 action role @-@ playing game developed by Square Enix and Brownie Brown and published by Square Enix and Nintendo for the Game Boy Advance . It is an enhanced remake of the original Game Boy game Final Fantasy Adventure , which was released as Seiken Densetsu : Final Fantasy Gaiden in Japan and Mystic Quest in Europe . Final Fantasy Adventure is the first game in the Mana series , and Sword of Mana is the fifth released game in the series . Set in a high fantasy universe , the game follows an unnamed hero and heroine as they seek to defeat the Dark Lord and defend the Mana Tree from enemies who wish to misuse its power .

While incorporating gameplay elements from the original game and generally following the same plot , Sword of Mana has new gameplay mechanics and a much more involved story . It removes elements of the Final Fantasy series present in the original game as a marketing ploy , while adding in gameplay elements and artistic styles from later games in the series . The plot is modified to allow the player to follow the parallel stories of either the hero or the heroine , and the backstory and dialogue is expanded from the original . Sword of Mana was produced by series creator Koichi Ishii , directed by Takeo Oin , and largely developed by employees of Brownie Brown who had previously worked on the series for Square .

The game received weakly positive reviews from critics . Reviewers praised the graphics of the game , as well as its enhancements to the original version . They were generally dismissive of the plot , even with enhancements , and disliked elements of the gameplay , especially the computer @-@ controlled ally . Critics recommended the game mainly to fans of the genre or the series .

= = Gameplay = =

The gameplay of Sword of Mana is an expanded and modified version of the gameplay of the action role @-@ playing game Final Fantasy Adventure , with elements added from later games in the Mana series . Like previous games in the series , Sword of Mana displays a top @-@ down perspective , in which the player characters navigate the terrain and fight off hostile creatures . Unlike the original game , the terrain is in color , is not composed of square tiles , and the player is not restricted to moving only in the cardinal directions . At the beginning of the game the player chooses to follow the story of either the unnamed hero or heroine , and controls them thereafter . The player is often joined by either the unchosen protagonist or by temporary companions , and at any point during battles can choose to take direct control of the other party member instead of their chosen character . The non @-@ selected character is controlled via artificial intelligence . Unlike prior games in the series , Sword of Mana does not have a direct multiplayer component . Instead , players can connect their Game Boy Advances together via a Link Cable to give their characters powerful attacks to be used at a later time , known as the " Amigo " system . The original game featured no multiplayer capabilities .

The two main characters have different capabilities . Both are capable of using weapons and magic , but the hero is stronger with melee weapons and the heroine is stronger with ranged magical attacks . Weapons have three attributes : slash , jab , and bash ; and different attributes cause more or less damage to different enemies . Magical spells can cause damage or defend the protagonists , and are affected by the weapon the character is holding . Combat takes place in real @-@ time . Located at the bottom of the screen is an overdrive gauge that increases by one point at each hit given to an enemy . When that gauge is full , the player can release a powerful attack that will deplete the gauge completely if the attack lands . Upon collecting enough experience points in battle , each character increases in level and improves in areas such as strength and evasion .

The player can rest in towns , where they can regain hit points or purchase restorative items and equipment . Options such as changing equipment , casting spells , or checking status are performed by cycling through the game 's Ring Commands , a circular menu which hovers over the currently controlled party member . The Ring Command menu , which lets the player pause the game in

combat to select different weapons , spells , and items , was not present in the original game , but was present in the sequels Secret of Mana and Seiken Densetsu 3 . A version of the day @-@ and @-@ night system introduced in Seiken Densetsu 3 was added to the game , whereby some enemies are only present at different times of day , which changes whenever the player enters a new area . Much like Legend of Mana , players can forge weapons and plant produce in an orchard in the game 's " Hot House " feature .

= = Plot = =

 Sword of Mana has a similar story to Final Fantasy Adventure with additional details and dialogue added . The player has the choice to follow the story of either the hero or the heroine , who are named by the player , instead of only the hero as in the original game . The two stories parallel each other , and the two protagonists are often together .
 The hero 's story begins with a flashback dream of the death of his parents at the hands of the Dark Lord , the ruler of the nation of Granz . Upon waking , the hero , a gladiator @-@ slave in Granz , attempts to escape before being confronted by the Dark Lord and thrown off of a bridge . After being fished out of a lake , the hero is advised to head to the city of Topple . The heroine 's story also begins with a flashback dream of the Dark Lord and his assistant , Julius , killing her stepmother and destroying her village . Upon awaking , she is advised by the knight Bogard to head to Topple , while he journeys to the city of Wendell . The hero and heroine meet in Topple , and agree to journey together . They head toward Wendell , and along the way discover that women of the Mana tribe , which the heroine belongs to , are being kidnapped by vampires . The heroine is kidnapped , and is rescued by the hero and an unnamed man ; they discover that the kidnappings are to keep the woman safe from the Dark Lord and Julius , who are killing them all in part because the tribe was unable to save the Dark Lord 's mother from a terrible fate .
 In Wendell , the two protagonists learn that Bogard and several other knights were instrumental in overthrowing the Vandole Empire twenty years prior , which had been abusing Mana , the source of magic . The hero states his intention to find the legendary Mana Sword in order to avenge his parents and the heroine reveals she has a pendant from her stepmother that is the key to the Mana Tree , the source of Mana . The unnamed man then reveals himself to be Julius and kidnaps the heroine for the pendant ; during a failed rescue attempt the hero falls from an airship along with the pendant . After a side story resulting in the hero and heroine killing the Dark Lord 's mother , who had been turned into a monster , the pendant is stolen and given to the Dark Lord . The protagonists chase after him . After the two defeat the Dark Lord , Julius reveals himself to be the last survivor of the Vandole Empire . Once gaining the pendant he mind controlled the heroine to use the pendent to give him control the Mana Tree , which Vandole had attempted to do prior to being overthrown . Julius defeats the hero and heroine , and heads off to the Mana Tree .
 The hero and heroine split up to find the Mana Sword . After the hero passes trials to prove himself worthy of the sword , which first appears as a rusty blade , the two join forces to storm the Mana Tree and defeat Julius . They do so , but the tree is killed in the process ; prior to death , the tree reveals that she was the heroine 's mother , and asks the heroine to replace her as the next Mana Tree . The heroine agrees , and the two protagonists part ways .

= = Development and release = =

 After the release of the previous game in the Mana series , 1999 's Legend of Mana , several members of the development team for the game left Square to form a new development studio , Brownie Brown . These included character designer Kameoka Shinichi and lead artist Kouji Tsuda , as well as several other writers and artists . Square , in turn , outsourced development of the fifth game in the Mana series to Brownie Brown . The producer for the game was Square 's Koichi Ishii , who had directed or designed the previous games in the series . Ishii had served as the director for the original game in the series , Final Fantasy Adventure , which Sword of Mana is a remake of . The remake , in addition to adding enhanced graphics to the original Game Boy title , sought to add

elements present in later games in the series , such as the Ring Command menu system , and to expand the game 's storyline . It also removed elements from the Final Fantasy series , which had been placed in the original game as a part of the marketing for the game before its sequels moved to be a distinct series .

While the original game had black and white graphics in a style similar to The Legend of Zelda , Sword of Mana 's Game Boy Advance graphics were made similar to the third game in the series , the Super Famicom game Seiken Densetsu 3 . The ability to play as the girl character was added , and an element of multiplayer features that the series had become known for was added by allowing two players to link their Game Boy Advances together to trade items .

Square announced in August 2002 that a Mana game for the Game Boy Advance was under development , and in early 2003 announced that the game was a remake of Final Fantasy Adventure and would be released in Japan later that year under the name Shinyaku Seiken Densetsu . On April 24 , 2003 , Square Enix , formed from the merger of Square and Enix during the game 's development , announced that Sword of Mana would have North American and European releases as well . While Legend of Mana had been released worldwide , Seiken Densetsu 3 had only been released in Japan . In July 2003 , IGN listed the game as one of the top ten most anticipated Game Boy Advance games of 2003 . Sword of Mana was released in Japan on August 29 , 2003 , in North America on December 1 , and in Europe on March 18 , 2004 . In Japan , a special edition " Mana Blue " -colored Game Boy Advance SP was released on the same date as the game , packaged with Sword of Mana and a carrying case . Those who purchased the game 's soundtrack and strategy guide between August 27 and September 30 , 2003 , were given the opportunity to win a Cactus character cushion and a cellphone strap .

= = = Music = = =

The score for Sword of Mana was composed by Kenji Ito , the composer for the original Final Fantasy Adventure . The music includes reworked tracks from the original game as well as new material . Ito 's music is mainly inspired by images from the game rather than outside influences ; however , he never played either the original game or the remake . The 2003 Sword of Mana Premium Soundtrack album collects 47 tracks of music from the game . The two @-@ disc album contains over an hour and a half of music and was published by DigiCube , with a 2004 reprint by Square Enix . The first disc contains music directly from the game , while the second disc features seven piano arrangements by Ito of songs from the soundtrack . The first edition of the soundtrack included a bonus disc , containing an orchestral arrangement of " Rising Sun ~ Endless Battlefield " . The album reached position # 118 on the Japan Oricon charts , and stayed on the charts for only one week . Music from the soundtrack has been arranged for the piano and published by DOREMI Music Publishing . Additionally , KMP Music Publishing has published a book of sheet music for the piano tracks included in the album .

= = Reception = =

Sword of Mana sold over 277 @,@ 000 copies in Japan in 2003 . It received positive reviews from critics . The game 's presentation was praised , especially its graphics ; Brad Shoemaker of GameSpot praised the " lush , colorful backgrounds " and animation quality , which was seconded by the reviewer for GamePro . Game Informer 's Justin Leeper also felt that the graphics were beautiful , and Shane Bettenhausen of Electronic Gaming Monthly said it was " one of the most stunning games on [the] GBA " . Kevin Gifford of 1UP.com also praised the graphics in relation to other Game Boy Advance games , while Darryl Vassar of GameSpy said that it would have been the best @-@ looking Game Boy Advance game if were not for what he felt was poor animation quality . Reaction to the music was more mixed ; while the reviews for Game Informer and GamePro praised it , Shoemaker of GameSpot termed the music " mostly bland " and Craig Harris of IGN and GameSpy 's Vassar said it was nice but repetitive . Reviewers also noted technical problems with the presentation : both the GameSpot and IGN reviews noted graphical glitches in the game as

marring the presentation .

 The game 's plot was widely dismissed ; IGN 's Harris termed it " a little on the basic side " and " borderline silly " , which 1UP.com 's Gifford amended to just " silly " , with " needlessly @-@ long dialogue " . Vassar of GameSpy felt that the added dialogue simply unjustly inflated a simple story . Shoemaker of GameSpot called it " quaintly simplistic " , while the Electronic Gaming Monthly review said it was one of the biggest problems with the game .

 Elements of the gameplay were also poorly received . The computer @-@ controlled companion was almost universally derided : Bettenhausen of Electronic Gaming Monthly said they were " nearly useless " , as did Gifford of 1UP.com , Shoemaker of GameSpot called them " just plain dumb " , and IGN 's Harris said it was " the absolute pits " and " definitely the weakest aspect " of the game . The GamePro , GameSpot , and GameSpy reviews found issues with the combat mechanics , and the GameSpot and IGN reviewers felt the game was too easy . 1UP.com 's Gifford felt that the boss battles were too easy , and that the weapon @-@ switching system was needlessly complicated . IGN 's Harris and Game Informer 's Leeper found the day / night system to be odd and unnecessary , and Harris additionally felt that the multiplayer system was underwhelming . Shoemaker of GameSpot concluded that the game was " pretty good " , and recommended it for fans of the genre , while Leeper of Game Informer and Bettenhausen of Electronic Gaming Monthly said that it was " decent " and " worth a look for fans " of the series . The Japanese magazine Famitsu said that it was a good update to Final Fantasy Adventure without innovating the gameplay much beyond the original game .

= = = Legacy = = =

 Sword of Mana was adapted into manga form by author Shiro Amano and published by Enterbrain on February 25 , 2004 . Two novels based on the game were written by Matsui Oohama with illustrations by Yumiko Murakami and were also published by Enterbrain on February 27 , 2004 . Square Enix also produced a book of yonkoma comics based on the game on January 16 , 2004 .